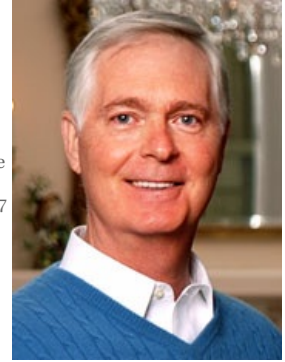


## TAR HEEL STATE SPURS BUILDING TO CREATE JOBS, HELP POLAR BEARS

North Carolina's top elected officials have agreed to accelerate more than \$740 million in government building projects, a decision that outgoing Democratic Governor Mike Easley says will speed up the creation of more than 25,000 vitally needed new jobs. Billed as a stimulus package for the state's sagging economy, Easley said the decision by the Council of State will accelerate construction projects including prisons, university buildings and a museum complex by a month or two. Easley will step down this weekend, passing the baton to Democratic Lieutenant Governor Beverly Perdue, the state's first female governor. He says the move will make a difference in a state whose 7.9% unemployment rate is the highest in 25 years. The panel voted in favor of authorizing the issuance of \$507 million in new debt, already approved either by the General Assembly or indirectly by voters. The council had to formally sign off on the borrowing, as well as agree to the projects to be paid for with the proceeds of the debt offering. The projects, which were approved by the Legislature last summer, include five prisons, 14 university capital improvements and a \$107 million office and museum complex in downtown Raleigh. A \$2.7 million renovation of the North Carolina Zoo's polar bear exhibit in Asheboro also made the list. Two Republican council members, State Auditor Les Merritt and Labor Commissioner Cherie Berry, voted no on the borrowing.



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