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Meeting with UNC BOG Chair Bradley Wilson
November 17, 2004

UNC Board of Governors (BOG) Chair, J. Bradley Wilson, paid a visit to ECU on November 17 as part of a tour of all UNC institutions. During his visit, Mr. Wilson met with a group of ECU faculty and staff to discuss issues related to ECU and the UNC System. Prof. Deedee Glascoff (Health and Human Performance, Vice Chair of Faculty) and Rebecca Bizzell (Chair of Staff Senate) served as the moderators. Prof. Jan Tovey (English, Secretary of Faculty), Prof. Cal Christian (Accounting), and Prof. Mark Sprague (Physics) participated in the discussion along with twelve representatives from the ECU Staff Senate. The meeting lasted about an hour, and the discussion covered many topics including Mr. Wilson's background and role on the BOG, University-employee benefits, and graduate student tuition waivers.

Introduction and Background

Mr. Wilson gave us some background information on himself.

- Received a Bachelor's degree from Appalachian State University and a law degree from Wake Forest University.
- Served as a lobbyist at the NC Legislature for the Gov. Jim Hunt administration.
- Currently senior vice president, general counsel and secretary for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina. Mr. Wilson noted that he excuses himself from BOG discussions involving the state health care plan because his company is the current plan administrator (although the terms of the plan are dictated by the state).

State Health Care Plan

The discussion immediately focused on the state health care plan and its deficiencies. One faculty member made the point that the state plan was great if you are young, single, and healthy but terrible if you would like to cover your spouse or family on the plan. Mr. Wilson then gave some insight into the state health care plan from his unique perspective.

- An outdated "1970's health care plan" that requires broad changes,
- Terms of the state health care plan are dictated by state law. In other words, the Legislature must approve any changes to the plan.
- Each year the Legislature approves small adjustments that keep the plan afloat, but the broad changes needed to modernize the plan would require a massive legislative effort. Mr. Wilson encouraged all of us to address our concerns with the state health care plan to our legislators.
- State employees as a group are older, are more likely to smoke, and are on average less healthy than the rest of the state population. The state health care plan is forced to pass the increased cost of covering a less healthy group to the participants by increasing deductibles as well as the cost of covering dependents.

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A staff member who works at one of the ECU clinics noted that ECU would like to address employee health care costs by providing services to ECU employees, but they are forbidden by state law from offering any kind of discounts to employees. She asked if

- Mr. Wilson commented that this was an excellent idea that he would discuss with the BOG.
- The group mentioned the need for dependent tuition waivers, and Mr. Wilson reminded the group that funds for tuition waivers would have to be appropriated by the Legislature.

The meeting concluded with Mr. Wilson saying that he had thoroughly enjoyed his visit to ECU and that ECU had made great changes since the last time he had visited. He hopes to be able to return soon.

the BOG could address this issue and consider creative benefits such as allowing employees to visit ECU clinics without using personal leave.

Benefit Package

- A faculty member stated that ECU has lost faculty position candidates as a result of the poor benefits package, and that the benefit package has become a liability for us when we try to recruit top-notch faculty in the competitive academic job market.
- Mr. Wilson recognized that this was, indeed, a serious problem, and said that it would have to be addressed by the Legislature.

Graduate Student Tuition Waivers

A faculty member noted that graduate students bring more to the University and state than tuition dollars. The group made several important points about graduate student tuition waivers.

- Graduate students bring more to the University and state than tuition dollars. Graduate student research helps bring in grant dollars and results in technological development that attracts businesses to North Carolina. Furthermore, a large portion of graduate degree recipients—including many originally from out of state—remain in North Carolina after graduation, increasing the state average level of education and income.
- Many other universities have instituted graduate student tuition remission programs for all graduate students with assistantships. Institutions with these tuition remission programs have seen increases in the number and quality of graduate program applications, and, in turn, increased competitiveness for research funds.
- Graduate student tuition waivers should be viewed as an investment in the future of the University and the state.
- An ECU undergraduate student, who was serving as Mr. Wilson's tour guide, said that he was graduating from ECU with honors this Spring semester but would be attending an out-of-state graduate school due to a tuition waiver. He added that he would like to pursue a graduate degree at ECU but could not afford to do so.
- Mr. Wilson agreed with the assessment that graduate students are assets and noted that the BOG has considered many tuition waiver plans to attract and retain quality students. He added that any waivers given to graduate students, even half tuition waivers, would be an improvement over the current situation but the funds for tuition waivers must come from the Legislature.

Employee and Dependent Tuition Waivers

A staff member added that employee and dependent tuition waivers could be improved as well and recommended a change in the policy.

- Employees are allowed to take one three-hour course per semester for free, but the tuition charge is the same for a student taking three to five credit hours.
- The state would not lose any income by allowing employees to take up to five hours, as long as it did not affect their job performance.