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Follow the money



How lawsuits are trying to drive your 2022 elections

BY DONNA KING

As the Biden administration and Congress struggle with plummeting approval numbers, a battle is being waged in North Carolina and other states over who will control the drawing of congressional districts. The 2022 elections could turn the balance of power to Republicans in Congress.

The latest Cygnal poll shows 51% of likely voters surveyed said they prefer a Republican candidate for Congress as a check against the Biden administration, while 40% would prefer a Democrat to support Biden's agenda. Combine those numbers with a 2020 census that gave North Carolina an extra congressional seat and new maps, and the stakes get high.

Consequently, on Feb. 2 the N.C. Supreme Court, with a 4-3 Democrat majority, was set to hear arguments over the state's electoral maps approved by a Republican-led legislature. Lawsuits over the maps were filed before they were even passed by the state legislature, and the plaintiffs are familiar — Common Cause North Carolina and the N.C. League of Conservation Voters, with financing from some of the highest levels in the Democrats' political apparatus.

The food chain

At the top of the food chain sits the National Democratic Redistricting Committee.

continued PAGE 4



Unfinished business

Medical marijuana, expanding Medicaid on agenda when lawmakers return for 2022 short session this spring

BY JOHN TRUMP

The 2021 session of the General Assembly began in January, as the world was entering its second year of the pandemic. The hope was the COVID fog would lift, allowing a return to normalcy, at least in a relative sense, and that lawmakers could go about business as usual.

Much was on the legislative agenda, among the most pressing a need to finally pass a budget Gov. Roy Cooper would sign and redraw election maps Democrats might accept, all with a goal of finishing the session by Halloween.

The results were decidedly bittersweet, at least from a Republican standpoint, with Democrats choosing tricks over treats.

Cooper, albeit begrudgingly, signed a budget passed by the Republican-led General Assembly, which was a first. Things then took a turn toward an extended session and protracted court battles, which, to be fair, came as no surprise. Lawmakers submitted maps, the outcome, they said, the product of a fair and transparent process.

"I am confident that the House and Senate have approved redistricting plans that include maps that are constitutional in every respect," House Speaker Tim Moore, R-Cleveland, said after lawmakers approved the maps late last year.

Democrats, empowered by strong national interests determined to skew elections left, think otherwise. The N.C. Supreme Court was set to decide the latest redistricting lawsuits, though lawmakers have little time to do so and, because of court actions, voted to delay the 2022 primaries until June 7.

Jordan Roberts sensed some fatigue among lawmakers, as a second pandemic-laced session moved toward Christmas. Roberts, director of government affairs at the John Locke Foundation, said lawmakers are eager to finish in 2022 so those seeking re-election can get to work raising money and campaigning.

continued PAGE 8





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# An Olympic repeat in the making

**DONNA KING**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Athletes from around the world packed up their gear, and dreams of Gold, to head out to the Olympic games. Meanwhile, just miles from the flickering Olympic torch, religious minorities were being corralled into concentration camps while the host country was capitalizing on the games to push propaganda of a modern, strong nation.

The year was 1936, and the games were in Berlin, but it could be 2022 in Beijing.

The Olympics in 1936 came as Hitler tried to convince the world that Germany was peaceful and tolerant, all the while camouflaging the growing Nazi tyranny and hiding the new shuffle of gypsies and Jewish people into work camps.



As historians study the games, the 94 nations that sent athletes that year legitimized the Nazis and missed the opportunity to reveal the beginnings of atrocities that would later stun the world.

In China that history may be repeated. The 2022 Olympics in Beijing were scheduled to start Feb. 4.

With the world watching the People’s Republic of China, under the direction of the Chinese Communist Party, they’re offering a sanitized view of communist China with cartoon mascots and flashy technology.

But, just as in 1936, mere miles away up to 2 million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities are being corralled and sequestered in labor camps in China’s Xinjiang province where human rights groups say the CCP violates “nearly each and every act” of the U.N. Genocide Convention.

If even a portion of the reports are true, there are clearly human rights violations in China on a historic scale.

Evidence to support allegations of torture, forced sterilization, and other abuses leaks regularly from China. Prisoners there are required to wear “suicide-proof” uniforms.

Last month the Biden administration declared a diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Beijing Olympics to spotlight China’s human rights abuses. It means that U.S. officials won’t be there, but U.S. athletes can compete. Since February 2021, more than 180 human rights groups globally have called to cancel the 2022 Beijing games altogether.

With the Biden administration’s diplomatic boycott announcement coming so late, just nine other nations have joined so far. It’s dashed hopes of an alliance of nations. French President Emmanuel Macron called Biden’s boycott “insignificant.”

“How other countries proceed is up to those countries,” said U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield in

continued PAGE 19

# North Carolina’s Overton Window is open to freedom

**AMY O. COOKE**  
PUBLISHER



**BY THE NUMBERS**

**81%**

Percentage of likely N.C. voters that support choice in education

**MY NEIGHBOR** recently asked me, “What do you do at a think tank?”

“Shift the Overton Window,” I responded.

The Overton Window is a term named for the late Joe Overton of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a Michigan-based sister think tank. Overton described the movement of public policy ideas from novel to mainstream. His window covers the range of policy options acceptable to the public.

Various things can influence public perception about an idea, including think tanks like the John Locke Foundation, media including Carolina Journal, along with corporate news, social media, Hollywood, and crises. Since politics is downstream from culture, politicians, who are concerned about elections, rarely stray too far outside of the Overton Window.

Two signatures from Gov. Roy Cooper signal that North Carolina’s Overton Window is expanding in favor of freedom, thanks, in part, to the work we’ve been doing at Locke and CJ for three decades. Cooper’s draconian COVID lockdowns over the past two years have accelerated that movement.

The most recent signature occurred Jan. 13 when the notoriously anti-educational choice Cooper quietly signed a proclamation in support of the 11th annual National School Choice Week.

It’s not that Cooper is indifferent to school

choice; prior to Jan. 13, he had been openly hostile to it. Every year since Cooper took office in 2017, the N.C. Association for Public Charter Schools has asked the governor to sign a proclamation for National School Choice Week, the News and Observer reported. Every year he’s ignored that request until now.

His signature is more than ink on a piece of paper. It reflects that even Cooper knows North Carolina’s Overton Window on education policy has shifted away from simply funding government-controlled schools toward more educational options.

Our polls and parental action have been showing it for years. Over 81% of likely N.C. voters support choice in education. Nearly 23% of North Carolina’s 1,847,701 K-12 students are in an educational structure away from a traditional, brick-and-mortar public school.

Smart state legislators either recognized or agreed with the policy shift and provided N.C. families with a wide array of options including charter schools, magnet schools, online schools, homeschools, private schools, traditional public schools, and re-

continued PAGE 19



## Follow the Money

More than \$8,562,128 has been funneled to key plaintiffs in lawsuits designed to shift N.C.’s 2022 elections.

- N.C. celebrates National School Choice Week ..... page 3
- New laws for a new year..... page 3
- Merger of providers could be broadband boon for N.C..... page 6

POLLS **12**

OPINIONS **13**

## This Issue

**1**  
GA PREVIEW: Medical marijuana, Medicaid on agenda for 2022

**6**  
The true cost of switching N.C. vehicles to all-electric

**7**  
Small businesses in North Carolina are struggling with inflation

**11**  
REDISTRICTING: Fate of elections, maps remain unclear



# N.C. celebrates National School Choice Week amid surge in educational options

BY CJ STAFF

The Tar Heel State has celebrated National School Choice Week for years, but 2022 brought a number of firsts for this annual acknowledgment of the importance of educational options for every family.

For one, the event — held Jan. 23-29 — came nearly two years into a pandemic in which educational alternatives have grown and flourished. About three in 10 school-age children in North Carolina now attend an alternative to their locally zoned public school — a private (107,341 students), charter (129,955 students), magnet (162,024 students), or home school (179,900 students).

Another surprise landed in mid-January when Gov. Roy Cooper, a stalwart opponent of school choice since securing the governor's office in 2016, issued a proclamation acknowledging National School Choice Week.

The proclamation affirms that North Carolina is “home to a multitude of high-quality public and nonpublic schools from which parents can choose for their children, in addition to families who educate their children in the home.” The proclamation also states that “education variety not only helps to diversify our econo-



National School Choice Week was held Jan. 23-29. The event is an annual acknowledgment of the importance of educational options for families.

my but also enhances the vibrancy of our community” and that “high-quality teaching professionals” can be found in both public and private schools.

The move by Cooper comes after he and the GOP-controlled General Assembly came to terms on a budget for the new biennium that expands and strengthens the state's three school-choice schol-

arships — the Opportunity Scholarship Program, the Children with Disabilities Grant, and the Education Savings Account.

“It has been a rough ride the last two years due to the pandemic. However, these trying times have served to accelerate the demands for school choice across our state and nation,” said Mike Long, president of school-choice

advocacy organization Parents for Educational Freedom in North Carolina. “We have seen more and more students and their families empowered by the educational options available in our state.”

The nonprofit National School Choice Week partnered with 838 schools and organizations to raise awareness about school choice.

## Parents flock to alternatives

Shortly before the nationwide celebration of school choice got underway, National School Choice Week released a poll showing that 52% of parents said they were considering — or considered in the past year — choosing a new or different school for their children.

Education quality and pandemic disruptions were the top reasons cited for finding another school: 36% of parents wanted a school offering a higher quality of education, while 34% said the decision was due to their school's COVID-19 policies that disrupted the educational process.

Rounding out the list of reasons cited were bullying (26%), a child not being happy in school (23%) and wanting more of a say in curriculum choice or what the child was learning (21%).

Minority parents were more likely to seek an alternative to traditional district schools, with 62% of black parents and 59% of Latino parents reporting they had sought, or were seeking, a different school.

## Choice cuts costs

More good news has landed for school-choice advocates in the form of an analysis by EdChoice, showing that two N.C. choice programs have saved taxpayers between \$74.1 million and \$154.3 million through fiscal 2018.

Those figures translate to between \$3,373 and \$7,022 in local and state taxpayer savings for each student enrolled in these programs.

“These savings result from many of the students who exercised choice who would have been enrolled in a public school if these choice programs did not exist — and enrolled in public schools at a much larger taxpayer cost,” wrote Martin Lueken, director of the Fiscal Research and Education Center at EdChoice.

For 40 school choice programs across the United States, the cumulative impact in cost savings is between \$12.4 billion and \$28.3 billion in net savings for local and state taxpayers.

# New laws for a new year

BY THERESA OPEKA

A new year ushers in new laws in North Carolina. Here's what took effect Jan. 1:

**SENATE BILL 473**, Enhance Local Government Transparency, bans public officials from gaining financially from their position. They can be charged with a felony if they do so. The law also prohibits public officials who serve on nonprofit boards from voting to award contracts to those organizations.

“Surprisingly, there was very little on the books in terms of laws prohibiting local government officials from abusing their power while in office before this piece of legislation,” said Jordan Roberts, director of government affairs for the John Locke Foundation. “Now enacted, this law clears up ambiguities in current statutes and makes clear that no matter the level of government, someone can't profit off of their seat.”

The measure followed an audit in May that found several Rocky Mount officials prevented the city's utility payment of office from trying to collect \$47,704 that Mayor Pro Tem Andre Knight owed in past-due utility bills.

State Auditor Beth Wood's office opened the investigation after getting more than 200 complaints at its hotline alleging misconduct by elected officials and employees of the city of Rocky Mount.

The new law also gives some independence to local government offices responsible for auditing



their government colleagues.

There are also new requirements for people who want to go into law enforcement. **HOUSE BILL 436** requires those looking to obtain employment as police officers to receive a psychological evaluation. It also requires officers to receive education on mental health and wellness strategies and creates a physical fitness study.

“This legislation combines two of the most critical issues of this past session: mental health and criminal justice reform,” Roberts said. “This bill was one of several that aimed at making policing in our communities better while placing a high importance on the mental health issues many suffer from.”

The law implements a database allowing law enforcement officials to check the status of an incoming officer from previous law enforcement agencies.

A related measure, **SENATE BILL 300**, increases protections, training, and oversight for state and local law enforcement officers, including the creation of a decertification database.

Multiple provisions in the state budget, **SENATE BILL 105**, took effect Jan. 1. They include: bonuses of up to \$1,000 for teachers and principals who qualify by taking certain additional training; the end of taxation of military pensions; an increase in the per-child income tax deduction;

and implementation of new requirements for assisted living and nursing homes in management of infectious disease outbreaks.

**SENATE BILL 693**, Expedite Child Safety and Permanency, amends various abuse, neglect, and dependency laws to ensure the safety of children in out-of-home placements and expedite permanency planning hearings for children removed from their homes.

It also discusses child welfare reform, establishes safeguards to help protect against human traffickers, implements a statewide child protective services hotline, and provides safe placement for children in need of mental health services.

**HOUSE BILL 110** made changes to the Housing Opportunities and Prevention of Evictions Program, or HOPE. The bill comes as state and local leaders struggle to quickly distribute federal rental assistance aid they're tasked with administering.

The changes allows landlords to apply for assistance on behalf of tenants, along with other changes designed to facilitate a more effective administration of the program.

In 2020, while the world succumbed to COVID-19 pandemic policies that closed businesses, and thus froze many incomes, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued a moratorium on evictions. The move was massively disruptive for landlords and left them in limbo for months.

North Carolina established the

Housing Opportunities and Prevention of Evictions Program, or HOPE, to provide rent and utility assistance to low-income renters who were experiencing financial hardship due to pandemic policies, protecting them against utility disconnections and evictions.

**HOUSE BILL 890** allows ABC stores to sell their items online, to be picked up in stores. It allows distilleries and wineries to sell packaged products at certain times on holidays including New Year's Day, July 4, Labor Day, and Thanksgiving. It also requires that the Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission make a good-faith effort to offer all liquor brands to all local boards, so they are more readily available in stores statewide and not just in a few select areas.

Other laws that took effect include **SENATE BILL 248**, which includes additional information about dental plans on health insurance cards. Senate Bill 103 reduces regulations to help children with autism.

**HOUSE BILL 734** protects people from unlicensed mental health facilities. **HOUSE BILL 489** updates building codes and development regulatory reforms, including the requirements to be licensed as a general contractor in the state.

**HOUSE BILL 366** provides regulatory relief by allowing, for example, remote building code inspections.

**SENATE BILL 329** deals with building permit rules and time-shares.



4 INVESTIGATIONS

Follow the money

continued from PAGE 1

mittee, run by former U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder. Upon leaving office in 2015, Holder committed to turning his focus to states’ congressional district maps in the next phase of his career. That organization spawned several others, including the National Redistricting Action Fund, the National Redistricting Foundation, and All on The Line, a series of state-level groups that use social media to train speakers and potential witnesses on how to oppose congressional maps in courtrooms and public hearings.

In 2019, the National Redistricting Fund merged with a political project of former president Barack Obama called Organizing for America to launch “Redistricting U” and All On The Line.

AOTL’s state director said in a training session that it was designed to put on the record speakers whose testimony would “be impactful during any future litigation.” An analysis of speakers at the legislature’s redistricting hearings held across the state found that of the 464 speakers, 324 were either from AOTL or partisan groups with a vested political interest. Plaintiffs used their testimony to argue that lawmakers had disregarded “public opinion.”

In its first news conference, the NDRC openly shared its discussions with Democrat House members on how the group will work through shaping state maps to create more seats for their political party. The Holder-led organization has been a “max-out” donor, \$5,400, to more than 40 Democrat candidates for N.C. offices from state Senate and House to the judiciary. That last category includes the Earls for Justice campaign to support Anita Earls, an associate justice on the N.C. Supreme Court.

“Fixing this redistricting problem will involve not just focusing on the lines but focusing on the larger effort to win back governance,” Holder said in 2017. “This is the path to ensuring Democrats have their rightful seats at the table in 2021.”

The NDRC has contributed significant resources to aid lawsuits by North Carolina’s current plaintiffs, but other groups have chipped in as well. The Tide Foundation of California and the Proteus Fund of Massachusetts, who are big beneficiaries of George Soros’ Open Society Institute, have given thousands to the primary plaintiffs.

At the state level, the A.J. Fletcher Foundation and the Winston-Salem-based Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation have ponied up money for the lawsuits.

While this isn’t the first time Common Cause and other plaintiffs have sued over the state maps, this time well over \$15 million has come from political players at the state and national level to affect the new district maps.

“This is clearly a long-term game plan for the Democratic Party and their allies,” says Jim Stirling, research fellow at the John Locke Foundation’s Civitas Center for Public Integrity. “If we look back to the 2013 Blueprint N.C. brief, they lay out their plan to retake the legislature very clearly. They called for their members to



Former president Barack Obama with his U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder.

‘eviscerate, mitigate, litigate, cogitate, and agitate’ state legislative leadership.”

The Blueprint N.C. strategy in 2013 was underwritten by left-leaning funders that include the Common Cause Education Fund and Z. Smith Reynolds, which also awarded a \$50,000 grant to the National Redistricting Foundation, labeling it “Fighting for Fairer Maps in North Carolina Project.”

“The most shocking part for me has been just how many of these lawsuits against the General Assembly are being handled by the same legal institutions and lawyers,” Stirling added. “The Southern Coalition for Social Justice, Arnold and Porter Kaye Scholer LLP, and Patterson Harkavy show up throughout a large majority of these suits against the General Assembly.”

In following the money trail, much of it seems to pass through Common Cause North Carolina from its Washington, D.C.-based parent organization and its Common Cause Education Fund. All state and federal donors listed above contribute to the education fund, which in part passes it on to Common Cause North Carolina.

A nationwide effort

North Carolina is not alone. The National Redistricting Action Fund, a 501(c)(4), and the National Redistricting Foundation, a 501(c)(3), are supporting litigation this year against electoral maps in North Carolina, Minnesota, Ohio, Texas, Col-

orado, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Alabama.

Except Colorado, all those states run by Republican legislatures. In most cases, the plaintiffs

for suing to get the 2008 Minnesota Senate recount that pushed now disgraced Al Franken into office and gave Democrats the votes they needed to pass the Af-

fordable Care Act. Since then, Elias has focused his lawsuit lens on what he calls “grotesque gerrymandering” in states’ congressional maps ... except in Maryland.

In January, Elias attracted criticism for filing a motion on behalf of defendants in a lawsuit over Maryland’s maps. The group Fair Maps Maryland is suing the Democrat-led legislature over the Democrat-drawn state congressional map. Critics say the map is designed to elect Democrats to all eight congressional districts. Republicans hold one Maryland seat in the U.S. House today.

Doug Mayer of Fair Maps Maryland called Elias’ motion “an appalling display of hypocrisy.” He highlighted the lawsuit machine that is shaping politics, and ultimately policy, in the United States.

“This is really indicative as the kind of games that are being played,” Mayer said in an interview with Carolina Journal. “Marc Elias likes to portray himself as a defender of democracy. Listen, I’m a Republican operative in my day job, and Marc Elias is a Democrat operative. That’s all this is about.”

“We actually looked at the case that Marc Elias was bringing in North Carolina to build some of the legal arguments in our case [against Maryland’s maps],” May-

er added. “The idea that he is now going to be on the other side, defending gerrymandering in Maryland, was too rich of an opportunity to pass up.”

Ad campaigns mix with legal action

The Princeton Gerrymandering Project graded Maryland’s 8-0 Democrat maps an “F” for a “significant Democrat advantage.” The Princeton Project also gave North Carolina an “F” for “significant Republican advantage.” The Princeton group developed criteria for grading maps, with assistance from a group called “RepresentUs,” which bills itself as a non-partisan peacemaker carrying the tag line “We’re Saving Democracy. Join us.”

RepresentUs received a \$25,000 grant from the National Redistricting Action Fund in 2018. It also helped develop the map-grading criteria and graded the state’s maps, which N.C. plaintiffs the League of Conservation Voters used to request that the N.C. Supreme Court intervene to strike down N.C. maps.

Now, as the court and lawyers prepared for Feb. 2 oral arguments, RepresentUs ran a social media campaign on Facebook and local Raleigh news websites urging Supreme Court justices to overturn the maps.

Plaintiffs call this an effort to protect voting rights. Some of the same groups have taken legal action intended to expand voting rights for felons, early voting, and same-day voter registration.

“If allowed to stand, these extreme gerrymanders would cause profound and lasting harm to the people of our state, especially hurting Black communities, by depriving voters of a voice in choosing their representatives,” said Bob Phillips, executive director of Common Cause North Carolina. “We look forward to taking our case to the state Supreme Court. We are confident that the people of North Carolina will ultimately prevail in our fight for fair maps.”

These funders have also helped lawsuits in overturning voter ID. In 2018, 57% percent of North Carolinians voted to add a voter ID requirement to the state constitution. That amendment has not been enacted because it has been tied up in court by lawsuits initially filed by the N.C. NAACP and Clean Air Carolina.

Using the legal system to overturn the policy of the opposing party is not new. Common Cause has been fighting state districts since 2011, when Republicans took control of the state legislature for the first time in a century. But the number of lawsuits has exploded in recent years, in some ways contributing to political polarization. The Southern Coalition for Social Justice is using it’s legal team to represent Common Cause in the redistricting lawsuit currently before the N.C. Supreme Court.

“It’s very understandable for many voters to be frustrated right now with the overt partisan leanings of various groups,” said Stirling. “However, I don’t believe there has ever been an organization in modern history that hasn’t had some small partisan leaning to it. The best way to combat this is more information rather than ignoring it entirely. Researching who is funding these organizations, where their C-suite members have worked prior to their current positions will tell you what the beliefs of many of these groups are.”

**Brent Woodcox**  
@BrentWoodcox

These tweets that pretend the lawsuit industrial complex wasn’t going to sue no matter what are pure gaslighting. Eric Holder and Marc Elias promised to sue NC before maps even were drawn. These lawsuits aren’t about fairness. They are about Democratic political power. #NCPOL

**Asher D. Hildebrand** @adhildebrand · Dec 7, 2021

Just a friendly reminder that none of this chaos was inevitable. Had the @NCGOP heeded public calls to enact maps that were “remotely” fairer, candidates and voters would know what districts they are running and voting in.

#ncpol twitter.com/wunc/status/14...

8:55 AM · Dec 7, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

Mike Rusher is a political observer and vice president of The Results Co. in Raleigh.

**Mike Rusher**  
@mjrusher

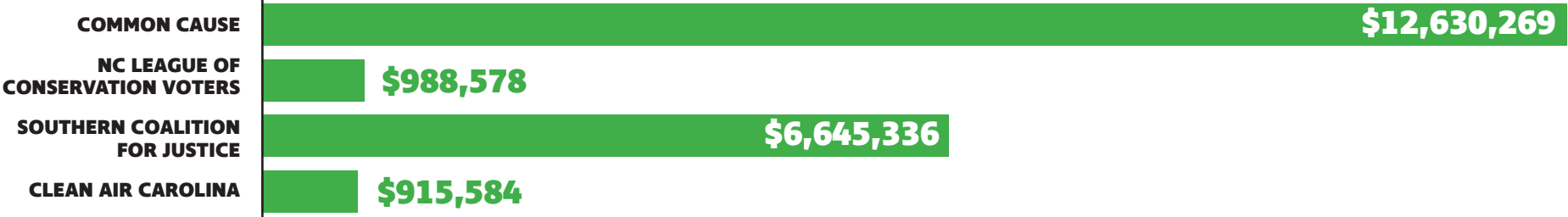
If this use of dark money proves to be successful, we should expect (1) many more PR campaigns to bully N.C. Supreme Court Justices as they are considering cases, and (2) plaintiffs/defendants embracing shadow funds to tip the scales their way

#ncpol #ncga

Brent Woodcox is senior policy counsel at N.C. General Assembly.

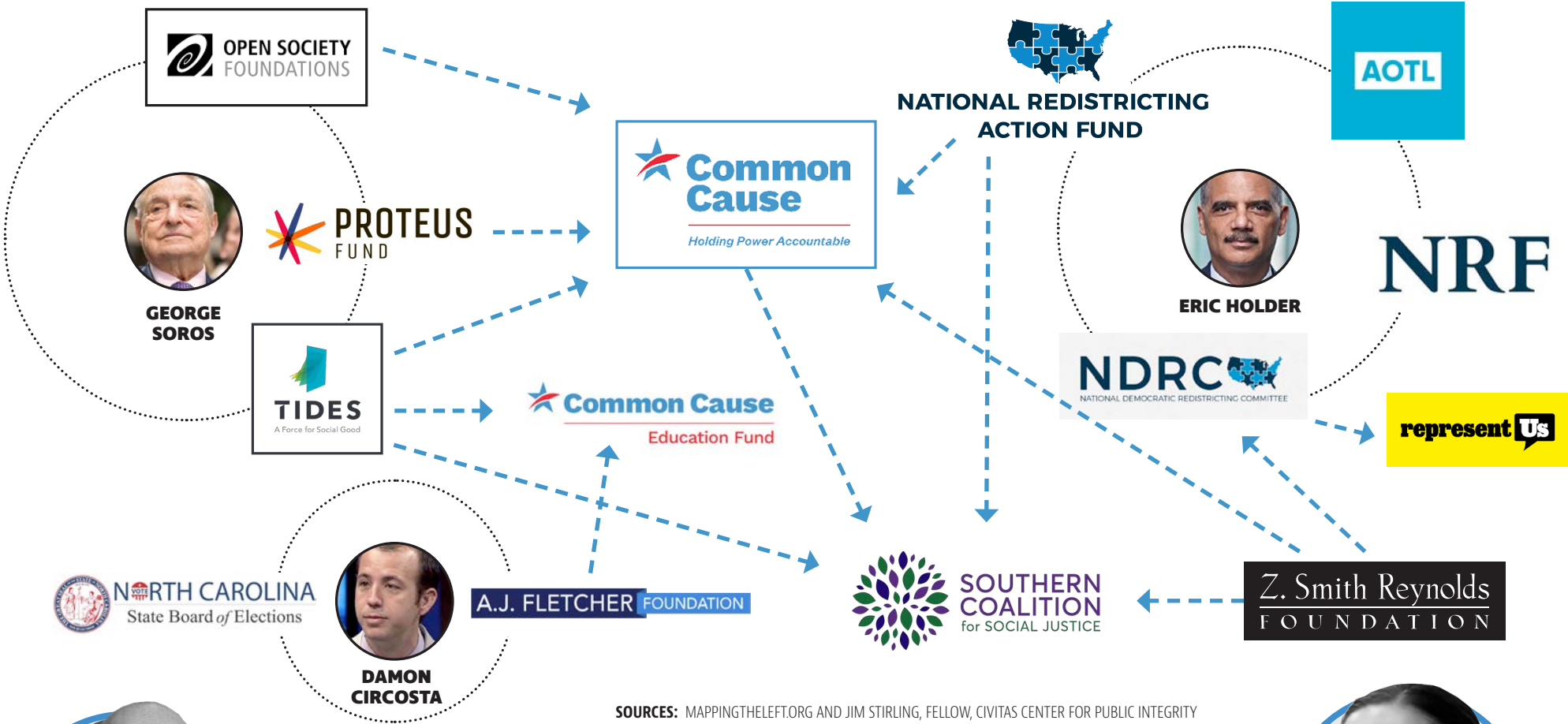


KEY PLAINTIFFS IN THE ELECTION LAWSUITS W/ ANNUAL REVENUES



SOURCE: INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE FORM 990S

LAWSUIT BANKROLLERS AND DIRECTION OF FUNDS



SOURCES: MAPPINGTHELEFT.ORG AND JIM STIRLING, FELLOW, CIVITAS CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY



**MARC ELIAS** is the mastermind behind the national congressional maps lawsuit industry, including in North Carolina. Hillary Clinton’s former campaign lawyer, Elias is best known for paying for the Steele Dossier in 2016, and for suing to get the 2008 Minnesota Senate recount that pushed now-disgraced Al Franken into office and gave Democrats the majority to pass the Affordable Care Act.



**DAMON CIRCOSTA**, executive director of the A.J. Fletcher Foundation, is the current chair of the N.C. State Board of Elections, appointed by Gov. Roy Cooper in 2018.



Lawsuit bankrollers



**George Soros, The Open Society Institute**  
The Open Society Institute is a private grantmaking foundation created and funded by billionaire financier and liberal philanthropist George Soros.



**National Redistricting Action Fund**  
Created to litigate against state elected officials for alleged voting rights infractions and what it deems “gerrymandering” of state legislative and congressional districts ahead of the 2020 U.S. Census.



**All on the Line**  
All On the Line was created when the National Redistricting Action Fund merged with Organizing for Action, an advocacy group dedicated to President Barack Obama’s agenda.



**Proteus Fund**  
The Proteus Fund is a “pass-through” funder and donor-advised fund provider. The Proteus Fund moves money through a number of “donor collaboratives” funded by major grantmaking foundations.



**National Redistricting Foundation**  
The National Redistricting Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit affiliate of the NDRC, a Democratic Party-aligned PAC chaired by former Attorney General Eric Holder.



**Common Cause**  
Opposes Republican politicians, Republican-nominated judges, Republican-backed efforts to ensure the integrity of voter rolls, and generally Republican redistricting efforts.



**Tides Foundation**  
The Tides Foundation is a major center-left grantmaking organization and a major pass-through funder to numerous left-leaning nonprofits. George Soros is a major donor.



**A.J. Fletcher Foundation**  
The A.J. Fletcher Foundation gives to left-progressive groups like the Common Cause Education Fund and the Southern Coalition for Social Justice.



**Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation**  
The Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation utilizes legacy monies from the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco fortune to fund North Carolina-based liberal agendas and organizations.



The National Democratic Redistricting Committee PAC donated \$250,000 to the N.C. Democratic Party. The party then contributed to Supreme Court Justice **ANITA EARLS**, who now is considering litigation the NDRC is funding on electoral maps.



The National Democratic Redistricting Committee, launched by former U.S. Attorney General **ERIC HOLDER**, and its subsidiaries the National Redistricting Action Fund and the National Redistricting Foundation are supporting litigation against electoral maps in North Carolina, Minnesota, Ohio, Texas, Colorado, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Alabama. In most of those cases, the plaintiffs are asking that the courts intervene and either draw new maps themselves, or higher a “special master” to redraw maps.



# The true cost of switching N.C. vehicles to all-electric

BY THERESA OPEKA

Gov. Roy Cooper's ultimate goal of reducing greenhouse gases to net-zero by 2050 with his latest executive order may be clear, but the cost to N.C. taxpayers is quite murky.

Executive Order No. 246, signed on Jan. 7, targets reducing greenhouse gas emissions by increasing the statewide goal to a 50% reduction from 2005 levels by 2030 and achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Cooper's plan calls for transitioning all state vehicles to electric and encouraging drivers to switch to electric and other zero-emission vehicles.

"Transforming North Carolina toward clean energy and a more equitable economy will provide good jobs and a healthy environment for generations of families across our state," Cooper said in a press release.

North Carolina has 16,190, or 1.6%, electric vehicles on the road.

The order calls for an increase in registered zero-emission vehicles to at least 1.25 million by 2030, building upon his goal of 80,000 by 2025 in Executive Order 80 from 2018, and for 50% of sales of new vehicles in North Carolina to be zero-emission by 2030. It also directs the Department of Transportation to develop a N.C. Clean Transportation Plan for decarbonizing the transportation sector through reductions in vehicle miles traveled, an increase in zero-emission cars, trucks, and buses, and other strategies.

Estimated total cost for DOT? Well, that's up in the air as well. "As part of our efforts to reduce our transportation-related carbon footprint, a task force has been established to explore electrification of our fleet," said Jamie Kritzer, assistant director of communications for NCDOT in an emailed statement when asked about the costs associated with purchasing electric versus gas-powered vehicles and the costs to maintain them. "The team developing the Clean Transportation Plan as part of the recent executive order will explore a number of areas related to transportation innovations, including the costs to buy and maintain zero-emission vehicles versus gas vehicles."

"The costs, including grid upgrades, charging stations, tax incentives, and rebates just to name a few, will be astronomical," said Amy Cooke, John Locke Foundation CEO. "Basically, low- and moderate-income North Carolina drivers will subsidize the driving habits of wealthier urbanites through higher taxes and fees, higher-priced vehicles, and higher electric rates. No wonder they don't want an honest debate at the legislature."

Costs for transitioning over to electric vehicles typically come with a high price tag. In a 2019 report, California had earmarked \$2.46 billion in public funds geared toward constructing charging stations, incentives for the public to buy electric vehicles, and switching state vehicles over to electric as well.



Go Raleigh Station has made movement toward being more EV friendly with electric buses included in their fleet.

Duke Energy has proposed \$56 million for charging stations and electric buses, and the federal government has allocated \$109 million to North Carolina for charging stations in the infrastructure bill signed last year.

But will it be enough? Charging stations are typically located in more urban settings, leaving those in rural and poorer communities at a disadvantage. Studies estimate the state will need 25 times more Level 2 chargers — which give 80 miles of range in four hours and 10 times more fast chargers, which can add the same amount of range in 30 minutes, than what it has now.

Paying for the building and maintenance of new roads and bridges is also a factor as gas taxes consumers pay at the pump would be greatly reduced or eliminated with the switch to electric vehicles. Federal and state fuel taxes account for more than 40% of transportation funding, making them the largest revenue source. States like Pennsylvania are looking at tolling bridges in order to stem losses to make up for lost funding. The federal government is also looking at implementing a "pay per mile" tax to replace the gas tax, although no one is sure how it would be ad-

ministered and there are privacy concerns with being tracked. It would also hurt those who live in rural areas, who usually have less income.

Dangers also exist with electric vehicles. Lithium-ion batteries power all-electric vehicles and are extremely flammable. Some parking garages exclude electric vehicles from the premises. It took more than four hours and 30,000 gallons of water to put out the fire from a deadly crash involving an electric vehicle. Tesla owners in Alaska and Canada also recently had heat pump issues that caused their heaters not to work. Manufacturers, however, are working on making vehicles safer.

Jon Sanders says Cooper's order is fraught with problems. He's the senior fellow in regulatory studies and research editor at the John Locke Foundation.

"The governor is ordering changes that might sound good to those with no familiarity with the matters at hand, but practically they would raise costs on electricity consumers, from industrial sites on down to poor families struggling to get by," Sanders said. "Nor

**Low- and moderate-income North Carolina drivers will subsidize the driving habits of wealthier urbanites through higher taxes and fees, higher-priced vehicles, and higher electric rates. No wonder they don't want an honest debate at the legislature.**

- Amy Cooke, CEO John Locke Foundation



## Merger of providers could be broadband boon for N.C.

BY JOHNNY KAMPIS

As the federal government — and leaders in North Carolina — look to plow millions of taxpayer dollars into broadband growth, a possible merger between two internet providers with strong footprints in the state could help facilitate high-speed infrastructure development.

Zayou Group LLC of Boulder, Colorado, is looking to buy the Little Rock, Arkansas, companies of Windstream Holdings and Uniti Group Inc., according to The Wall Street Journal. Talks began in June, according to the newspaper, but not much progress has been made on the possible \$3.5 billion acquisition recently.

Arkansas Online noted that Uniti was once part of Windstream, spinning off into a separate company in 2015. Uniti engages in buying and building communications industry infrastructure, and Windstream has paid Uniti for access to some of that infrastructure, according to the outlet.

The owners of Zayo believe that bringing Windstream and Uniti back together could accelerate the construction of broadband infrastructure to a million more households by redirecting the \$700 million that Windstream spends annually on lease payments.

The two companies haven't been without their quarrels. Arkansas Online reported that Windstream sued Uniti in 2020, a year after emerging from a voluntary Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing, alleging the lease agreement it had with Uniti was overpriced and financially burdensome. The companies settled and agreed to a new long-term lease agreement.

Uniti has been tight-lipped about the possible acquisition, but Windstream has commented on the possible benefits of such a deal.

"Without commenting on any specific potential transactions, any plan that will allow us to accelerate and deepen our fiber build will be a positive for Windstream and its customers," Windstream president and CEO Tony Thomas told Arkansas Online.

CJ PHOTO BY NAYA REAGAN



# Small businesses, like Ashworth's in Fuquay-Varina, struggling with inflation

BY LAURI SALOVAARA

Ashworth's Clothing in Fuquay-Varina opened in 1937. It survived through some trying times, such as World War II, the Vietnam War, and the Great Recession.

Owner Steve Ashworth says the current state of the world economy offers some unique challenges, too.

"This is unusual, especially the government's lockdown in 2020, which impacted us," he told Carolina Journal.

Small businesses across the country, like Ashworth's, are struggling to get back to normal after those closures. Now, they're facing runaway inflation, growing to 7% in December, the highest rate in 40 years. Rising gas prices and food prices compound problems for small businesses faced with competing with bigger businesses, plus the rising health insurance cost and wages for employees.

Small business owners report inflation as their second biggest problem, with quality of labor topping the list, according to the National Federation of Independent Business' Small Business Optimism Index.

This is in line with the results of the November Civitas poll, in which 77% of 600 likely general election voters reported inflation as a top issue.

NFIB surveyed 639 business owners, mostly from the retail, services, construction, and agriculture sectors, with the largest group in the study having three to five employees.

About 49% of owners reported having trouble finding enough people to fill job openings. Of



Steve Ashworth of Ashworth's Clothing in Fuquay-Varina.

those surveyed, 31% said few of their applicants were qualified, and 26% had reported no applicants. To compete with bigger businesses, 48% reported having raised pay, with 32% planning to.

Not every small business owner can afford that. According to Cigna + Oscar Alliance's July survey, 70% of 406 small-business owners and decision-makers said health insurance "wasn't built with small businesses in mind."

Furthermore, 60% reported limiting health care benefit options due to costs, and 59% reported being unable to compete with larger companies on benefit offerings.

Ashworth is looking for more workers, particularly people willing to work full time. Two full-time workers and several part-time employees run Ashworth's.

"There doesn't seem to be any hope on the horizon," he told CJ.

To further complicate the hiring process, Ashworth's business is highly specialized, and employees have to be equipped with the proper skills and experience to handle the work.

"Custom clothing requires a fair amount of knowledge," he admits.

For Ashworth's, circumstances began to improve in April 2021, when state government began to lift its mandates. But new prob-

lems surfaced, like labor shortages and supply chain issues. With their products stuck at the Southern border and in California ports, Ashworth's has dealt with increasing costs encompassing freight, containers, insurance, building repairs, and tailoring. The Christmas season was especially tough.

Ashworth's Clothing will have to raise prices to compensate.

"Starting March 1, I am not going to have any other choice," Ashworth said. "Labor costs are going to increase especially."

According to NFIB, 49% of small business owners planned to raise prices, which was 54% in the November report. About 57% had already raised prices, down from 59%. The most affected sector is wholesale, followed by construction.

To survive, businesses must change their plans according to the economy, a John Locke Foundation expert says.

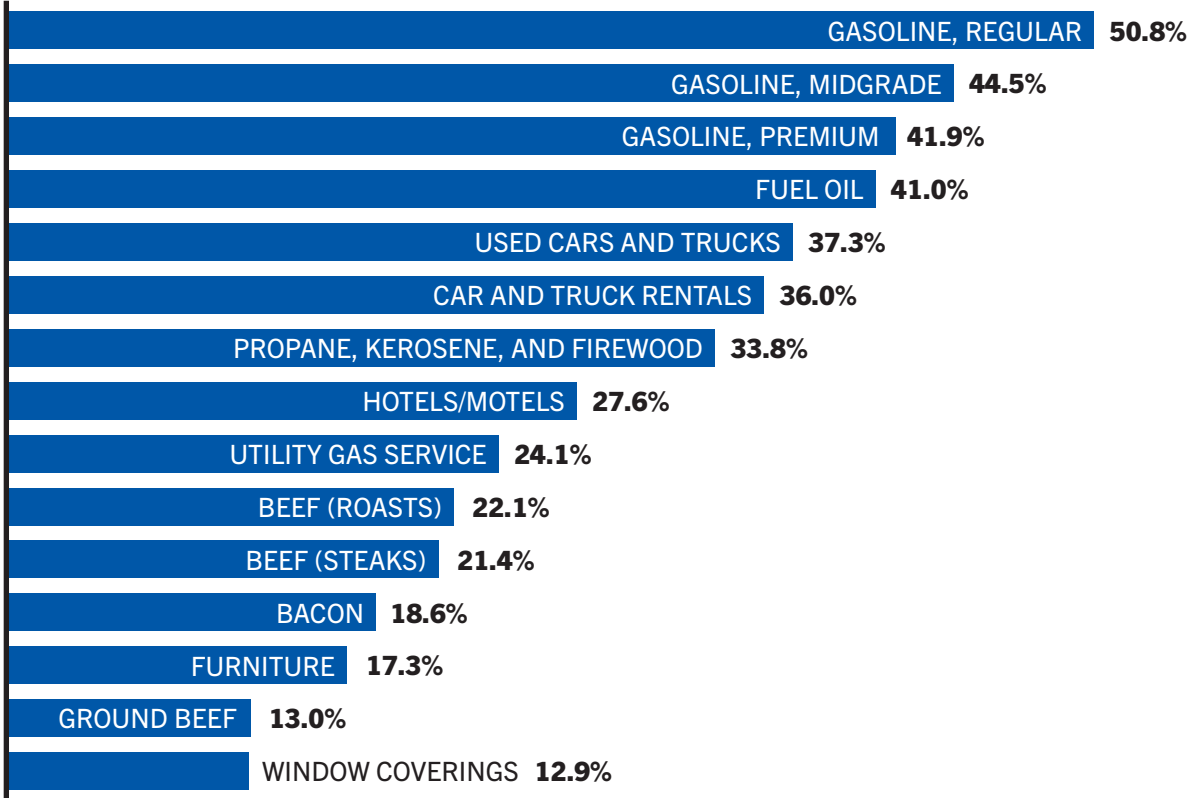
"To combat inflation and maintain a productive workplace, small businesses must adapt by raising prices, streamlining services, automating, eliminating less-popular products, or employing creative means to stay afloat as costs of doing business rise," said Paige Terryberry, Locke senior analyst for fiscal policy.

While the retail industry reported record holiday sales growth of 13.7% year-over-year for the 2021 season, retail consultants Customer Growth Partners estimated that more than half of that growth (6.7%) is due to the record inflation in December.

Lauri Salovaara is an intern with Carolina Journal. He is a senior studying political science at N.C. State University.

## Amid U.S. inflation surge, which prices are rising the most? Fuels, used cars and lodging lead the way

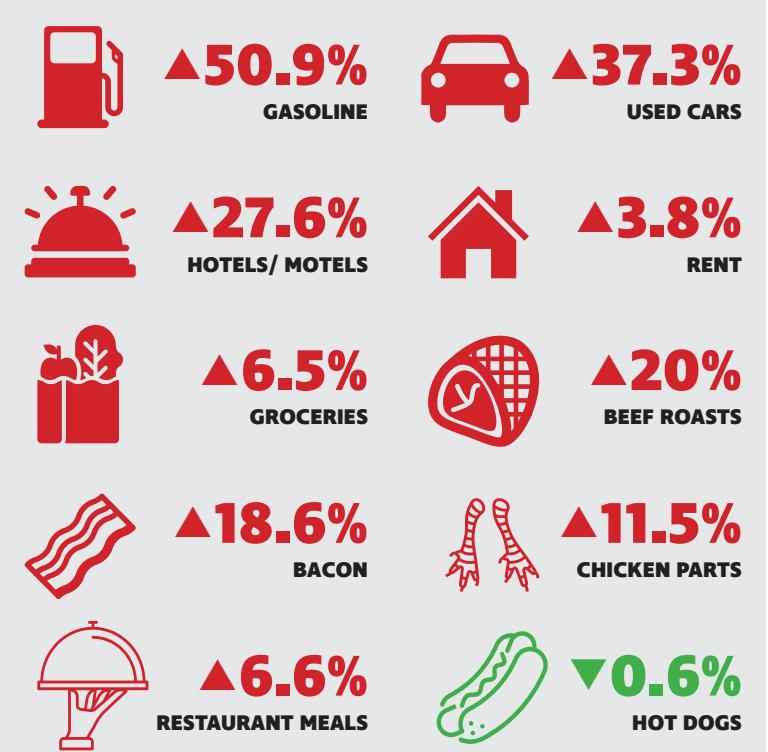
Biggest % increases in consumer prices, December 2020-December 2021



SOURCE: U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS, PEW RESEARCH CENTER

## Cost of living climbs in 2021

The Consumer Price Index increased 7.0% from December 2020 to December 2021, the highest rate in nearly 40 years.



SOURCE: U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS, PEW RESEARCH CENTER



General Assembly session preview

continued from PAGE 1

“I see a sense of urgency to finish up business and be done,” Roberts told Carolina Journal.

After all, he said, there’s less time to do the work of getting elected if legislators keep returning to redraw maps. “I think there’s just a real sense of urgency to wrap up.”

The General Assembly, as mentioned, is focused on finishing with redistricting — whatever that looks like — and either preparing stump speeches or taking a long-delayed break. The 2022 version of the short session, typically held in even-numbered years, won’t start until spring or early summer, though the 2021 marathon continues.

The 2021 session ended Dec. 10, with lawmakers technically returning to work Dec. 30. Most lawmakers actually reconvened in Raleigh in January after the holidays. Finishing the redistricting process and rescheduling the election primaries were early priorities. Once lawmakers focus on other issues in the regular short session, the goal is to finish by the Fourth of July.

“In different times, N.C. lawmakers would return to action in May of an even-numbered year after a lengthy break — perhaps as long as nine or 10 months,” said Mitch Kokai, John Locke Foundation senior political analyst. “Because their 2021 session lasted so long, and because they returned to Raleigh earlier than normal in 2022, it’s not clear that they will have the willpower to engage in long, drawn-out heated debates this time around. Add in the fact that almost all of them will see at least some changes in their election districts, and they will have even more incentive to get to work, do what needs to be done, and then go home.”

Senate Republicans have not formally set their priorities for the upcoming short session, Lauren Horsch, spokeswoman for Senate President Phil Berger, R-Rockingham, told Carolina Journal.

“However,” Horsch said, “we remain committed to building off of our successful 2021 session that cut taxes for all North Carolinians, expanded access to school choice, and provided relief for businesses impacted by the pandemic.”

Roberts expects some caucusing and serious discussion around several free-market issues, including sports wagering (see sidebar), medical marijuana, and Medicaid expansion, an issue for the newly formed Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Medicaid and N.C. Health Choice, which Rep. Donny Lambeth, R-Forsyth, and Sen. Jim



Rep. Donny Lambeth, R-Forsyth, will co-chair the newly formed Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Medicaid and N.C. Health Choice.

Perry, R-Lenoir, will co-chair.

Expect lawmakers to take up fewer individual bills, however, Roberts said, though measures such as House Bill 324, Ensuring Dignity and Nondiscrimination in Schools, may get a second chance.

The bill was designed to prevent schools from forcing students to adopt certain controversial beliefs. Supporters and opponents alike linked some of those beliefs to the controversial Critical Race Theory, but Cooper vetoed the move. Republicans in the General Assembly could override that veto, albeit with some help from Democrats, a tenuous prospect, at best. “The legislature should be focused on supporting teachers, helping students recover lost learning, and investing in our public schools,” Cooper said in vetoing the bill. “Instead, this bill pushes calculated, conspiracy-laden politics into public education.”

Berger, who led the push for the final version of H.B. 324, fired back.

“It’s perplexing that Governor Cooper would veto a bill that affirms the public school system’s role to teach students the full truth about our state’s sometimes ugly past,” Berger said in a prepared statement. “His invented excuse is so plainly refuted by the text of the bill that I question whether he even read it.”

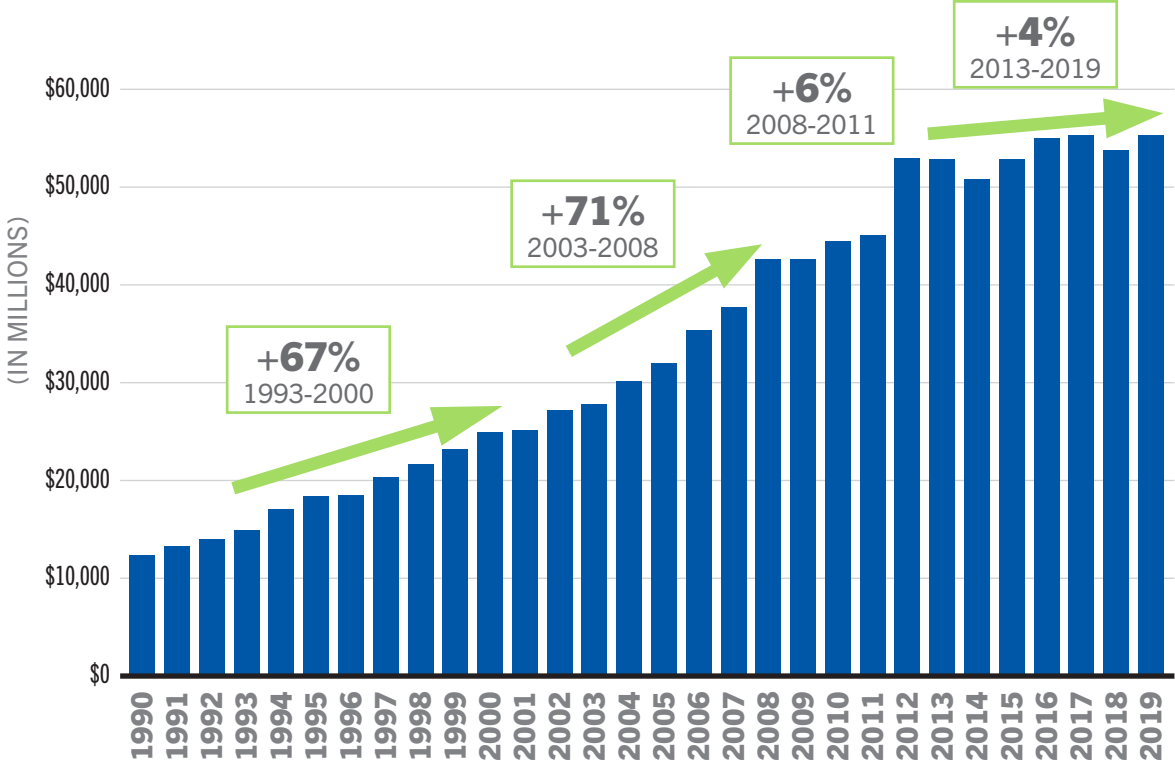
“More broadly, Democrats’ choice to oppose a bill saying schools can’t force kids to believe one race is superior to another really shows how far off the rails the mainstream Democratic Party has gone.”

Democrats’ choice to oppose a bill saying schools can’t force kids to believe one race is superior to another really shows how far off the rails the mainstream Democratic Party has gone.

- Senate leader Phil Berger, R-Rockingham

Total North Carolina state government spending over time

Senate Bill 717, Taxpayer Bill of Rights, would limit state spending growth and require annual deposits in a state savings fund.



SOURCE: OFFICE OF THE STATE CONTROLLER

To that point, one impetus for the Medicaid committee is Democrats’ incessant pleas, led by Cooper, to expand the federal program, a primary reason the governor has cited for vetoing previous budgets. Whether the committee plans to make serious moves toward that goal or is effectively placating Cooper isn’t yet clear.

But the committee may, says Roberts, advocate reforms proposed by the John Locke Foundation, which means choosing against expanding Medicaid in favor of free-market reforms, such as reforming the state’s certificate-of-need laws, granting full practice authority to the state’s advanced practice nurses, and expanding access to telehealth.

A bill legalizing the use of medical marijuana, Senate Bill

711, may at least get a hearing in the Senate, Roberts told CJ, if only to “see what the temperature is.” The oft-revised measure, called the N.C. Compassionate Care Act, would allow marijuana to treat “debilitating” conditions such as cancer and post-traumatic stress disorder. The most recent iteration of the well-traveled bill was sent to the Senate’s Rules Committee on Aug. 26, and that’s where it has remained.

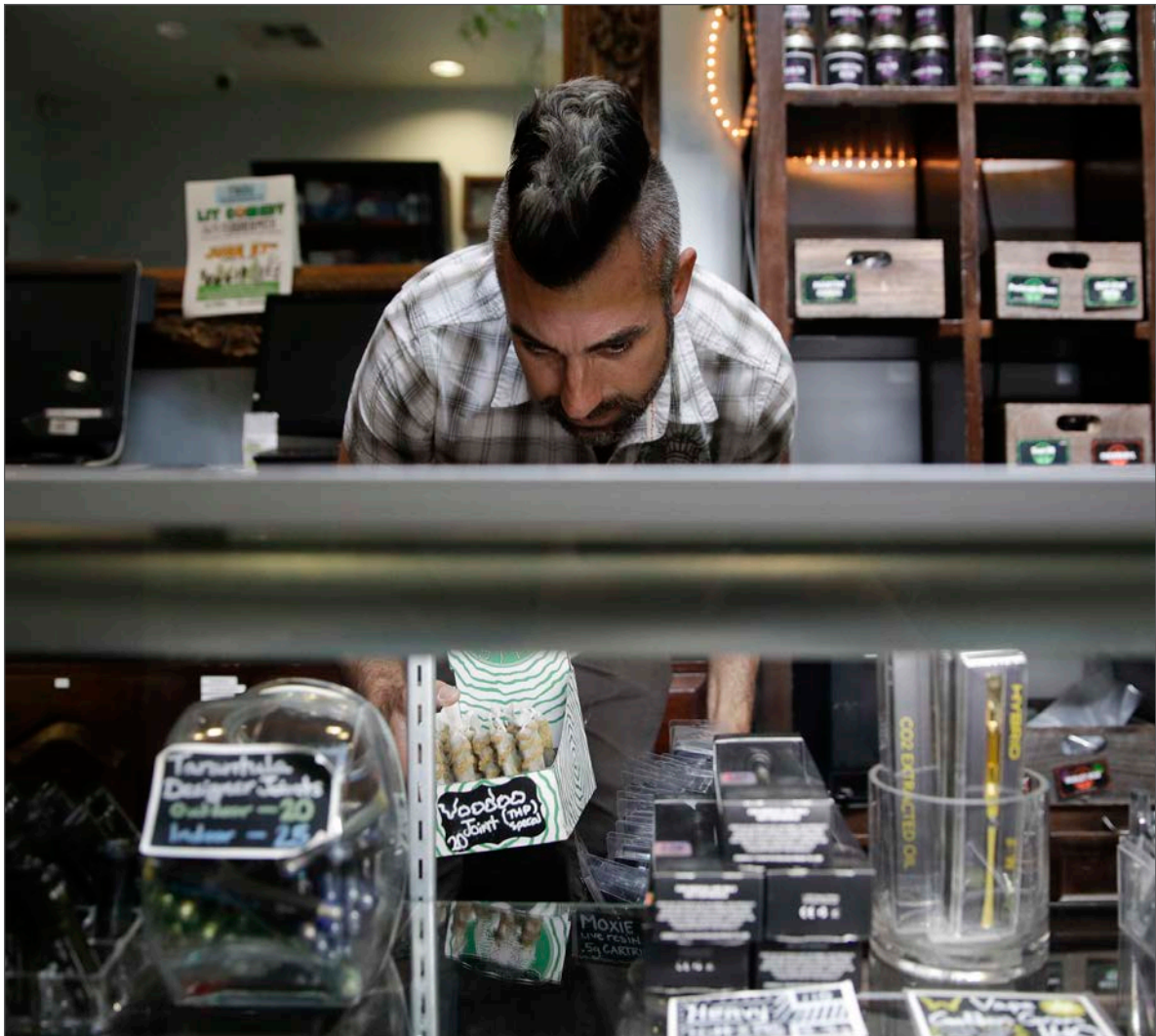
As of May 2021, 36 states and four territories allow for the medical use of cannabis products, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. As of Nov. 29, 18 states, two territories, and the District of Columbia have enacted legislation to regulate cannabis for nonmedical use. Sen. Bill Rabon, R-Brunswick, is a pri-

mary sponsor of S.B. 711. Rabon is a cancer survivor.

“Just personally, I’ve waited long enough,” Rabon told The Assembly, a long-form news website. “Every session we wait, every day we wait, someone’s gonna suffer that could benefit.”

Lawmakers also may again take up some proposed constitutional amendments, including Senate Bill 717, Taxpayer Bill of Rights, in the form of a constitutional amendment, which would require for approval a three-fifths vote of all members of the Senate and House. The measure limits state spending growth not to exceed the combined rate of inflation plus population growth, and

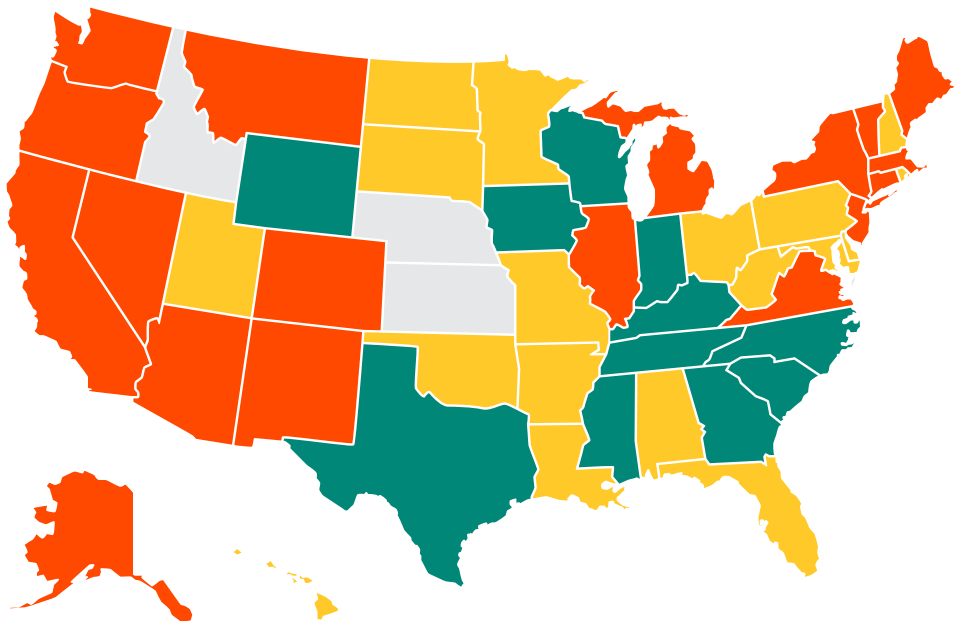




**MEDICAL MARIJUANA DISPENSARY.** Senate Bill 711, legalizing medical marijuana, may at least get a hearing in the Senate. Sen Bill Rabon, a cancer survivor, is a primary sponsor of the bill.

Medical marijuana regulation in the United States

Thirty-six states and four territories allow for the medical use of cannabis products.



- Adult & medical use regulated
- Comprehensive medical cannabis program
- CBD/Low THC program
- No public cannabis access program

SOURCE: NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES

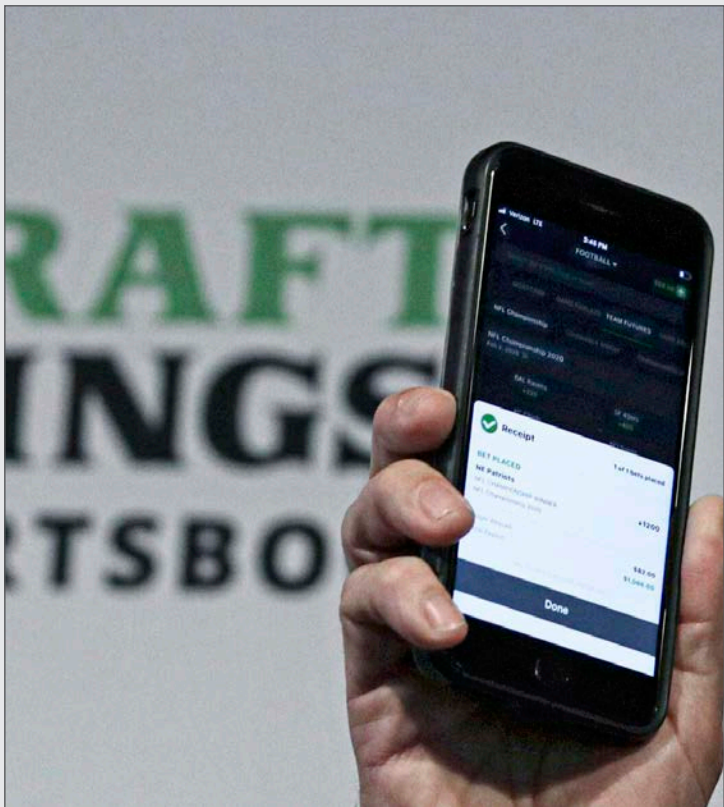
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it requires annual deposits in a state savings fund, for example. That bill was sent to Senate Rules in April, where it now sits. In March of last year, the John Locke Foundation asked likely voters whether they would support such a measure. Some 58% supported the idea, with just 17% opposed; 24% either had no opinion or were unsure. Brian Balfour, senior vice president of research for the John Locke Foundation, offered five reasons to support the measure. Those include making permanent fiscal restraint, ending the state budgetary roller coaster, and the positive prospects for job creation and growth. It's also possible, says Roberts, that Senate Bill 355, the Government Transparency Act of 2021,

will re-emerge in some form. Senators held several hearings to discuss S.B. 355, but the effort ultimately stalled. Later in the session, the Senate tried again by replacing the original language of the House-passed House Bill 64 with the same language from S.B. 355 through a process known as "gut and amend." H.B. 64, in its new form, returned to the House for concurrence; House members voted not to concur, a move that sent the bill to a conference committee, where it sits. "I think that might get done," said Roberts, attributing his optimism to the legislation's path through the committee process. The N.C. Press Association is strongly pushing the bill, though employee unions, including the N.C. Association of Educators, have worked to make it disappear. S.B. 355 would create a new requirement that government enti-

ties make a general description of certain personnel actions available to the public. Under current law, personnel files of state employees are confidential and may not be released except in certain limited circumstances to certain individuals or entities, the summary says. Among those pushing for the bill is John Bussian, one of the country's top press lawyers. Bussian has said the bill places a modest but important light on the records, especially when compared with other states. "There is no legitimate public policy reason not to allow North Carolinians the right to see records of disciplinary actions taken against the people they employ in state and local government," Bussian said. "The vast majority of states enjoy access like this, and the best of these states allow complete access to these files."

A good bet  
Sports betting  
legislation will  
probably make a  
comeback in 2022



**STATE REP:** "The fact is, people are already doing it. It's not regulated. It makes sense to create a framework and allow people to do it legally."

BY JOHNNY KAMPIS

A bill that would legalize mobile sports betting in North Carolina is likely to see significant consideration in the House during the abbreviated spring legislative session. Rep. Jon Hardister, R-Guliford, and majority whip in the House and one of the sponsors of the legislation, said recently that he believes Senate Bill 688 has enough bipartisan support to pass the legislature. While North Carolinians can place legal wagers in the two casinos operated by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in Cherokee and Murphy, observers note that many residents place wagers online through the black market on offshore websites. "The fact is, people are already doing it. It's not regulated," Hardister told Spectrum News. "It makes sense to create a framework and allow people to do it legally. The state can collect tax revenue on it." S.B. 688 would permit on-site wagering in more locations, including at professional sports venues, as well as authorize border-to-border betting on cell phones. It would set a tax rate of 8% of revenue, one of the lowest in the country. Fiscal estimates report about \$24 million in annual tax revenue would be gen-

erated. The legislation passed the Senate but didn't have time in 2021 to make it through the necessary House committees before reaching the House floor. Jordan Roberts, director of government affairs for the John Locke Foundation, told Carolina Journal in November the sponsors wanted to bring the issue up for discussion to gauge the likelihood of it passing this year and to see how it might need adjusted. Roberts figured then that the legislation could be a hot issue during the 2022 session. Roberts said uncertainty about the 2022 schedule makes the priorities for legislators unclear. "Having passed the Senate already and cleared a key House committee, S.B. 688 does not have many more steps to make it to the House floor for approval," Roberts said. "The bill's fate this session will all be determined by the appetite of legislative leaders when they do decide to hold a session this year." The top priority for lawmakers in early 2022 is the primary election. Members of the GOP caucus announced plans to attempt to delay the already postponed state primary because of concerns the state Supreme Court may strike down their re-districting plans.



# A highway runs through it

Farmers, landowners question the effects of planned bypass

BY DAVID BASS

Property owners in one of the few remaining rural areas of fast-growing Wake County are questioning plans to build a bypass for U.S. 401 that would dissect several long-time family farms.

The plan — orchestrated by the N.C. Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization — could expand the corridor to 19 miles of highway from Banks Road to Fuquay-Varina and into Lillington in Harnett County. The population in the region is expected to mushroom by 100,000 people by 2045, according to official estimates.

The bypass is included in the 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan. Even if approved, it could be a decade or more before workers break ground. But local landowners and some policymakers are concerned about what the plan will mean for small-business farmers who have lived there for generations and continue contributing to the local economy.

N.C. Rep. Erin Pare is one of them. The only Republican member of Wake County's N.C. House delegation, Pare represents a southern portion of the county that includes all of Fuquay-Varina and parts of Holly Springs and Apex.

Pare says the 401 bypass plans have been in the works for decades, leaving local property owners in limbo. "It handicaps how they can use their property or sell it," Pare told Carolina Journal.

"The point is they're not just plots of green space that people own," she added. "They actually contribute to the overall economy. That's the missing piece that people don't pay attention to."

At a meeting in early December, CAMPO opted to punt on a final vote on the bypass until March. But several members of the public spoke out against the bypass plan.

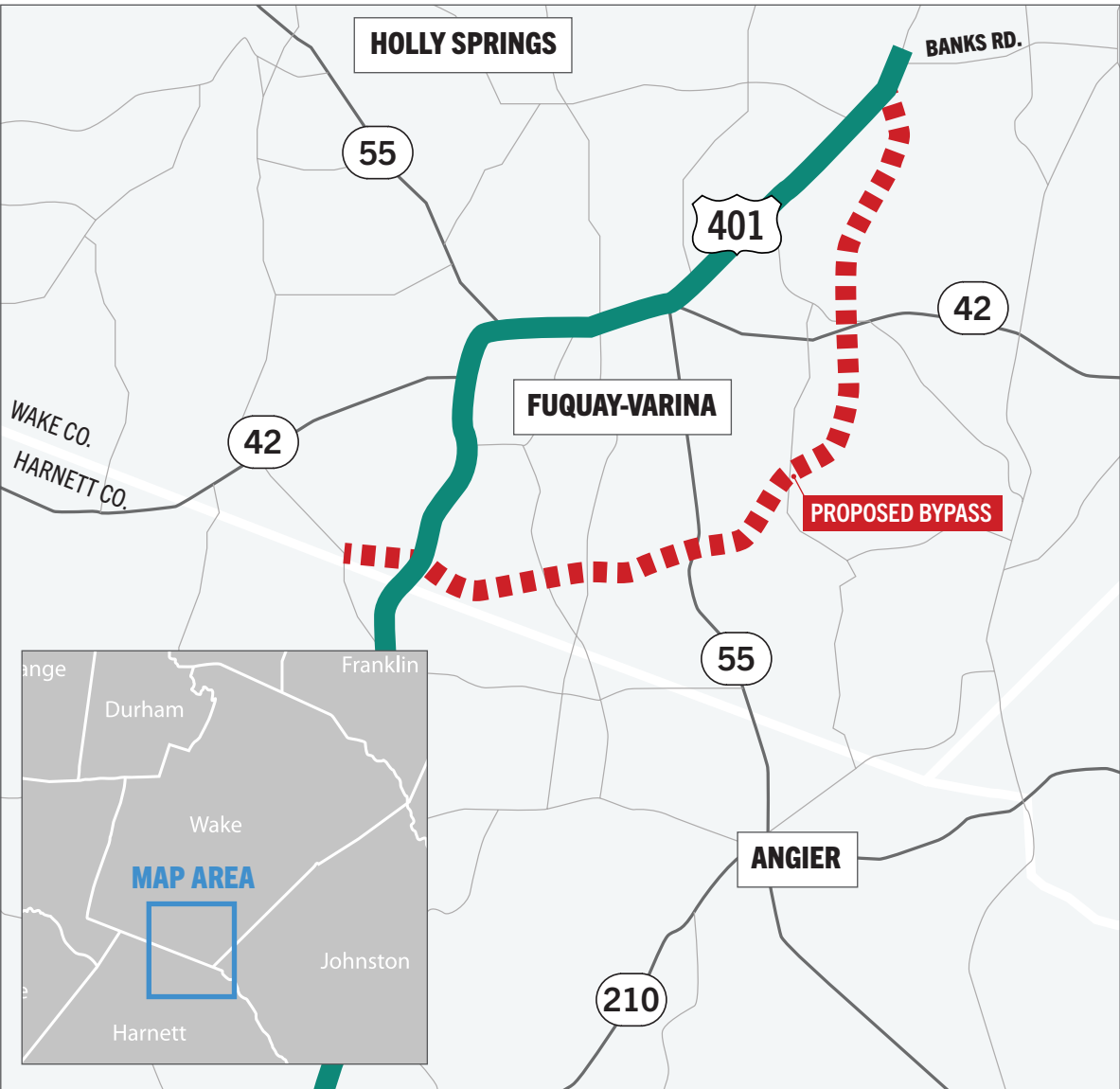
"We get it," said local resident Terry Yeagan, whose property is in the planned corridor for the bypass.

"Growth and development will ultimately change and likely eliminate our way of life. What you're seeing with our comments and prior communication is the beginning of our last gasp of our way of life as it dies."

Another property owner who spoke at the meeting, Meredith Crawford, owns and manages Pepperwood Farm, a 118-acre horse farm in Fuquay-Varina that includes multiple horse barns, an indoor arena, and an outdoor ring and round pen with



Candace Olive Gray surveys her family's property, Olive's Tree Farm, that would be destroyed by the 401 bypass.



lights and a jump field. The farm boards around 60 horses, including steeds for the Raleigh mounted police unit.

Crawford said if the bypass cuts through the farm, it will mean eventual closure. "The economic impact of what our farm provides to the area is significant,"

she said. "As a farm, we spend almost \$1 million a year with our vendors, with our farriers, just for the farm."

Seventeen horse farms have closed in fewer than five years, without any new farms created, Crawford said. The industry is shrinking and moving outside

counties like Wake and Harnett.

Other property owners have raised concerns about the bypass being too close to Fuquay-Varina — instead, they believe the road should fall farther east and south of the town. Martha Fish is one of them. Her land is part of JC Roland Farms LLC, a working farm,

and has been owned by her family for 260 years from the 1761 land grant. She asked that the bypass proposal be removed from the maps to allow time for more study.

Candace Olive Gray is another local former owner. Her family's property, Olive's Tree Farm, is 73 acres near Fuquay-Varina. That has been run as a nursery business for two decades. Most of their business is local.

"I make the 17th generation living off this land with hopes that my kids will continue to do the same," said Gray. "The thoughts of a bypass destroying our homes, livelihood, legacy, and heritage is heartbreaking."

Local municipal and county leaders have spoken in favor of the bypass.

Blake Massengale, the mayor of Fuquay-Varina, acknowledged landowners' concerns but said the public benefit of the bypass was crucial.

"I can appreciate the connection that a property owner may have with their own property very much. That said, all if the information that I've seen, and from what I've been told by transportation planners and consultants, the 401 bypass is needed to support future transportation ability," he said.

"The 401 bypass is of extreme importance to Harnett County," said Lewis Weatherspoon, chairman of the Harnett County Board of Commissioners.

Gray said elected officials need a new process for making these decisions.

"I believe the whole CAMPO process needs to be revamped, starting with proper notifications to property owners and our farms that provide extreme economic benefits should be weighed more heavily," she said.

CJ PHOTO BY MAYA REAGAN



# Waiting on the courts

Fate of elections, maps remains unclear

BY CJ STAFF

North Carolina's 2022 elections for Congress and the state House and Senate remained in limbo at press time, as the state Supreme Court prepared for oral arguments in lawsuits challenging new state election maps.

A three-judge bipartisan panel of Superior Court judges unanimously endorsed the maps in a ruling issued Jan. 11. The Supreme Court could affirm that ruling and allow elections to proceed as planned. Or the seven-member high court could strike down all or parts of all three targeted maps.

Oral arguments were scheduled for Feb. 2. Observers anticipated a ruling within weeks, perhaps days, of that virtual hearing.

State law and tradition call for the court to give state lawmakers a second opportunity to tweak existing maps or draw new ones if the enacted maps are rejected. But a tight timeline for North Carolina's primary election could prompt the Supreme Court to bypass that process and produce court-drawn maps for 2022 elections.

Fear of that possibility helped prompt the Republican-led General Assembly to return to Raleigh on Jan. 19 to approve House Bill 605. It would move the primary election date back by three weeks. The delay would guarantee lawmakers more time to comply with a court order.

The fight over election maps had already prompted the state Supreme Court to bump North Carolina's originally scheduled March 8 primary back to May 17. H.B. 605 would set a new primary date of June 7. Lawmakers approved the measure on a party-line vote, with Republicans favoring the delay and Democrats rejecting it. At press time, Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper had yet to announce whether he would sign the bill, veto it, or allow it to move forward without his signature.

At stake in the fight over drawing of election maps, also known as redistricting, is potential partisan control of key N.C. elected offices for the next decade.

All 50 seats in the N.C. Sen-

ate and all 120 seats in the N.C. House of Representatives are up for election every two years. Republicans now hold a 28-22 Senate majority and a 69-51 advantage in the House.

Critics of new maps drawn with fresh 2021 U.S. census data suggest that Republicans engaged in "extreme" partisanship in redistricting. Critics contend the new maps would help preserve GOP control of both legislative chambers, regardless of election results, between now and 2030. That's when the next U.S. census will prompt another round of redistricting.

Multiple legal challenges contend that the excessive partisanship leads to a level of "extreme gerrymandering" that violates multiple sections of the N.C. Constitution.

Along with the election maps' potential impact on control of the General Assembly, the legal fight also could affect Congress.

Population growth during the 2010s helped North Carolina gain a 14th seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. That means lawmakers were required to shift the state's political boundaries to accommodate a new 14th Congressional District. Republicans hold an 8-5 advantage among the current U.S. House delegation. Critics argue that the challenged congressional map would guarantee a 10-4 or even 11-3 Republican electoral advantage moving forward.

That's one reason why national groups aligned with the Democratic Party are playing a leading role in challenging N.C. maps. Organizations linked to former Obama-era U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder are taking part in the proceedings. Attorneys tied to national Democratic election lawyer Marc Elias represent some plaintiffs in the ongoing cases.

The three-judge panel that upheld the maps in January issued a 260-page judgment. It applied to all active state lawsuits challenging the election maps. Judges Graham Shirley and Nathaniel Poovey, both Republicans, and Dawn Layton, a Democrat, agreed with redistricting critics that the enacted maps showed evidence of "intentional, pro-Republican partisan redistricting."

But the judges also agreed unanimously that nothing within the state's political or constitutional history suggested that Republican lawmakers did anything that would prompt courts to throw the maps out.

Citing the U.S. Supreme Court's 2019 ruling in the N.C. partisan gerrymandering case *Rucho v. Common Cause*, the N.C. trial-level judges noted that courts



Organizations linked to Obama-era U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder are challenging North Carolina's maps.



Attorneys tied to national Democratic election lawyer Marc Elias represent plaintiffs in the map challenges.

have not been able to produce a manageable standard for partisan gerrymandering cases. Such a standard would distinguish an acceptable level of partisanship in redistricting from "extreme" partisanship that would render maps unconstitutional.

"Redistricting is a political process that has serious political consequences," the bipartisan panel of judges wrote. "It is one of the purest political questions which the legislature alone is allowed to answer. Were we as a Court to insert ourselves in the

manner requested, we would be usurping the political power and prerogatives of an equal branch of government. Once we embark on that slippery slope, there would be no corner of legislative or executive power that we could not reach."

For the latest information about the ongoing court battle over redistricting:  
[www.carolinajournal.com](http://www.carolinajournal.com)





# School choice: 61% of likely voters back N.C.'s Opportunity Scholarship Program

BY DAVID BASS

Support for the Opportunity Scholarship Program stands at 61%, according to a new Civitas Poll of likely voters presented by the John Locke Foundation.

The results arrived during National School Choice Week, an annual nationwide celebration of educational options for all students.

The poll found that likely voters also take into consideration a politician's position on Opportunity Scholarships when deciding at the ballot box.

Forty-six percent said they would be more likely to vote for a pro-scholarship candidate in the 2022 mid-terms, compared to 22% who would be less likely.

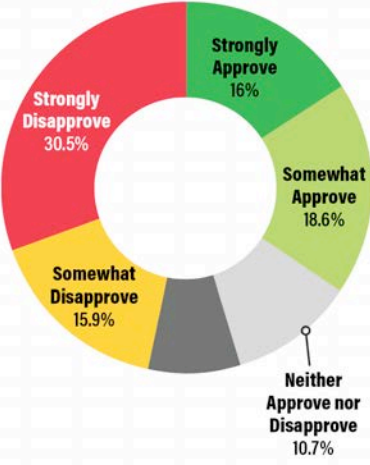
Opportunity Scholarships provide up to \$5,900 a year for low- and moderate-income families to attend the private school of their choice.

"Elected officials and public school advocates who continue to rail against parental choice represent a small, pitiful faction of enthusiasts clinging to antiquated ideas about K-12 education," said Terry Stoops, director of the Center for Effective Education at the John Locke Foundation.

"The Civitas Poll mirrors findings from national polls, which

### Cooper Job Approval - Education

Do you approve or disapprove of the way that Governor Roy Cooper is handling his job as it relates to education in North Carolina?



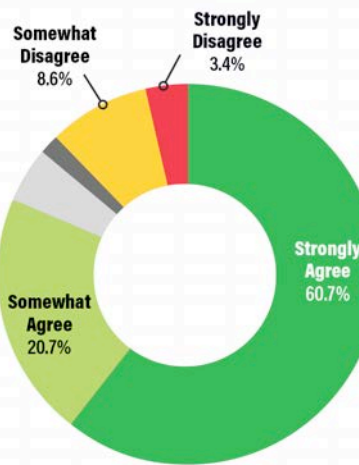
Strongly Approve 16%  
Somewhat Approve 18.6%  
Neither Approve nor Disapprove 10.7%  
Somewhat Disapprove 15.9%  
Strongly Disapprove 30.5%

Cygnal Polling, on behalf of John Locke Foundation, surveyed 600 likely general election voters from January 21 - 23, 2022 with a margin of error of ±3.95%.

locke CIVITAS POLL CYGNAL

### School Choice

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Parents should have the ability to choose where their child attends school.



Strongly Agree 60.7%  
Somewhat Agree 20.7%  
Strongly Disagree 3.4%  
Somewhat Disagree 8.6%

Cygnal Polling, on behalf of John Locke Foundation, surveyed 600 likely general election voters from January 21 - 23, 2022 with a margin of error of ±3.95%.

locke CIVITAS POLL CYGNAL

found overwhelming support for parent choice. It is a good reminder that public opinion remains solidly in the pro-parental choice camp."

Poll respondents favored a range of other types of school choice as well, including 58% voicing support for public charter schools and 59% backing the

creation of Education Savings Accounts designed for students who experienced learning loss during the pandemic.

Nearly eight in 10 respondents believe that parents or legal guardians should determine where a child attends school, compared to 11% who believe the decision should be up to local school boards.

Over one-third of respondents have changed schools or considered changing schools due to the pandemic.

The poll also gauged likely voters' attitudes on the general direction of the state and country. Seven in 10 likely voters believe the country is on the wrong track, with 52% saying the country is "definitely" on the wrong track.

President Biden's approval rating continued its decline, reaching a low of 38% in January, compared to 42% in August and 48% in March.

The enthusiasm gap among Biden's supporters has only worsened in the past 10 months — in March, 34% "strongly" approved of Biden, while now only 18% do.

Gov. Roy Cooper's approval rating has also slipped in recent months. Forty-four percent of likely voters approve of the governor now, compared to 46% in November. In May, Cooper's approval rating was as high as 53%.

On education specifically, most likely voters don't trust the direction Cooper has taken the state — 46% disapprove of his job performance and 35% approve.

"The poll results are not good news for President Biden or Governor Cooper, whose policies continue to be unpopular with families," said Robert Luebke, senior fellow at the Center for Effective Education. "The numbers, however, continue to be good for school choice advocates. They keep telling us two things: North Carolinians like choice, and they want more of it."

In a surprising move, Cooper issued a proclamation in mid-January recognizing National School Choice Week, a first for him since he took office after the 2016 election.

"Governor Cooper's National School Choice Week proclamation makes this year's celebration even more special," said Stoops. "It suggests that even the most ardent opponent of parental choice can be persuaded of its merits."

More broadly, 66% believe that K-12 education in North Carolina is headed in the wrong direction, compared to 20% who believe it is on the right track.

*The survey was conducted Jan. 21-23 of 600 likely general election voters.*

# McCrory tops Budd in GOP primary poll of 2022 U.S. Senate race

BY DAVID BASS

Former N.C. Gov. Pat McCrory is the preferred choice for the state's U.S. Senate seat in 2022, according to a Civitas Poll of likely GOP primary voters released Jan. 13.

McCrory leads the Republican primary field with 24% of the vote, compared to 19% for 13th Congressional District Rep. Ted Budd and 7% for former 6th Congressional District Rep. Mark Walker. Forty-nine percent of those surveyed were undecided.

The general election for the Tar Heel State's Senate seat is expected to be one of the most competitive of 2022 and could decide the balance of power in that chamber. The seat is open due to the retirement of incumbent U.S. Sen Richard Burr.

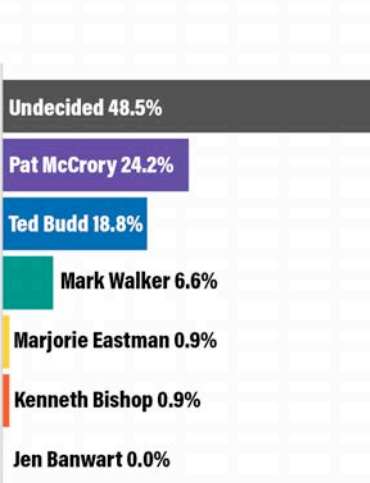
In the poll, McCrory makes his strongest showing in three of four major regions across the state, with 24% support in the Triangle, 27% on the coast, and 27% in Charlotte.

The only area in which Budd comes out on top is central North Carolina, with 28% support. All four regions have a high undecided rate, ranging from 35% in the central portion of the state to 57% in the Triangle.

"This poll shows that there are

### 2022 GOP Senate Primary

If the Republican primary election for U.S. Senate was held today, and you had to make a choice, who would you vote for out of the following options?

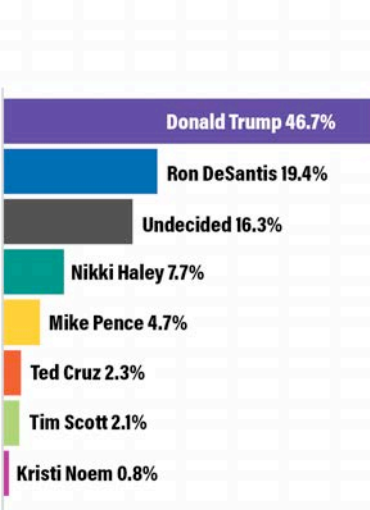


Cygnal Polling, on behalf of John Locke Foundation, surveyed 600 likely GOP primary voters from January 7 - 9, 2022 with a margin of error of ±3.95%.

locke CIVITAS POLL CYGNAL

### Presidential Ballot

If the 2024 Republican presidential primary election was held today, and you had to make a choice, who would you vote for?



Cygnal Polling, on behalf of John Locke Foundation, surveyed 600 likely GOP primary voters from January 7 - 9, 2022 with a margin of error of ±3.95%.

locke CIVITAS POLL CYGNAL

two very different paths to victory for the McCrory and Budd campaigns," said Donald Bryson, pres-

ident of the John Locke Foundation. "Budd's path is more straightforward: He needs the

field to narrow. McCrory, on the other hand, with better name recognition, needs his campaign to begin putting lead on target, specifically Ted Budd himself and core conservative issues like border security and election security."

The results of the new survey show that former President Trump's influence in the race is strong but not overwhelming. Even with Trump's endorsement landing in June, Budd has been unable to overtake McCrory in the polls.

Asked how Trump's endorsement would impact their vote, 50% of GOP primary voters said they would definitely or probably vote for Trump's pick, while 37% said they would keep an open mind.

Michael Bitzer, professor of politics and history at Catawba College in Salisbury, predicted that Trump's influence will be a significant factor as the race heads into the home stretch.

"I'd expect to see Budd publicize Trump's endorsement to the hilt — that's likely the type of GOP primary voter that will be out there," Bitzer told Carolina Journal.

"McCrory's name recognition and previous runs certainly are a fundamental advantage to him, but my question continues to be

how loyal will this GOP primary electorate be toward Trump?"

Andy Taylor, a political science professor at N.C. State University, noted that half the Republican electorate is still undecided in the race. "There is plenty of room for things to change, clearly," he said.

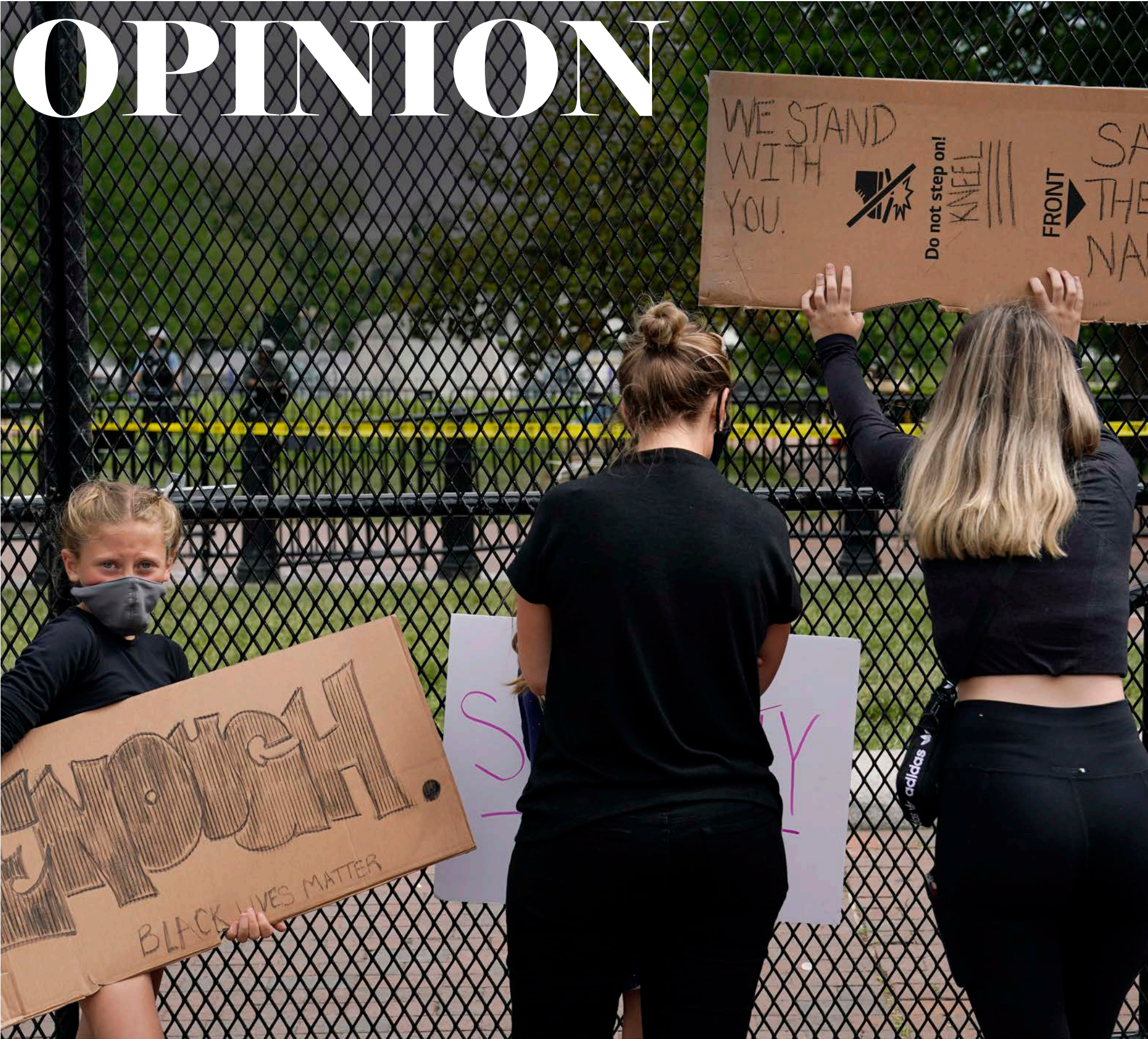
When it comes to a possible presidential primary in 2024, Trump remains the runaway favorite among Republican voters. Forty-seven percent said they would vote for the former president over Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (19%), former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley (8%), or former Vice President Mike Pence (5%).

The Civitas poll unearthed several other key data points. Asked whether the U.S. is headed in the right or wrong direction, nine out of 10 GOP primary voters checked "wrong direction." Eighty-one percent disapprove of the job that the U.S. Congress is doing.

GOP primary voters also expressed concerns over election integrity. Asked "Do you believe the November 2022 general elections will be free and fair?" 49% said "no," 21% "yes," and 31% were unsure.

*The poll was conducted by Cygnal and queried 600 likely voters Jan. 7-9.*





## Privilege obsession is a form of insanity

**RAY NOTHSTINE**  
OPINION EDITOR

Last month, a public school in Fairfax County, Virginia, had students play “privilege bingo.” Of course, the bingo card had the usual so-called privileges like “white,” “heterosexual,” “Christian,” or “male.” All meant to lower the self-esteem of certain kids in the class, I’m sure. The card also had a space for “military kid.” Supposedly, that’s now a privilege, too, under the warped rubric of identity politics.

This nonsense isn’t just a rogue teacher but is an approved curriculum for Fairfax County schools. Parents Defending Education, a national grass-roots organization, rightly labeled the privilege tag for military kids as “grotesque.”

I’m far from an expert on every topic, but I know something about being a military kid. My dad was in the Air Force for over a quarter century. While I was blessed to see the world, I also didn’t see my dad but once or twice a year at times. I moved around to seven or eight

different schools. It turns out that’s not the best formula for academic stability. I played a lot of catch-up. I lost friends and lived far away from my grandparents and other extended family members. I likely received at least one chronic disease from water contaminated by jet fuel at Strategic Air Command bases. I don’t consider myself a victim, but you get the point.

Spare me any “privilege” lectures.

I doubt the kids that watched their dad or mom come back from Iraq or Afghanistan in a box took comfort in their so-called privilege.

This kind of growing grievance industry that infects the left marches on toward clownish levels of absurdity. Much of the nonsense is fueled by the desire to climb up the hierarchy of victimhood.

In the new religion of identity politics, being aggrieved is sacramental or a higher state of grace. Those that reach this enlightened state of victimhood are beyond challenge, in their own minds, at least.

Some believe that around every corner is racism, an oppressor, or they’re enslaved to a worldview

| Identifying Your Privilege        |                              |                           |                                  |                      |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Native English Speaker            | Both Parents Went to College | Never Worried about Food  | Drive/Get Driven to School       | Employed             |
| Comfortable Walking Outside Alone | White                        | Parents are Married       | Born in Country of Residence     | No Speech Impediment |
| Heterosexual                      | Christian                    | FREE SPACE                | Feel Safe Around Police Officers | Mentally Healthy     |
| College is the Expectation        | Never Been Racially Profiled | Feel represented in media | Able-Bodied                      | Military Kid         |
| Have your own                     | Involved in Extra Curricular | Cisgender                 | Never lost a loved               |                      |

that believes everyday language is violence.

The left thrives on division, and shouts of “privilege” are too often weaponized to shut down debate and discussion. Guilt or non-standing is based more on one’s race or sex than substance. We’ve all seen it filter out of the college campus environments and spill over into the culture.

Equally troubling is that Fairfax County has many of the best public schools — not just in Virginia, but the entire nation. Be-

cause it’s a highly affluent area, education spending is over \$16,500 per pupil.

Yet woke-obsessed education, like privilege bingo cards, does virtually nothing to reflect the mission of public schooling in the first place, which is to train up good, responsible, and productive citizens.

After their ludicrous bingo card leaked and parents were understandably outraged, the school district said the exercise would be revised and offered an apology, albeit with the caveat they need to take

student privilege exercises more seriously. But do you trust these education bureaucrats and administrators?

Fortunately, the most recent elections in Virginia saw massive pushback to woke agendas and classroom indoctrination. Efforts to divide people by race must be rejected. Efforts that lower students’ self-esteem because they belong to a particular group — particularly if a parent or parents serve in the military — are insane.

Social engineering and leveling schemes fail wherever and whenever they are tried. The 20th century is the bloodiest in world history because it propagated this kind of ideology around the globe. Parents deserve better. We all do as taxpayers and citizens.

The exercise rightly produced outrage over the inclusion of military kids, yet the entire assignment is flawed and offensive. Making students feel bad about their circumstances is not for the benefit of the kids but ideologically minded adults with a dangerous and un-American agenda. If this kind of thought goes unchecked, the woke public school establishment can’t die fast enough.



# How parenthood, pandemic, and propaganda are destroying the teaching profession

**DR. TERRY STOOPS**  
CONTRIBUTOR

As a state, we are fortunate that many teachers fulfill their varied roles and responsibilities admirably, even in the face of immense challenges that often are beyond their control. Three such challenges come to mind.

The first is changes to family structure. According to a 2019 study by the Pew Research Center, the United States has the highest rate of children living in single-parent households in the world. Researchers reported that 23% of U.S. children under 18 live with one parent and no other adults. To put that in perspective, that is more than three times the share of children worldwide who do so.

Many single-parent households thrive thanks to strong support networks, while others produce stressors that impact children's psychological, social, and intellectual development. Teachers must then attempt to educate and supervise children who cannot manage these extraordinary stressors and engage with parents or guardians facing their own unique challenges.

The second challenge is, of course, the pandemic. The psychological, physical, and educational effects of school building



23 percent of U.S. children under 18 live with only one parent.

closures on children cannot be overstated. Numerous academic studies find that the response to the pandemic increased anxiety, emotional distress, and depressive symptoms in children. It also disrupted their sleep patterns, decreased physical activity, and promoted a sedentary lifestyle. With parents and teachers encountering mental health challenges of their own, the pandemic compromised the traditional support structures for children.

Proficiency rates on standardized tests stagnated long before the pandemic. Yet, instructional changes implemented in response to COVID-19, including mandated remote learning and extended quarantine periods, produced unprecedented levels of learning loss. A working paper published by the National Bureau of Economic Research in November concluded that "pass rates declined compared to prior years and that these declines were larger in districts with less in-person instruction." Researchers found that pass rates on standardized math tests declined by a staggering 14.2 percentage points on average. Last year, North Carolina Association of Educators President Tamika Walker Kelly called learning loss a "false construct," but study after study suggests it is not a figment of our imagination.

In addition to health and learning impediments is the difficulty of teaching with masks. Con-

Today's educators must tiptoe around the hair-trigger sensibilities of students who teeter on the edge of outrage, standing at the ready to arouse the mob by amplifying transgressions on social media.

sider the exertion necessary to project one's voice through a mask for several hours each workday or try to discern nonverbal cues from students whose faces are concealed by face coverings. Also, consider the amount of "policing" required to ensure that children always wear suitable face coverings appropriately. And this herculean effort to conduct a school day with universal masking is performed even as evidence continues to suggest that the harms of masking children outweigh its benefits.

The final challenge is woke-ness in the classroom. Consider teachers who have been told that they have a moral responsibility to ensure that all children emerge from their classrooms with "correct" beliefs about race, gender,

sexuality, and physical appearance. At the same time, supervisors demand that they closely regulate communication with (and between) students to ensure that they faithfully employ selected pronouns, identities, and designations. Today's educators must tiptoe around the hair-trigger sensibilities of students who teeter on the edge of outrage, standing at the ready to arouse the mob by amplifying transgressions on social media.

For a minimal number of outspoken activist administrators, educators, and their protégés, the woke classroom is the fulfillment of a dream hatched by academics, teacher union officials, and progressive politicians that they admire. The silent majority, who are committed to the teaching profession but do not espouse left-wing ideology or politics, will play along by promising that they maintain an equity-centered classroom featuring equity-focused instruction reinforced by equity-centered policies highlighting equity-minded practices teaching equity-based solutions utilizing equity-driven models for equity-seeking groups.

The cumulative effects of single-parent households, the pandemic, and woke classrooms will be challenging to quantify. In the meantime, the best-case scenario is that these pressures continue to expand school choice and produce sweeping changes to how we train, recruit, and retain teachers.

# On becoming a political advertiser

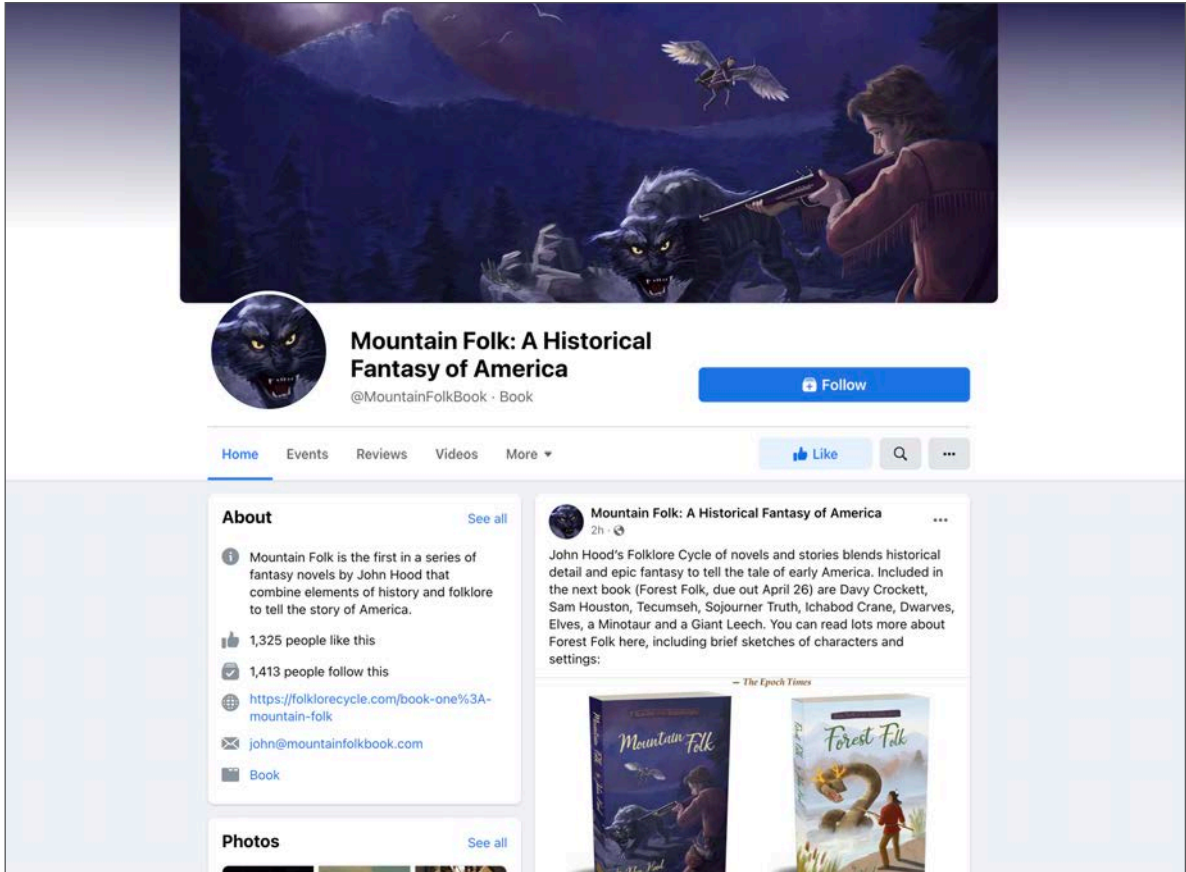
**JOHN HOOD**  
CONTRIBUTOR

IT'S NOT PERSONAL, it's just business — or so Facebook assures me.

On this matter, I'm inclined to believe the company. That doesn't make my latest encounter with the social-media giant any less frustrating, however. I just spent many days jumping through its authorization hoops so I could run political ads on a Facebook page I manage. And even after finishing the process, I still had my ad rejected and had to appeal the decision multiple times.

Before you accuse me of burying the lede, let me clarify. I am not abandoning my long-time role as political commentator in order to run for office. I am, of course, unelectable. Thousands of highly opinionated newspaper columns and TV appearances over more than three decades will do that to the best of men, and also to me.

No, what set off Facebook's alarm was something else entirely. It flagged me as attempting to use boosted posts on a nonpolitical page in order to promote a political cause. That's a no-no, according to the policies Facebook adopted amid criticism of the role its ads played in the 2016 election and subsequent controversies. The company now requires special authorization and disclosures



"Mountain Folk" is a historical fantasy set during the Revolutionary War. To promote the book, I set up a Facebook page and occasionally spend a few dollars boosting posts about its characters, settings, and themes.

in order to run "ads made by, on behalf of, or about a candidate for public office."

Last year I published my first novel, "Mountain Folk." It's a historical fantasy set during the Revolutionary War. To promote the

book, I set up a Facebook page and occasionally spend a few dollars boosting posts about its characters, settings, and themes.

It was one of those boosted posts that Facebook rejected multiple times. The post consisted al-

most entirely of review excerpts. As best I can determine, this was the offending passage:

"Fairies, elves, dwarves, water maidens, monsters, and more. Soldiers and heroes of the American Revolution. Founding Fa-

thers of our country like Washington and Jefferson. Cherokee and Shawnee women and warriors. A minister turned soldier and politician who is unembarrassed to quote Scripture. Throw all these ingredients into a stew pot of fiction, turn up the burner, and you soon have bubbling on the stove John Hood's Mountain Folk."

See the problem? The reviewer described George Washington and Thomas Jefferson as "Founding Fathers of our country." That could be construed as an implicit endorsement of candidates for public office — assuming Facebook readers possess time machines, that is, or that some evil genius is reanimating the corpses of dead presidents to effect a zombie takeover of the federal government (which would, I admit, be something of an improvement).

The absurdity of my case merely serves to illustrate the greater absurdity of the present moment. Upset by claims you consider baseless or ideas you consider objectionable? The proper remedy is neither government restrictions on political speech nor heavy-handed policies by social-media platforms. Don't hinder debate. Encourage it. "We are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead," Jefferson famously said, "nor to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it."

Official disclaimer: This is not an endorsement of Washington/Jefferson '24.

SCREENSHOT FROM MOUNTAIN FOLK FACEBOOK PAGE



# Don't believe the left's spin on inflation

DONALD BRYSON  
CONTRIBUTOR



The Biden Administration and progressive thought leaders, such as Paul Krugman and even Rob Schofield, from N.C. Policy Watch, have been bending over backward at the beginning of 2022 to defend the administration's economic record and downplay the significance of skyrocketing inflation.

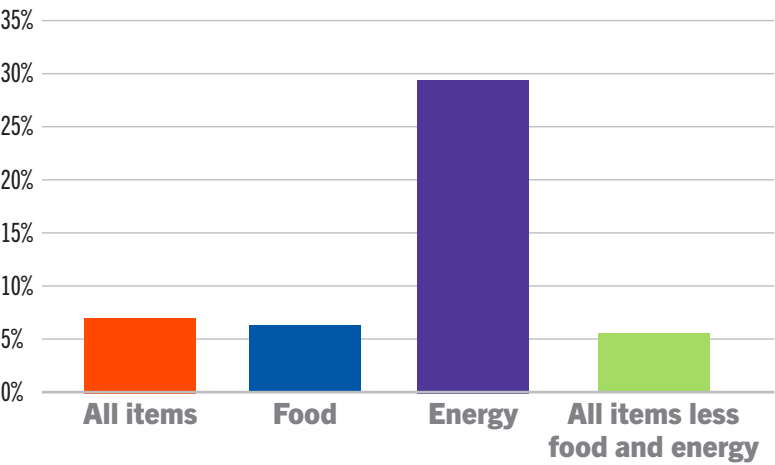
And it's no wonder — President Biden is receiving full blame for the state of the economy. According to a Jan. 25 Economist/YouGov poll, 51% of American citizens disapprove of Biden's handling of jobs and the economy. In the same survey, when asked if unemployment or inflation is the more important threat to the economy, 46% answered inflation, compared to 10% with unemployment.

There lies our most significant economic challenge, not just inflation, but inflation with low consumer confidence.

Inflation is the reduction in the value of money reflected in a general increase in the price of goods and services. It is a significant problem for American families and the overall economy, as the federal Labor Department reported that prices increased at an annual rate of 7% in December. That is the fastest inflation rate since Ronald Reagan's first term as president.

Why is inflation a problem? Well, Margaret Thatcher, speaking about four years before she

12-month percentage change, Consumer Price Index, selected categories



SOURCE: U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS

became British prime minister, said it very well in a 1975 speech. Speaking on inflation, Thatcher said, "It is threatening to destroy not just the relative prosperity to which most of us have become accustomed, but the savings and plans of each person and family and the working capital of each business and other organization."

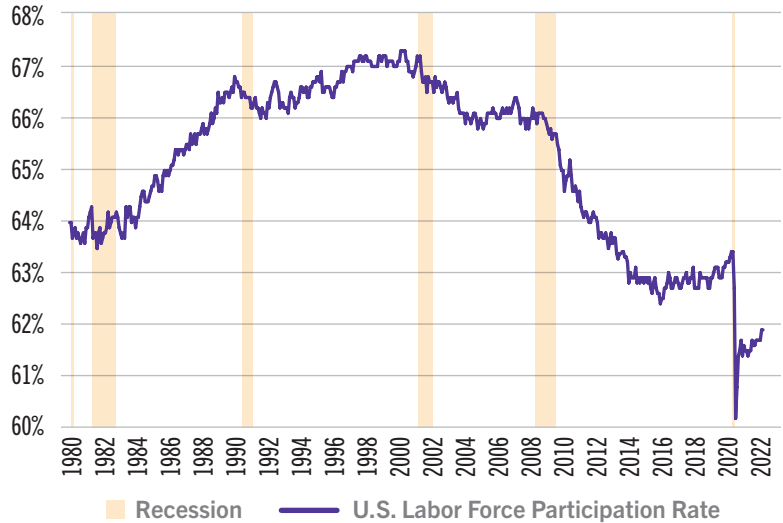
In other words, if the price of goods and services far outpaces wage growth and savings interest, then the average American family is poorer even though nothing in their life has changed. This inflation makes our nation and society less prosperous and devalues the labor of the American family. The American Dream is becoming more distant for so many.

So why is inflation so high? There are two unequal pieces to this puzzle.

First, there is a global supply chain crisis. Labor shortages caused by labor strikes and COVID-19, in addition to trade tariffs, have slowed the flow of goods across the world, leading to product scarcity, and thereby, price increases. By way of illustration, a November 2021 Civitas Poll found that 61% of North Carolina voters noticed a shortage of meat, dairy, and eggs in their grocery store in 2021.

Second, with the backing of both sides of the aisle, the federal government has injected more than \$4 trillion in COVID-relief funds into the American economy.

U.S. labor participation rate has yet to recover



SOURCE: U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS

While this temporarily increased the buying power of some American consumers, the combination of a spike in demand while supply was already low led to a massive inflation spike. This spike is now causing American consumers to have less buying power.

Of course, all of this is happening as the national labor force participation rate has not recovered to pre-COVID levels, and congressional Democrats are seeking to throw another \$3 trillion into the economy through Build Back Better. It is no wonder American consumer confidence is now at its second-lowest point in the past decade, only just above April 2020, when the COVID shutdowns began.

In other words, don't believe the spin from the left that the economy is OK and inflation isn't a big deal. It is a huge deal.

I quoted Thatcher earlier, from a 1975 speech titled "Inflation is Caused by Governments." Right now, America needs a Thatcher — rock-ribbed leader who understands the role of government and dedicated to fighting inflation with economic stability. Unfortunately, the party currently in charge of Washington seems to ignore the threat and spend their way through it.

*Donald Bryson is president and chief strategy officer for the John Locke Foundation.*

# Worker shortage won't end soon

JOHN HOOD  
CONTRIBUTOR



ON A RECENT road trip through Western North Carolina and north Georgia, I had occasion to stop at service stations, restaurants, hotels, and small businesses. Each establishment had a sign on the door conveying the same message: help needed.

Not help wanted. Help needed.

Although the worker shortage appears to be most acute in service industries, many different kinds of businesses find themselves short-staffed. They're struggling to serve their customers. And as demand pressures overwhelm supply, prices are soaring.

The problem began during the first few months of the COVID-19 crisis, but even gobs of (borrowed) federal money and the easing of pandemic restrictions have failed to rectify it. North Carolina's labor-force participation rate was 59.3% in November. Two years ago, in November 2019, that rate was 61.5%.

That seemingly small difference translates into approximately 70,000 North Carolinians who under normal circumstances

would be either employed or actively looking for work but are instead on the sidelines. Their reasons vary. Some are young, live with their parents, and lack motivation. Some in their 50s and early 60s lost jobs during the COVID lockdowns, despaired of finding comparable positions, and decided to retire early. Others are still too busy taking care of family members to seek employment or too afraid of the virus to risk re-entering a workplace.

In retrospect, it was a mistake to close down schools. The transmission risk was low. The economic and educational toll from closure was, alas, huge. And it was a mistake to expand and extend unemployment insurance benefits in ways that delayed re-entry into the work force. These effects are, however, increasingly visible only in the rear-view mirror. They can't fully explain our current predicament. Nor can wage rates. Some jobs that pay \$15 an hour or more are going unfilled.

Policymakers should find ways to remove the structural barriers that separate prospective workers from productive employment. For example, some folks decided during COVID to leave jobs they felt were undercompensated and unfulfilling. They want to change



A sign posted in a store window in Buncombe County advertising job openings with benefits.

careers, perhaps even start their own businesses. But our state's archaic regime of occupational licensing stands in their way.

Similarly, some North Carolinians aren't working right now because technological innovation has eliminated their jobs and created a mismatch between what they know how to do and what today's employers need done. Although community colleges, private firms, and other providers may well be in a position to retrain them quickly and inexpensively, displaced workers often ar-

Although the worker shortage appears to be most acute in service industries, many different kinds of businesses find themselves short-staffed.

en't aware of such opportunities. We need a robust effort by public and private institutions to fill that information gap.

Some policymakers think North Carolina and the country will have to get used to far lower work force participation. "We're not going back to the same economy we had in February of 2020," said Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell. "The post-pandemic labor market and economy in general, and the maximum level of employment that's consistent with price stability, evolve over time."

Perhaps. But if North Carolina's participation rate has been permanently reduced by more than 2 percentage points, economic consequences will be severe.



# Popular ed school fads fail students who need help the most

MITCH KOKAI  
CONTRIBUTOR



The fight over Critical Race Theory grabs the headlines. But there's a more fundamental problem plaguing public schools.

It's one the American Scholar magazine addresses in a recent feature: "Why So Many Kids Struggle to Learn."

Consider article writer Natalie Wexler's opening anecdote. It focuses on Eric Kalenze, who studied for a master's degree in education in the 1990s.

Kalenze was "immersed in pedagogical theories that have prevailed at ed schools for a century," Wexler writes.

"Learning proceeds best, he was told, when focused on skills like critical thinking and tailored to the interests of individuals. Rather than assuming the role of a 'sage on the stage,' depositing facts into children's passive brains, a teacher should be a 'guide on the side,' enabling students to learn primarily through inquiry and hands-on activities."

Though dubious, Kalenze put these ideas into practice as a high school English teacher. In one particular lesson about F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic novel, "The Great Gatsby," he avoided discussing the symbolism of the author's description of a green light at the end of a dock.

"Instead, he had [students] spend two or three days looking up meanings of the word 'green,' finding magazine ads using that color, cutting them out, and making collages," Wexler writes.

It's easy to spot a glaring problem with that approach.

Yet "Kalenze's students loved



Who suffers most when teachers fail to provide students with proper foundational skills? It's no surprise.

him, and other teachers observed his classes because they'd heard the buzz," Wexler explains. "But after a few years, writing assignments and class discussion showed that his apparently engaged students weren't grasping Gatsby's significance."

To Kalenze's credit, he recognized the problem. He ditched the multiday collage assignments. Instead he started providing students historical background that placed Fitzgerald's fiction in context.

Wexler, author of "The Knowledge Gap: The Hidden Cause of America's Broken Education System — And How to Fix It," uses the Kalenze story to set up a larger theme.

She points to science that shows "acquiring factual information isn't a useless, soul-crushing experience; it's the prerequisite for higher-order thinking."

"Asking students who don't know much about a topic to learn through inquiry or 'discovery' is inefficient at best," Wexler argues. "Projects and hands-on activities often waste precious time. Engagement is crucial, but it's quite possible for students to be highly engaged without learning anything important."

One need not agree with all of Wexler's arguments. But she identifies clear problems linked to the "guide on the side" approach. Among them: "[S]tudents tend to remember whatever their attention is focused on — which could just be cutting out ads with the color green."

Policymakers in North Carolina have focused much attention in the past decade on boosting reading skills. Of particular emphasis: grade-level reading ability for third-graders.

Yet the "standard instructional approach" for students to learn how to decode words "conflicts with a mountain of scientific evidence," Wexler warns. The same is true for teaching reading comprehension.

"Many children, perhaps most, need systematic instruction in phonics and other foundational reading skills to become fluent decoders," Wexler writes. "And yet, teacher-prep programs either encourage candidates to develop their own philosophy of teaching reading or endorse the now-standard 'balanced literacy' approach, which embraces phonics in theory but retains a skepticism that has deep roots in the education world."

Who suffers most when teachers fail to provide students with proper foundational skills? It's no surprise.

"[S]tudents who come from highly educated and usually affluent families are more likely to thrive, since they generally have greater access to the academic knowledge or support missing at school," Wexler writes. "Others — who are disproportionately low-income and minority — are left to flounder."

Learning few skills they need in early grades, "they also often arrive at upper grades without the background knowledge suddenly assumed by the curriculum," Wexler adds.

"The problem is not that they can't learn; it's that no one has deemed it important to give them access to the knowledge for which they're now being held accountable."

Despite the bad news, Wexler identifies bright spots. One has a tie to North Carolina.

Former middle school teacher Hilary Dack, now a professor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, takes part in the national Learning by Scientific Design network. The group helps her fight standard ed school practices that fail students.

"The scientific evidence, and in-class activities she devised that brought the principles home, also helped students understand what Dack calls 'the equity lens' — the recognition that certain standard pedagogical approaches will inevitably leave some students behind."

Challenging decades-old teaching techniques is unlikely to generate as much attention as battling Critical Race Theory. But the issue deserves much more scrutiny in the years ahead.

Mitch Kokai is senior political analyst for the John Locke Foundation.

## GOT AN OPINION?

Carolina Journal is accepting letters to the editor and guest opinions (op-eds)\* on issues related to North Carolina. We cover the state from a limited-government and free-market perspective but will consider varying viewpoints, depending on relevance and quality. A good guideline for letters is 200-500 words and 550-800 words for op-eds. A letter to the editor is comment or disagreement with a published CJ piece; an op-ed is a guest opinion argument.

Please email any submissions to opinion editor  
Ray Nothstine | [rnothstine@lockehq.org](mailto:rnothstine@lockehq.org)

\*We retain the right to edit or to not publish any submitted letters or op-eds.





# This, too, shall pass. Maybe it already has

**JOHN TRUMP**  
MANAGING EDITOR



Patience is a virtue.

It's an old proverb, which, as a child, I heard repeatedly in the weeks before Christmas.

This two-year pandemic has redefined the ideas of — if not the words themselves — tolerance, patience, and acceptance.

We hear these words almost daily in the context of COVID-19 and the variant of the hour. As a society, we've mostly listened to them and heeded them. But we haven't made their respective meanings cultural norms.

We should at least give that a shot.

News people talk about disruptions to the supply chain, as if it's a singular entity and not a web of intricate, moving, and evolving parts. These same people talk about inflation as though its source is easily identifiable and should be immediately eradicated. They talk about tanking stock markets and soaring interest rates, at the same time failing to expound on their meaning or to offer historical precedent.

People hear these so-called “news” stories and repeat them to others, which, in turn, leads to half-truths and gossip, sans context or reliable sourcing. Hyperbole and exaggeration ensue, and any thread of virtuous patience gets left where the store keeps its overpriced cereal and cured meat sticks.

Relax. It will be OK, eventually.

COVID wreaked havoc on a world wholly unprepared to deal with a novel virus. Governments,

at all levels, then spewed contradictory edicts, overzealous regulations, and nonsensical mandates. The fearmongering news media piled on, trying to scare us all to death and to fear our neighbors. A part of the population turned to a segment of social media posts espousing ridiculous conspiracy theories and goofy thoughts about killer vaccines.

Reason and pragmatism have remained, although those ideals were hopelessly caught somewhere between the competing noise.

We, as a risk-averse society, have largely created these issues. What did we think would happen? When we closed restaurants and bars, schools, factories, and ports. When we sent everyone home to work, knowing that for many people — if not most — working from home was impossible. When we passed out government checks like Tootsie Rolls on Halloween. Many of us knew that was a bad idea, but we also took the money, like we do the candy, knowing all the while that nothing in life is truly free, and we'll pay for it later. Somehow, some way.

Well, “later” is here now, the gooey glop stuck in our teeth.

The collective supply chains broke, disrupting the economy and leading to inflation and uncertainty, which, by the way, the markets hate. People stuck in low-paying jobs and getting big government checks basically packed it in, staying home for good. As did people close to retirement and mothers who couldn't afford child care or chose to stay home with their kids.

This was all largely predictable, with a couple caveats.

Hospitals remain strained as



**JOHN TRUMP: “Reason and pragmatism have remained, although those ideals were hopelessly caught somewhere between the competing noise.”**

the omicron variant, though abating in the East, continues to infect large numbers of mostly unvaccinated people throughout much of the country. Health care workers have indeed remained patient, even as hospital staffs shrink as overburdened workers quit in frustration — many later to be hired by staffing agencies — and others call in sick with COVID, even though they aren't contagious. Vaccine mandates for health care workers, a Biden administration move upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court, has also played a role in the worker shortage.

One of the reasons for the original lockdowns and suppressions was to prevent hospitals

from becoming overwhelmed. Two years later, hospitals, according to news reports, are, well, overwhelmed. Now, the Biden administration is sending out masks, the “good” ones that really do prevent transmission.

Wasted money and wasted time, another government move akin to leaving open the barn door and freeing the horses, which have since settled on Corolla and by now are raising families, feasting all day on the grassy fields and running along the sandy beaches.

It's too late for masks to matter and, unless your immunity is somehow compromised, getting a test and — should it be positive — hunkering down at home for

a week or so makes, at this point, little sense.

Those news people, it seems, too, have pretty much given up. The COVID headlines and stories are fewer and less anxious. Health experts and politicians have finally admitted — some two years into all of this — the virus is here to stay, and we'll have to learn to live with it.

The world is inherently a volatile, frightening place. It's fraught with problems, which are so much more so if we relent to hype and media fearmongering, from traditional and nontraditional sources.

Things will probably never be exactly fine. But they'll be OK.

Writing in *The Wall Street Journal*, Daniel Halperin makes many of the same points made here. Tests are unreliable; masks, particularly cloth ones, do little to prevent spread; and symptoms from an omicron infection are relatively mild.

“It's past time to shift focus from trying to stamp out all new infections to protecting the most vulnerable from severe disease directly through vaccination and other evidence-based measures and alleviating hospital staffing shortages,” writes Halperin, an adjunct professor at the Gillings School of Global Public Health at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

“Ending mask mandates, de-emphasizing isolation, and encouraging vaccination ought to be a compromise most of us can live with,” he writes.

I also, while growing up, remember the oft-repeated phrase, “This too shall pass,” a favorite of my mother's.

If we show a little patience, it soon will. Maybe it already has.

## Why the chance of a recession in 2022 just went up

**MICHAEL WALDEN**  
CONTRIBUTOR



**RECESSIONS ARE** part of the economic cycle. Each economic cycle contains a period of growth — called an expansion — and a period of decline, which is labelled a recession. Since World War II there have been a dozen recessions. The last recession occurred in 2020. It lasted only two months but was very deep.

Bad things happen during recessions. Businesses go bankrupt, workers lose their jobs, the stock market declines, and the federal government goes deeper in debt trying to help the country survive.

One of the long-studied issues about recessions is what causes them. The consensus answer is that recessions result from some excess that has developed in the economy. Indeed, recessions are the way those excesses are eliminated.

Consider the recession of 2007-2009, the so-called “sub-prime recession.” Affordable interest rates and lenient lending standards motivated a boom in home construction and buying. Home prices surged, and investors became convinced investing in homes was a “sure thing.” Unfortunately for buyers, home prices



**New construction in Knightdale is under way in an attempt to accommodate new residents moving to the area.**

eventually peaked, sparking a big sell-off as investors took profits. Those who bought at the peak in prices lost large amounts of money, as did the financial institutions that backed them. The country came close to having a financial meltdown similar to the “Great Depression” of the 1930s.

The last recession in 2020, dubbed the “COVID recession,”

had an unusual origin. It occurred as a result of government mandates for some businesses to close and individuals to stay home in order to curtail the spread of the virus. Policymakers knew the economy would decline as a result, but the costs were deemed necessary to lower cases, hospitalizations, and deaths from COVID-19.

If there is a recession in 2022,

there will also be a COVID link. Here's why. With the economy partially shut down in early 2020, and with public institutions such as hospitals facing rising numbers of patients, the federal government began providing an unprecedented amount of financial aid. Stimulus checks to households, enlarged unemployment compensation checks to laid-off workers, special payments to households with children, expanded Food Stamps, widened health care support, and special loans to businesses were provided in several aid packages over 2020 and 2021. These allocations totaled \$5.5 trillion.

The financial assistance was so broad and generous that median household income rose and the poverty rate fell. Many households actually emerged from the worst of the virus in 2021 in better financial shape than prior to the virus. They were flush with cash and the desire to spend.

But a problem was that the virus also curtailed the ability of producers to make products and deliver them to consumers.

So, with robust spending but limited supply, the national inflation rate — which had been running between 1% and 2% annually in the 21st century — began rising and ended 2021 at 7%.

Hence, 2022 began with inflation as a top economic problem

for the first time in 40 years. Although improvements in the supply chain will ease inflation, most experts estimate it will be months before supply problems are completing fixed.

Therefore, the work of reducing the inflation rate will fall to the nation's central bank, the Federal Reserve.

The Fed will have to unwind its “cheap money” policy followed during the pandemic, when it pushed interest rates to near zero and expanded the money supply by 85%. Interest rates will have to be raised and the money supply curtailed.

In the best case, the Fed will be able to slow the economy enough to reduce the inflation rate, but not too much that economic growth drops, unemployment rises, and a new recession occurs.

Forty years ago, the Fed faced a similar situation. It did reduce the inflation rate, but at the cost of a deep recession.

Unfortunately, the “gas pedal” the Fed controls is not precise. The Fed never knows exactly how the economy will respond when it pushes down or lets up on the pedal. This is why a recession in late 2022 must be considered as a possibility.

*Michael Walden is a Reynolds distinguished professor emeritus at North Carolina State University.*



# Progressive case against vouchers ignores history



**DR. ROBERT LUEBKE**  
CONTRIBUTOR

Those who assert that public financial support for private schools is inconsistent with our nation's educational history conveniently ignore our pluralist roots. Yet, this false historical assertion is central to their opposition to North Carolina's Opportunity Scholarship Program for low-income children, which allows parents to send their children to a private school of their choosing.

Progressives tell us our public schools are the only institutions that can instill democratic values, build a nation, and help assimilate millions of immigrants. It was true in the 1830s and 1840s, they say, and it is still true today.

Problem is, it wasn't true in the 1830s and 1840s, and it isn't true today.

In an amicus brief for an upcoming case before the U.S. Supreme Court, Professor Ashley Berner of Johns Hopkins University speaks to this point.

"From the nation's founding until the end of the 19th century, cities and towns throughout the United States levied taxes for a plurality of schools — Catholic, Protestant (in various forms), and nonsectarian — as demography dictated," Berner writes.

The fact is, before the current system of uniform public schools, our nation had a system that reflected the diverse religious and cultural heritage of the American people. North Carolina even aided private academies to help educate a growing population.

So, what changed? What turned history on its head?

As Berner notes, public schools were the response to worries over massive immigration to the United States in the 1840s.

The new public schools were uniform, embraced national iden-

tity, and repudiated sectarianism. Public schools were intended to destroy educational pluralism and diminish or end public funding or support of religious and other forms of private education that had flourished in the U.S. for decades.

In other words, public schools aimed to turn education into a one-size-fits-all proposition.

Progressives also enshrine the principle of neutrality and use it to oppose Opportunity Scholarships. Is it possible, however, for any school to be truly neutral?

What school doesn't seek to instill certain values, ideas, and concepts over others? Today's parent movement has revealed that schools and teachers have a point of view.

Education is an inherently normative process. We know that to be true. That truth spawned private and public schools, schools with different curricula, institutional distinctives, and instructional methods.

This is not a bad thing. It's simply reflective of the diversity of thought and of our cultural heritage.

In misreading history and educational progress, progressives have come to the wrong conclusion about choice in general and Opportunity Scholarships in particular.

As a John Locke Foundation Shaftesbury Society panel discussed in January, North Carolina should be applauded for empowering parents to educate their children as they see fit through the Opportunity Scholarship Program.

In upholding the program's constitutionality in 2015, the N.C. Supreme Court clearly did not view the dilemma as deciding for either public or private schools.

The court held that the state constitution "does not prohibit the General Assembly from funding educational initiatives outside



Biden's Plan to Restore Civility



of that system [of uniform public schools]."

Put simply, the state legislature can fund the public schools and encourage other private school options.

By funding Opportunity Scholarships, North Carolina empowers parents to decide how and where their child is educated.

In doing so, the program gives children a chance of a better education and affirms our cultural and religious heritage while defending the fundamental values of freedom and liberty.

Progressives have every right to continue to make a case against the program. However, let's be intellectual-

ly honest and agree it's well past time to dispense with an argument that's at odds with our history and the values we hold dear as a people.

Dr. Robert Luebke is senior fellow at the Center for Effective Education for the John Locke Foundation.



## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

*N.C. study: For-profit hospitals are often more charitable*

It's common nowadays to see nonprofit health care organizations congratulated blithely for "caring" more for patients than their for-profit counterparts. Nonprofits are exempted from paying state and local taxes because they presumably spend that money on charitable services.

But as Carolina Journal reported in a recent news story, "a majority of the state's hospitals are reaping the benefits of tax-exempt status but come up short in providing adequate charity care to earn that designation — and they're getting away with it." The revelation reflected the findings of a Johns Hopkins University study commissioned by the State Health Plan, which debunked nonprofits' pious portrayal by the mainstream media.

The state's largest nonprofit hospital systems received more than \$1.8 billion in annual tax

breaks, but for most of them, the value of their charity care was less than 60% of their tax write-downs, the expert analysis found. That's way off-kilter.

Furthermore, the same study found that for-profit hospitals spent more on charity care than nonprofits. This should bring down to earth the inflated reputation of tax-exempt hospitals.

Our elected officials should examine carefully why those "nonprofits" get so much benefit for so little contribution to their communities, which is a rotten deal for the state's taxpayers.

Meanwhile, we should commend for-profit hospitals for living up to the care standard we expect in the medical profession while contributing much more to their communities through local and state taxes that support public services.

J.L. Riddick III  
Raleigh, N.C.

*Olympic repeat*

continued from PAGE 2

a recent Facebook live event.

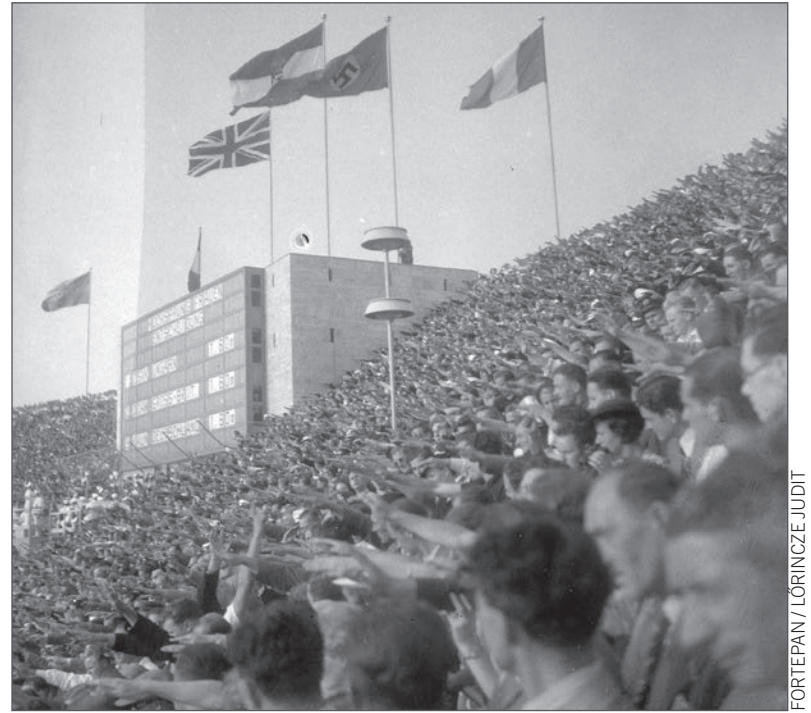
News of the diplomatic boycott has been censured in China, so the CCP is holding up the Olympic games as a sign that all is right in their world.

"Their political agenda wins no support and is doomed to fail," said Liu Pengyu, spokesperson for the Chinese Embassy in Washington, D.C., in a prepared statement.

Where is the American leadership and outrage? Even more importantly, where is evidence of the painful lesson that history taught us at the end of World War II? If China is allowed to go unanswered, parading the massive investment of the International Olympic Committee in the 2022 games before the world, while simultaneously there are reports of Uyghur detainees "systematically tortured, subjected to sexual violence, including rape, and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment or punishment, deprived of their basic human needs," then we did not learn from the Holocaust.

If the chance to move the games has passed, rather than sending no one from the U.S. government, the Biden administration could have sent a contingent of human rights officials to make a clear statement that democracy, religious freedom, and human rights are pillars of American values and the civilized world. Instead, those seats will be filled with whomever China wants to be there. It is a missed opportunity.

There are bills sitting before the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee on Capitol Hill that call to move the Olympics, or even strip the IOC of its 501(c)(4) tax exempt status. That



Spectators giving the Nazi salute during the 1936 Olympics in Germany.

bill is co-sponsored by Reps. Mike Waltz, R-Florida, and Jennifer Wexton, D-Virginia, who refer to the games as the 2022 Genocide Olympics.

"The IOC is complicit in promoting the regime's agenda to distract the world from their atrocities with the Olympic Fanfare," said Waltz. "Adding insult to injury to the victims of the Uyghur genocide, the IOC is clothing their officials for the games with uniforms sourced from forced-labor concentration camps in Xinjiang, flaunting their indifference to the cries of the oppressed."

As American athletes travel halfway across the world, the excitement of representing their nation is palpable, but so is the tension. Team USA has been advised to leave personal electronics at home, to rent computers and bring "burner phones." Athletes have been told to assume the Chinese government is tracking all personal communications, and their belongings can be searched

at any time without their consent.

The app that China is requiring all athletes and attendees of the Beijing Olympics to download, for what their government calls "remote health monitoring," reportedly contains programming to collect user files and audio, according to an analysis by a Canadian technology lab.

The fight for personal liberty is here. It is at our front door and on our televisions. As we watch our American Olympians realize their dreams, we also must recognize those who are suffering for their faith, just miles away from that stadium. We've seen the atrocities of World War II and wonder how the world could have missed the signs. Those signs are here again, this time in the People's Republic of China. Let's not turn our backs.

For more on the 1936 Olympics, check out "The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold in the 1936 Berlin Olympics," By Daniel James Brown.

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*N.C. is open to freedom*

continued from PAGE 2

sources like educational savings accounts and Opportunity Scholarships.

It hasn't always been that way. In 1996, when North Carolina's first charter school enabling legislation became law, it capped charter schools at 100 statewide. Opportunity Scholarships and ESAs didn't exist. It remained that way until voters turned over control of the legislature to Republicans in 2011. That change in leadership ushered in a decade-long renaissance of K-12 policy reforms that expanded charter schools and provided resources for ESAs and vouchers.

During this renaissance, Cooper and anti-choice special-interest groups vigorously and dishonestly opposed choice. Every one of Cooper's budgets has defunded Opportunity Scholarships for low-income students, claiming they "are wrong. They hurt public schools. They hurt students."

COVID has shifted the Overton Window even more toward educational choice. While teachers unions worked to keep schools closed, parents were thrust into the role of teacher. They didn't like what they saw with curriculum and had to grapple with their children's learning loss.

When schools did reopen, school boards forced unnecessary mask mandates on small children and denigrated parents who criticized virtual classes and COVID restrictions. Now, the policy push is "fund students, not systems," meaning direct educational dollars to individual students rather than government-run school districts. Legislatures across the country, including our own, are responding.

Last November, voters held candidates accountable. They flipped school boards across the country. Most surprising was the governor's race in deep-blue Virginia. Voters there elected GOP businessman Glenn Youngkin over heavily favored, anti-school choice Democrat Terry McAuliffe.

My guess is the Youngkin victory has Cooper concerned about 2022. He isn't running, but a lot of his Democrat colleagues are. If Virginia is an early indication,

opposition to popular ideas inside the Overton Window will cost them. Democrats could lose control of the state Supreme Court, and Republicans could win a legislative supermajority. Democrats will try to blame redistricting, but the fact is that they are too far removed from the Overton Window.

That may be why the other signature came shortly after Youngkin's victory. After vetoing every budget in prior years, Cooper finally signed one passed by the GOP-controlled legislature.

This year's budget included historic tax reform and expanded educational choice with additional funding for Opportunity Scholarships and ESAs. Two things Cooper vehemently opposes. Plus he was denied the Medicaid expansion he desperately wants. He signed the budget bill anyway.

Cooper's two signatures are more political strategy than a road-to-Damascus conversion. He's smart enough to know he's well outside the Overton Window, but he'd like to have voters believe he's not. The most important point is that North Carolina's Overton Window is wide open to freedom. Candidates will have to embrace it if they want to win in November.



Voters in Virginia recently elected GOP businessman Glenn Youngkin over heavily favored, anti-school choice Democrat Terry McAuliffe.



# N.C. ABC creates board to help address problems, but will it only add to an already bloated bureaucracy?

BY JOHN TRUMP

The N.C. Alcoholic Beverage Control system has a new commissioner. It gets continued reassurance from its boards and warehouse operator that they'll get it right and, to that end, newly created groups meant to help them do so.

Yet, in myriad ways, it's mostly still the old N.C. ABC system. Liquor held by local boards — the source from merchants and consumers alike — remains in short supply, a problem more pronounced in the larger counties, such as Forsyth and Wake, and boards are still struggling to learn a new ordering system implemented this summer.

Lawmakers have taken steps toward modernizing a system now pushing 90 years old, but issues inherent with a state-controlled monopoly and store managers indifferent to customers' wants and needs persist.

Further, more efficient systems in Virginia, also state-controlled, and South Carolina — which is private — push N.C. residents across the border for rare products and even easily found products such as Jack Daniel's and Jameson.

"It comes down to the county manager doing his or her job," says Jason Ruth, vice president of the N.C. Bar Owners Association.

In New Hanover County, he says, board managers have worked to get direct shipments from distillers, "and that's what saved us."

Some customers aren't so fortunate

"It's hit or miss across the state," says Ruth, who owns a couple of successful neighborhood bars around Wilmington.

In the ABC store on Cary Parkway, smack-dab in one of the more affluent areas in the state, shelves are bereft of most Scotch brands and any bourbon beyond that not highly marketed and recognizable.

No other state, even most of the 16 others under state control, Ruth says, is having a similar experience. "I can drive across the border in South Carolina and find anything I need."

N.C. ABC says it's committed to fixing ongoing problems with supply and the state's warehouses, operated by LB&B Associates. In March 2021, the ABC Commission voted unanimously to recommend the state award a new 10-year contract for warehouse services to LB&B, the target of an audit in 2018 that has, over previous years, cost the state about \$13.5 million. The ABC concurred with the audit and promised to fix the myriad issues, including a focus on accountability and efficient delivery.

The agreement, the ABC says, includes a requirement of nearly error-free and on-time deliveries as well as increased delivery frequency to the state's 171 local ABC boards. LB&B has operated the state warehouse system since 2003. A new software system was implemented in early July and, LB&B attorney Ben Thompson told lawmakers this fall, customers are still learning to use it. Some local ABC boards are reluctant to use the new system at

ing problems with supply and the state's warehouses, operated by LB&B Associates. In March 2021, the ABC Commission voted unanimously to recommend the state award a new 10-year contract for warehouse services to LB&B, the target of an audit in 2018 that has, over previous years, cost the state about \$13.5 million. The ABC concurred with the audit and promised to fix the myriad issues, including a focus on accountability and efficient delivery.



A Virginia Alcohol and Beverage Control store employee places sale tags on merchandise. Virginia's more efficient system draws North Carolinians across the border for rare products.

all, continuing to use the older system, which connects suppliers and customers with the warehouse.

In March, Gov. Roy Cooper appointed Hank Bauer chairman of the N.C. ABC Commission. Bauer replaced A.D. Zander Guy Jr., who abruptly resigned in September. Bauer, a news release says, is former general manager at Empire Distributors, where he also served as the director of sales and on-premise director. He takes over during a turbulent time for the ABC, as the state warehouse struggles to get liquor into state-run stores, now highlighted by empty shelves and out-of-stock signs.

The ABC says it's addressing the problems, in myriad ways.

The ABC Board Advisory Committee, with ABC board members from around the state, plans to meet quarterly to provide recommendations to the commission related to allocated products and other distribution-related issues.

A separate entity, the Spiritu-

ous Liquor Advisory Council, was created by House Bill 890. The goal of the group, a news release says, is growing the spirituous liquor industry in the state, improving the state's rank as a spirituous-liquor-producing state, raising awareness of the industry and the quality of the products, developing a plan that identifies problems and constraints of the industry, and offering advice and recommendations to the state commissioner of agriculture.

That board includes nine members, but, outside the distillers, it's short on people who actually buy spirituous liquor to sell to the public. The board's members, a news release says, are:

- » Pete Barger, Southern Distilling Co.
- » Brian Call, Call Family Distillers
- » Michael Yates, Republic National Distributing Co.
- » Meredith McCormack, Beam Suntory of Wake Forest

- » Greg Stallings, ABC Commission
- » Walter Harris, chairman of the Chatham County ABC board in Pittsboro
- » Joel Keith of the Wake County ABC board
- » Jason Smith, N.C. Restaurant and Lodging Association
- » Robert Fleming, Fleming Brothers Farm

Ruth called the idea of creating a board without a plethora of permit holders "absurd."

"You can't have a successful situation without having a permit holder on there," says Ruth, who intimated the board itself will contribute to an already bloated bureaucracy.

Spokesman Jeff Strickland told Carolina Journal the ABC Commission asked that the local ABC boards form the advisory committee — composed of board members — to enhance and streamline feedback the commission gets from local ABC boards. The ABC doesn't want to tell the boards how to run the committee.

"It is the commission's goal for this committee to be independently organized by the ABC boards, with a focus on providing reports and recommendations to the commission about how to improve distribution or other board-related topics," Strickland said.

"The initial advisory committee members were selected by their fellow ABC board representatives who were in attendance. To ensure statewide representation, the general managers split into four groups along geographic lines and selected representatives for those regions. It will be up to these individuals to coordinate the next meeting, determine the plan for filling out the committee membership structure, and make sure all 171 ABC boards have input and are part of the process."

## SNOW DAYS



Several inches of snow covered much of the Triangle and eastern parts of the state, as a winter storm struck North Carolina over the weekend starting Jan. 21.