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CAROLINA JOURNAL
4800 SIX FORKS ROAD, #220
RALEIGH, NC 27609
CJ ONLINE
f carolinajournal
t @CarolinaJournal
www.carolinajournal.com
editor@carolinajournal.com



PUBLISHER
Amy O. Cooke
[@therighttaoc](#)

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Donna King
[@DonnaKingCJ](#)

OPINION EDITOR
Ray Nothstine
[@RayNothstine](#)

DEPUTY EDITOR
David Larson
[dlarson@carolinajournal.com](#)

STAFF WRITERS
Theresa Opeka
[topeka@carolinajournal.com](#)
Dallas Woodhouse
[dwoodhouse@lockehq.org](#)

CONTRIBUTORS
David Bass
Andrew Dunn
A.P. Dillon
Johnny Kampis
Brayden Marsh

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Greg de Deugd
[gdedeugd@lockehq.org](#)

GRAPHIC DESIGNER
Bill Capps
[bcapps@lockehq.org](#)

PUBLISHED BY
locke
THE JOHN LOCKE FOUNDATION

The John Locke Foundation
4800 Six Forks Road, #220
Raleigh, N.C. 27609
(919) 828-3876 • Fax: 821-5117
[www.JohnLocke.org](#)

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Primaries show voters think for themselves

DONNA KING
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Nothing turns out voters like climbing inflation and \$5-a-gallon gas. This year a 20% primary turnout represents the highest rate in the last 30 years of N.C. primary elections. The only higher turnout was 2002, the year after 9/11. In a new twist, unaffiliated voters are now North Carolina’s single largest voting population and, in early voting, took a Republican ballot nearly twice as often as a Democrat ballot. That should be encouraging news for Republicans, but the turnout also tells Democrats that “voter suppression” is an increasingly difficult case to make.

The 2022 primaries in North Carolina also showed that extremism failed. With a possible recession on the horizon, candidates with plans for big government spending and far-left endorsements were sent packing. That definitely was the case of candidate Nida Allam in the NC-04 Democrat primary. She lost out to state Sen. Valerie Foushee, D-Orange, who had significant backing from the party’s establishment. Not even the presence of a wild card, celebrity Clay Aiken, made a difference in derailing Foushee’s primary election win. Similarly, Rep. Madison Cawthorn, R-11th District, with his myriad scandals, lost to state Sen.

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Senate Watergate Committee hearing

U.S. SENATE

That '70s Show

AMY O. COOKE
PUBLISHER

ARE THE '70S BACK? Hopefully not the fashion, but I’ll take the music. Tube socks with short shorts are a bad look for most people. Yet the world would be a better place if we listened to a little more “Saturday Night Fever” and Yacht Rock. Two things I had hoped we’d never relive from that decade: the politics and the economics. Increasingly, it’s looking more like we haven’t learned the lessons of history. Recent polls show 80% of voters believe America is headed in the wrong direction. Economic insecurity and political polarization have infected the country and appear harder to cure than COVID. Watergate was a national em-

barrassment as well as a shocking criminal enterprise. Solid investigative journalism and federal officials who put the country ahead of political power followed the money and exposed the crimes. People were held accountable. President Richard Nixon resigned, and top officials from his administration went to prison, deservedly so. The country could heal. Today we have the Russia collusion hoax. It’s worse than Watergate because of the damage done to institutions beyond the executive branch. Years of investigating and millions of taxpayer dollars later, we finally find out what many suspected: Hillary Clinton ordered it. According to testimony from campaign manager Robby Mook, candidate Clinton approved fabrication of the Trump-Russia collusion.

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Senate Republicans back Medicaid expansion, with health care access reforms

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Bill of rights proposed to protect students, empower families

State Supreme Court takes up voter ID, felons at the polls, school funding

BY MITCH KOKAI

North Carolina's highest court is scheduled to issue several rulings in the months ahead with major implications for the state's public policy. Upcoming decisions could influence who can vote in the November election and whether voters will be required to show photo identification. The court could determine whether a judge can dip into the state treasury to pay for education programs.

Some of these decisions could become clear as early as June 17. That's the next day that the N.C. Supreme Court is scheduled to issue written opinions.

Voter ID

Supreme Court justices are dealing with two separate cases linked to voter ID. The court heard oral arguments Feb. 14 in N.C. NAACP v. Moore. That lawsuit challenges North Carolina's 2018 constitutional amendment mandating photo identification for voters.

Though more than 2 million people (55% of those casting votes) approved a voter ID requirement, opponents argue that the issue never should have been placed on the ballot. They say a gerrymandered legislature should not have had the right to put the voter ID question before voters. The same critics challenge another 2018 state constitutional amendment. It lowered North Carolina's existing cap on state income tax rates from 10% to 7%.

All seven state Supreme Court justices will help decide the case's outcome. The newest justices — both Republicans — had been targeted for forced removal in the constitutional amendments case. But the high court decided to leave decisions about recusal in the hands of each individual justice. Carolina Journal documented the political controversy surrounding forced removal of justices at ExtremeInjustice.com.

The court has yet to hear arguments in the second voter ID case. Holmes v. Moore involves a challenge to the voter ID law approved in 2018, weeks after the constitutional amendment referendum. A split 2-1 trial court panel rejected that law as unconstitutional in September 2021.

Plaintiffs asked the state Supreme Court to bypass the N.C. Court of Appeals to address the voter ID law. The request helps highlight the partisan makeup of jurors who will decide the case.

In the original trial panel, two Democratic judges overruled a Re-

publican colleague to strike down voter ID. Republicans outnumber Democrats, 10-5, on the Appeals Court. Democrats hold a 4-3 advantage on the Supreme Court. Republican legislative leaders accused the Holmes plaintiffs of "forum shopping." Lawmakers say the plaintiffs wanted to bypass the Appeals Court only because they expected to lose in that venue.

Felon voting

The state Supreme Court also agreed to bypass final action from the Appeals Court to deal with Community Success Initiative v. Moore. That suit aims to guarantee that felons who have completed active prison time can vote in N.C. elections.

A three-judge panel split, 2-1, in ruling on March 28 that felons should be able to vote. A Democratic judge and an unaffiliated colleague outvoted a Republican judge in making that decision. The majority threw out a 1973 state law setting rules for felons to have voting rights restored.

At the Appeals Court, a panel of two Democrats and one Republican split along party lines. The Democrats agreed that felon voting should not be permitted for May 17 and July 26 elections. But their ruling opened the door for felons to participate in November's general election. The ruling could lead to 56,000 new voters who are on parole, probation, or post-release supervision.

Critics say the trial court ignored clear guidance from the state Constitution. Article VI, Section 2(3) says felons cannot vote un-

less their citizenship rights have been restored "in the manner prescribed by law." If the 1973 law is unconstitutional, the critics argue, felons cannot vote until a new law passes constitutional muster.

The felon voting case has yet to be scheduled for oral arguments.

Education funding

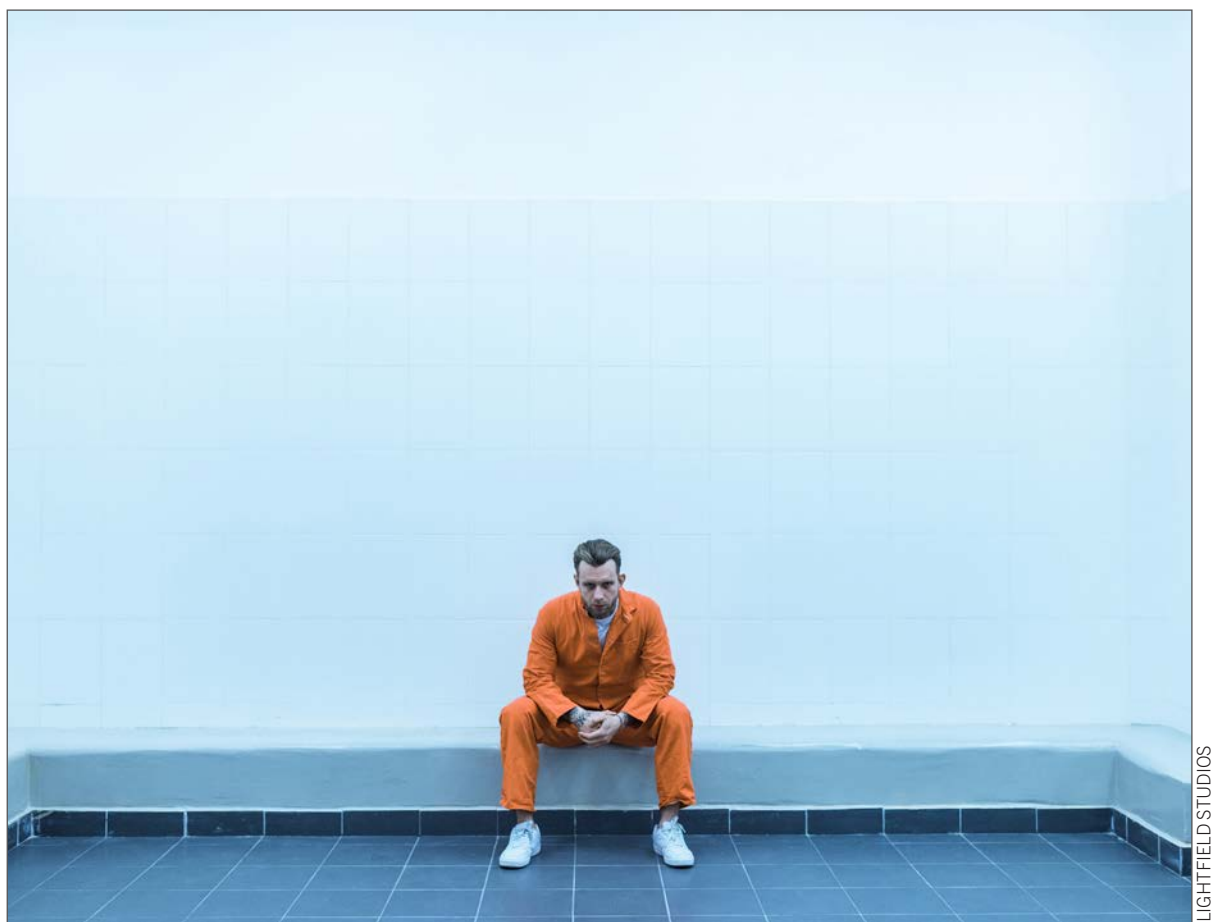
The state Supreme Court could issue its third major ruling in a long-running school funding dispute. Officially titled Hoke County Board of Education v. State, the case is better known by the shorthand title Leandro. That was the name of a plaintiff in the original lawsuit dating back to 1994.

The latest dispute in the case involves funding for a court-ordered comprehensive remedial plan. The plan developed by San Francisco-based consultants would span multiple years and cost at least \$5.6 billion.



NORTH CAROLINA COURTS

Supreme Court Justices Tamara Barringer and Phil Berger Jr. were targeted for forced removal in the voter ID cases. But the Supreme Court decided to leave decisions about recusal in the hands of each individual justice.



LIGHTFIELD STUDIOS

A case called *Community Success Initiative v. Moore* aims to guarantee that felons who have completed active prison time can vote in N.C. elections.

On Nov. 10, 2021, a judge who signed off on the plan ordered officials to transfer \$1.75 billion out of the state treasury. That money would head to two government agencies and the University of North Carolina system.

One official targeted by the Nov. 10 order, State Controller Linda Combs, urged the N.C. Appeals Court to block the order. Combs argued that a judge could not force her to move state taxpayers' money without authorization from the legislature.

The Appeals Court agreed with Combs, but the state Supreme

Court stepped in once again. Before hearing arguments for and against the forced money transfer, justices sent the case back to the trial judge.

The Supreme Court called for a review of the impact of the state budget, signed into law Nov. 18, on the \$1.75 billion order. On the same day, Chief Justice Paul Newby installed a new trial judge to consider the issue.

That new judge whittled the \$1.75 billion order down to \$785 million. He also removed the original order's most controversial provision. He refused to call for

state executive branch officials to transfer funds without legislative approval. Instead he declared that the state owed money to the two specified government agencies and the UNC System. He said nothing about enforcing his order.

At press time, the Supreme Court had not announced how it would proceed with the case. It's unclear whether justices will take up the issue of a judge's ability to bypass state lawmakers to fund government programs.

Head to CarolinaJournal.com for regular updates on developments at the N.C. Supreme Court.

State legislature's short session in full swing

BY CJ STAFF

The N.C. General Assembly convened the 2022 short session May 18 with fast-track plans to “pre-negotiate” the state budget and be out of Raleigh by July 1. Still, important issues are on the to-do list, like health care access issues and parental involvement in education.

Lawmakers gaveled in the short session just months after the longest long session in state history concluded in March. Both the Senate and House would like the short session to stay short, especially after the marathon long session and for those campaigning for the general election in November.

“Members, it’s good to see everyone back,” said House Speaker Tim Moore, R-Cleveland. “It just doesn’t feel like it has been that long ago that we were here, still in the long session. Now, we are finally in the short session. My hope is as true as the word ‘long session’ was, I hope this time that the word will truly be a short session as well.”

The Senate followed a similar plan, gaveling in and out in less than two minutes on opening day.

The Senate filed Senate Bill 762, the North Carolina Farm Act of 2022, which includes permanently removing hemp from the controlled substances list. Sens. Brent Jackson, R-Sampson, Norman Sanderson, R-Pamlico, and Mike Woodard, D-Durham, are the primary sponsors.

Bills of note filed in the House include House Bill 1005. Republican Reps. Jamie Boles, Ted Davis, Allen McNeill, and Carson Smith are lead sponsors of the bill that would lead to stiffer criminal penalties, including prison sentences of up to 15 years, for some cases of organized retail theft.

House Bill 1014, sponsored by Rep. Ashton Wheeler Clemmons, D-Guilford, would appropriate \$10 million from the Opioid Abatement Reserve to establish an institute at UNC-Greensboro that would prevent and treat opioid misuse.

Moore said the House was scheduled to begin voting on bills the week of May 23.

He said House leaders are working to pre-negotiate the budget with the Senate as much as they can to speed the process — calling it “reverse engineering” — starting with a conference report and getting it resolved. Usually, the legislature begins with a House budget and a Senate budget and brings everything together. Then, they end with a conference report, which represents a joint House-Senate compromise.

“If we can try to get those issues identified now and deal with that, that is the intention of the chair,” he said. “We certainly have been here enough last year and into this year that I think we can make it a little more of an efficient process. We’ll be asking members to

be talking with the appropriations chairs if you have a specific request on things you want to work on.”

“Appropriations chairs” lead the House and Senate budget-writing committees.

Despite its brevity, the short session looks to be filled with important items on the agenda on both sides of the aisle. It comes as the recently released revised forecast from state government economists indicated the state will have an additional \$6.2 billion in revenue through the end of the next budget year.

“State employment had returned to pre-pandemic levels by the summer of 2021 and, by March 2022, already exceeded our pre-pandemic forecast,” stated the revised forecast from the General Assembly’s Fiscal Research Division and the governor’s state budget office.

“Nevertheless, consumer demand outpaced inflation, as consumers continued to spend down savings accumulated during the pandemic.”

Inflation surged in March to its highest level since January 1982, at 8.5%.

“We will continue Republican-led policies that created a stable economic climate and balanced state budgets in North Carolina while avoiding efforts by state Democrats to replicate the ill-advised approach of the Biden administration,” said Senate leader Phil Berger, R-Rockingham, in an emailed statement to Carolina Journal. “The Biden administration’s disastrous economic policies have wrecked family budgets and brought terms like ‘inflation,’ ‘stagflation,’ and ‘supply chain disruption’ into our daily conversations. Since Democrats have made a recession more likely in the next 12 to 24 months, we will look to ensure the state has the resources needed to weather an economic slowdown.”

Berger said there would also be discussions about health care access and parental involvement in education. He hopes to conclude the short session as quickly as possible, hopefully by July 1.

Democrats in the legislature share some of those priorities but have a broader target list for the session.

“In the short session, the House Democrats want to continue the work to expand opportunities for all North Carolinians,” said Rep. Robert Reives, D-Chatham, in an emailed statement to Carolina Journal. “We want to truly expand broadband access both by investing in infrastructure and in digital literacy efforts to help all North Carolinians and small businesses benefit. We want to continue to try to save rural health care by helping hospitals stay open, increasing the number of health care professionals in these areas, lowering health care costs, and creating

more accessibility for all.” Reives also said that Democrats would like to fully fund the public educational systems in the state for residents to take advantage of the many job opportunities.



AVIGATOR FORTUNER

The Senate filed Senate Bill 762, the North Carolina Farm Act of 2022, which includes permanently removing hemp from the controlled substances list.



SHARKSHOCK

Republicans are lead sponsors of the bill that would lead to stiffer criminal penalties for organized retail theft, including prison sentences of up to 15 years for some offenses.



PETER KIM

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Jordan Roberts, director of government affairs at the John Locke Foundation, said he expects education and health care to be the dominant policy issues that are discussed during the short session. “Concerning education, the budget surpluses could provide some room for additional pay increases for teachers and other state em-

ployees and what was in the biennial budget agreement last year,” he said. “Furthermore, legislators will likely look at legislation that increases parents’ involvement in their child’s education as concerns about the public education system grow.”

Roberts said lawmakers agreed to hold a joint legislative committee to look at health care access and Medicaid expansion as part of a budget agreement with Gov. Roy Cooper, a Democrat. The committee heard numerous presentations over the course of six meetings that

looked at Medicaid expansion in other states, certificate-of-need reform, telehealth reform, and full practice authority for nurses. “It remains to be seen what lawmakers will do in the health care space, but given the committee’s work over the last several months, lawmakers will likely advance some legislation to address access issues across the state,” Roberts said.

Roberts added that sports wagering and medical marijuana are some of the issues that will likely come up for discussion during the short session.

Legislative Republicans eye veto-proof majority in November

More than 40 Republicans are running unopposed, 25 Democrats

Three members of the General Assembly advanced to congressional races

BY DONNA KING

All 170 seats in the N.C. General Assembly are up for re-election this fall, and some legislative leaders believe a return to Republican-led veto-proof supermajorities may be at least a possibility. Already some closely watched races show that November will shape N.C. policy for years to come. Overall, seven incumbent legislators — five Republicans and two Democrats — lost their primary for re-election. Four Republicans were “double-bunked” with party colleagues, meaning their district in the new maps overlapped with another incumbent of the same party.

Turnout was historically high for a primary. At 20%, the only higher-turnout primary in more than 30 years was the one just after 9/11. In 2002, 21% of North Carolinians voted. This time, however, the growth in unaffiliated voters is a wild card. There are now more registered unaffiliated voters in North Carolina than either Democrats or Republicans. They have the option to vote in either party’s primary. In the May contest, almost twice as many unaffiliated voters took a Republican ballot than took a Democrat ballot. It could signify that they plan to vote Republican in the fall, or they may have just wanted to influence who their Democrat candidate opposes.

For now, state legislative Democrats say they anticipate holding the line in November and winning back a few seats. Republicans, on the other hand, see a chance to regain a veto-proof supermajority and stop the flood of vetoes coming from the governor’s mansion. Republicans have a majority with 69-51 in the House and 28-22 in the Senate and would need to gain three seats in the House and two in the Senate to make this dream a reality.

Gov. Roy Cooper has vetoed more bills than all other N.C. governors combined, with 71 vetoes since taking office in 2017. Forty-three have been sustained since the GOP lost supermajorities in 2018 because legislative Democrats have remained in lockstep behind the governor. Several Democrats have been absent during key override votes to avoid crossing the aisle and bucking Cooper.

Cooper eliminates Democrat deViere

Sen. Kirk deViere, D-Cumber-

land, learned that lesson the hard way; he lost a high-profile primary for the seat he’s had since 2018. Cooper targeted deViere after the senator crossed the aisle and voted with Republicans on some issues, including the legislative vote to re-open schools during COVID shutdowns, which Cooper opposed. DeViere also worked with Republicans to negotiate the state budget. As a result, Cooper threw his weight behind deViere’s opponent in the Democrat primary, Val Applewhite, a former Fayetteville City Council member. Cooper even appeared in a TV ad supporting her. She won 56% of the primary vote, compared to deViere’s 36%.

“I need legislators who will help me expand Medicaid, pay teachers more, and give everyone an opportunity,” Cooper posted on Twitter, to explain turning on deViere.

In the November general election, Applewhite will face former Sen. Wesley Meredith, who won his primary with 72% of the vote. DeViere defeated then-incumbent Meredith in 2018 to win the seat.

On election night, deViere reflected on the campaign season and said that politics lately “are about winners and losers; but when that happens, what gets lost are ideas and values.”

Sen. Ernestine Bazemore, D-Bertie, also lost her primary in N.C. Senate District 3 to Valerie Jordan of Warren County.

Double-bunking claims incumbents

Double-bunking also took out a few leadership members of the General Assembly. Sen. Deanna Ballard, R-Watauga, lost her primary to Sen. Ralph Hise, R-Mitchell, in District 47. Hise and Ballard came within one percentage point, 50.6% to 49.3%, or about 400 votes. Ballard is chair of the Senate Education Committee and played a pivotal role in getting schools reopened during the pandemic shutdowns. Hise now runs unopposed in November.

Sen. Norm Sanderson, R-Pamlico, will also run unopposed in November after defeating fellow incumbent, Sen. Bob Steinburg, R-Chowan. Senate Republicans have a total of 14 caucus members running unopposed in November, including the Senate Rules Committee chairman Sen. Bill Rabon, R-Brunswick, and Senate President Pro Tempore Phil Berger, R-Rockingham. Senate Democrats have one member running unopposed in November, Sen. Mujtaba Mohammed, D-Mecklenburg.

On the House side, long-time Rep. Jamie Boles, R-Moore, also lost his primary to Rep. Ben Moss, R-Richmond; and Rep. Jake Johnson, R-Polk, defeated Rep. David Rogers, R-Rutherford. Moss will run unopposed in November, along with the House Majority Leader John Bell,



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Double-bunking took out a few leadership members of the N.C. General Assembly. Sen. Deanna Ballard, R-Watauga, lost her primary to Sen. Ralph Hise, R-Mitchell, in District 47.

R-Wayne, and 27 other Republican members. House Democrats have six members running unopposed in the general election.

State lawmakers advance to congressional races

Three legislative members are advancing to the congressional general election in November, as Sen. Chuck Edwards, R-Henderson, beat Trump-endorsed Con-

gressman Madison Cawthorn in the NC-11 Republican primary. N.C. Rep. Tim Moffitt, R-Henderson, will run for Edwards’ state Senate seat in November.

N.C. Sen. Wiley Nickel, D-Wake, won the NC-13 Democratic primary, where he will face Republican Trump-endorsed candidate Bo Hines. Current N.C. Rep. Gale Adcock, D-Wake, is running for Nickel’s Senate seat. Sen. Valerie Foushee, D-Orange, beat Nida Allam to run in the NC-04 race for Congress, and current state Rep.

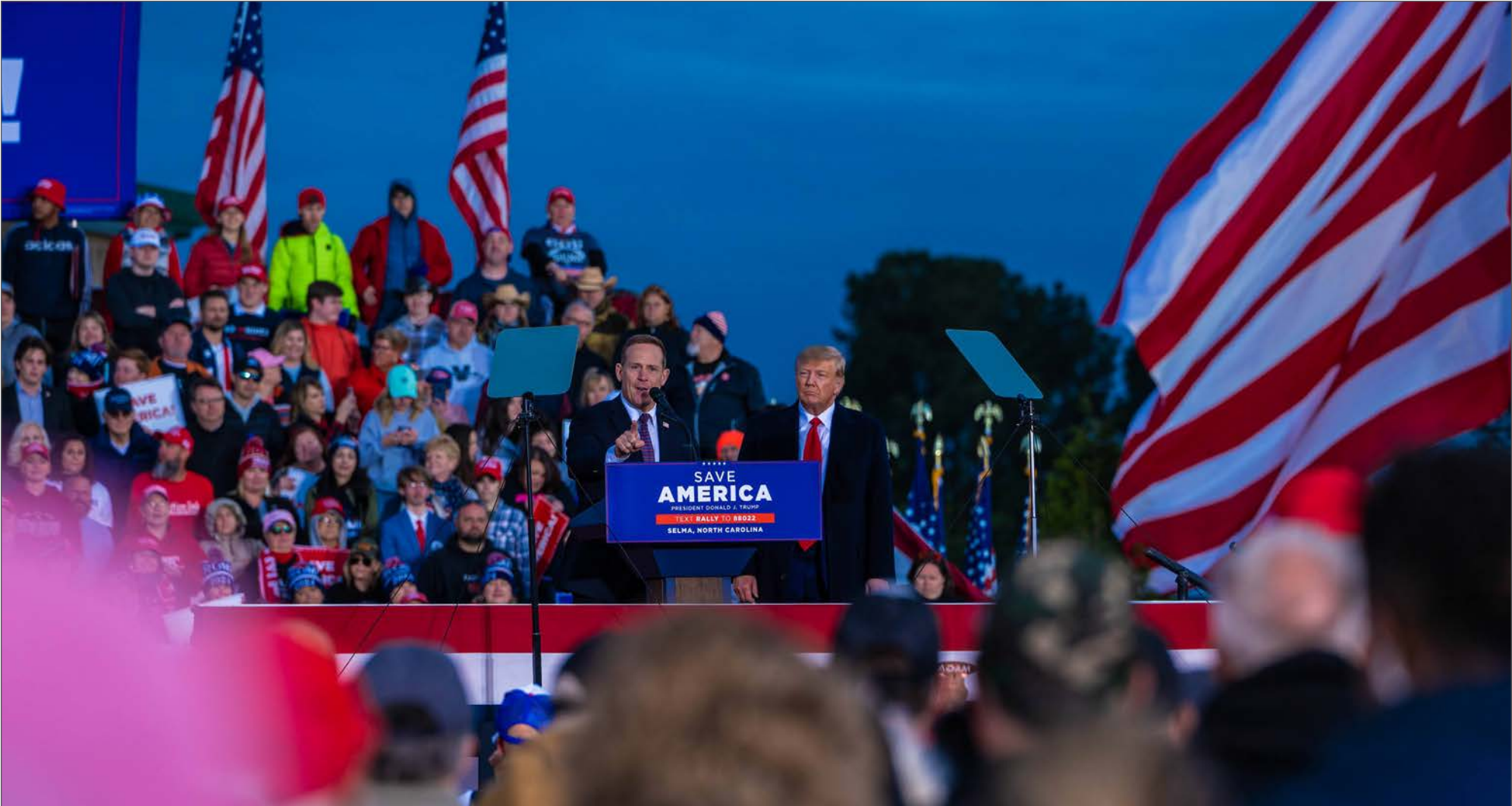
Graig Meyer, D-Orange, is running to fill Foushee’s state Senate seat.

Some well-known N.C. lawmakers are returning to the ballot this November after the primary. Sen. Toby Fitch, D-Wilson, will face former Sen. Buck Newton, R-Wilson, to represent District 4, while incumbent Rep. Diane Wheatley, R-Cumberland, will be challenged by former state Rep. Elmer Floyd, D-Cumberland.

North Carolina’s general election will be held Nov. 8.

CJ PHOTO BY MAYA REAGAN

CJ PHOTO BY MAYA REAGAN



Ted Budd addresses the crowd at a "Save America" rally in Johnston County.

N.C. congressional primaries see high GOP turnout, big spending

BY DAVID LARSON

There were many big headlines from the May 17 congressional primaries in North Carolina. Among them were big outside spending, a few contentious races that narrowly evaded a runoff, and an unusually high percentage of unaffiliated voters deciding to take GOP ballots in early voting.

To take the last item first, despite 68% of early voters taking a Democrat ballot in 2020 — and despite early voting generally favoring Democrats — Republicans achieved a nearly 50-50 split with Democrats on ballots statewide. This was largely due to a surge in unaffiliated voters choosing to take Republican ballots. By the end of early voting, 62% of unaffiliated voters had picked a GOP over a Democrat ballot.

While this is not proof that Republicans can count on these voters to remain with the party in the general election, it at least shows unaffiliated voters were motivated to cast their ballots for Republicans. The U.S. Senate race pitting Trump-backed U.S. Rep. Ted Budd against former Gov. Pat McCrory and others, which Budd handily won, likely caused some of the imbalance. This is due to the fact that the Democratic Senate primary, which former N.C. Supreme Court Chief Justice Cheri Beasley won with 81% of the vote, was not nearly as competitive.

"For the first time ever, we have more unaffiliated voters registered in the state of North Carolina [than Democrats or Republicans]," Brad Crone, a Raleigh-based political consultant, said during Carolina Journal's live primary coverage. "There are 2,532,000 inde-

pendents, 2,198,000 Republicans, and 2,493,000 Democrats. There's a shift taking place with the voters. Will we see that shift take place at the ballot box?"

Panelists also considered that part of the motivation for the high Republican voting numbers among unaffiliateds could be because of some controversial figures in the congressional Republican primaries, meaning they could have been voting against rather than for a particular candidate.

One of those controversial figures was western N.C. freshman Rep. Madison Cawthorn. The 26-year-old Henderson native suffered a dramatic loss in support from local voters after a number of scandals, including making allusions to drug use and orgies by other members of Congress, bringing a loaded gun to an airport checkpoint, driving infractions, calling the president of Ukraine a "thug," and questionable videos of him and friends.

State Sen. Chuck Edwards was able to capitalize on Cawthorn's slipping approval, defeating his Hendersonville neighbor 33.4% to 31.9% (a 1.5% victory), clearing the 30% threshold to avoid a runoff and the 1% margin for a recount. Edwards was able to

cast himself as the only candidate with a real shot of defeating Cawthorn in a crowded field of challengers. His list of prominent endorsements — including U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis, N.C. House Speaker Tim Moore, and N.C. Senate leader Phil Berger — bolstered that view.

Another 26-year-old Trump-endorsed candidate, Bo Hines, narrowly won in a crowded field in NC-13, the state's most competitive district for the general election. Hines was criticized by other candidates for his age, lack of experience, and short relationship with the district, but in the end, he was able to earn 32% of the vote, enough to avoid a runoff and secure the GOP nomination. Local businessman DeVan Barbour came in second with 23% and attorney Kelly Daughtry came in third with 17%. Hines will face off with Democratic state Sen. Wiley Nickel in November.

Sandy Smith, who cast herself as the MAGA candidate while not being officially endorsed by the former president, also won narrowly over Rocky Mount Mayor Sandy Roberson in NC-1, likely the second-most competitive district after NC-13. Just like in NC-13, a crowded field and the 30% run-

off rule came into play, with Smith winning over Roberson, 31% to 27%.

Mitch Kokai, senior political analyst for the John Locke Foundation, spoke with CBS-17 on the 2017 change from a 40% threshold to a 30% threshold, saying, "The legislature at the time thought, '30% is enough. You don't need to go through the expense and trouble of having a second election just because somebody didn't make the 40%.'"

But as Kokai pointed out, in this primary alone, this rule change led to five congressional primary winners narrowly escaping from often very-crowded fields.

Looking at the other congressional races, Republican victors included newcomers Christine Villaverde in NC-2, Courtney Geels in NC-4, Christian Castelli in NC-6, Tyler Lee in NC-12, and Pat Harrigan in NC-14, and incumbents Greg Murphy in NC-3, Virginia Foxx in NC-5, David Rouzer in NC-7, Dan Bishop in NC-8, Richard Hudson in NC-9, and Patrick McHenry in NC-10.

Among Democrats, the most notable race was likely the Triangle-area NC-4 victory of state Sen. Valerie Foushee, an African American who has served Orange County in elected office for years, over Durham County Commissioner Nida Allam, a controversial candidate endorsed by members of the far-left "Squad," as well as by socialist U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont and U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts.

In NC-1, the victory of state Sen. Don Davis over former state Sen. Erica Davis was also noteworthy. Davis has long been considered among the most conser-

vative Democrats in the state Senate, and he will now face off with Smith for the competitive rural northeastern N.C. seat.

In the other races, Democrat victors included newcomers Barbara Gaskins in NC-3, Kyle Parrish in NC-5, state Rep. Charles Graham in NC-7, Scott Huffman in NC-8, state Sen. Ben Clark in NC-9, Pam Genant in NC-10, Jasmine Beach-Ferrara in NC-11, and state Sen. Jeff Jackson in NC-14, and incumbents Deborah Ross in NC-2, Kathy Manning in NC-6, and Alma Adams in NC-12.

The last big story of the night was the large amount of out-of-state money that poured into these North Carolina congressional primaries. Both parties had examples, with Hines in NC-13 winning his GOP primary and Democrat Foushee in NC-4 winning hers after major spending by outside groups on behalf of their candidacies.

Hines benefited from \$2 million of spending from outside the state, according to WRAL, including \$1.5 million by Club for Growth Action.

That group also spent \$12 million to lift Budd past McCrory in the Republican primary for U.S. Senate. Both Hines and Budd were also endorsed by former President Donald Trump.

On the Democratic side, Foushee benefited from even more outside spending than Hines, with \$2.8 million spent in support of her candidacy. Much of that spending was from a pro-Israel PAC called the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

With many progressives critical of Israel and of "dark money" spending, the money became controversial in the campaign.

For the first time ever, we have more unaffiliated voters registered in the state of North Carolina [than Democrats or Republicans]. ... There's a shift taking place with the voters.

- Brad Crone, political consultant

Single statewide health plan for foster children aims to end chaotic status quo

Average foster child in North Carolina has been in seven different living environments

BY DAVID LARSON

Currently, members of both major parties and both chambers at the General Assembly seem in agreement that the status quo on health care for N.C. foster children is unacceptable. The children are moved frequently, and when they arrive at their new placement, they are frequently dropped from their health providers and have to start over.

Now it seems there is momentum to finally get something done to fix the issue. Members of both parties told Carolina Journal that there will likely be legislation on it during this 2022 short session. The plan appears to be to create one statewide health plan for children in foster care.

"I think this is very bipartisan," Sen. Jim Burgin, R-Harnett, a chairman of both the Senate Health Committee and the Senate Health Appropriations Committee, told Carolina Journal. "There should be no politics at all in this. We've just got to do our best for the kids that will one day be making the decisions."

Burgin said that at the moment, foster children are too frequently being transferred from one location to another. He said that not only is this traumatic for them, but their medical care is then thrown into chaos each time.



The average foster child in North Carolina has been in seven different living environments, like homes or facilities, and is on six prescriptions.

"Listen to these numbers: The average foster child in North Carolina has been in seven different living environments, like homes or facilities, and is on six prescriptions," Burgin said. "That's a recipe for disaster to me."

Sen. Sydney Batch, D-Wake, works in child-welfare law in addition to being involved in legislative discussions on the issue, giving her more than one angle on the chaos in health care for foster children.

"One of the kids on my caseload has moved five times," Batch told Carolina Journal in a phone interview. "And if you move from one LME-MCO [a local management entity or managed care organization that oversees an individual's government-funded health care] catchment area to another, services don't get con-

tinued. So you have to switch over and start [new] providers. So this kid has had four therapists and five placements in the matter of two-and-a-half or three years."

Batch said this is a problem because there is often a time gap before they are able to find new providers, get the providers up to speed, and start up services again. Often, by the time this whole process is complete, the child's new foster placement may have fallen through, and they need to move again, creating a longer gap in their health services.

Batch said this is especially a problem with foster kids with higher needs, because there may not be the specific services they need in one area. This means they will often be moved from one specialized group home or therapeutic environment to another, and

these will not likely be within the same LME-MCO catchment area. These highly troubled children, after being repeatedly moved and not having psychiatric services for weeks on end, often have difficulty adjusting to the new placements, so they are then moved again.

"And the cycle continues and continues," Batch said. "And every additional move for a child is an additional trauma."

In 2017, members of both parties and many in the child services and health care fields realized the system was failing, and the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services began to develop solutions. Batch said changes were delayed due to the Medicaid-reform transition in North Carolina and then because of the COVID pandemic. But this past year, DHHS released a "white paper" on

the topic, and there is a bipartisan group in the state House and Senate motivated to move quickly on the issue, possibly even in the short session.

"So what we're working on is I want to get it where we do a fantastic assessment of a child, we put them where they need to be, and they stay there," Burgin said. "We're looking at a statewide system and there's going to be some requests-for-proposal put out later this year. The LME-MCOs and the different health plans will be able to submit a proposal to take over foster care and run a statewide program."

Batch said many of the LME-MCOs and other entities that are interested in bidding to be that sole statewide provider are concerned that they will not have enough time to get their RFPs together. For this reason, she said there is talk of passing a bill authorizing the new foster-care health system during the 2022 short session, but including a one-year delay to allow more bids.

"There is probably going to be a bill, not by me, probably on the House side, to just delay the RFP process," Batch said.

She just hopes that the delay doesn't lead to an extension of the current system. Batch said, in addition to the LME-MCOs, insurance companies like Blue Cross Blue Shield are also likely to make bids.

"There needs to be enacting legislation in order to have a statewide foster-care plan," Batch said. "So if nothing happens, then the LME-MCOs will continue to provide the services and we'll continue to have mental health services provided in all these different areas."

Burgin said there are currently 41,000 children under 18 that are connected to the foster-care system, with 11,000 active at the moment in a placement.

"We've got to do better for these kids," Burgin said.

Inflation situation: How will the country's No. 1 problem affect midterm elections?

BY BRAYDEN MARSH

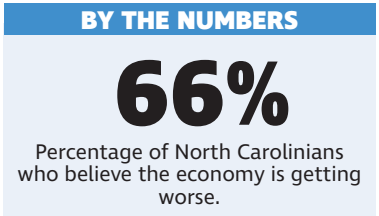
The state of inflation in North Carolina and the United States at large has been a topic of widespread discussion in 2022. Rising gas prices and inflated grocery bills are hitting close to home, and decisions by President Biden — like canceling oil leases on the coast of Alaska and pushing for increased public spending — leave the public with no answer as to when rising prices will end. The record price of gasoline is of particular concern.

"I wouldn't be surprised to see diesel being rationed on the East Coast this summer," John Catsimatidis, CEO of United Refining Co, said in a phone interview with Bloomberg on May 11. "Right now

inventories are low, and we may see a shortage in coming months."

The April Civitas Poll showed that inflation was the top issue people were concerned with in the upcoming November elections, with 18% of the responses. The third-highest issue was jobs and economy, with 10% choosing this option. Around 66% of those polled believe the economy is getting worse, and 54% believe the Biden administration has caused the economic decline. The concern expressed in the poll foreshadows how candidates' plans on inflation could be a deciding factor in the upcoming November elections.

The rise in gas prices has caused more issues than just travel expenses. The increased price to refine a barrel of crude oil has



led to a decrease in the amount of truckers along the East Coast. This in turn has led to supply-chain disruptions because trucking companies are responsible for transporting 70% of the country's goods.

"A lot of these trucks you see now are not going to be here anymore," said Omar Edwards, N.C. truck driver and business owner, when asked by WJZY what affect inflation has had on his business. "A lot of these trucks are a small

company like myself that just can't afford to pay these high prices."

During Carolina Journal's primary elections broadcast, Andrew Taylor, political analyst and professor of political science at North Carolina State University, addressed the issue, saying, "It's not easy to know who that [inflation] benefits in primaries. Presumably, it's going to be a real issue for Democrats come the fall with having the trifecta [control of the White House and both congressional chambers] in Washington, and obviously people looking to hold President Biden accountable."

"It's something the younger voters don't remember," said Taylor during a phone interview on May 24. "It's not something that is going to go away quickly, so we're going to have it around for the

elections. It's going to provide a backdrop. I think the administration always gets blamed for these kinds of problems. When people are feeling downbeat on their circumstances, they tend to sour on the administration. As we've seen time and time again in midterm elections, it translates into them voting for congressional candidates of the other party. And I don't see that being any different this time."

Along with inflation being the highest since the early 1980s, Biden's approval rating is at 39%, the lowest rate of his presidency. With 62% of unaffiliated voters choosing Republican ballots during early voting this year, analysts think the norm of midterms going against the party controlling Washington might continue.

Bill of rights proposed to protect students, empower families

BY DAVID BASS

The COVID-19 pandemic was a watershed moment for the parent-rights movement in K-12 education. Scores of parents rebelled over public school closures, mask mandates, radical curriculum choices, controversial sexual theories in classrooms, and school board meetings closed to in-person attendance.

Now a push is under way in North Carolina to strengthen parental rights in education through state statutes.

A new Parents' Bill of Rights proposed by the John Locke Foundation would safeguard the right of parents to direct their children's education and protect their safety in the classroom.

The document is a framework for legislation that would codify parental rights in state statutes. It lands as a sizable majority of North Carolinians report dissatisfaction with schools — 66% of likely voters say K-12 public education is headed in the wrong direction.

"Many parents feel increasingly powerless over what their children are being exposed to in the classroom," said Terry Stoops, director of the Center for Effective Education at the John Locke Foundation. "These feelings have been exacerbated by an increasingly radicalized curriculum and pandemic-era policies. Parents must be empowered to make educational decisions for their children and should be able to expect full transparency from schools, teachers, and administrative staff."

The bill of rights stipulates that every parent has a right to:

Direct their child's physical, mental, and emotional health.

Direct how and where their child is educated.

Transparency when dealing with their child's teachers and school.

A classroom and school environment that is safe and nurtures their child's well-being.

Be actively engaged in their child's education.



Families demonstrated Feb. 15 at the Unmask the Kids rally outside a meeting of the Wake County school board, calling for the board to schedule a meeting to discuss making masks optional for Wake County public school students.

Resources and accountability of school districts, administrators, and teachers.

"Parents are frustrated by what they see and don't see going on in the classroom. They are tired of being marginalized," added Bob Luebke, senior fellow at the Center for Effective Education. "Parents are standing up and reminding everyone of their right to control their child's education and their commitment to working alongside teachers and administrators to give their children the best possible education."

The N.C. version of the Parents' Bill of Rights lands even as dozens of other states have either passed

or are considering legislation based on similar proposals. Some of the efforts are based on the electoral success of newly minted Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin, a Republican who walked to victory in November after running a campaign that tapped into parental anger and angst over public K-12 education.

The version of the bill in Florida has drawn the most national attention.

That legislation, incorrectly known as the "Don't Say Gay" bill, would bar third parties from teaching students in kindergarten through 3rd grade about sexual orientation or gender identity,

in addition to numerous other protections for parents' autonomy over their children.

Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis signed the bill into law March 28, saying in a statement that families "should be protected from schools using classroom instruction to sexualize their kids as young as 5 years old."

In April, Georgia lawmakers passed a measure stipulating that parents have the right to see the curriculum their children are learning. Republican Gov. Brian Kemp is expected to sign the measure into law.

In other states, a Parents' Bill of Rights has met stiff resistance

from Democrats and teachers' unions. Also in April, Wisconsin Democratic Gov. Tony Evers vetoed a bill passed by the Republican-controlled legislature that would have codified several parental rights in state law.

Those include the right "to determine the names and pronouns used for the child while at school" and the right to "opt out of a class or instructional materials for reasons based on either religion or personal conviction."

Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly, also a Democrat, vetoed a similar bill, while measures have also fallen prey to veto pens in states like Pennsylvania.

CJ PHOTO BY MAYA REAGAN

THE CAROLINA JOURNAL



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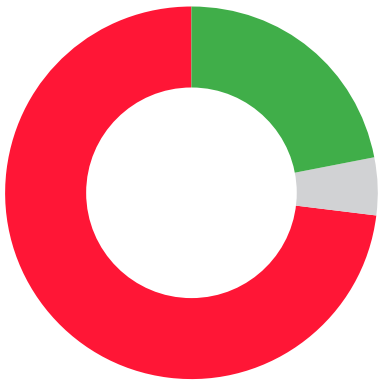
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PUBLIC OPINION

Direction of Country

73% of likely voters say the U.S. is on the wrong track, compared to 22% who say right track.



■ Right Direction 22%
■ Wrong Track 73%
■ Unsure 5%

Presidential Approval

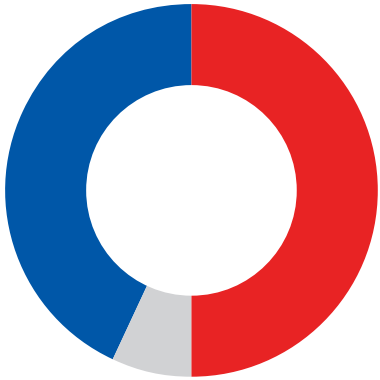
Biden's disapproval rating stands at 61%, while 33% approve of the president.



■ Biden Approval 33%
■ Biden Disapproval 61%
■ Unsure 6%

Republicans v. Democrats

50% would vote for a Republican candidate for Congress on a generic ballot, compared to 43% Democrat.



■ Republican 50%
■ Democrat 43%
■ Unsure 7%

Governor Approval

46% disapprove of Gov. Roy Cooper's job performance, with 42% approving.



■ Gov. Cooper Approval 42%
■ Gov. Cooper Disapproval 46%
■ Unsure 12%

Civitas Action survey of likely general election voters in North Carolina.

U.S. Senate: Budd tops Beasley in new poll

BY DAVID BASS

Republican U.S. Senate candidate Ted Budd is polling slightly ahead of Democratic candidate Cheri Beasley, according to a new Civitas Poll of general election voters.

Budd, now serving as a congressman from the state's 13th Congressional District, polled at 44%. That number just edges out the 42% support for Beasley, a former chief justice of the N.C. Supreme Court. Libertarian candidate Shannon Bray secured 2% support, and Green Party candidate Matthew Hoh 1%, with 12% of the electorate remaining undecided.

"North Carolina is a perennial battleground state for presidential and Senate races, and this year will be no different, looking at this poll," said John Locke Foundation President Donald Bryson. "While Ted Budd is in a strong position in this poll, he still trails Republicans on the generic ballot test by a few points, and it's a long contentious journey to November."

"This is as close to a statistical tie as you can find," said Chris Cooper, a political science professor at Western Carolina University. The Civitas Poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.95%. "There are not a lot of undecided voters left, but when they matter, they matter a lot."

Republicans continue to enjoy a comfortable advantage on a generic ballot for state and federal offices.

The polling results also showed Republican candidates for state Supreme Court seats edging out their opponents. Republican Trey Allen bested Democrat Sam Ervin, 46% to 40%, for one seat. Republican Richard Dietz topped Democrat Lucy Inman, 44% to 40%, for the other.

Republicans continue to enjoy a comfortable advantage on a generic ballot for state and federal offices in North Carolina, the poll results showed. Forty-nine percent said they would vote for a Republican candidate for the state legislature, compared to 43% for a Democratic candidate. For Congress, 50% would pick a Republican on a generic ballot and 43% a Democrat.

President Joe Biden's approval rating dipped to a new low, according to the results of the poll, reaching 61% disapproval compared to 33% approval. Gov. Roy Cooper's approval rating has also declined since April, with 46% of likely voters now disapproving of the governor compared to

42% who approve. Seventy-three percent of voters say the U.S. is on the wrong track, compared to 22% who say right track.

On the issue of abortion, 40% of likely voters identify as pro-life and 43% as pro-choice. Fifty-one percent do not want the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn its 1973 Roe v. Wade decision that legalized abortion nationwide, while 34% would like to see it overturned.

Meanwhile, nearly 70% of likely voters said that abortion should be limited in some way — ranging from restrictions on a minor's access to abortion all the way to a complete ban — and only 23% said abortion should be legal without any restrictions.

Fifty-seven percent of respondents would support a Parents' Bill of Rights in North Carolina. Twenty-four percent were opposed to the idea. Forty-six percent have an unfavorable view of Critical Race Theory, and 30% have a favorable view.

Asked for their perspective on gun restrictions, 42% reported that gun laws should be more restricted than they currently are, 34% that the laws should be left as they currently are, and 19% said they should be less restrictive.

The poll was conducted May 21-22 — prior to the deadly school shooting in Uvalde, Texas — and surveyed 600 likely general election voters.

LGBT flashcards removed from Wake Pre-K class

BY A.P. DILLON

On May 27, flashcards featuring LGBT themes were confiscated from a preschool classroom in Wake County, North Carolina's largest school district.

The cards were allegedly used to teach preschoolers their colors at Ballentine Elementary in Fuquay-Varina. The cards featured gay and lesbian couples with children, as well as a card depicting a pregnant man.

A press release from N.C. House Speaker Tim Moore said that state Rep. Erin Paré, R-Wake, received an email from a constituent that alerted her to the use of the flashcards, along with pictures of some of the cards. According to the press release,

Paré immediately contacted the principal of the elementary school, who quickly investigated, found the cards, and confiscated them.

"The principal confirmed that the flash cards were not part of approved curriculum and that she was unaware that they were being used," the press release said.

"The principal immediately took possession of the cards, contacted the WCPSS area superintendent, and engaged human resources."



"I am grateful that a concerned constituent reached out and that this issue is being addressed in a swift and professional manner by Ballentine Elementary School," said Paré in the press release.

"Schools should only be using age-appropriate materials, and these flashcards clearly do not meet that standard for a preschool classroom," Paré said.

"I hope schools across Wake County and the State of North Carolina will follow the example of Ballentine and respond swiftly when a parent expresses concern and ensure that materials like this are not being used to teach young students."

The cards are in the "Progress Pride Flag Rainbow Families" collection sold by ByUsBox.com. The cards are currently sold out, according to the website, which describes them as being laminated and "perfect for baby showers!"

A statement from the Wake County Public School System said that an initial review determined that flashcards "were not tied to the district's Pre-K curriculum, did not complement, enrich, or extend the curriculum, and were used without the Principal's review, knowledge, and/or approval."

WCPSS also said the "inappropriate materials" were removed

from Ballentine Elementary and the "district is reviewing the matter."

In reaction, state Superintendent of Public Instruction Catherine Truitt tweeted:

"I can think of a hundred other ways to teach colors to preschool children. Classroom materials need to be age appropriate, and this certainly doesn't meet the mark."

The discovery of the flashcards followed an announcement earlier in the week of a Parents' Bill of Rights, which seeks transparency in curriculum and notification of parents regarding health decisions and other issues.

The parents' bill of rights is contained in House Bill 755, which also includes a section barring the teaching of gender identity ideology and topics about sexuality to kids in kindergarten through third grade.

With these flashcards being used in a pre-K classroom, the bill may see an update to include pre-K.

Democrats and LGBT groups have already tried to label the bill as "N.C.'s Don't Say Gay" bill, and at least one Democrat, Sen. Michael Garrett, D-Guilford, has tried to call the bill the "classroom version" of H.B. 2.

On the national level, President Biden's education secretary refused to say if schools should keep student gender transitions secret from their parents.

U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona was questioned about the issue by Rep. Jim Banks, R-Indiana, during a May 26 House Education and Labor Committee meeting.

Banks repeatedly pressed Cardona on whether he believed schools should keep a student's gender transition a secret from their parents.

This article is reprinted with permission from A.P. Dillon's More to the Story.

Senate Republicans back Medicaid expansion, with health care access reforms

BY DONNA KING

On May 25 the N.C. General Assembly's Senate leadership announced a health care proposal that includes Medicaid expansion under the federal entitlement program, the Affordable Care Act. House Bill 149 contains work requirements for Medicaid expansion enrollees and measures the senators say would cut health care regulations that limit the number of providers and facilities. State Medicaid expansion could put more than 600,000 able-bodied, working-age adults onto the taxpayer-funded health care program.

"If, as a result of giving half-a-million people that card, you end up creating longer lines for folks who already have insurance coverage, we really haven't helped in terms of access," said Senate leader Phil Berger, R-Rockingham, in a press conference at the state Legislative Building in Raleigh. "It is our belief that partnering the increased coverage with measures designed to increase the number of providers and the number of facilities people can go to is the right balance to achieve an overall improvement in access and quality."

Work requirements could dead on arrival

Waivers to allow states to put work/volunteer requirements or a small co-pay into expansion plans were a carrot put in by the Obama administration to encourage states to expand the program. Under the Trump administration, states that expanded Medicaid had the waivers approved, but the Biden administration has put a hard stop to them.

"The bill as drafted has a work requirement. That is what we would like to see," said Berger. "We will get it passed, and then we will deal with how to convince the Biden administration and the courts."

According to the bill language, the new enrollees would continue to be eligible for Medicaid, even while the work requirement was being litigated.

"Republicans have done a complete about-face, and it's a massive risk to take the work requirements to court," said Donald Bryson, president of the John Locke Foundation, a free-market organization that oversees the Carolina Journal. "If they lose, then it's just Medicaid expansion as Obama wanted it."

In the May 25 press conference, Berger was joined by members of the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Medicaid and N.C. Health Choice, which studied expansion and heard testimony over six meetings.

Part of the deal to get Gov. Roy Cooper's signature on the latest state budget was for the legislature to study expansion. The committee's recommendations have not been released, but Berger says they are likely to resemble this bill.

Long opposed by Republican lawmakers and state economists, Medicaid expansion has held up nearly every state budget since Cooper has been in office, as he vetoed any that did not fund it. State



Sen. Joyce Krawiec, R-Forsyth, explains her support for Medicaid expansion: "I think the bill is a rescue plan for our hospitals, especially our rural hospitals who have had some tough times this last couple of years through the pandemic."



Se. Ralph Hise, R-Mitchell, discusses factors that led to the Medicaid expansion bill: "As we continue through this pandemic, we have reached a situation where the federal government has prohibited removing anyone from the Medicaid rolls, and we are estimating that around 300,000 ineligible people are on the Medicaid rolls in North Carolina and would have to be removed within a year."

Republican leadership filed a bill in 2019 that would have instituted work or volunteer requirements into any expansion plan. They now say that COVID changed the calculus, because so many people were added to Medicaid with federal rescue plan money, and hospitals took on a lot of extra expense.

"The environment has clearly changed in North Carolina," said Sen. Ralph Hise, R-Mitchell. "As we continue through this pandemic, we have reached a situation where the federal government has prohibited removing anyone from the Medicaid rolls, and we are estimating that around 300,000 in-

eligible people are on the Medicaid rolls in North Carolina and would have to be removed within a year."

The federal government would cover 90% of the bill for Medicaid expansion, with the 10% fiscal gap covered by an assessment levied on hospitals, which would in turn draw that money from the feder-

al government. The offer lawmakers would not refuse was a sweetener put on the table by the Biden administration. In expanding the program, 10% of the expansion cost falls to the state, which means

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Senate leader Phil Berger, R-Rockingham, had changed his mind about Medicaid expansion: “It is our belief that partnering the increased coverage with measures designed to increase the number of providers and the number of facilities people can go to is the right balance to achieve an overall improvement in access and quality.”

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North Carolina could face a funding gap between \$119 million and \$171 million. The Biden administration is offering one-time American Rescue Plan money to the 12 states that have not expanded Medicaid. For North Carolina that would mean \$1.2 billion.

Increasing supply

While the bill increases the demand side of the health care equation, lawmakers say they are including some cleanup measures in regulations on the supply side. That includes partial repeal of certificate-of-need laws. This bill repeals CON for some areas of health care, but not all, and reduces the number of medical specialties for which the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services is allowed to dictate “market need.”

“It’s absolutely crucial that the General Assembly work to increase health care supply in our state,” said Jordan Roberts, director of government affairs for the John Locke Foundation. “Across North Carolina, numerous counties suffer from a lack of critical care. In many cases, restrictive state laws cause this shortage. Health care demand is there; we need to ensure our state can serve all the pa-

tients in need.”

The bill also contains the SAVE Act, which allows nurses to practice at the top of their training without a doctor present. It’s a measure that doctors’ groups have opposed but is targeted to rural areas where staffing shortages have reduced access to health care.

The bill further directs insurance companies to cover telehealth services and requires some medical billing transparency. Patients would have to be notified 72 hours ahead of a procedure or visit if they may have an out-of-network provider.



With rising inflation, shortages of supplies like baby formula, and signs of increasing economic uncertainty, it’s incredibly risky to saddle taxpayers with a multibillion-dollar ongoing government obligation.

- Amy O. Cooke, John Locke Foundation

Sen. Joyce Krawiec, R-Forsyth, has been working to stop surprise billing in health care and found a spot for the goal in this bill. She also co-chaired the Medicaid and health choice committee, working with hospitals who wanted expansion and coverage for telehealth, among other items.

“I think the bill is a rescue plan for our hospitals, especially our rural hospitals who have had some tough times this last couple of years through the pandemic,” she said.

If the bill passes out of the Senate as Berger expects, there will likely be a full-court press on House members from the Senate and the governor’s office to agree. So far, Speaker Tim Moore has said that there is little appetite for Medicaid expansion in the House.

BY THE NUMBERS

600,000

Number of able-bodied, working-age adults that would be added to Medicaid under expansion.

“I would like to see us pass it in the Senate and get it over to the House and continue the process of educating our colleagues on why we have changed our mind,” said Berger.

How did we get here?

As the N.C. Medicaid program stands today, there are about 2.6 million people in the state covered. They have incomes of 40% or less of the federal poverty level. The new expanded population could make up to 138% of the federal poverty level. They are working age, not disabled, and some already have private health insurance. Existing Medicaid patients are generally the sickest North Carolinians, including children and the elderly, and this would add more than a half million people to the program.

“This would force-feed half a million people into a system that is already overwhelmed,” said Brian Balfour, Locke senior vice president of research. “Coverage will not mean access to care, and do lawmakers really want to expand with a recession coming, which will further swell Medicaid rolls with the newly unemployed?”

One of the primary reasons that Berger and fellow Republicans had vehemently opposed Medicaid expansion in the past is concern that the federal government could reduce its 90% share promise and leave N.C. taxpayers with a gaping hole in the state budget. The new measure ends the Medicaid expansion program if the federal government changes its contribution, a provision that may sway some Republicans in the House who are concerned about a

recession on the horizon.

“It makes zero sense for the N.C. General Assembly to consider expanding Medicaid now. With rising inflation, shortages of supplies like baby formula, and signs of increasing economic uncertainty, it’s incredibly risky to saddle taxpayers with a multibillion-dollar ongoing government obligation,” said Amy Cooke, CEO of the John Locke Foundation.

After years of opposition to Medicaid expansion, which included passing a law in 2013 saying the state would not expand, last year Berger indicated that he was softening to the idea. However, he led the May 25 press conference saying that they tried to push a free-market-driven solution to health care access but couldn’t get it through.

“The legislature has consistently filed other market-oriented health care reform bills that would have increased insurance plan options for patients and increase health care provider choices, and increase the number of places for patients to seek medical care,” said Berger.

In 2019, Republicans proposed House Bill 655, which would have expanded Medicaid, but it contained some fiscal measures to make it more palatable. For example, it would have permitted large group insurance plans to cover self-employed people and other populations.

However, it was not the full, Obama-style expansion, so the bill was relegated to the House Rules Committee in fall 2019 as the governor demanded a “clean” Medicaid bill.

Back then, it was estimated that expansion would add 600,000 people to the Medicaid rolls, but that was pre-COVID, so now lawmakers are not sure.

“We really don’t know how many because we expanded a lot during the pandemic, so we are not sure how many,” Krawiec said. “That’s why this bill pairs with many other policy changes that will

improve access to care.”

Louisiana faced a similar unknown when lawmakers there expanded Medicaid. The Pelican Institute recently reported that since Louisiana expanded Medicaid in 2015, there has been a 65% increase in the number of people joining the program from the expanded population. Researchers there say the cost ballooned from \$1.4 billion in projected costs to \$3.1 billion in actual costs.

“Medicaid expansion has singularly failed to meet its advocates’ own promises of success,” said the Louisiana researchers. “Louisiana should begin the process of unwinding this failed experiment and put into practice reforms that can reduce the cost of care for beneficiaries, while focusing Medicaid on the vulnerable populations for which it was originally designed.”

Worse, a Duke study in 2019 outlines how the existing Medicaid program is not serving patients adequately.

Duke University scholars found that organization problems within the current system are already harming the poorest and sickest North Carolinians because of red tape and staffing shortages.

Other states, like Arizona and Oregon, which has already partially expanded Medicaid, report an overall increase in the number of people getting health care but say now that expansion put obstacles in the care of existing patients and cost more than expected.

Republicans have focused in recent years on reforming Medicaid and its chronic cost overruns. Now, they say it has improved enough to handle the now-unknown number of new enrollees.

“Medicaid was a program that was mismanaged, burdened taxpayers with billion-dollar shortfalls on a regular basis,” Berger told reporters. “Fortunately, over the past decade, Republican leadership in the General Assembly has turned Medicaid around in North Carolina. We’ve had eight straight years of solid Medicaid budgets without cost overruns. We reformed the system and implemented Medicaid transformation. ... Here’s another reality: The Affordable Care Act is not going to go away.”

What do voters think?

The more voters learn about Medicaid expansion, the less likely they are to agree. A recent Civitas Poll revealed that 58% of likely Republican primary voters opposed expanding Medicaid.

In the same survey, 56% of those polled said they would be less likely to support expansion after learning that the federal government does not allow waivers for expansion to be tied to work requirements.

Plus 65% of respondents said they were less likely to support expansion when learning that the expanded population was primarily healthy, working-age adults with no children.

Berger told reporters on May 25 that he would welcome the opportunity to explain why he changed his mind on Medicaid expansion.

“I still believe that there are better ways to address some of these issues, but reality has to play a part in the solutions that we offer,” said Berger. “We are talking about helping people and ensuring that when the Biden recession hits us, the state’s budget will be in good shape.”

CJ PHOTO BY MAYA REAGAN

Young, urban Republicans set on taking back Charlotte

BY THERESA OPEKA

Charlotte City Council has had a 9-2 Democratic supermajority for more than a decade.

A slate of Republicans, including a group of young, first-time candidates, are hoping to turn the tide of Charlotte City Council with a red wave of their own this July. A Republican has not been elected to an at-large council seat in Charlotte since 2009.

Under the current city council, a lot has changed in the Queen City. Crime has increased. Total homicides in 2009 were 56, compared to 118 in 2020 and 98 in 2021.

Affordable housing is hard to come by. About 1% of area rental apartments are priced under \$1,000 per month in Mecklenburg County, which includes Charlotte.

Home purchase prices have also increased by almost 20%, and the city's public transportation, the CATS bus system and LYNX light rail, are widely criticized for inefficiency. Some can face riding the bus for 1.5 hours to get across town.

Those on the Republican slate are campaigning on a message of tackling these issues and making Charlotte a better place to live.

The slate includes mayoral candidate Stephanie de Sarachaga-Bilbao and at-large candidates Kyle Luebke, Charlie Mulligan, David Merrill, and Carrie Olinski.

James Bowers is running in District 3 and Mary Lineberger Barnett in District 2.

Incumbent Tariq Bokhari is running for re-election in District 6.

David Michael Rice, another candidate who was not part of the slate, also ran as a Republican at-large candidate in the May 17 primary. He finished fifth, so the four-member slate advanced to face off against Democrat contenders in a July 26 election.

Bokhari put the slate together over the last nine months because he said Democrat Mayor Vi Lyles and Democrat city council members have not been meeting the needs of city residents.

"They voted themselves pay raises, voted to extend the at-large and mayor race beyond when they needed to, even though the General Assembly gave them the authority to have it in November, voted to abolish single-family zoning, and threw the police under the bus by championing 'defund the police,'" Bokhari stated.

"The real reason they refused [to hold the at-large and mayor race in November] is they knew

In the May 17, 2022 Republican primary, the top four candidates were David Merrill with 24%, Charlie Mulligan with 22.7%, Carrie Olinski with 20.8% and Kyle Luebke with 19.9%.



Tariq Bokhari anticipates a red wave coming after seeing what has been happening in New Jersey, Virginia, and with the San Francisco school board.

they had just done some very unpopular things [abolish single-family zoning, giving themselves raises] expecting to have more time to have people forget. There is this litany of examples, not just of not meeting needs but also proactively doing things that logical, regular voters are kind of scratching their heads over."

Bokhari anticipates a red wave coming after seeing what has been happening in New Jersey, Virginia, and with the San Francisco school board.

He says he would love Charlotte to become a part of it if he and his fellow GOP candidates were to win seats in the city council election.

"It's going to give us not just an opportunity but make us a nation-

al bellwether for what's going to ultimately happen in November. If we could pick up a couple of seats, let alone my moonshot goal, which is to achieve a Republican majority by sweeping the four at-large seats, that will be national news without a doubt," he said.

Bokhari is working with the NCGOP to establish the Urban Defense Fund, which will help with advertising and mailers.

"Rarely has the state looked at Charlotte as anything but just a liberal haven, and they had given up on it," said Bokhari. "If we give up on those, we will leave all these things unchecked. That message is starting to be heard. I think and hope we may be able to pull off a moonshot here."

Luebke is a lawyer who practices financial services law and serves as president of the Log Cabin Republicans of North Carolina, a Republican organization representing the LGBTQ+ community.

"I felt for so long that I had to be a Democrat, but being a Democrat constantly conflicted with my conservative principles," he said.

"Cities are where our economic engines are. If we sacrifice our cities to the left, then we are sacrificing a very significant portion of America, both from an economic

standpoint and just from a demographic standpoint."

Luebke wants to focus the campaign on issues that appeal to voters in rural and urban areas: safe communities, good-paying jobs, affordable housing, and reliable transportation.

Luebke, Mulligan, Merrill, and Olinski met recently with the Charlotte Firefighters Association, who said the city won't meet with them and hear their concerns, including issues with recruitment.

"You can have all the great policy in the world, but unless you have rhetoric where people are valued and they feel as if they have a place in a city or in their workplace, you aren't going to attract individuals to come work for you," Luebke said.

Olinski, a physician assistant in functional medicine, was inspired to run because of her 18-month-old daughter.

"It got me thinking that if I want to see those changes for her, I have to start now because things don't turn around in a day," she said.

"It's not just for her but all the kids. The kids are the future of Charlotte. We need to give them our best shot. Also, I feel that this

is an open door from the Lord, so I am following Him in that."

Merrill warns that throwing money at the affordable housing problem isn't going to solve anything, and a key opportunity is cleaning up the way housing subsidies and vouchers are managed. She said that would improve how fast landlords are paid.

"We have to take a multiprong approach to fix our housing affordability," he said.

The slate of young Republicans worries conservatives are quick to cede urban areas to Democrats, and Charlotte is just one example.

Mulligan, an executive with Carolina Fintech Hub, pointed to his brief stay in a \$4,000-per-month, one-bedroom apartment in San Francisco.

He said he was surrounded by crime, sirens constantly blaring, stepping over needles and human feces.

"We cannot abandon our cities as conservatives and people who care about the social welfare of our communities and urban centers," he said.

N.C. municipal elections are scheduled for July 26, the same day as runoffs from other elections in the May 17 primary.

TARIQ BOKHARI

OPINION



CJ PHOTO BY TIM ROBBINS

Robinson is a locomotive barreling past political obstacles

RAY NOTHSTINE
OPINION EDITOR



A new poll shows Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson besting Attorney General Josh Stein by six points in a head-to-head matchup for governor in 2024. Save for some establishment Republicans and the political left, it's no big surprise. Robinson just picks up steam despite any highly controversial statements or past actions.

Case in point: The left and some Triangle-area media finally thought they had finished Robinson off when an old Facebook comment surfaced of Robinson admitting to paying for an abortion. The incident in question occurred over 30 years ago when his now-wife became pregnant before they were married.

Local and national media seized on the story to supposed-

ly highlight Robinson's hypocrisy to his Christian supporters — perhaps even relishing the thought that Christians and conservatives would abandon him outright. At the very least, the story was supposed to crater any chance Robinson had at ascending to governor. Yet his popularity only seemed to surge with conservatives across North Carolina.

Of course, most Christians don't live in a legalistic bunker waiting to ambush people over their past sins. This is still surprising to some who don't understand Christianity, repentance, or grace.

Furthermore, many of the most effective pro-life leaders and advocates are those who themselves experienced an abortion. After the story, Robinson's follow-up video sharing his experience only seemed to ingratiate himself to conservatives and the pro-life community even more.

"How can leaders proclaim repentance to this chaotic world?"



A new poll shows Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson besting Attorney General Josh Stein by six points in a head-to-head matchup for governor in 2024. Save for some establishment Republicans and the political left, it's no big surprise.

This is how," U.S. Rep. Dan Bishop tweeted in March. "A public confession many years before emerging into public life. Unblinking acknowledgment now. How refreshing."

Furthermore, many pundits and media members had already declared Robinson done after

making controversial comments about homosexuality and transgenderism. And boy, were they controversial, particularly given today's rules about discussing human sexuality in the public square.

"There's no reason anybody anywhere in America should be telling any child about transgenderism, homosexuality, any of that filth," Robinson told an audience at Asbury Baptist Church in Seagrove. "And yes, I called it filth. And if you don't like it that I called it filth, come see me, and I'll explain it to you."

Can the reader imagine any other American politician saying that without getting politically obliterated or canceled for good? Does anybody else know of any current politicians who talk about the wrath of God when it comes to personal behaviors? Yet, almost paradoxically, Robinson's the most popular Republican in the state.

In the recent past, Robinson said he was about 95% sure he is

running for governor. Those are pretty good odds, and it's unlikely he'll lose a primary if he remains as popular as he is now. Democrats may indeed relish his run, thinking they are on their way to an easy victory in the governor's race. In their eyes, Robinson has already disqualified himself and his mouth remains a ticking time bomb.

Today's political rules don't allow for someone to make the comments Robinson makes and be a viable candidate going forward. The wailing and gnashing of teeth promise to be relentless. Outside money will pour in along with apocalyptic predictions of impending doom if Robinson wins.

Imagine the corporations that will threaten to pull out of North Carolina if Robinson wins. It could prove to be one of the most historic political races in state history, and it will be fascinating to watch. At times, it might even be fun.

Do we live in the most uncertain times?

MICHAEL WALDEN
CONTRIBUTOR

I was born in 1951, so my seven decades of life now make me a senior citizen. As I think back, our country has been through many crises in those 71 years. In 1951 we faced the uncertainty of a war in Korea. Later came the Cuban missile crisis, John Kennedy's assassination, the Vietnam War, 11 recessions, the largest single percentage stock market drop in 1987, the 9/11 attacks, the COVID-19 pandemic, and numerous others. My point is that, as a country, we have faced many challenges just during my lifetime.

While not taking anything away from the previous tests to our country, I think a strong case can be made that this year — 2022 — may be the most traumatic and uncertain for our country, at least since World War II. A big reason is we don't just face one or two uncertainties, but we are confronted with many.

Indeed, I count at least five big uncertainties, each one of which would be enough to make us worry. Ranked in no certain order are high inflation, the possibility of a recession, the Ukraine War, the talk of a nuclear conflict, and significant changes to work.

The latest reading on inflation shows an annual increase in the typical consumers' market basket of goods and services of 8.5%, the biggest jump since 1981. Since most households are not receiving comparable increases in their wages and salaries, today's inflation rate means the average standard of living — measured by what people can buy — is falling. This hasn't happened in three decades.



The Ukraine War is our most dangerous challenge. Russian leaders have openly hinted about the possibility of using nuclear weapons both against Ukraine and countries backing Ukraine.

The problem of high inflation directly leads to the next challenge of today: the possibility of an upcoming recession. The typical way inflation is corralled is for the U.S. central bank — the Federal Reserve — to slow the pace of spending. The Fed does this by increasing interest rates and pulling cash out of the economy. The problem is the Fed's tactics aren't precise, and they can easily lead to an overcorrection and a recession.

Although the Ukraine War is foremost a geo-political conflict — with the United States and European allies backing Ukraine against Russia — it also has broad economic implications. The conflict has already caused many commodity prices, like oil, gold, and wheat, to rise well above their levels at the beginning of the year. We've especially seen the impact of higher commodity prices at the gas pump and in supermarkets.

Until now, the Ukraine War has been fought with conventional weapons. Yet as Russia's military goals have been stymied by

the Ukrainians, Russian leaders have openly hinted about the possibility of using nuclear weapons both against Ukraine and countries backing Ukraine. This is our fourth, and most dangerous, challenge. A full-fledged nuclear world war would likely destroy most of civilization. As a youngster, I remember the last time the world was brought to the brink of a nuclear war during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. It was a tense and scary time.

The fifth worry — the swift changes happening in the labor market — are a feature of the post-COVID economy. COVID prompted three big shifts in the labor market. One was a reassessment of life, motivating a surge in retirements of older workers and a departure from the labor market of many younger workers, especially those with children. The second was an up-skilling of numerous workers during the height of the pandemic, meaning when they returned to the work force, they left lower-paying jobs and moved to higher-paying jobs.

The third emerging labor market shift is a result of the first two. It is the accelerated use of technology and automation by companies that have not been able to eliminate their labor shortages. We will see much more labor-saving technology in coming years that will keep many workers guessing if they will continue to have jobs.

Individually, each of these uncertainties is hard to predict. Collectively, they're impossible. This makes me believe 2022 is a unique year. Wish ourselves good luck!

Michael Walden is a Reynolds Distinguished Professor Emeritus at North Carolina State University.

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CARTOONS



Post-game primary report

DALLAS WOODHOUSE
CONTRIBUTOR



North Carolina's primary produced similar headlines across the state. Former President Trump's influence in North Carolina clearly matters. However, there is much more to unpack.

In general, the data bode well for Republicans heading into November.

Overall, 758,000 registered Republicans and registered unaffiliated people voted a GOP ballot in the primary election. That's 146,000 more than the 612,000 who voted a Democrat ballot.

Much of that can be attributed to the fact the GOP had a high-profile U.S. Senate race that was heavily advertised on TV, while the Democrats coronated Cheri Beasley as the Democratic nominee for U.S. Senate.

Turnout was strong across North Carolina.

North Carolina's 2022 primary final turnout was 19.66% of registered voters. That's the highest turnout for a midterm election in two decades.

Only one primary election in the last 32 years had a higher turnout. The 2002 primary hit 21.21% in the first major election after Sept. 11, 2001.

Republicans can't win statewide elections with just GOP voters. They need a majority of unaffiliated voters and a slice of registered Democrats.

The fact that 62% of unaffiliated voters, who can vote in either primary but not both, picked GOP ballots is a good sign.

In 2016, 75% of unaffiliated voters who voted in the GOP primary went on to vote for Trump and other GOP candidates.

Western Carolina University political science professor Chris Cooper believes that both the high overall turnout and the high number of unaffiliated voters selecting a GOP ballot in the NC-11 race were factors that worked in Chuck Edwards' favor in his successful efforts to defeat freshman U.S. Rep. Madison Cawthorn.

"What we saw on the Republican side of that 11th Congressional District primary was almost the exact same turnout that we actually had in a presidential year," Cooper told Blue Ridge Public Radio.

Yes, endorsements mattered

Two of the most popular figures in each of the political party in North Carolina were largely successful in their political efforts in the primary.

The former president went 2-3. His endorsement was key in Congressman Ted Budd's commanding victory over former Gov. Pat McCrory in the GOP U.S. Senate race.

Trump's last-minute appeal to voters to give Cawthorn a second chance did not save the controversial far western N.C. congressman.

But Trump helped keep the race close, and one can hardly blame Trump for Cawthorn's defeat.

In my final pre-primary column, I stated:

"The Woodshed has analyzed data in several key races across the state, including the races and can-



Donald Trump's endorsement was key in Congressman Ted Budd's commanding victory.



Victories by Valerie Foushee (above), Chuck Edwards, and Don Davis prove the establishment is not dead.

didates Trump is most closely connected with including Budd in the Senate race, [Bo] Hines in the 13th, and Madison Cawthorn in the 11th. We believe that a Trump endorsement along with some money to inform GOP voters of that endorsement results in about 30% support for that candidate."

Budd was unknown to most voters outside of his congressional district when Trump endorsed him in early June 2021.

By January, the Trump endorsement had earned Budd about 34% of the vote when polled in a two-way race with McCrory. In January, Budd was pulling 19% of the vote

After a new round of commercials in early March reminding voters of the Trump endorsement, Budd hit that magic 30% against all candidates, according to the John Locke Foundation's Civitas poll and other polls.

With that 30% Trump base secure, millions of dollars in negative advertising from the Club for Growth brutally attacked McCrory along with further boosting Budd, leading to an easy victory.

In the 13th District congressio-

nal race, Trump-endorsed Hines earned 32% of the vote based almost solely on the Trump endorsement. The 32% was enough to advance to the general election.

In the 1st Congressional District, the most Trump-aligned candidate, Sandy Smith, pulled 31% of the vote, enough in the multicandidate field to win.

According to an Edwards internal poll released in early April, Cawthorn appears to have dropped 20 points in the last six weeks of the campaign, as a cascade of negative news stories and advertisements hit the area.

However, it's worth noting that the Cawthorn collapse halted around the 30% mark in part based on Trump renewing his endorsement the weekend before the election and recording phone messages for Cawthorn. However, in Cawthorn's case, the 32% he earned was 1,300 votes too few to beat Edwards.

North Carolina's trend of the 30% Trump endorsement boost is mirrored in other states.

Ahead of the Georgia governor's primary, former U.S. Sen. David Perdue polled right at 30% af-

ter being endorsed by Trump, but he was way behind incumbent GOP Gov. Brian Kemp, who polled well over 50% and easily defeated Perdue.

In the Pennsylvania U.S. Senate primary, Trump-backed Dr. Mehmet Oz won 31% of the primary vote. He had a narrow lead in a race headed for a recount.

In Idaho, Trump-backed Lt. Gov. Janice McGeachin won 32% of the vote in a primary against sitting Gov. Brad Little, who easily defeated her with 53% of the vote.

Author J.D. Vance, who earned Trump's endorsement in Ohio's Republican Senate primary, won the GOP contest with 32% of the vote.

Republican voters in Nebraska picked University of Nebraska regent Jim Pillen as their nominee for governor over Trump-endorsed Charles Herbster.

Pillen won with 34% of the vote, but Trump's pick, despite allegations of sexual misconduct, still pulled 30%.

On the Democratic side, Gov. Roy Cooper's political execution of Fayetteville state Sen. Kirk deViere was ruthless, but successful.

Cooper appears to have worked

behind the scenes to help defeat state Sen. Ernestine Bazemore, who represents several northeast N.C. counties. She was defeated by Cooper Department of Transportation board appointee Valerie Jordan.

The establishment is not dead

Established elected leaders still have influence.

"The influence and involvement of 'the establishment' was most clearly seen in the NC-4 Democratic primary and the NC-11 Republican primary, according to Susan Roberts, professor of political science at Davidson College.

U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis went all in for Edwards. Tillis condemned forcefully the unlawful and immature behavior by Cawthorn. The Tillis-aligned PAC, Results for NC, spent heavily to defeat Cawthorn. Edwards does not win without Tillis.

In NC-1, retiring Democratic U.S. Rep. G.K. Butterfield endorsed Don Davis over Erica Smith, helping Davis pull away to a big victory. Smith was seen as the more progressive candidate, while Davis was the more mainstream Democrat. Davis gives Democrats the best chance to win in November.

NC-4 was an open deep-blue Democratic seat following the retirement of Rep. David Price.

Nida Allam, a 26-year-old serving as a member of Durham County Board of Commissioners and the first Muslim woman elected to political office in North Carolina, ran a progressive campaign with endorsements from Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and Elizabeth Warren.

However, state Sen. Valerie Foushee was supported by more establishment Democrats, such as Attorney General Josh Stein, Congressman G.K. Butterfield, and Congresswoman Alma Adams.

Victories by Foushee, Edwards, and Davis prove the establishment of each party is not dead.

Grassroots and community service still matter in elections

Grassroots and community service still matter. GOP activist and previous NC-1 candidate Sandy Smith defeated Rocky Mount Mayor Sandy Roberson.

Roberson spent considerably more down the stretch, but Smith has been working the district on the ground for years, and that made the difference.

While he did not win in NC-13, Johnston County's DeVan Barbour came in second while spending a fraction of the money of other candidates who finished behind him.

His campaign matched his years of community service through civic organizations, church, and his longtime service to the Republican Party.

Finally, while there were many factors in Cawthorn's defeat, it is worth noting that Cawthorn won 11 of 14 counties in the district.

However, Edwards performed excellently in Transylvania, Henderson, and Buncombe counties — counties he currently represents in the state Senate. His previous service to his voters was key in the victory.

Black conservative group supports legal fight to end race-based UNC admissions

MITCH KOKAI
CONTRIBUTOR



Federal courts have upheld an admissions policy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill that favors black applicants. That's not stopping one group of outspoken black activists from fighting the policy. The group has helped take the issue to the U.S. Supreme Court. Justices will hear the case this fall.

The activist group, Project 21, bills itself as the "National Leadership Network of Black Conservatives." Started by the National Center for Public Policy Research, Project 21 promotes the views of "African-Americans whose entrepreneurial spirit, dedication to family, and commitment to individual responsibility have not traditionally been echoed by the nation's civil rights establishment," according to a friend-of-the-court brief.

The brief argues now is the right time for the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn its 2003 decision in *Grutter v. Bollinger*. In that 5-4 ruling, the court upheld universities' ability to use race as a factor in admissions.

"From the day on which it was decided, *Grutter* has been 'grievously wrong,'" according to the brief authored by lawyers from the Pacific Legal Foundation. "The Equal Protection Clause contains a categorical statement: Government shall not 'deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.' Yet the thrust of *Grutter* is that 'not every decision influenced by race is equally objectionable.'"

"*Grutter* expressly endorsed racial preferences — so long as



Melanie Collette: "That's the real white supremacy — the thought that blacks are always going to be inferior, that blacks are always going to need a hand up from a white person in order to be successful. That is something we should oppose."

universities administer them in a 'flexible, nonmechanical way,'" the brief added. "But the Equal Protection Clause and Title VI prohibit racial discrimination of any kind — flexible or rigid; mechanical or not."

Opponents warn of *Grutter*'s "disastrous consequences." "Such preferences not only deny students their right to equal justice before the law, but harm the very students they purportedly benefit," the brief argued.

Critics cite "mismatch theory" as evidence of racial preferences' harm. "African American students at elite colleges were less likely to persist with an initial interest in

academic careers than their counterparts at less elite schools because of academic mismatch."

"Students who 'benefit' from racial preferences end up transferring more frequently, take longer to graduate, and were more dissatisfied compared to others in their class," according to the Center for Equal Opportunity, a group joining Project 21 in supporting the friend-of-the-court brief.

"All students, regardless of race, bear the burden of racial preferences," the brief concluded.

Project 21 member Melanie Collette offers other reasons to reject UNC's admissions policy. "We

at Project 21 are very concerned with things like equality, particularly the rules of equality that liberals don't usually play by, which is truly being equal," Collette said during an interview with *Carolina Journal*.

A student's race does not tell you whether she can succeed in college, Collette said. "For me personally, it seems like a black cloud over my education — I have a master's degree — over my career as an educator," she said. "Everybody kind of looks like you like, 'Oh, she's an affirmative-action hire.'"

"You don't want to live in a world where you're viewed as less-

er," Collette said. "I would argue that is exactly what the plan is. ... That's the real white supremacy — the thought that blacks are always going to be inferior, that blacks are always going to need a hand up from a white person in order to be successful. That is something we should oppose."

Racial preferences help perpetuate the view among some blacks that they are "always in a state of victimhood," Collette said. "Anything that happens to them must have something to do with race and not some other circumstance or context."

"That's the real racism — to keep blacks, African Americans, people of color — in a constant state of victimhood so that they feel like they can't achieve," she said. "It's insidious."

The U.S. Supreme Court faced no obligation to take the Chapel Hill case. It had not yet worked its way through normal appeals. But the nine justices decided to consider UNC admissions along with a similar lawsuit targeting Harvard.

"I would really like to see them revamp the previous law that approved this race-based admissions process," Collette said, referring to the nearly two-decade-old *Grutter* ruling. "We need to promote equality. We need to have actual unity in the country. All these kinds of policies do is serve to divide."

The nation's highest court has revisited multiple controversial rulings in recent years. The disputed admissions policy at UNC-Chapel Hill presents another opportunity for positive change.

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

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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

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

THE CAROLINA JOURNAL

How did the primary election change North Carolina education?

DR. TERRY STOOPS
CONTRIBUTOR



Voters were not necessarily thinking about education when they went to the polls for the primary election in May. Multiple polls suggest that the economy, specifically inflation, topped the list of voters' concerns. But that does not mean that the election was inconsequential for education in North Carolina.

General Assembly leadership

The Republican primary for N.C. Senate District 47 featured two sitting senators, Deanna Ballard and Ralph Hise. Ballard's narrow loss to Hise in the primary means that the state Senate will be losing one of its top education policymakers. Ballard is co-chair of the Senate Education/Higher Education Committee and has led efforts to reopen schools during the pandemic, expand school choice, and improve literacy instruction. Hise chairs the Appropriations and Redistricting committees and currently does not sit on any Senate education committees.

In N.C. House District 70, Rep. Pat Hurley's loss to Brian Biggs means that the House Education Appropriations Committee will lose one of its three co-chairs. Hurley served eight terms in the House and has been a longtime champion of school choice. Her most notable legislative achievement was sponsoring a bill in 2013 that mandated cursive writing instruction and memorization of multiplication tables.



CJ PHOTO BY MAYA REAGAN

Biggs is a realtor and has served on the Randolph County Board of Education since 2014. He is a conservative Christian who touted his record of opposing politicized curricula and pandemic-era mandates.

School board races

In over half of North Carolina's 115 school districts, voters elected school board members or selected candidates for the general election in November. While the pandemic produced an unexpected but welcome parental rights revolution in education, in

most cases, it did not translate into an avalanche of anti-incumbent sentiment among voters.

The school board race in Durham County received special media attention thanks to accusations that five easily identifiable Republicans were running a "stealth campaign" in the nonpartisan school board race. In an interview with N.C. Policy Watch, infamous Duke University history professor Nancy MacLean proclaimed, "What we have been seeing statewide and nationally, and now locally in Durham, is a radical right that understands that its policy agenda is unpopular, so

it has to deceive, distract, or rig election rules to gain power."

Predictably, none of the "stealth slate" candidates won seats on the board in the heavily Democratic county. Voters supported three of the four incumbents on the ballot and two other candidates that met their ideological litmus test. Of course, if progressives are genuinely worried about "stealth candidates" in school board races, they could join me in supporting partisan school board contests. Lawmakers can call it the "Nancy MacLean Election Transparency Act."

School facility bonds

Guilford County voters approved a \$1.7 billion school construction bond, the largest in the history of North Carolina. But they rejected a new one-quarter percent increase in the county sales and use tax, which county commissioners promised to use for ongoing debt service on the bond. As a result, Guilford County commissioners will sock it to property owners, who will foot the bill for the estimated \$50 million a year needed to repay the principal and interest on the bond.

Like most school districts, Guilford County Schools has declining student enrollment and millions of unallocated coronavirus relief funds. Certainly, the school board could have used part of its \$219.6 million in unspent federal relief funding and the unspent portion of the \$300 million bond approved in 2020 to address short-term capital needs. District enrollment projections could have informed a realistic capital plan that would have addressed long-term needs while placing a much lighter burden on county taxpayers.

Unfortunately, the Guilford bond referendum outcome will motivate elected officials elsewhere to ask voters to approve new debt for school facilities. It also will inform their pitch. In the fall, county commissions seeking voter approval for school bonds likely will propose paying for the debt with property tax increases, recognizing that an electorate battered by the Biden economy has little appetite for sales tax increases. If economic conditions deteriorate further, they may oppose future school bond referenda with the same fervor.

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Telehealth genie has escaped its bottle

JOHN HOOD
CONTRIBUTOR



Before the onset of COVID-19 in early 2020, patients who preferred to obtain medical services through video chats or phone calls were unlikely to be reimbursed for those expenses. Medicare, for example, covered telehealth visits only for patients in remote rural areas and only if they journeyed to some other institution — a doctor's office, say, or a clinic — in order to consult with a provider based elsewhere. Other third-party payers followed similar protocols.

The pandemic loosened these constraints, for a time. Private in-

surers expanded coverage to include many more telehealth services. The federal government adopted temporary rules to allow its programs more latitude, as well. In March, Congress enacted a budget bill that, among other things, extended Medicare's broader coverage of telehealth for a few more months.

Why not make the status quo permanent? I think we ought to, although I grant that the issue isn't a simple one. There are plausible objections that deserve careful consideration.

For example, some policymakers believe reimbursing patients to "see" providers from home rather than going to medical clinics or physician offices will result in worse health outcomes. Some services can only be delivered effec-

tively in person, they argue, which is clearly true. In addition, while being examined, patients who come in for one condition or procedure may exhibit signs of something else that requires immediate attention — something that may not be detected in a video chat or telephone call. And as far as the already exorbitant cost of medical care is concerned, some policymakers worry that expanded access to telemedicine will make it easier for patients to consume services of little incremental value, thus increasing revenue to providers without any noticeable gain in outcomes.

These objections are practical ones, not philosophical ones. Pretty much everyone grants that telehealth has the potential to lower costs and improve the patient ex-

perience.

So, does the practice of telehealth deliver on that potential? Real-world experience during the pandemic looks promising to me. In a new research paper jointly published by the Progressive Policy Institute and Americans for Prosperity, researchers found big cost savings. Before COVID, only 134,000 Medicare patients were receiving weekly care via telehealth. After the reimbursement policy was temporarily broadened, that number shot up to an astounding 10.1 million.

"Between January 2020 and February 2021, the average telehealth patients' health care expenses fell 61%, from \$1,099 per month to \$425 per month," the authors found. "Furthermore, telehealth patients purchased few-

er in-person health care services such as emergency care during this time period. This suggests virtual care improves patient health and allows individuals to purchase fewer expensive procedures."

Other research suggests similar benefits. A March 2022 paper in the journal Pain Management Nursing found that offering telehealth to veterans resulted in a gigantic 83% reduction in missed doctor visits, which likely had salutary effects on both cost and health outcomes.

In surveys, most patients receiving virtual care report high levels of satisfaction. Let's face it: The telehealth genie will never be crammed back into its pre-COVID bottle. Time to give it more explicit — and lasting — instructions.

It's time to end offshore drilling bans

DONALD BRYSON
CONTRIBUTOR



Americans are experiencing something beyond a generational energy crunch, but lawmakers of both parties are either apathetic or too frightened of the environmental left to do anything to help.

Just two years ago, in the wake of COVID-19 and a tumultuous election year, Democrats and Republicans betrayed America's working class through ill-conceived energy policies. It's past time to reverse that betrayal.

In 2019, the U.S. House passed a series of bills banning offshore energy development, a significant source of employment for blue-collar Americans. Fueled by environmental fervor, these lawmakers were willing to sacrifice opportunities for their most important constituents.

Up to 90 billion barrels of oil and 328 trillion cubic feet of gas could be buried beneath federally owned sections of the ocean floor. Ideally, energy companies would lease these submerged lands from the government and extract this bounty. That's enough oil and natural gas to power the United States for over a decade.

Unfortunately, the Obama administration outlawed energy development in more than 90% of federal offshore territories. This policy prevents companies from accessing energy riches in the Arctic, Pacific, and Atlantic oceans — as well as the Gulf of Mexico.



Offshore drilling is getting safer by the year. And energy development is tightly regulated to protect the environment.

Soon after taking office, President Trump vowed to lift this ban and revamp offshore energy production. However, in September 2020, Trump crafted a moratorium on drilling off the coasts of Florida, Georgia, and South Caro-

lina until 2032. A few weeks later, he extended that ban to include North Carolina and Virginia.

These policies deny working-class Americans prime employment opportunities. Jobs in the offshore sector often don't re-

quire a college degree, are largely immune to outsourcing, and pay an average salary north of \$75,000.

Even under existing federal constraints, offshore development supports 300,000 jobs. Opening offshore territory would create hundreds of thousands of additional jobs over the next 20 years.

Still, the D.C. elite, including Democrats and Republicans, claim it's an environmental imperative to ban offshore drilling. Rep. Joe Cunningham, D-South Carolina, current Palmetto State gubernatorial candidate and lead sponsor of one of the bills, said that offshore drilling would "ruin our vibrant natural resources." Beto O'Rourke, former congressman and current Texas gubernatorial candidate, told a crowd that "offshore drilling threatens the local wildlife."

These concerns are unwarranted. Offshore drilling is getting safer by the year. And energy development is tightly regulated to protect the environment.

Every rig employs at least one "species observer" who is empowered to stop development if marine animals come too close to operations.

And while the environmental left, and Republican leaders that cave to them, are getting the vapors about environmental concerns, none of them is making a peep about the havoc offshore wind installations are wreaking on ocean ecosystems.

In April, an article in the Journal of Marine Science and Engineering found that the electro-

magnetic field created by wind farm cables creates deformities in lobsters and crabs, rendering them unable to swim. And in Massachusetts, there are accusations that the wind energy industry is making donations to environmental groups that raise serious questions about the ability of those groups to analyze the impacts of offshore wind on right whales, one of the world's most endangered whale species.

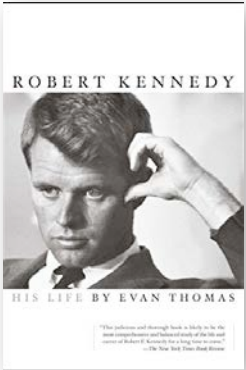
Additionally, this anti-offshore drilling ban will likely damage the environment by choking off funding for a critical federal conservation program. A slice of tax revenue from offshore operations is earmarked for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which helps finance environmental preservation and national parks. Offshore operations contribute \$900 million to this fund every year.

Actions speak louder than words. By moving legislation or signing an executive order to ban offshore exploration and drilling, Washington has shown that they aren't serious about improving the lives of the working class. They wouldn't pursue policies that make it harder for Americans to find good, stable jobs if they were.

As energy prices continue to skyrocket and the monthly budgets of American families are squeezed, it would be nice to know that someone in Washington is interested in helping to keep the lights on and groceries on the table. Unfortunately, both parties are too interested in the next news cycle to worry about governing.

BOOK REVIEWS: 5 GREAT POLITICAL BIOS

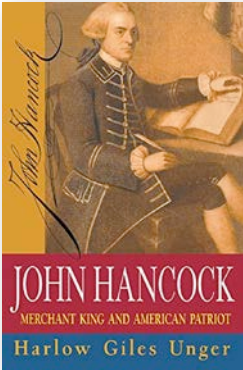
By Ray Nothstine



ROBERT KENNEDY: HIS LIFE
Evan Thomas

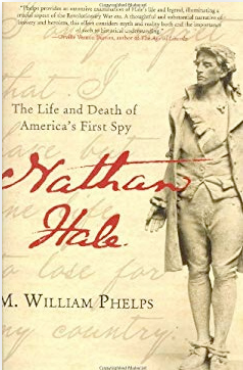
Evan Thomas is a gifted writer who captures the nuances of Robert F. Kennedy. If you're looking for a balanced look at a soul who was haunted by his brother's assassination and — at times — became disillusioned by the government solutions to poverty, this is a good read.

Thomas could be criticized for some of his psychoanalysis of Kennedy, but it works to enlighten the reader at every turn. Kennedy's "Day of Affirmation" address in South Africa is one of the great defenses of the free society, and Thomas highlights that well in this account.



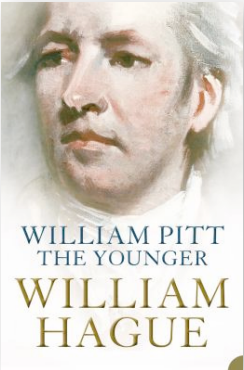
JOHN HANCOCK
Harlow Giles Unger

One of the wealthiest men in the American colonies, Hancock offered up much of his fortune for the revolution. He despised English taxes, declaring, "The Crown has no right to put their hands in my pocket." Hancock used his wealth to support charities and widows, too. John Adams, who was often a political rival, said that Hancock personified generosity better than any man. Known for his signature and as the former president of the Second Continental Congress, Hancock spent much of his energy heroically toiling for the war effort even during the darkest days for American Independence.



NATHAN HALE
M. William Phelps

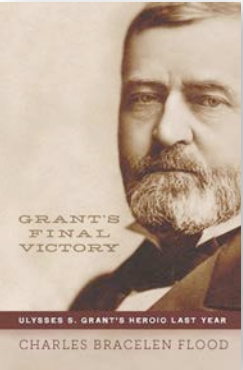
Many Americans know Nathan Hale's famous quote: "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country." Phelps, to his credit, crafts a narrative that offers a rich story beyond Hale's patriotic and courageous quip before his execution. At only 21, Hale was hung as a spy trying to help the American cause, but Phelps notes he had all the qualities to be a hero even if he had simply died of old age.



WILLIAM PITT THE YOUNGER
William Hague

At 24, William Pitt the Younger (1759-1806) is still the youngest prime minister ever of Great Britain and Ireland. William Hague, who also wrote an exceptional biography of William Wilberforce, is the former Conservative leader of Parliament (1997-2001) so his political knowledge and experience adds to the story.

Pitt deftly led the British Empire through King George's madness and the instability of the French Revolution and a European war. Pitt's rivalry with Charles James Fox is one of the great political friendships and then clashes of all time. This book is not only a great biography but an amazing tutorial in British history.



GRANT'S FINAL VICTORY
Charles Bracelen Flood

There are few more heroic moments than Ulysses S. Grant's race to publish his wartime memoirs after bad investment schemes bankrupted his family. Grant, who smoked 20-25 cigars a day, was dying of throat cancer, and completion of his memoirs allowed for his wife to live her final years very comfortably. Mark Twain agreed to give 75% of the profit to his widow. Grant's work was a huge success, and nobody tells the story better than Flood.

Grant suffered while he wrote, and, at times, old Union soldiers would walk by his residence as he worked on his porch and offer up encouragement and old war whoops. He died three days after completing his account. This story explains why Grant was one of the most admired men of the 19th century.

UNC project needs realistic goals

JOHN HOOD
CONTRIBUTOR



About a million North Carolinians have spent some time in college but left without obtaining a degree. Policymakers at the University of North Carolina System and the General Assembly see these non-completers as an enormous opportunity, an untapped resource of potential professionals, leaders, and entrepreneurs. Policymakers also see out-of-state institutions scrambling to help those noncompleters get degrees. Right now, UNC schools serve about half of the North Carolinians taking on-line courses.

That's why the UNC System secured \$97 million from the state to launch a new endeavor, Project Kitty Hawk. "To make North Carolina competitive," CEO Wil Zemp told Triangle Business Journal, "we have to very quickly set up a capability that can up-skill, re-skill, or skill working adults that are either not being served



The UNC System secured \$97 million to launch Project Kitty Hawk to "up-skill, re-skill, or skill working adults"

or don't have services available to them."

That makes sense, but I hope he and other officials have set realistic goals. The vast majority of those who exit higher education without a degree will never earn one. Some left after discovering they didn't enjoy or weren't prepared to succeed in college-level

courses. Others left for financial or personal reasons, then built careers and lives without a credential, and no longer deem it worth the time or expense to acquire one.

Don't take my word for any of this. Just look at the available evidence, as Triangle Business Journal did for a recent cover story. In California, state leaders created an online community college to help working adults finish their degrees. Over the first two years, only 12 of 904 enrollees completed enough courses to graduate.

Consider also the findings of a study of 200,000 Virginians who left community college without obtaining degrees. After screening for academic performance and occupation, the researchers concluded that only 3% "could reasonably expect a sizeable earnings premium from completing their degree." In other words, on strictly economic grounds, it would be difficult to convince the vast majority to return.

This issue reflects the age-old conflict between two old-age maxims: "he who hesitates is lost" and "look before your leap."

Applying the first maxim, proponents of Project Kitty Hawk argue that if the UNC System fails to respond boldly and creatively here, it will lose potential enrollment and revenue to competitors while leaving North Carolina with a weaker pool of college-educated talent to fuel the state's future growth. The second maxim reminds us, however, that good intentions aren't enough.

I wish university leaders had engaged in more extensive public debate about Project Kitty Hawk before it secured the seed money. Still, the initial outlay is relatively small, and UNC has recruited experienced hands to the project who seem to be focused on adult learners for whom a degree is likely to have large financial returns.

Good. University education shouldn't be solely, or even mostly, about vocational training. But if what a working adult really desires is to read great books, explore great ideas, or appreciate great art, our modern world offers many options. UNC doesn't need to build a new platform to satisfy those desires. Fortunately, its leaders seem to recognize that.

The '70s

continued from PAGE 2

sion narrative and handed it to an eager press that never bothered to confirm it. The fake news was reported as true. The campaign also peddled it to the FBI, providing cover for media to keep reporting it as if it was legitimate.

The Wall Street Journal editorial board opined the fake Russian collusion story "disgraced the FBI, humiliated the press, and sent the country on a three-year investigation to nowhere. Vladimir Putin never came close to doing as much disinformation damage."

I doubt Americans will see much, if any, justice for what's been done to them. The media won't come clean. It's unlikely Clinton will be held accountable in any serious way. Washington, D.C., lacks the political will to clean house at the FBI and CIA. It proves that for some, the end justifies a by-any-means-necessary method of operation. No wonder Americans have



Amy O. Cooke on the Russian collusion story: "It's unlikely Clinton will be held accountable in any serious way. Washington, D.C., lacks the political will to clean house at the FBI and CIA."

so little regard for or faith in elite institutions.

As for the economy, turn on any cable news outlet. You'll probably find an economist making comparisons between current economic conditions and those of the 1970s. Baby Boomers remember all too well the wretched economy, stagflation, and its descriptive data point — the misery index. There's real fear that '70s-style stagflation will rear its ugly head soon.

Stagflation is the combination of persistent high inflation and unemployment, coupled with slow economic growth.

Larry Summers, former treasury secretary for President Clinton, wrote recently, "The Fed's current policy trajectory is likely to lead to stagflation, with average unemployment and inflation both averaging over 5% over the next few years — and ultimately to a major recession."

One indicator economists watch is the price of oil. In the '70s, the OPEC oil embargo on shipments

to the United States resulted in high prices, long gas lines, and rationing. High crude oil prices helped push inflation to over 14%. To fight the "Great Inflation," the Federal Reserve hiked interest rates to a record 20% in December 1980.

Today, inflation is nearly 8%. Last time I went to the grocery store, butter was \$7.49 a pound and half a loaf of bakery bread was \$3.99. Shelves are bare, especially if you're searching for baby formula.

Taken together, President Biden's reversal of President Trump's energy independence doctrine and war in Ukraine have sent crude prices soaring. According to AAA, the average price nationally for a gallon of gas was a record high \$4.59 a gallon on May 20. J.P. Morgan analysts predict we'll see a national average of over \$6 before the end of summer. It was \$3.04 one year ago.

If what economists like Larry Summers are predicting comes to fruition, Americans are right to be worried. We're in for some pain that won't be resolved in a 30-minute TV show.

Primaries

continued from PAGE 2

Chuck Edwards, with a less-conspicuous persona but solid legislative skill set, even if he doesn't have Cawthorn's back story and Trump endorsement. Like Foushee, Edwards had backing from his state party's leaders.

N.C. voters on both sides of the aisle think for themselves. They are paying attention to policy. They care about the economy, education, and candidates' voting history.

North Carolina is a prize for either party, and both have their eyes on us. It won't be cheap. The race between the GOP's nominee, Con-

gressman Ted Budd, and the Democrats' Cheri Beasley is expected to be one of the most expensive Senate races ever.

Gov. Roy Cooper is calling for financial support for Beasley to flood into the state, but not only to win a U.S. Senate seat for the Democrats after 14 years of losses. He needs it for Democrats in the General Assembly too.

"I know what it takes to win in North Carolina, and Cheri Beasley can do it. With everything on the line this year, we need to leave it all on the field for her from the national party on down to the local level," Cooper recently told Politico.

If the national Democrats pour money into North Carolina to drive turnout for Beasley, it helps Democrats running for the state legislature and could prevent Republicans from regaining a super-majority.

However, with an anti-Biden Republican wave predicted, Democrats at the national level could be in triage mode, focused on protecting their incumbents but leaving newcomers like Beasley short-changed.

Money talks, but it doesn't say everything.

The lesson of May 17 is that policy matters too. Issues like college debt forgiveness are proving to be a dud for Democrats, especially as inflation soars.

Just 13% of Americans have college debt. One quarter of those people went to graduate school, but they account for half of the outstanding student loan debt.

Democrats' focus on this issue not only draws few voters, but it also reinforces the reputation that Paul Begala, a former adviser to President Bill Clinton, described; in one generation, the Democratic Party has migrated from the factory floor to the faculty lounge.

With misguided policy focus, surging inflation, widespread shortages, foreign policy crises, and runaway spending, Republicans should be in the proverbial catbird seat.

However, there could be trouble ahead.

N.C. Republicans are considering massively expanding government-run health care in North Carolina by adding more than 500,000 people to an already-overburdened and under-

staffed state Medicaid system.

There are provisions in the bill that they say will remove or update regulations to increase access, a huge obstacle for anyone on a government entitlement program.

Unless the number of providers and the number of people they can serve grows, a Medicaid card is only worth the paper it's printed on.

People will simply not be able to get an appointment and not be able to get care.

Republicans must decide if they going to be problem solvers, or problem creators. Are they truly the party of smaller government, healthy competition in industry, and free-market principles?

The stakes are high; they risk snatching defeat from the jaws of victory in 2022 and 2024.

20 PHOTO GALLERY

SCENES FROM THE SAVE AMERICA RALLY

Just weeks before North Carolina's 2022 primary election, former President Donald Trump held a Save America rally in Selma that drew thousands of supporters. People camped out starting the night before to get into the gates. Trump endorseses Rep. Ted Budd, Rep. Madison Cawthorn, and NC-13 candidate Bo Hines spoke to the crowd, along with current Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson. Cawthorn lost his primary to state Sen. Chuck Edwards on May 17. Hines and Budd went on to win their primaries and will be on the Nov. 8, 2022 general election ballot.

Photos by Tim Robbins

