



Cape Fear Firebird

The Light of Save the Cape

June 1, 2011

This state cannot afford to go backwards. These children ... in urban and rural and rich and poor school districts deserve the right to a place in the new economy and that place is clearly possible only through education.

–Governor Beverly Perdue

Young Minds or Yang Ming?

The most visible part of the haggling among the Governor, the House of Representatives, and the Senate about the State budget is the number and cost of classroom positions and other needs of the State's education system. Yet in the same budget—the proposal by the Governor and the versions adopted by the House and Senate—there lurks \$4,535,000 for a variety of “water resource” projects (dredging, really) intended to match Federal funds. But the matching funds for \$1,925,000 of that are not available. The language of the budget bill—section 30.3—permits moving the money around to other projects, whether specified in the budget or not. A kind of slush fund for dredging. Consider:

- \$250,000 is listed for the Wilmington Harbor Feasibility study, the estimate for the State share of the first year of the study to be conducted by the Corps of Engineers. That leads to ..
- \$2,500,000 for the State share of the full multi-year study, if the estimate of \$5.3 million for that study is valid. That leads to
- \$14,400,000 for the State share of the dredging project, if the current estimate of \$41 million holds up. Such estimates never do.

All of this is to facilitate movements to the Port of Wilmington by the container ships of the CKYH consortium: COSCO (China Overseas Shipping Company), K-Line (a Japanese shipping line), Yang Ming (Taiwan), and Hanjin (Korean).

This is not the first project to open the Cape Fear River to large vessels. In 1998,

- \$250,000,000 was approved by the State and Federal governments to deepen the channel for 42 feet from 38 feet. That grew to
- \$338,000,000 spent by 2009, \$118 million of which is for the account of the State of North Carolina. Completion of the project would take the total cost to
- \$533,000,000, of which \$174,000,000 is for the account of the State of North Carolina.

This deeper channel serves two ships per week from Asia. Would it not be better to spend such sums on education? Or even a fraction of such amounts?