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Fraser fir from Ashe County selected for 2023 White House Christmas Tree

BY THERESA OPEKA

A tree from North Carolina once again graces the Blue Room at the White House this Christmas. Cline Church Nursery in Fleetwood, Ashe County, was selected for the honor. The National Christmas Tree Association chose them as the 2023 Grand Champion Grower.

The association holds a contest every two years in which consumers, industry experts, and growers choose which nurseries will provide trees for the White House and the vice president's official residence, continuing a 58-year-old tradition.

This year marks the 15th time a tree from the Tar Heel State was chosen as the official Christmas tree for the White House, more than any other state in the nation. The last time was in 2021 when a Fraser fir tree was donated from Peak Farms, owned by Rusty and Beau Estes of Jefferson, also in Ashe County.

"Ruby," a 78-foot tall red spruce from North Carolina's Pisgah National Forest, was chosen as the 2022 US Capitol Christmas Tree.

North Carolina is the second-largest Christmas tree-producing state in the nation, after Oregon, and is known for the Fraser fir — native to the Appalachian Mountains — and the most popular Christmas tree choice.

White House officials selected the 19-foot Fraser fir on Oct. 9, and it was removed and shipped to Washington, DC, on Nov. 15.

This isn't the first time Cline Church Nursery has received a special honor. In 2022, they were selected as Reserve Champion by the NCTA and presented a North Carolina Fraser fir Christmas tree for display in the vice president's residence.

The 2024 White House Christmas Tree will also come from North Carolina. Cartner Christmas Tree Farm of Newland, again in Avery County, was selected as the NCTA's 2024 Grand Champion Grower.



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"Ruby" was selected as the official Christmas tree for the White House. This is the 15th time a tree from North Carolina was chosen.



COURTESY OF GERMAIN MEDIA

White House officials selected the 19-foot Fraser fir on Oct. 9, and it was removed and shipped to Washington, DC, on Nov. 15.

BY THE NUMBERS

25.7%

North Carolina produces 26.7% of all Christmas trees grown in the United States. — North Carolina Tree Association

850

There are approximately 850 Christmas tree farms in North Carolina.

4,031,864

North Carolina produces more than four million trees annually.



North Carolina is pretty much the North Pole of Christmas trees.

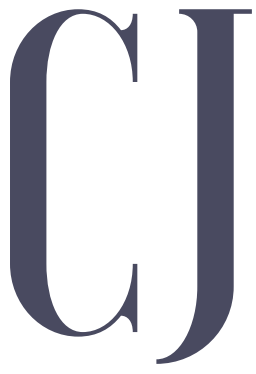
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CREATIVE COMMONS IMAGE BRIAN HERZOG

Listen closely to the campaign promises this year

DONNA KING
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Stepping up to the check-out counter might hurt more this holiday season. For a state where the economy is churning with low taxes and steady growth, North Carolinians have struggled under the weight of inflation in 2023.

Headlines are brimming with news of economic growth in North Carolina, although it remains below the national level of 3%. So why do nearly half of us in the Tar Heel State say we are worse off financially than one year ago?

It's not because of "misinformation" or partisan messaging. It is simply because prices are ballooning faster than paychecks. According to a study from the American Enterprise Institute, average real wages are down 3% from 2020. Even worse, average wages artificially spiked during the pandemic because lower-paid workers lost their jobs. Now, we have a society that remembers a pre-pandemic economy with growing wages and low interest rates and

prices. They will not forget that in 2024.

As election season heats up, nothing gets closer to a "kitchen table issue" than inflation, and few policy priorities or political messages can distract voters from it.

For millions of North Carolina families, it all comes down to the cost of groceries. Over the last 12 months, the CPI inflation rate in North Carolina was 7.7%. The average price of gas was \$3.39 per gallon this year, and milk was \$4.22 per gallon. While inflation's heated trajectory cooled a bit to 3.5% this fall, it is still well over the 2% target rate set by the Federal Reserve. Since President Joe Biden took office, the CPI has risen 17%.

More than 80% of North Carolinians say inflation has affected some or most of their spending decisions. Half of us expect inflation to get worse, and it could, particularly if our labor participation rate continues to stall. Over 2023, the number of North Carolinians working fell to 60%, more than two percentage points lower than the national average. Small

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You're invited to the largest gathering of its kind...



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CREATIVE COMMONS IMAGE VIA SALVATION ARMY WEST

BEYOND GOVERNMENT SOLUTIONS

Unleashing the potential of philanthropy

DONALD BRYSON
PUBLISHER



As the year draws to a close and the holiday season envelops us in its festive glow, I'm reminded of Charles Dickens' timeless sentiment from "A Christmas Carol": "I have always thought of Christmas time as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys."

This monologue from Fred, Ebenezer Scrooge's nephew, beautifully captures the season's essence, notably the surge of generosity that characterizes end-of-year giving to philanthropies. Amid the trimmings of holiday decorations and the cheer that permeates the

air, the culmination of the year becomes a poignant moment for individuals and corporations alike to embrace the charitable spirit, recognizing the shared journey of humanity and the transformative power that philanthropy holds in shaping a more compassionate and equitable world.

In today's complex cultural landscape, the clamor for government intervention to solve all societal issues often overshadows the incredible potential of individual and private-sector initiatives. While acknowledging the importance of government in addressing significant challenges, it's crucial to recognize that not every societal problem requires a government solution. Philanthropy is an indispensable pillar, offering a powerful avenue for individual citizens to become social investors, providing solutions and support that complement traditional approaches.

In 2022, charitable giving in the United States experienced a decline for the first time in four

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North Carolinians gave more than \$58 million to charities last year

BY THERESA OPEKA

North Carolinians were more generous in their giving to charities in the state this past year.

According to the recently released 2022-23 North Carolina Secretary of State Charitable Solicitation Licensing Annual Report, licensed fundraisers collected over \$58 million for charities between July 1, 2022, and June 30, 2023, an increase of \$10.4 million from overall giving in the state in 2021-22.

About \$43.8 million of the over \$58 million went directly to the charities for their programs, a \$4.9 million increase. The remainder went to fundraising and administrative costs.

The Secretary of State's Office noted that although it regulates fundraising activity pursuant to federal case law, it cannot legally penalize a charity for using most of its donations on fundraising or administrative overhead.

"While we saw a slight drop from last year's record high aggregate percentage of donors' charitable dollars going to charities, the total dollar amount going directly to charities' programs still grew by nearly \$5 million," Secretary of State Elaine Marshall said in a press release. "As people continue to contend with the effects of global inflation, so many charities are doing vital work for people in need and struggling to meet the demand with donations. I



CJFILEPHOTO

thank all of those nonprofits that are doing good work and encourage North Carolina's giving public to use our Annual Report and Charitable Solicitation registry to research nonprofits as they make decisions with their charitable donations this holiday season and all year round."

This past year's numbers, Marshall said, were also impacted by fewer nonprofits reporting fundraising campaigns related to civic issues and economic development.

Marshall released the report at the volunteer and donation center for Note in the Pocket, Raleigh. The agency takes referrals from school social workers and human service agencies in the Triangle to distribute clothing to children and families experiencing homelessness and economic hardship. Marshall said the organization has seen a 70% increase in the number of clothing requests it receives from referring agencies in the past two years.

The annual report is only a "snapshot" of giving under North Carolina's Charitable Solicitations statute (§ 131F) and is not a comprehensive view of all charitable giving in the state.

The office licenses charities and nonprofit organizations that use professional fundraising services for their solicitation campaigns, compensate their officers, or raise at least \$50,000 and are not exempt from state law for reasons such as being a religious in-

stitution, volunteer fire department, or educational institution.

The report did, however, show a downturn in the numbers reported from national fundraising campaigns that included North Carolina donors.

Multistate campaigns using professional fundraisers took in over \$1.09 billion, a decrease of \$139.8 million from overall funds raised in 2021-22. About 81.57% of each charitable dollar to these national fundraising campaigns went to charities after fundraising and administrative costs, compared to 85.12% last year that went to charities in national fundraising campaigns.

Marshall encouraged everyone to take a look at the report to see what charities actually took in for their programs before fundraising and administrative costs.

"It's always a good idea to check out the numbers over the past two or three years for charities you're interested in supporting," she said. "There may be many reasons for a low percentage going to a charity in a given year, such as fundraising campaigns beginning near the end of the reporting period. Never hesitate to ask questions, and look for the most effective charities working to address the causes you care about."

People with questions about individual charities or charitable solicitation activities in general can call the Secretary of State's Charitable Solicitation Licensing Division at 1-888-830-4989.

NC Appeals Court hears arguments in Charlotte Latin School case

BY DAVID BASS

A three-judge panel of the North Carolina Court of Appeals heard arguments in October in a suit brought by parents claiming that a Charlotte-area private school went woke and then expelled students of parents who disagreed.

The lawsuit argues that Charlotte Latin School "hatched a plan" to expel students after the parents started asking questions about changes in the school's operations. The suit was filed by parents Doug and Nicole Turpin.

The Turpins originally filed suit in April 2022. A trial judge dismissed all but one claim in October 2022. The Turpins are now urging the state's second-highest court to reverse the trial court's decision.

"Being a parent isn't easy. Parents have a right — or, at the very least, a need — to understand what their children are exposed to, whether by their friends, the media, or their teachers," according to a brief the Turpins' lawyers filed in August. "This is a case about two

parents needing an answer to that question."

"Yet when they asked, Charlotte Latin School and its administrators, Chuck Baldecchi and Todd Ballaban, shut them down," the brief continued. "In just over two weeks, the Turpins went from valued community members, invited to speak to Latin's board of trustees, to pariahs whose children were expelled."

"Latin expelled the Turpin children ... to make examples out of the Turpin family," the parents argued. "The Turpins' valid concerns irked the school's administration. When Latin's administrators got the chance, they hatched a plan to expel the Turpins' children. ... [T]his Court should reverse the trial court's decision dismissing the complaint."

During oral arguments, the lawyer for the Turpins, Chris Edwards of the law firm Ward and Smith, argued that the school unfairly targeted the family for expulsion.

"This is a business, not a public school," Edwards said. "It may be a nonprofit business, but this is a business, not a public school. So,

the Turpins are the school's consumers, and it has an obligation to deal with them in good faith."

In contrast, attorney Jennifer Van Zant of the Greensboro firm Brooks and Pierce, representing Charlotte Latin, argued that the school was well within its rights to end its relationship with the family. Van Zant emphasized that, in the school's view, the students were not "expelled," but the contract was simply ended.

"The very point of private education — whether it be a religious, classical, progressive, Montessori, experiential — is that schools can set a curriculum and policies and then parents can choose schools that match their personal ideologies," Van Zant said. "Affirming the trial court's order will affirm that in North Carolina, a private school may set its own course and may preserve a contractual right to separate from parents who want their children educated differently."

Previously, the school has characterized the suit as a challenge to its "diversity, equity, and inclusion" measures.

The NC Association of Independent Schools and Southern As-

sociation of Independent Schools filed briefs with the state's second-highest court. The two groups supported Charlotte Latin's case.

In a video interview with Carolina Journal, Turpin said that he and his wife were looking for a classical education for their children. They thought that would be achieved at Charlotte Latin. But the school took a turn toward progressivism after the George Floyd riots in 2020.

"All of a sudden they started sending out all kinds of very puzzling emails that sounded like virtue signaling," Turpin said. "Then strange things began to appear in the school that were rather alarming to Christian parents like us."

One of those was a picture hung in the school hallway depicting Jesus with his throat cut and black blood coming down his shirt, with the words "God is dead" on the forehead, according to Turpin.

The negative experience inspired Turpin to found a group called the Coalition for Liberty, which seeks to establish new classical model schools that are apolitical, among other objectives.



The very point of private education — whether it be a religious, classical, progressive, Montessori, experiential — is that schools can set a curriculum and policies and then parents can choose schools that match their personal ideologies.

- Jennifer Van Zant
Attorney, Brooks and Pierce

4 NORTH CAROLINA

Holiday staff shortages hit the service industry hard

BY SHERMAN CRINER

Triangle-area restaurants faced considerable staffing shortages heading into the holiday season, findings from the North Carolina Restaurant and Lodging Association suggest.

The NCRLA compiled hiring data from Lightcast and Indeed and found that since the beginning of October, approximately 2,134 restaurant jobs have opened up in the Triangle area alone. This development may come as a surprise to some due to the state's low unemployment rate of 3.4%.

However, these service-industry shortcomings are part of a broader, statewide worker shortage. A US Chamber of Commerce study indicates that North Carolina has 55 available workers for every 100 open jobs.

"Restaurants tend to get busier during the holiday season, and it is an important time that allows you to get potential regulars into your restaurants, but we are now tasked with hiring and training new staff," said Jason Smith, owner of 18 Restaurant Group and Cantina 18 during an interview with Carolina Journal.

Smith, a Raleigh native, has served as the chef and proprietor of 18 Restaurant Group since 2006. Despite these difficulties with worker shortages, he believes there is reason to be optimistic



Chef Jason Smith, a Raleigh native, has served as the chef and proprietor of 18 Restaurant Group since 2006.

about the restaurant industry's immediate future.

"I would say that the holiday season is a great opportunity for folks to come and work in the restaurant industry," he said. "If they come and enjoy it, then they can stay and enjoy our working environment along with other benefits, like the financial independence of having their own job. On days that are harder to staff, I try to reward working people be-

cause they want to work hard and do a good job."

During the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent shutdowns by the government, restaurants across the state were forced to close their doors and lay off thousands of workers. For Smith, the pandemic's effects are still being felt today.

"I think the biggest setback is going all the way back to the pandemic," he said. "As the hospitality

industry was shut down, and we were told to furlough everyone. We rolled into a time when businesses were very, very busy and people were hiring, but much of our workforce left the industry to work in other things and weren't coming back. When we started to rehire, everyone else was re-hiring."

The shutdowns were especially grueling for smaller local restaurants like Cantina 18 because na-

tional chain restaurants could better absorb the financial hit, Smith explained.

"Many restaurant workers were laid off and have since sought work in other fields, making it more difficult for restaurants to find willing workers," wrote Brian Balfour, the John Locke Foundation's senior vice president of research, in an email to Carolina Journal.

Some studies show that fine and casual dining have declined 85% and 65% respectively compared to fast food, which decreased by only 21%. Small, locally owned restaurants were disadvantaged by the pandemic's shutdowns, further diminishing their ability to compete with international restaurant corporations.

While the pandemic devastated local restaurants, it may not be the sole contributing factor to the current worker shortage. In fact, Balfour suggests that inflation, which reached a four-decade high of 8.5% in 2022, is to blame for these employment shortcomings.

"Inflation certainly impacts the labor market in a few ways," he said. "First, because of the rising cost of living, workers need higher wages to keep up. Unfortunately, over the past few years, average incomes have not kept up with inflation. Additionally, businesses, especially small businesses, can't af-

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How will Gen Z impact 2024 elections in NC?

BY DAVID BASS

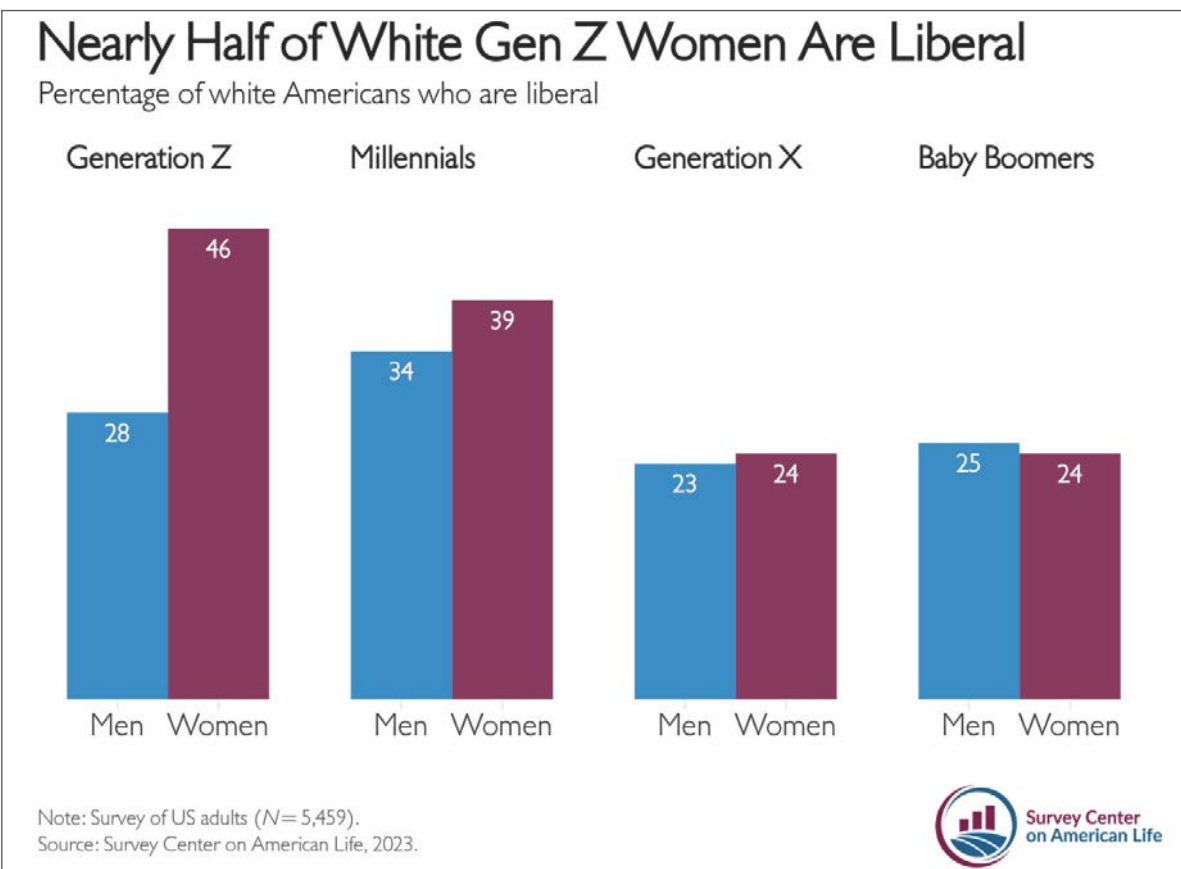
A new generation of voters will impact the outcome of North Carolina elections in 2024. The big question: Will they turn out, and which party will they vote for?

The cohort in question — Generation Z — is those born between 1997 and 2013. This generation is roughly 72 million individuals. An analysis by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement predicts that 41 million members of Gen Z will be eligible to vote in the 2024 presidential election.

Data from the NC State Board of Elections show that 13% of registered voters in the Tar Heel State fall in the 25-years-old and below range, for a total of 953,720 voters. Of those, 27% are registered Democrats, 22% Republican, and 49% unaffiliated. The data are current as of the Oct. 10 election.

A new report from the American Enterprise Institute sheds light on the political leanings of this generation — finding that the generation leans liberal, but not necessarily Democratic. For the nation as a whole, 32% are Democrats, 21% are Republican, and 29% are independents. Sixteen percent identify as "something else."

On political ideology, 39% identify as liberal, 32% as mod-



erate, and 26% as conservative. However, there is a noticeable gap between men and women, particularly for whites: 46% of Gen Z women are liberal, while 28% of men are. In contrast, 36% of Gen

Z men identify as conservative, compared to 26% of women.

The AEI report compared that gender divide to past generations — including Millennials, Generation X, and Baby Boomers — and

found that there wasn't as great a divide.

There is also a sizable gender gap based on whether men and women call themselves feminists. Sixty-one percent of Gen Z wom-

In the most recent Meredith College Poll, a majority of Gen Z males had a favorable view of former President Donald Trump, while almost 70% of Gen Z females had an unfavorable view of the former president.

- David McLennan, Political science professor Meredith College

en identify as feminist, compared to 43% of men. That 18 percentage-point gap is the largest of any recent generation going back to Boomers, who had a 12 percentage-point gap.

The gender gap doesn't surprise David McLennan, a political science professor at Meredith College in Raleigh.

"In the most recent Meredith College Poll, a majority of Gen Z males had a favorable view of former President Donald Trump, while almost 70% of Gen Z females had an unfavorable view of the former president," McLennan noted. "Even on issues like abor-

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Woman with North Carolina ties is among hostages released by Hamas terrorists

CJ STAFF

Adrienne “Aviva” Siegel, an American citizen with ties to North Carolina, was among the 100 hostages released by the militant group Hamas in late November. Hamas had taken a total of 240 people hostage during brutal attacks on Oct. 7. The announcement came from US Sen. Ted Budd, R-NC, who played a role in negotiating Siegel’s release. Her husband, Chapel Hill native Keith Siegel, 64, remains a hostage in Gaza.

Aviva Siegel’s was the third group of hostages released after a brief ceasefire negotiated between the terror group Hamas and Israel.

The Siegels are humanitarian workers living in Kfar Aza, a kibbutz hit particularly hard.

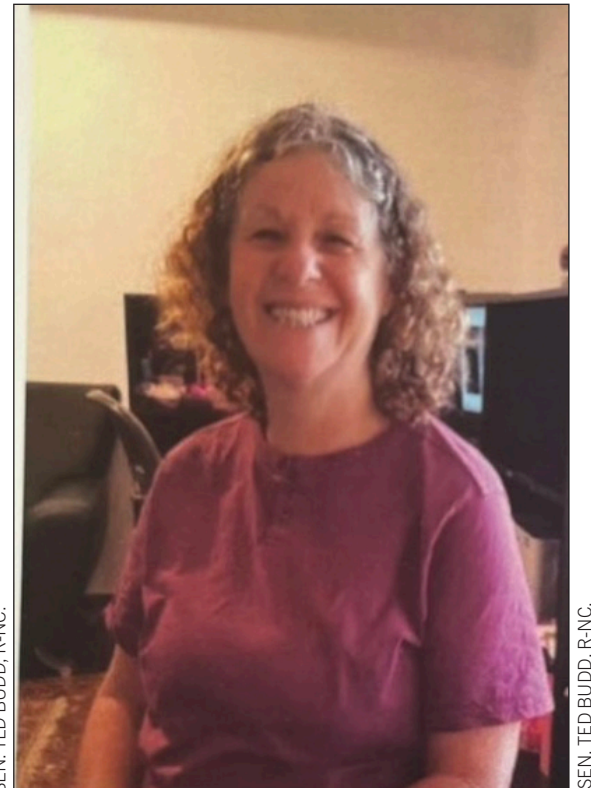
They are part of a small group of North Carolina expatriates living in Israel.

The Siegels were abducted by Hamas, and their captivity raised concerns internationally, with various diplomatic efforts undertaken to secure her release, among them work from Budd’s office.

Earlier in November, Budd met with Qatari Ambassador Meshal Al Thani in Budd’s Washington office and strongly urged the Qatari government to use its leverage on Hamas leaders and hold those same Hamas leaders ac-



Sen. Ted Budd, R-NC, meets with Qatari Ambassador Meshal Al Thani in Budd’s Washington, DC, office.



Adrienne “Aviva” Siegel, an American citizen with ties to North Carolina.

countable once the hostage situation is fully resolved.

“We are pleased that some hostages have been released and are now home with their loved ones,” said Budd in a statement. “We remain steadfast in our commit-

ment to secure that freedom for North Carolina native Keith Siegel, Omer Neutra, and all hostages illegally held by Hamas terrorists. While we are encouraged by the government of Qatar’s efforts to mediate the release of some of the

hostages, we renew our call to their government to exert pressure on Hamas leadership to release each and every hostage immediately and unconditionally.”

Also among the hostages released was 4-year-old American

Avigail Mor Idan, whose parents were murdered in front of her by Hamas terrorists.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office reports that nine children were on the list to be released.

‘Where are the kids?’ State audit unearths concerning pandemic truancy

BY DAVID BASS

A new state audit has revealed a troubling trend for student attendance records in six North Carolina school districts during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The six school districts auditors examined were Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Winston-Salem/Forsyth, Johnston, Hyde, Robeson, and Henderson.

“All six school districts did not comply with North Carolina’s Truancy Law during the 2020-2021 school year,” the report concluded. “Specifically, District schools did not perform required actions for students with three, six, and ten or more unexcused absences.”

In late 2021, the General Assembly authorized State Auditor Beth Wood to conduct a performance audit that reviewed truancy data.

Henderson County was the only school district that could be accurately reviewed because the other districts didn’t keep adequate attendance data, the audit found.

Henderson had 1,647 — or 13% — of students chronically absent during the 2020-21 school year. The school district also promoted 1,327 of those students to the next grade or graduated them from high school.



IMAGE COURTESY OF CREATIVE COMMONS

“In my opinion, the whole situation warrants further review. The numbers from the OSA report are more than concerning,” said Robert Luebke, director of the Center for Effective Education at the John Locke Foundation.

“The NC DPI press release seems unusually combative. One wonders why their points weren’t

raised earlier. If thousands of kids are missing from our schools, we owe it to them and their families to find out why and to try to get them back in school,” Luebke added.

The Department of Public Instruction issued a statement the same day the audit was released, calling it an “egregious report” that contained a “magnitude of errors.”

“Instead of recommendations to get students back to school, our agency and six of our school districts have been unnecessarily reprimanded,” said State Superintendent of Public Instruction Catherine Truitt. “Much of how this report was conducted is an example of how state government time and taxpayer dollars and resources

should not be used.”

In March 2022, DPI released a report showing crippling learning losses for public school students during the pandemic.

The negative effects were most significant for students from low-income families, and the worst subject areas were math and biology.



Instead of recommendations to get students back to school, our agency and six of our school districts have been unnecessarily reprimanded. Much of how this report was conducted is an example of how state government time and taxpayer dollars and resources should not be used.

- Catherine Truitt
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

6 AT THE MOVIES

'The Holdovers' review: An early Christmas gift

BY GRANT LEFELAR

One scene in director Alexander Payne's latest movie, "The Holdovers," epitomizes the entire film. On Christmas morning, Paul Hunham (Paul Giamatti), the usually cantankerous classics teacher at a New England boarding school in the early 1970s, summons rebellious student Angus Tully (Dominic Sessa) and grieving cafeteria lady Mary Lamb (Da'Vine Joy Randolph) to the mess hall for a hastily put-together celebration. Gleaming with self-satisfied delight, Hunham unveils a tilted and unadorned Christmas tree littered with poorly wrapped presents at its foot.

It's a pathetic display, reminiscent of "A Charlie Brown Christmas," but it's Hunham's effort to turn a miserable situation into an enjoyable festival that counts. That is what "The Holdovers" is all about: making the most of the holiday season despite less-than-ideal circumstances.

Starring the Oscar-nominated Giamatti, in his latest collaboration with Payne after 2004's "Sideways," "The Holdovers" is a snapshot of a specific time and place: Christmas break 1970 at a snow-covered New England boys' prep academy for the rich.

The school's headmaster gives Hunham, a lonely and despised teacher, the unenviable task of watching over the handful of unlucky students forced to spend holiday break on campus.

Hunham's set-in-his-ways attitude and open loathing of the boys set up a near battle of wills between Hunham and those under his command, specifically the defiant yet highly intelligent Tully.



to digitally add 16 mm film grain to the finished copy, giving the movie both a '70s setting and a '70s feel that avoids pastiche. The '70s vibe combined with the cozy romanticism of snow-blanketed New England is strong enough to raise feelings of nostalgia, even in those who were not alive during the era.

"The Holdovers" is a welcome departure from Payne's previous feature, the 2017 Matt Damon-led "Downsizing," a satire of environmental solutions in response to climate change that got lost in its half-baked socio-economic message. While "The Holdovers" touches on contentious issues of its period — race, class, and the Vietnam War — the script does not linger on them for too long nor expresses them heavy-handedly. Instead, Payne focuses the story on the importance of human connection rather than his usual social satire. While "The Holdovers" is just as biting and bitter as his previous films, there is a warmth to it that brings a new element to his filmography.

As millions put up their Christmas trees, uncover boxes of dusty ornaments, and staple cheap, multi-colored lights from Target to their roof gutters, I advise them also to set their big-screen TVs to this wonderful film in celebration of the holidays. I hope you will join me in thinking of it as not only an early Christmas gift but as a new holiday classic worth returning to in the years to come.

Rating: Five big, beautiful, shiny Christmas ornaments.

"The Holdovers" is playing in select theaters and is available for streaming purchase.

However, what transpires is more than the classic "headstrong adult versus unruly youngster" story. It is a new spin on the traditional holiday flick set in a picturesque winter wonderland as Hunham and Tully slowly forge a complicated friendship and a mutual understanding.

"The Holdovers" has many strengths, especially in its performances. Giamatti's portrayal of Hunham showcases the slow melting of a stubborn snowman, one who hates his students as much as he cares for their success. Giamatti's ability to translate Hunham's frosty demeanor and shrouded warmth, often in the same scene, brings depth and complexity to the film's story.

Sessa, a young newcomer to cinema, depicts Tully as a young man unable to deal with his aban-

donment by his family. Sessa smartly balances the line between disobedience and reasonability in his performance, an impressive debut for an actor I hope and predict we will see in plenty more movies to come.

Outside of the film's two main protagonists, Randolph shines as Lamb, the school's head cafeteria worker mourning the death of her son in the Vietnam War. Randolph brings the film's emotional core, acting partially as a moral compass as she treads the rocky road left in the wake of her son's passing.

Desperate for a connection over Christmas, the three form an informal yet caring family as they wait out Christmas before the start of the upcoming semester.

"The Holdovers" is as funny as it is sincere and poignant. The

script, written by producer David Hemingson, is filled with as many hilarious moments as there are reflective ones. Even when touching on dark subjects, such as loneliness, depression, and dysfunctional families, the script treats them with appropriate humor, allowing the film to breathe and not get muddled down in its melancholy. It would not be a true Christmas film if no joy was interwoven into the story. Furthermore, for a movie nearly 2 hours and 15 minutes long, there are enough turns and developments to keep the audience engaged.

Payne also makes use of the setting: the early 1970s. The film features the fashions and car models of the time alongside excerpts from "The Newlywed Game" episodes. Importantly, Payne made the wise decision

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BEHIND THE SCENES AT A THINK TANK



CAPITALISM

NC's Biltmore House features in Hallmark Channel's 'A Biltmore Christmas'

BY THERESA OPEKA

One of North Carolina's most famous and historic landmarks is on full display after the Hallmark Channel debuted "A Biltmore Christmas" Nov. 26.

The Biltmore House in Asheville is featured as part of the cable channel's 2023 "Countdown to Christmas."

The story features a screenwriter hired to write the script for a remake of a 1940s Christmas movie that was originally filmed at the Biltmore House. When the head of the studio isn't happy with the script's ending, he sends Lucy (Bethany Joy Lenz), the screenwriter, to Biltmore for inspiration. While there, she is transported back in time to 1947 with the help of an hourglass. Lucy becomes close with one of the original film's stars (Kristoffer Polaha), and drama ensues.

"The Biltmore is absolutely its own character in this movie," said Lenz in a trailer for the film. "This place is magical."

Polaha echoed Lenz' sentiments.

"Viewers are going to love the fact that they can have this very intimate tour of Biltmore House," he said.

Filming took place in January in several locations across the Biltmore Estate, including the Gardens, Conservatory, and The Inn. According to the Asheville Citizen-Times, other areas outside the estate that were used for filming included Chemist Spirits' Antidote cocktail bar, office space above Jerusalem Garden Café in downtown Asheville, and a train station in Hendersonville.

"A Biltmore Christmas" is the first movie to spotlight the estate itself in a movie.

Other movies that have used the estate as a setting include "The Odd Life of Timothy Green" (2011), "Hannibal" (2001), "Patch Adams" (1998), "My Fellow Americans" (1996), "Richie Rich" (1994), "Forrest Gump" (1994), "The Last of The Mohicans" (1992), "Mr. Destiny" (1990) "The Private Eyes" (1980), and "The Swan" (1956).

The Biltmore House is a National Historic Landmark. Known as America's Largest Home, it spans 175,000 square feet, more



Actress Bethany Joy Lenz in a scene from the Hallmark Channel's "A Biltmore Christmas."



The banquet hall at the Biltmore Estate.

than four acres of floor space. The 250-room French Renaissance chateau includes 35 bedrooms, 43 bathrooms, and 65 fireplaces. It took six years to construct. George Vanderbilt first opened his home to family and

friends on Christmas Eve, 1895.

The estate currently sits on approximately 8,000 acres, but during Vanderbilt's lifetime, it was about 125,000 acres, which included property later sold to the federal government to create Pis-

gah National Forest.

The Biltmore first opened to the public in 1930 at the request of the City of Asheville to increase tourism during the Great Depression and to strengthen the estate's finances.

Fun Facts About 'A Biltmore Christmas'



BILTMORE®

- » Over 8,000 people submitted applications online to be cast as extras, which Hallmark producers said is the most they've ever received. Only 300 Asheville-area locals were hired.
- » 200 yards of artificial snow were used.
- » Nine rooms inside Biltmore House were used for filming: The Library, Tapestry Gallery, Main Hallway, Staircase Hall, Vestibule, Winter Garden, Banquet Hall, the corridor around the Winter Garden, and the corridor behind the Banquet Hall.
- » Four rooms at The Inn were used as film sets: The Lobby, the Library Lounge, and two guest rooms.
- » Biltmore is mentioned nine times in the film.
- » 15 days of filming took place at the estate.

SOURCE: USED WITH PERMISSION OF THE BILTMORE COMPANY.

SOURCE: USED WITH PERMISSION OF THE BILTMORE COMPANY.

The Biltmore is open every day of the year for tours but is especially popular at Christmastime.

"A Biltmore Christmas" premiered Nov. 26 on The Hallmark Channel.

Merry Christmas!
AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!
THE CAROLINA JOURNAL
www.carolinajournal.com

8 NORTH CAROLINA

NC Chamber blasts Cooper over his accusation of racial bias

BY DONNA KING

In a recent letter to Gov. Roy Cooper, the North Carolina Chamber of Commerce called his accusations of racial bias in the Chamber's work "malevolent and libelous."

It was in response to a letter from Cooper, in which he accused the Chamber of "outsized influence" over the General Assembly's "habitual failure ... to confirm Black nominees to judicial and quasi-judicial roles."

Cooper's accusation was delivered Nov. 17 in a two-page letter, not to the Chamber of Commerce, but to the media, the Chamber says. Cooper details what he describes as the legislature's "pathetic" record of approving his black nominees for business court judges, the Industrial Commission, and other posts. He said the Chamber influences the outcome and should be pushing to get black appointees confirmed.

"I ask that you confer with your staff and members, look at the facts, and look at the damage that the Chamber's actions can cause to our state's reputation, business community, and judicial system," Cooper's letter concludes.

'Beneath the dignity of your office'

The Chamber's response called Cooper's letter "meritless and beneath the dignity of your office,"



Gov. Roy Cooper announces judicial appointments. Judge Allison Riggs, right, joined the NC Supreme Court. Carolyn Thompson, left, replaced Riggs on the NC Court of Appeals.



Being wrongly and arrogantly lectured to by the state's chief executive with outrageous claims of racism is enormously hurtful and dispiriting. It was a moment our team will never forget and one we trust you will not repeat.

- Gary Salamido, President and CEO NC Chamber of Commerce

matching the governor's combative tone.

"The NC Chamber is profoundly disappointed regarding the decaying state of discourse and civility laid bare by communications such as your letter," wrote Gary Salamido, Chamber president and CEO. "Having worked tirelessly and effectively to secure a promising future for the entirety of North Carolina's business community - and always doing so without regard to identity - being wrongly and arrogantly lectured to by

the state's chief executive with outrageous claims of racism is enormously hurtful and dispiriting. It was a moment our team will never forget and one we trust you will not repeat."

Salamido points out that Cooper did not detail any of his own work or political capital spent to ensure the confirmation of his nominees, nor the actual reasons that some were not confirmed.

"You have publicly attacked our organization, suggesting we collude with another branch of gov-

ernment to deny the fruits of those benefits to a certain racial class," Salamido continued. "Taken in its best light, your commentary is simply and patently wrong. In its worst light, it is malevolent and libelous."

'Alarming racial disparity'

North Carolina law establishes the nomination process for such posts to involve both executive and

legislative branches of government. The executive branch offers nominations in the form of appointees, and the legislative branch makes the final decision, or confirmation. The tension between the two branches is inherent to the process, says the Chamber. Cooper successfully sued the legislature recently, blocking a new law that reduced his appointment power on the State Board of Elections.

In his letter, Cooper used the North Carolina Board of Review as an example of an "alarming racial disparity." The board currently consists of three women, all of whom are Cooper appointees and

continued PAGE 12

Redistricting lawsuit offers no roadblock to NC candidate filing

BY MITCH KOKAI

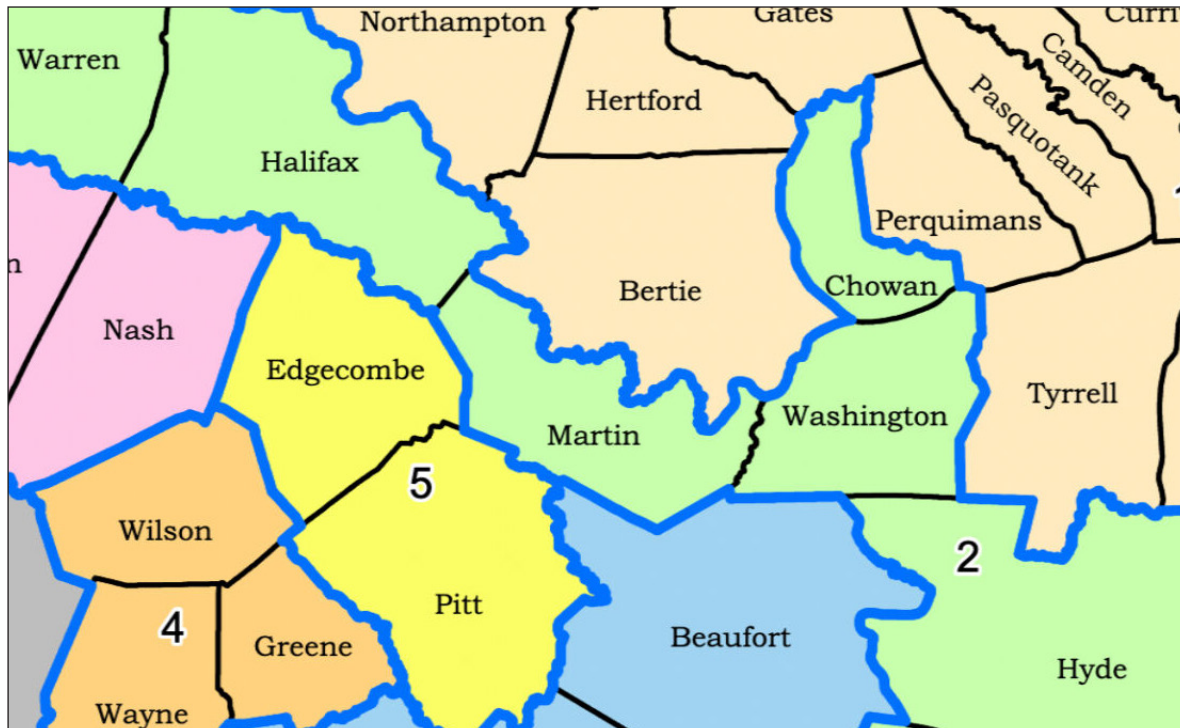
As candidates for North Carolina's 2024 elections prepared to file for office, they were unsure whether lawsuits related to new state election maps might delay their plans.

But at press time, the two lawsuits filed against new statewide election maps had no impact on candidate filing. One suit focuses on North Carolina's new state Senate map. Another targeted the map setting boundary lines for the state's 14 seats in the US House of Representatives.

Critics of North Carolina's new state Senate map sought an emergency injunction in federal court that could have delayed candidate filing. The filing period was scheduled to run from Dec. 4-15.

The proposal to block candidate filing fell short when US District Judge James Dever rejected an emergency timeline as "meritless."

At press time, the lawsuit challenging congressional districts did not include a request for an injunction that would stop candidate filing. No other law-



suits had been filed that could have pushed back candidate filing or otherwise delayed North Carolina's scheduled March 5 primary elections. Voters will head to the

polls to nominate candidates for governor, Council of State, Congress, the state House and Senate, North Carolina Supreme Court, and local elections.

Two plaintiffs filed suit on Nov. 20 objecting to the new map for North Carolina's 50 state Senate districts. The plaintiffs followed up with a motion for a pre-

liminary injunction to block the map. That motion arrived on Nov. 22, the day before Thanksgiving.

Plaintiffs set out a proposed timeline that would have forced the State Board of Elections and legislative leaders to respond to the requested injunction on the Monday after the Thanksgiving holiday. The timeline called for a hearing the following Wednesday and a decision two days later.

Dever noted on Nov. 27 that the General Assembly enacted the new state Senate map through Senate Bill 758 on Oct. 25.

"Plaintiffs do not explain why they waited 26 days to file this action and 28 days to move for a preliminary injunction," he wrote. "In so waiting, plaintiffs believe their 'claim that there is an urgent need for speedy action to protect [their] rights' or that their entitlement to a preliminary injunction is clear."

"Furthermore, plaintiffs' request completely ignores that their case is not the only case on the court's docket and that plaintiffs do not set this court's schedule for holding hearings or decid-

continued PAGE 12

RNC pushes Republicans to vote early and by mail

BY DONNA KING

Republicans are pushing to get more party faithful to vote early and mail in their ballots, while also trying to assure them of ballot security. An initiative from the Republican National Committee, Bank Your Vote, is aimed at tapping into turnout tactics that Democrats have been nurturing for years.

“We need a culture change with our Republican voters,” said US Rep. Richard Hudson, R-NC9, chair of the Republican Congressional Committee, in a recent media call with the RNC. “We are united in our efforts to educate Republican voters on how, when, and where to bank their votes before election day.”

In North Carolina, Republicans have been slower to embrace early voting and voting by mail, but that has increased in recent years. Meantime, voter concerns over election security in the 2020 and 2022 processes sparked efforts by the State Board of Elections and state lawmakers to increase transparency.

Early voting by the numbers

According to data from the NCSBE and analyzed by the Civitas Center for Public Integrity, more than two million North Carolina voters cast their ballots early in 2022, with 3.6 million voting early in 2020. Among the 2020 ballots, 34.7% of Republican votes were cast early, or “absentee,” with just over 20.7% of Republican votes mailed-in. Among Democrats who cast a ballot in 2020, 35.3% were cast early with 44.5% cast by mail-in ballot.

“Republicans have traditionally opted to vote on election day, rather than making use of one-stop-absentee voting,” said Jim Stirling, research fellow at the John Locke Foundation’s Civitas Center for Public Integrity. “Democrats, on the other hand, have opted to heavily promote the use of both early and mail in voting over the years and have seen their participation in these methods of voting rise due to it.”

Get to voters early

NCGOP Chairman Michael Whatley says in 2024 they are focusing their contact campaign earlier in the voting cycle and increasing efforts to reach undecided and infrequent voters. He’s hoping to expand their early-vote program from the special congressional election in 2019. In 2020, Republican early voters outnumbered Democrats for the first time in state history.

“As many of 60% of North Carolina voters are going to be voting before election day in 2024,” said Whatley. “We have got to communicate with those voters before they go vote. We’ve got to communicate with the independents, and the undecided voters



Sen. Ted Budd rallies at NCGOP headquarters on 2022 election eve.

so they have a higher propensity to vote Republicans when they get there.”

The pre-Election Day data is made public by the State Board of Elections so parties and campaigns can create strategy in the closing days. Once voters cast a ballot, they are removed from campaigns’ list of potential supporters. It gives candidates what Hudson called “visibility” into the state of their race.

“Pre-Election Day voting saves campaigns precious dollars because the longer it takes voters to cast their vote, the more it costs our Republican ecosystem valuable resources,” said Hudson.

Election integrity concerns

But election security was weighing on the minds of North Carolina voters ahead of the 2022 elections. In March of 2021, just 49% of voters polled said they thought the 2022 elections would be free and fair. The mistrust was felt more heavily by Republicans. In that poll, just 23% of Republicans were confident in the election, while 73% of Democrats expressed certainty in the process. Some 43% of unaffiliated voters at that time said they did not believe the elections would be free and fair. Since that time the state has instituted voter ID.

“Since 2020, Republicans in the state legislature have done great work to enact election integrity measures to make it easy to vote and hard to cheat,” said

US Sen. Ted Budd, R-NC. “North Carolina voters have the chance to vote securely before election day and we have to take advantage of that.”

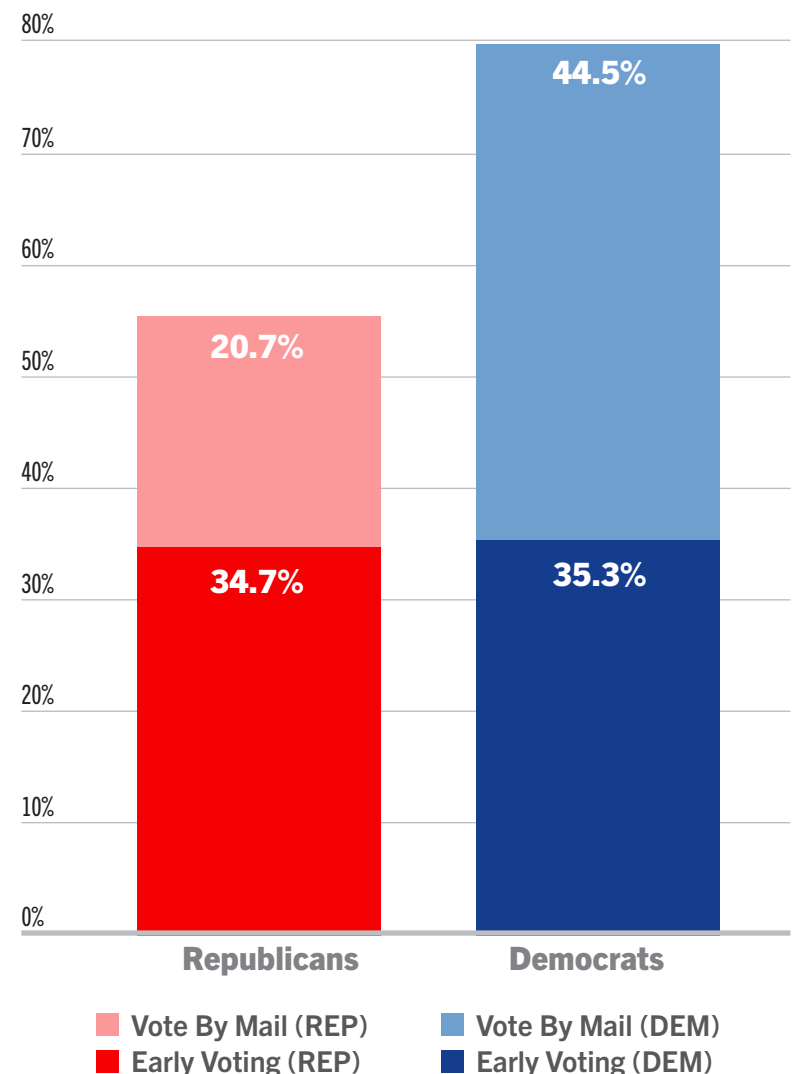
Outside groups are also getting into the act. American Majority estimates that an eight percent increase in early voting turnout among conservatives could bump final votes by two percent, which is often the margin of winning or losing close races. The group is training activists in 25 counties across the state.

“Improving early in-person voting among conservatives is a top priority in 2024,” said Dallas Woodhouse, state director of American Majority and contributor to Carolina Journal.

While Republicans in other states consistently used mail-in voting and North Carolina saw an increase, RNC Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel said that 2020 changes in election laws across the nation made Republican voters more reticent, with some opting to wait and vote in person on Election Day instead.

“I think things do change, and 2020 was part of that,” said McDaniel. “We had folks saying don’t vote by mail; don’t trust it. We can’t continue to win if we say things like that. We need to embrace it. The Democrats are embracing it, and it saves us money, time, resources, and allows us to seek out the new voters we are going to need. If we are saving it for Election Day, things happen on Election Day. We just can’t count on everything coming in that one day.”

Early Voting and Mail-In Voting in North Carolina by Party



COURTESY OF NC REPUBLICAN PARTY

Follow the Money

Renewable energy: redundancies, hidden costs, and the rocky road to carbon neutrality

BY DONNA KING

During this fall's Clean Energy Week, Gov. Roy Cooper highlighted his administration's work to promote wind and solar energy and the march toward building a taxpayer-subsidized energy industry in North Carolina. Wind and solar get more federal dollars than nuclear, natural gas, or coal, yet in power output produce fractions of what those other sources produced.

"Clean energy is the right thing to do to protect our planet and combat climate change. But it's also the right thing to do for our economy and putting more money in the pockets of our small businesses and families," Cooper wrote in a recent editorial.

"Clean energy isn't just about producing electricity, which is vital. It's about the shift to electric vehicles. It's about zero carbon commercial aviation," he continued. "So we're not just helping to create jobs to build offshore wind turbines, we're helping to create manufacturing jobs for that supply chain, and for automobile assembly, and for jet liners."

Announcements of EV manufacturing plants have been coming fast from the governor's mansion. Toyota is building an electric vehicle battery plant it says will employ 5,100 people, struggling Vietnamese automotive manufacturer Vinfast is building a plant in Chatham County with 7,500 jobs building EVs, and Wolfspeed has committed to 1,800 jobs in Siler City making the microprocessors needed for EVs. All the companies were recipients of millions in promised taxpayer-funded incentives and credits.

Spending in the renewable energy sector has certainly grown under the Cooper administration, but therein lies part of the problem, according to the John Locke Foundation.

"Viewing the energy sector as 'lucrative' is problematic," said Donald Bryson, CEO of Locke. "In many cases, the profitability of the clean energy sector is sustained by government subsidies, tax incentives, or other financial support mechanisms. These subsidies often mask the true cost of production and can create an artificial economic landscape where industries rely heavily on external financial injections rather than thriving based on market demand and efficiency."

If the primary end goal is an increase in energy-industry employment, rather than creating affordable energy to grow the broader economy of production and services, then we may be building a house of cards, warns Bryson.



Gov. Roy Cooper signs deal committing the state to millions in tax reimbursements for VinFast EV manufacturing plant. March 29, 2022.

Even more alarming, if the EV market growth that Cooper has bet these jobs on materializes, where will all these vehicles get their electric power, if the state is closing coal-fired plants by 2030 and not building clean, efficient replacement sources?

"In a high-functioning economy, the energy sector should prioritize streamlined and technologically advanced processes, minimizing reliance on excessive human resources," said Bryson. "A job-heavy energy sector signals inefficiency, diverting resources from production, which is how we measure the real economy."

Among those needed technological advancements is how to store the energy produced. Currently energy is produced "on demand" or as needed. Solar energy produced when it is sunny would

BY THE NUMBERS

70%

House Bill 951 requires the North Carolina Utilities Commission to reduce carbon emissions by 70% by the year 2050.

need to be stored for when it is not. Battery storage is a possible solution in the future, but according to Sanders, for now, large-scale battery technology is expensive and only lasts around four hours. Lawmakers have expressed concerns that some battery technology may also pose a threat to national security. In December, Duke Energy took an 11-MW project battery storage system offline at North Carolina's Camp Lejeune Marine Corps base after more than

two-dozen lawmakers wrote a letter to the Department of Defense raising national security concerns. The batteries for Lejeune were supplied by the Chinese company CATL with alleged ties to China's Communist Party.

In October of 2022, the federal Department of Energy warned in a report that battery storage could be vulnerable to cyber-attacks on the nation's power grid because potential attackers are beaming suppliers of hardware and software, seeking to "add backdoor capabilities that permit unauthorized access and control."

'Least cost and reliable' law

In 2021, Cooper signed House Bill 951: Energy Solutions for

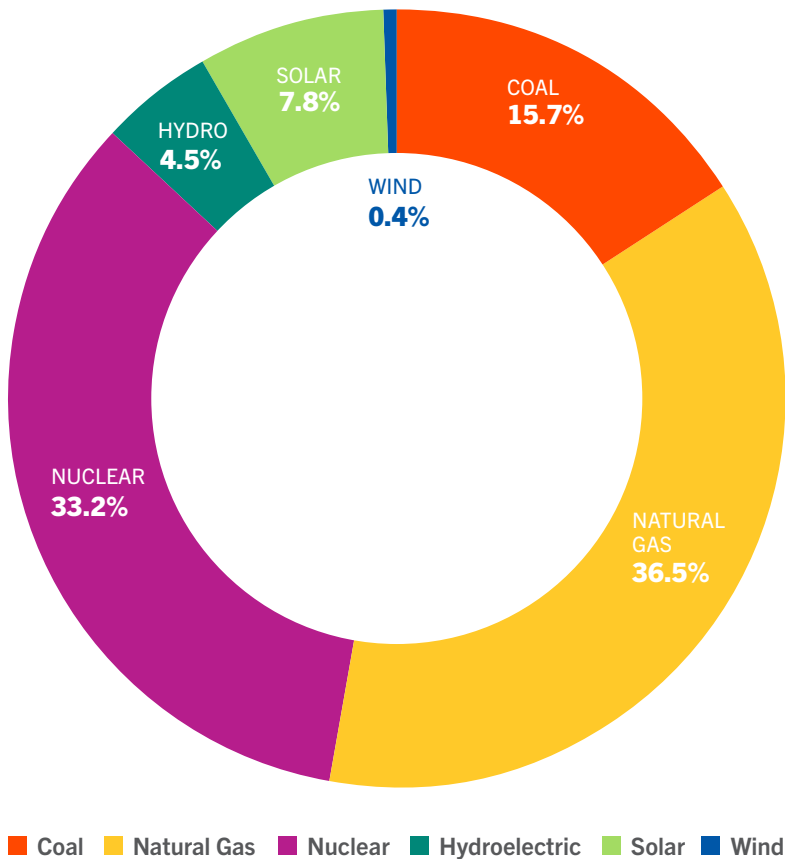
North Carolina into law, which requires the North Carolina Utilities Commission (NCUC) to take the steps for state utility providers to reduce carbon emissions by 70% from 2005 levels by the year 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. The bill, drafted by the Republican-led North Carolina General Assembly, calls for "the least cost mix of generation and demand-reduction measures which is achievable" and that "any generation and resource changes maintain or improve upon the adequacy and reliability of the existing grid." The bill makes allowances for adding more nuclear power generation projects.

Jon Sanders, director of the Center for Food, Power, and Life

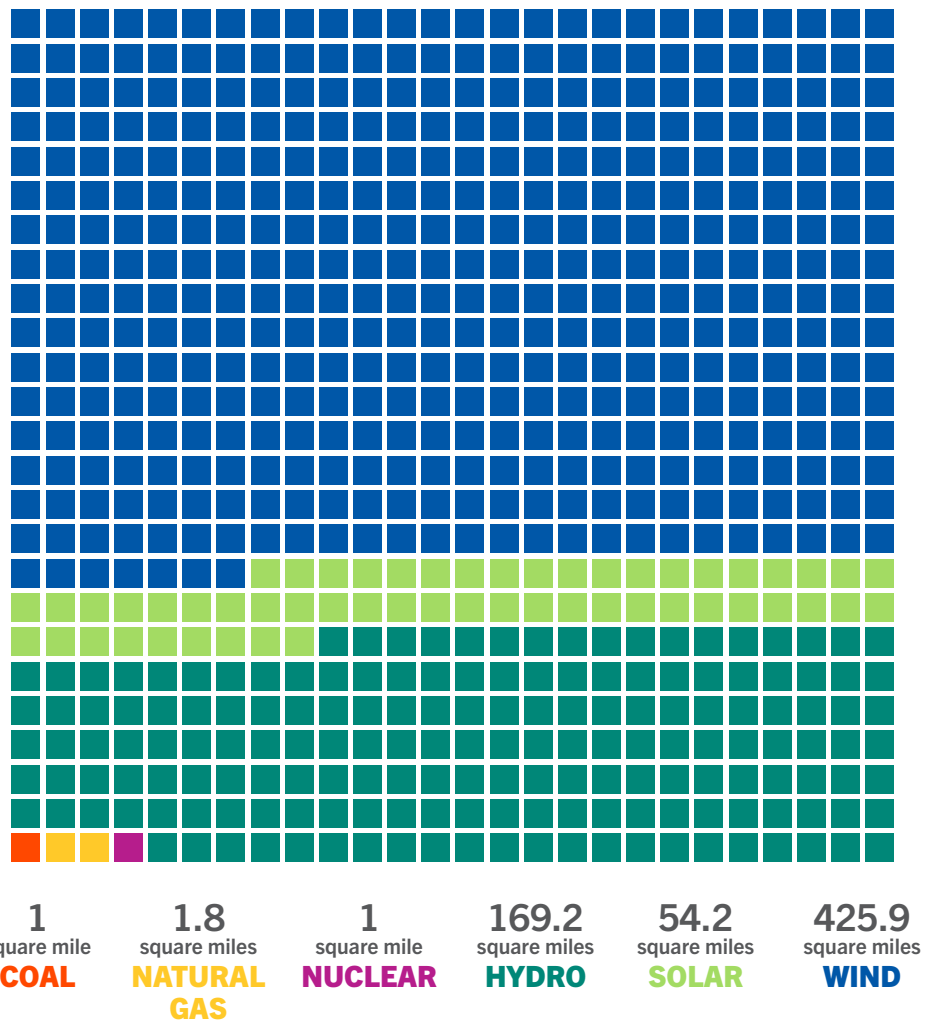
ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT 11

RUNNING THE NUMBERS: THE TRUE COST OF RENEWABLE ENERGY

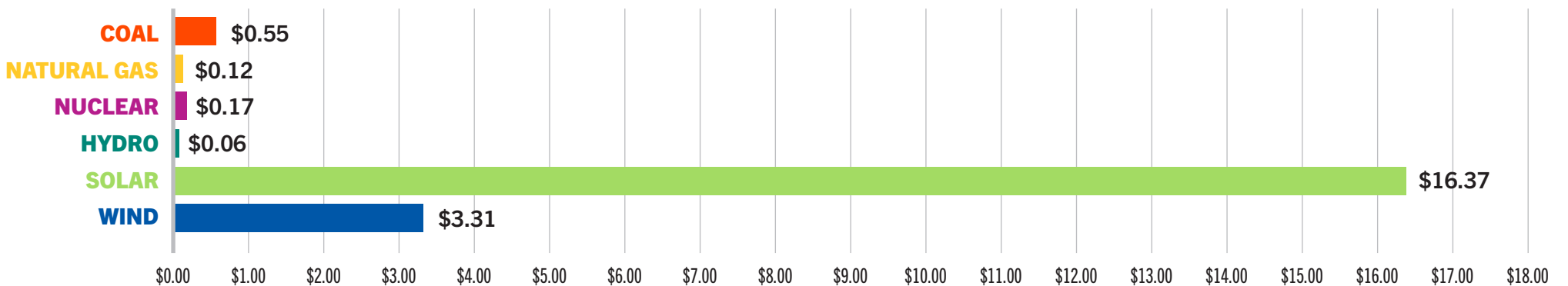
Percentage of North Carolina's Power Generation (2021)



Land Necessary for 1,000MWs of Output



Federal Subsidies per MWh



continued from PAGE 10

at the John Locke Foundation, points out that the law's "least-cost" requirement means the true cost and output of different power generation sources must be viewed as a whole. Solar and wind are not "free," as proponents claim. Variables must include the cost of construction, longevity, redundancies, and the cost to taxpayers in the form of credits and subsidies. For example, power from newly constructed plants costs considerably more than that from existing plants because those construction costs are allowed to be transferred to ratepayers. Meanwhile, the cost to upgrade or secure the existing grid falls to Duke Energy, incentivizing new construction over grid maintenance and upgrades. The

The federal government has been subsidizing renewable sources of electricity massively.

- Jon Sanders, director of the Center for Food, Power, and Life

push for building new solar- and wind-power generation means significant spending on the grid to prepare it for interconnecting to all those intermittent resources, which is why the NCUC public staff warns that electricity rates will likely double by the end of the decade. "While it is true that solar and wind do not have fuel costs, since nature provides them for free, those are not the only costs associated with energy facilities," Sanders tells Carolina Journal. "There are also capital costs, maintenance expenses, production and generation costs, transmission costs, and more. Also, nature frequently does not provide solar and wind 'fuel' at all. If those million homes were actually powered by solar, the residents would be very unhappy from late afternoon till

BY THE NUMBERS

100x

Solar energy has received 100 times more government subsidies than nuclear power.

mid-morning, and all day if it were rainy or overcast. Because of their intermittency, solar and wind have the significant additional expense of required backup generation from another resource, usually natural gas. Even the renewables advocates at the MIT Climate Portal acknowledge that making the grid more reliant on solar and wind power would make electricity more expensive because they are so unreliable." Supporters of wind and solar argue that construction start-up costs are covered by federal tax credits from the Biden administration's Inflation Reduction Act, which claims that the incentives will save people \$38 billion in power bills. According to Sanders, even if that were possible, those incentives and credits could cost taxpayers much, much more. "The federal government has been subsidizing renewable sources of electricity massively,"

Sanders said. "For example, since 2016 wind power has received nearly 20 times more subsidies per unit of power generated than nuclear, and solar has received nearly 100 times more than nuclear. Federal subsidies for renewables will only increase under the IRA. Wood MacKenzie recently estimated that the IRA's incentives and tax credits could approach \$3 trillion in final tally."

Is green agenda focused on the wrong technology?

Energy is cheapest coming from existing power plants, and nuclear is the cleanest and longest-lasting, according to Sanders' research. It does not require the redundancies and power storage that solar and wind require when the sun isn't shining and the wind isn't blowing. Development of small modular reactors (SMRs) were included in Duke Energy's updated proposal on how they would reach HB 951's goal of carbon neutrality by 2050. In August, Duke proposed deployment of SMRs at the duo-to-be-retired Belews Creek coal plant in Stokes County.

In October, lawmakers overrode Cooper's veto of Senate Bill 678, which reversed previous restrictions on nuclear facility construction and replaced the term "renewable energy" with "clean energy" in state statute to include nuclear fission and fusion. Technology and public support for smaller nuclear reactors is building, but the messaging machine for solar and wind has taken root, and the fear of nuclear is still a factor. In a Pew Research survey over the summer, 57% of Americans support building more nuclear power plants, but in that same poll, more say they favor additional solar power (82%) and wind power (75%) than nuclear. Sen. Paul Newton, R-Cabarrus, is SB 678's lead sponsor and advocated on its behalf before the Rules Committee. SB 678 "recognizes the role that nuclear [energy] is going to play in the future of cost-effectively meeting these target carbon reduction goals in the future," Newton said. "It also recognizes that fusion energy may be a contributor to our success in the future, and that we are wide open in North Carolina to welcoming fusion technology here in our state."

12 CONTINUED

Gen Z elections impact in NC

continued from PAGE 4

tion, there is a significant gap with a large majority of Gen Z women disapproving of the new abortion law in North Carolina, while almost half of the Gen Z males approving of it.”

The real issue for young voters in 2024 will be turnout, according to McLennan.

“As the AEI survey indicated, this group is more pessimistic about the future than their older counterparts and feel like the political system has failed them,” he said. “The large percentage of young voters that register as unaffiliated voters is evidence that many do not believe in the two-party system in the United States. If their pessimistic feelings continue until Election Day 2024, we may

see a lower turnout of young voters, as compared to 2020, which might bode poorly for President Biden’s re-election chances.”

According to data from Michael Bitzer, professor of politics and history at Catawba College, 2020 turnout for Gen Z in North Carolina closely mirrored the rate for Millennials. Turnout for Gen Z was 61% and 62% for Millennials. That compares to 86% for Boomers and 70% for Generation X.

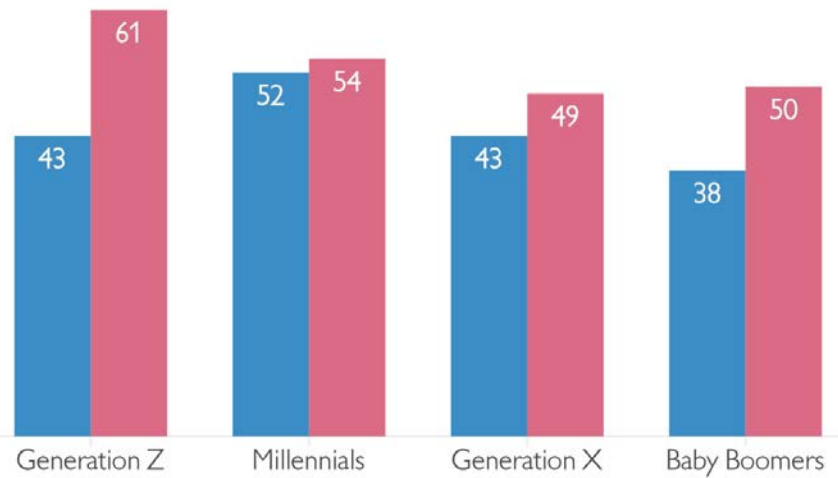
Another issue could be whether Gen Z will be motivated to turn out in an election cycle that could feature two older men — Trump will be 78 on Election Day, and Biden will be 81. Biden is currently the oldest sitting president.

“In terms of the rematch of two elder politicians, that is where the crux will be felt: In particular, can Joe Biden or other Democrats truly motivate Millennials and Gen Z voters to show up, or will the candidate’s age be a drag on motivation and energizing?” said Bitzer.

Most Gen Z Men Say They Are Not Feminists

Percentage of Americans who agree the “feminist” label describes them well

■ Men ■ Women



Note: Survey of US adults (N=5,459). Source: Survey Center on American Life, 2023.



Staff shortages

continued from PAGE 4

ford to pay higher wages to workers, making it difficult for them to attract workers. And the rising cost of benefits like health insurance pinch businesses’ budgets as well, leaving less money for worker salaries.”

The NCRLA recently launched a new hospitality industry recruitment campaign labeled “Serving Careers,” which is backed by a \$5 million grant from the state’s portion of the federal American Rescue Plan. This program connects prospective employees to employ-

ers through the Indeed job-searching platform while also offering free industry-specific training and certification courses. The plan is intended to boost North Carolina’s hospitality industry and help remedy some of the current worker shortages.

Even with the challenges facing restaurants heading into the holidays, business owners like Smith still feel a sense of gratitude and charity in the spirit of the season.

“We try to create a lift-up environment that serves as a great stepping stone for folks,” he said. “We try to create a positive work environment that can meet people’s needs in life and help people get better at what they’re good at. I feel very fortunate to live in a country where I get to own my own business.”

NC Chamber blasts Cooper

continued from PAGE 8

two of whom are black. Among Cooper’s failed nominees was Larry Hall, former chair of the House Democratic Caucus, whom Cooper appointed for the Board of Review, but was not confirmed by his former colleagues.

“It does not strain the imagination to suggest that the nominee possessed a host of personal relationships with the very members of the House and Senate who were considering his nomination,” Salamido wrote.

“The NC Chamber will leave it to reasonable minds to consider

whether it might have been those relationships, rather than any action or inaction by the NC Chamber, which led to this failed confirmation.”

Cooper said that the General Assembly has confirmed 13 out of 33 of his black nominees but 42 out of his 70 white nominees. He said the discrepancy is either a blind spot or “a record of troubling racism.”

“An organization that is designed to help the economy and North Carolina businesses should be strongly supporting the speedy confirmation of qualified Black nominees to positions of leadership in our state,” he wrote.

Cooper called on the Chamber to flex its political muscle for more black nominees.

In a detailed description

of questionable nominating decisions by the governor, the Chamber suggested that he devote more time to discussing and vetting nominees before presenting them to the legislature.

“We are proud of our role in helping North Carolina maintain its reputation as the nation’s number one state for business; we hope to work together to maintain that momentum,” Salamido wrote. “That will not happen if we level dispirited accusations without earnestly engaging in the more energy-consuming task of agreeing to disagree amicably, particularly when it relates to the qualifications and full commitment, not the immutable characteristics, of those being considered for the high calling of serving our state.”

Redistricting lawsuit

continued from PAGE 8

ing motions,” the judge wrote.

Dever rejected the idea of treating redistricting lawsuits as a “game of ambush.” Denying the plaintiffs’ motion to expedite the case as “meritless,” he promised to hold a hearing in the lawsuit “in due course if one is needed.”

The suit specifically challenges two state Senate districts in northeastern North Carolina. Plaintiffs argue that state lawmakers ignored “ample evidence of racially polarized voting” when drawing the districts. Republican lawmakers “adopted a Senate plan that unlawfully deprives Black voters of the opportunity to elect candidates of their choice,” according to the complaint.

The plaintiffs are working with Washington-based attorneys from Arnold and Porter Kay

Scholer, veterans of North Carolina redistricting battles. They are also working with Raleigh-based Edwin Speas, who defended Democratic election maps in redistricting lawsuits as a state Justice Department lawyer before joining the private sector.

The suit labels North Carolina’s state Senate map “just the most recent episode in North Carolina’s ‘long history of race discrimination generally and race-based vote suppression in particular.’”

“The Black population in North Carolina’s Black Belt counties is sufficiently numerous and geographically compact to form a majority-minority district,” the suit argues. “Voting in the region is also highly polarized along racial lines — Black voters there are politically cohesive, but white voters vote sufficiently as a bloc to usually defeat minority candidates of choice. Nonetheless, SB 758 ‘cracks’ Black voters in the region across multiple districts.”

Litigation still could delay March 5 primary elections. But that prospect becomes less likely as North Carolina moves further along the 2024 election timeline.

Federal courts often invoke the “Purcell principle,” based on the 2006 US Supreme Court ruling in Purcell v. Gonzalez. That case urged federal courts to avoid changing election rules too close to an election date. The decision cautioned that court-imposed changes elevated the risk of causing confusion for voters.



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OPINION



Feasting, fasting, and... freedom

DAVID LARSON
OPINION EDITOR



THIS SEASON, the staff and audience of Carolina Journal will sit down with friends and family for a series of feasts — Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year’s Eve, and likely others. These are important and enduring American traditions celebrating key features of our religious and cultural inheritance.

But the truth is, contemporary American culture is not about feasting at rare holidays and then returning to a more moderate baseline of intake regarding food, drink, entertainment, shopping, and all the other good things in life. Excess is our lifestyle. Our daily life is a feast.

This is why, especially in cultures like our own where we actually have a choice, there have usually been times of intentional deprivation included. Fasting is not just a means of self-flagellation pursued by a different variety of gluttons (gluttons for punishment). It’s a means of fighting for freedom over



our impulses, which can pull us every which way if we let them.

Those who originally set these seasonal traditions in place had a

more balanced view than our modern customs. Yes, they established Mardi Gras and Easter festivities, but in between there was a peri-

od of Lent. Yes, there are magical Christmas traditions, but there was also established a period of waiting and fasting beforehand called



It’s not just exterior forces like oppressive regimes that can rob us of liberty, but those inside us, too.

Advent.

Americans have largely decided to embrace the former and discard the latter. And who can blame them? When I lived in the Gulf Coast, there were many more takers for the raucous Mardi Gras parades than the opportunity to remember they will one day “return to dust” on Ash Wednesday. And the Christmas season takes over a larger and larger part of the calendar, while Advent fades from popular observance (except for maybe setting up a calendar, often stuffed with chocolate).

Even Thanksgiving traditionally had a fasting counterpart, cre-

CREATIVE COMMONS IMAGE VIA WORD PRESS USER MIBURNETTE.

Buy Christmas gifts without regret

JOHN HOOD
CONTRIBUTOR



As we engage in the annual custom of exchanging gifts, we are about to witness the ritualistic burning of a straw man. Call it one of many pagan-inspired traditions of the season.

Just watch: Some sly journalist or humorless scold will assert that the exchange of Christmas gifts is a lose-lose for our economy. The first version I saw of this argument was, I believe, in a New Republic column several years after I left the magazine.

In brief, the claim is that gift-giving is a waste of economic resources. Because the giver cannot crawl inside the mind of the receiver, the giver's selection of a present can't possibly be as satisfying as the present the receiver would purchase for himself with the same money.

If I spend \$30 on a book for you, and you spend \$30 on a digital download for me, we may each end up with goods that please us very little. I may have bought you a new history of the War of the Pacific, to which you may respond: "But I didn't know the Chilean Army fought in World War II." And you may have bought me the complete Mariah Carey film collection, to which I may respond: "What led you to believe I was a masochist?"

We're both worse off, the argument goes. Far better would be



CREATIVE COMMONS IMAGE VIA SHUTTERSTOCK

for us to exchange gift cards, or just straight cash. Indeed, some versions of the argument suggest that even this would be inefficient, given that we are exchanging the same dollar value. Why not just forget the whole thing? The exchange does, after all, involve some transaction costs (cards, wrapping paper, getting together, etc.)

This is a good example of people knowing just enough about economics to get them into the woods but far from enough to lead them out again.

A key error in this analysis lies in the definition of a good. It is

not correct to say that the good in question is simply a book or download. It is a gift. It consists not only of the tangible item but also of the time invested by the giver in picking it out, and the sentiment or message conveyed in the selection. The giver is demonstrating affection or consideration, something that can have real value to the receiver.

We all know this is true from everyday experience. Think of some of the gifts you've received. Don't they mean more to you than simply the retail price, because of who gave it and how, when, and where it was given? In-

deed, while a simplistic valuation of the good might start at the retail price and then go down due to depreciation, we often find that older items go up in value as we grow to appreciate more the circumstances in which we came to possess them.

Besides, individuals acting within the market process already figured out a way to address the problem of the truly awful or unsuitable gift. It's called a return.

Millions of Americans take back gifts to stores and purchase something else, a practice that fuels major retailer discounting in after-Christmas sales. Most peo-



Think of some of the gifts you've received. Don't they mean more to you than simply the retail price, because of who gave it and how, when, and where it was given?

ple don't see this as a big waste of time. In order to receive the benefits of gift exchange, they accept the risk of the occasional return — and often walk away with something else they didn't expect to buy but come to value.

That brings up another way gift-giving adds economic value: the pleasant surprise. You see, another basic flaw in the reasoning here is assuming that we all know precisely what we want at all times. No serious defense of the market process is predicated on this unrealistic proposition. In reality, we sometimes come to appreciate that which we wouldn't think to buy for ourselves, either because of sentimental value or just because it turns out our gift-giver knew something we didn't.

Which is not, by the way, an invitation for anyone to inflict Mariah Carey on me.

John Hood is a John Locke Foundation board member. His latest books, "Mountain Folk" and "Forest Folk," combine epic fantasy with early American history.

Lawmakers urge state's highest court to revisit Leandro history

MITCH KOKAI
CONTRIBUTOR



THE STATE SUPREME COURT will take a fresh look soon at a nearly 30-year-old legal battle over education funding. Legislative leaders hope the court's earliest rulings in the case can offer helpful guidance.

Lawmakers want the state's highest court to reject a plan that could subject taxpayers to billions of dollars in additional spending without accountability at the ballot box. The court's first assessments of the legal dispute point in that same direction.

"In its first two decisions in this case, this Court repeatedly warned the trial court to stay within the well-established boundaries that govern the exercise of judicial power. Those warnings have proved prescient," according to a brief legislators filed on Nov. 9.

Known officially as Hoke County Board of Education v. State, the case started in 1994 under the name Leandro. Chief Justice Burley Mitchell wrote the state Supreme Court's 1997 Leandro decision.

"In Leandro, Justice Mitchell,



CJ FILE PHOTO

writing for a unanimous court, explained that 'administration of the public schools of the state is best left to the legislative and executive branches of government,' according to lawmakers' brief. "For this reason, he held that 'courts of this state must grant every reasonable deference to the legislative and executive branches' and that only a 'clear showing to the contrary' will be sufficient 'to justify a judicial intrusion into an area so clearly the province, initially at least, of the legislative and executive branches as the determination of what course of ac-

tion will lead to a sound basic education."

Plaintiffs use the Leandro name when referring to other decisions from the past two decades. Legislative leaders disagree. They use "Hoke County," since the case produced just one trial focusing on one local school system.

This fact proved crucial in the 2004 "Hoke County I" or "Leandro II" ruling. "[B]ecause Plaintiffs' claims turn on the alleged conditions in their individual school districts, they only have standing to represent, at

most, the students who live in those districts — not those that live anywhere else," lawmakers contend.

"[T]he Court directed that further proceedings would be necessary to establish Plaintiffs' claims with respect to any other district" than Hoke.

"The Court grounded those warnings and limitations not only in judicial restraint, but also the fundamental notion that Plaintiffs must first prove their claims and establish the violation of a constitutional right before they can invoke the courts' remedial powers," lawmakers argued.

"Yet, Plaintiffs — who have now found allies in the executive branch — have refused to live within the boundaries set by this Court," the brief continued. "In the years since Hoke County I, they have persistently tried to recast that decision as one that establishes the existence of a state-wide violation in order to push the court to grant 'relief' that exceeds the scope of the judgment they actually obtained."

Republican legislators accuse plaintiffs of working since 2017 with Democratic "allies" in Gov. Roy Cooper's office and Attorney General Josh Stein's legal shop to bypass the political process.



Republican legislators accuse plaintiffs of working since 2017 with Democratic 'allies' in Gov. Roy Cooper's office and Attorney General Josh Stein's legal shop to bypass the political process.

That scheming produced a "sweeping" plan "that would dictate educational policy and spending for the whole of North Carolina over a period of eight years. The breadth ... cannot be overstated. It includes 146 action items that would dictate virtually every aspect of the State's education program," lawmakers warned. "It would also require billions in funding."

"The implications of imposing the [plan] through judicial fiat likewise cannot be overstated," the brief continued. "Our State Constitution explicitly recogniz-

Some good end-of-the-year news. But will it last?

MIKE WALDEN
CONTRIBUTOR



There's been some good economic news as we end 2023. Gas prices are down almost 60 cents per gallon since September. Thanksgiving meals were more affordable due to a 20% drop in turkey prices compared to 2022. The all-item inflation rate continues to moderate, and the Federal Reserve (the "Fed") has not raised its key interest rate since August. Also, in the labor market, the jobless rate has remained under 4% all year.

There are easy explanations for these results. Gas prices usually drop during the fall and winter months as people drive less. The avian flu that sent turkey prices skyrocketing last year no longer impacted flocks this year. The Fed's policy of raising interest rates to slow spending and take pressure off prices seems to be working. The all-item year-over-year inflation rate in October was 3.2%, significantly lower than the 9.2% rate in the summer of 2022. A fixed supply chain has also helped. Perhaps the best news is the economy did not slip into a recession in 2023.

Still, with all this upbeat information, two questions need to be addressed. First, will the good news at the end of 2023 persist into 2024? And second, if the economic news is so good, why do polls show most people are still



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unhappy with the economy?

Here are my forecasts. I think the Fed is done raising interest rates. The Fed is happy with the current path of inflation. The Fed's goal is a 2% year-over-year inflation rate, similar to the 2019 rate prior to the pandemic. The Fed believes they could be close to that rate by the end of 2024.

But I predict the Fed will wait until the middle of 2024 to begin reducing its key interest rate, and, once they start, the rate reductions will be modest. Also, don't look for the historically low inter-

est rates like existed in 2020 and 2021 to return. The Fed pushed interest rates to extraordinarily low levels to counter the COVID recession and accelerate the recovery.

What about a recession in 2024? Before I answer, here's some important background on the definition and designation of a recession.

A recession is defined as "a broad-based decline in economic activity that lasts for a significant period of time." The group that determines if a recession has oc-

curred is not based in the federal government. Instead, the task of designating a recession has been given to a private think tank, the National Bureau of Economic Research. Economists at the NBER constantly pour through data to spot if economic changes qualify as a recession.

There is a rule of thumb that a recession has occurred if the broadest measure of the economy — inflation-adjusted gross domestic product — declines for two consecutive quarters. But the NBER doesn't necessarily use

this rule. GDP dropped for two straight quarters in 2021, but no recession was called.

I forecast the economy will be challenging in the first half of 2024 for two reasons. The cumulative impacts of the Fed's previous rate hikes will be felt. Second, with consumers having spent most of their COVID relief money, combined with high consumer debt and continuing high interest rates, consumer spending will slow and maybe fall. Since consumers are the main driver of the economy, there will be a consequent slowdown in total economic activity. But hopefully it will be a "slowdown" and not a recession.

Afterward, there will be a rebound in the economy in the second half of 2024 as the Fed reduces interest rates. As rates drop, consumer spending will come back.

Finally, what about the polls showing people still upset about the economy, despite recent good news? I think the explanation is easy. Data show that even with the better news on inflation, compared to 2019, worker earnings have still risen less than prices. Translated, standards of living are still below pre-pandemic levels. Until this changes, attitudes about the economy won't improve.

Michael Walden is a Reynolds Distinguished Professor Emeritus at North Carolina State University. His latest book is The 60 Minute Investment Guide.

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THE CAROLINA JOURNAL



16 OPINION

'In the Pines' combats disinformation in telling of NC's darkest tale

GREG DEDEUGD
CONTRIBUTOR



THIS YEAR marked the 125th anniversary of the 1898 Wilmington Coup, the only coup d'etat to occur on United States soil. Also referred to as the Wilmington Massacre, it is a dark moment in North Carolina history. While producing the award-winning short film "In the Pines," a drama set in the days leading up to the violent coup, I learned a great deal about the events, the lives of those it impacted, and the lasting imprint it left on North Carolina.

The 1898 coup was the culmination of a months-long campaign by the Democratic Party to retake control of the North Carolina government. Spearheaded by eventual North Carolina Gov. Charles Aycock, the effort was known, in their own description, as their "white supremacy campaign."

In coordination with the Raleigh News & Observer (run by wealthy media mogul Josephus Daniels) and a network of other local papers across the state, the Democrats set about to divide an alliance of black North Carolinians, Republicans, and Populists. Two years earlier, in 1896, this alliance had wrested political control from the Democrats for the first time since Reconstruction. But the Democrats desperately wanted power back.

Their plan was to fill the pages of almost every newspaper with stories of black crime and anti-black propaganda and tour the state with the most experienced orators of the day, delivering speeches aimed at catalyzing race hate. In addition to the propaganda campaign, which was abetted by their near-total control of the mass media, the Democrats enlisted their own paramilitary group: the Redshirts.

The Redshirts brought real violence to the doorsteps of African Americans and anyone else who spoke up for the truth of what was happening during that summer of hate. The Republican governor of North Carolina was so fearful of the Redshirts' violent tactics that he made the journey from Wilmington to Raleigh in the baggage hold of a passenger train to avoid encountering them. They patrolled election sites on



Redshirts in a scene from *In the Pines*.



An image from the short film *In the Pines*.

Nov. 8, 1898, with the express purpose of depressing voter turnout by Republicans and black residents across the state.

Sadly, their hate-filled campaign was a resounding success; the Democrats won and took nearly every statewide office, going on to maintain control of North Carolina for over 100 years. The leaders of the white suprem-

acy campaign ascended to positions of great power within state and federal government. Charles Aycock not only became governor of North Carolina, he also became the architect of what would become our current public school system. Josephus Daniels became secretary of the United States Navy under Woodrow Wilson and ambassador to Mex-

ico under FDR. The party even honored Aycock with an annual fundraising gala in his name up until 2021.

Even after winning state control in the 1898 election, Democrats were unsatisfied. They also had their sights set on control of the municipal government of Wilmington, a vibrant, multiracial port city rich with natural re-



'In The Pines' tells a great story, and the John Locke Foundation has produced a quality film that has been met with enthusiasm and vastly more accolades than criticism. It has been accepted into dozens of film festivals, winning numerous awards for cinematography, performances, art direction, costumes, makeup, writing, and directing.

sources and teeming with dynamic entrepreneurs of all races. The Democrats had no patience to wait for municipal elections. They seized their moment.

Leveraging the raw violence fueled by their propaganda, the Redshirt army took the city of Wilmington by force on Nov. 10. They burned down the Daily Record, the only black daily newspaper in the nation, and forced most of the city's black residents to seek refuge in the swamps. Wilmington was on a trajectory of astounding financial success, a shining example of the economic benefits of pluralism and cooperation. But its diversity and dynamism were brutally cut short for the sake of political power.

With this political dynamic forming the backdrop of our film, I certainly anticipated negative press from the political left. I don't personally believe that today's Democrats are necessarily responsible for the actions of Democrats of the past. But the only honest way to tell the story of 1898 is by naming the people and groups involved. The film speaks very frankly about the history, and that could be one reason we were attacked in the press.

The Charlotte Observer, even before we shot any footage, had already released a smear article on the film. Likely based on casting notices and ads, they

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How NC legislators blocked Cooper's plan to adopt California's 'green' trucking rules

JON SANDERS
CONTRIBUTOR



On Oct. 17, John Stossel alerted “Stossel TV” viewers to the threat of California bureaucrats imposing their trucking regulations outside their own borders. The episode was given the ironic title “California’s Green Dream: Coming to Your State?”

The episode focused on Pennsylvania, whose “Environmental Quality Board decided to automatically copy rules from California” and said doing so is “important to stop pollution.” Stossel showed that all it’s really going to do, however, is stop trucking in Pennsylvania.

As a truck driver explains to Stossel, the new rules will “raise the cost of new trucks by more than \$50,000,” forcing Pennsylvania drivers to stay with older trucks — which are significantly greater sources of air pollution than newer trucks — until California bureaucrats force them to go “all electric.”

What Stossel doesn’t discuss is why Pennsylvania is putting California’s rules into its code. It goes back to July 10, 2020, when Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf signed a “Memorandum of Understanding” with California Gov. Gavin Newsom to align his state’s regulation of trucks and buses with California’s, as well as to promote sales of electric vehicles and depress sales of conventional, gasoline-powered vehicles.

That same day, North Caroli-



CREATIVE COMMONS IMAGE BY CHRIS YARZAB.

na Gov. Roy Cooper signed that same memorandum. Then in 2022, he issued an executive order to have the state Department of Transportation basically put California’s environmental rules into the state’s administrative code. Cooper ordered DOT to develop and implement a “Clean Transportation Plan” to emphasize “near-term action” for “decarbonizing the transportation sector.” Cooper’s order stated that the plan must include a focus on “transitioning” trucks and buses to zero-emissions vehicles as “informed by North Carolina’s participation” in Newsom’s memorandum.

So are California trucking rules coming to our state?

No, thanks to appropriate action taken by the General Assembly.

The General Assembly writes the laws in North Carolina, not

the executive branch, and certainly not some other state’s executive branch.

Why would a governor import another state’s rules in the first place? Outside of obvious constitutional implications, the act would seem thoroughly bereft of civic pride.

With respect to trucking and automotive regulations, it’s because the federal Clean Air Act lets California impose stricter regulations of vehicular emissions than the federal government and also allows any other state to adopt and enforce California’s standards. Regulation is done by unelected, unaccountable bureaucrats using delegated lawmaking power. Environmental radicals prefer it because it’s a much easier power to wield — as long as legislators are too disinterested to protect their constitutional authority from being usurped.

North Carolina’s legislators, however, underscored their interest in retaining their lawmaking authority. In 2013, they passed the no-more-stringent law to forbid state environmental agencies from issuing stricter environmental regulations than the federal government. The DOT wasn’t included in the agencies listed in the law, however — an omission that must have made the governor think he’d found a loophole.

If so, the General Assembly just closed it.

As the North Carolina Constitution makes clear, and as the no-more-stringent law upholds in principle, the legislative power of North Carolina is “vested in the General Assembly” — not California, not the governor, and not state agencies beyond their legislatively delegated and limited rulemaking authority.

A provision in the new budget exerts this constitutional authority. On page 373, the General Assembly included a provision to “Prohibit requirements for control of emissions from new motor vehicles.” It states:

Notwithstanding any authorization granted under 42 U.S.C. § 7507, no agency of the State, including the Department of Environmental Quality, the Environmental Management Commission, the Department of Transportation, or the Department of Administration, may adopt and enforce standards relating to control of emissions from new motor vehicles or new motor vehicle engines, includ-

ing requirements that mandate the sale or purchase of “zero-emission vehicles,” or electric vehicles as defined in G.S. 20-4.01.

It contains several noteworthy features:

- It applies to all state agencies, including DOT.

- It forbids all state agencies, including DOT, from adopting or enforcing “standards relating to control of emissions from new motor vehicles or new motor engines.”

- It prevents agencies from mandating sales or purchases of “zero-emission vehicles” or electric vehicles.

Proper action by the General Assembly has saved North Carolina from the constitutional crisis — not to mention shame — of rule by Californian functionaries. Given the autocratic bent of the current governor, however, they would be wise to expand the no-more-stringent law.

Legislators should amend the no-more-stringent law to forbid any agency from adopting more restrictive rules than imposed by the federal government. The only ones who should have that power should be elected lawmakers directly accountable to our voters.

Jon Sanders is director of the Center for Food, Power, and Life and also research editor at the John Locke Foundation.

Companies do good by serving consumers

JOHN HOOD
CONTRIBUTOR



NORTH CAROLINA businesses are generous donors of time and money to worthy causes across our state and beyond. Major corporations such as Truist, Duke Energy, Blue Cross Blue Shield, and Bank of America give tens of millions of dollars a year to charities through their respective foundations. Many other companies, large and small, aid nonprofits directly with checks, in-kind services, or teams of volunteers.

More broadly, North Carolina is home to hundreds of grantmaking foundations created by individuals or families whose wealth came from creating and running successful businesses. I serve as president of one of them, the John William Pope Foundation, which awards about \$15 million in grants each year.

For all the good these philanthropic activities do, their significance pales in comparison to the core social benefit of private businesses. It’s not about charity. Nor is it about the employees companies hire and train or the retirees whose pensions are funded by company earnings, though these



IMAGE OF CHARLOTTE STORE COURTESY OF LOWES.COM

are large and worthy sets of beneficiaries.

No, the primary means by which companies do good is by providing valuable goods and services to consumers.

“In the search for heroes, we enshrine political leaders or military commanders or TV cops or movie action heroes or the glorious protagonists of our mythical and legendary past,” I wrote in my first book, “The Heroic Enterprise: Business and the Common Good.” “But those who create the amenities we enjoy and the innovations that make our lives safer,

healthier, and happier exist, with very few exceptions, in relative obscurity.”

In that book, published in 1996, I offered hundreds of examples of profit-seeking entrepreneurs and companies revolutionizing the way we live, eat, travel, study, work, play, and shop.

“It is through invention and innovation,” I argued, “that business makes its most significant social contribution.”

What I wish I’d had back then is the kind of empirical evidence to be found in a recent study by scholars at Stanford University,

New York University, the International Monetary Fund, and the University of California at Berkeley. Released by the National Bureau of Economic Research, the paper sought to quantify the value of four kinds of social impact: consumer surplus, worker surplus, profits, and externalities.

To explain their results, I must first define their terms. Consumer surplus consists of the value customers place on the goods and services they consume minus what they have to give up to obtain them. When I purchase a cheeseburger for \$4, that doesn’t mean the burger is worth \$4. It’s worth more than \$4 to me, in fact.

Human beings don’t actually go around trading the equivalent of four \$1 bills for two \$2 bills, because we also value our time. That’s what makes economic activity a positive-sum game, not a zero-sum game. When I buy and eat that burger, the experience is worth more than \$4 to me. For those who staff, supply, or own the restaurant, the burger is worth less than \$4, which is why they’re willing to part with it at that price. All parties to the transaction are made better off.

Similarly, worker surplus represents the net value to employees

of being employed at a particular firm. Profits are returns to owners or shareholders. And externalities represent the effects of a company’s operations on other groups of people, such as neighbors forced to breathe toxic fumes (a negative externality) or communities made better off when at-risk youths find gainful employment (a positive one).

After quantifying these effects as best they could, the researchers found that for most companies, consumer surplus is by far the largest social impact, “dwarfing profits, worker surplus, and externalities.”

Another key finding here is that the much-politicized practice of evaluating businesses according to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) criteria has been misguided.

“Company-level scores from several prominent ESG rating systems are essentially unrelated to our estimates of corporate social impact,” they concluded.

I couldn’t have said it better myself.

John Hood is a John Locke Foundation board member. His latest books, “Mountain Folk” and “Forest Folk,” combine epic fantasy with early American history.

Freedom of speech protects unpopular ideas

ANDY JACKSON
CONTRIBUTOR



A gaggle of left-wing academic departments at the University of North Carolina at Asheville, many with the predictable “studies” as part of their titles, recently sponsored an event that explored what they claimed was “anti-Black or anti-Indigenous state violence that connects the United States and Israel.” It was an event with the clear aim of justifying the recent terrorist attacks against Israel, or at least providing the “context” for such a justification.

Republican Congressman Chuck Edwards, whose district includes Asheville, rightly condemned the event and declared, “Western North Carolinians and Americans everywhere must disavow and condemn events that encourage anti-Semitism and inspire violence.”

So far, so good. But Edwards then declared that it was “hard to believe that an institution like UNCA would allow this event on campus,” implying that officials at the university should have banned it. That would have been far more dangerous than the disease the congressman seeks to cure. It is proper to ban groups that provide material support to Hamas or other terrorist organizations, but this event appears not to go beyond thought and word.

But what about speech from the crazies? What about the antisemites? What about the racists? What about those who speak in favor of terrorism or offer jus-



IMAGE OF UNCA ASHEVILLE UNIVERSITY VIA PUBLIC DOMAIN.

tifications for the horrors of communism or fascism? What about Holocaust deniers? Do the views held by those firmly in the moral minority deserve the same freedom of speech protection as the views of those who favor truth and freedom?

Yes, they do.

John Stuart Mill explained that silencing a minority, even a minority of one, is repressive:

“If all mankind, minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.”

By silencing the speech of the minority, we also deny ourselves and future generations the right

of “exchanging error for truth” if those in the minority are right and a “clearer perception and livelier impression of truth” if they are wrong.

The organizers of the UNCA event are clearly in the moral minority. Most Americans support Israel in its campaign against Hamas in the wake of the Oct. 7 terror attacks that deliberately targeted Israeli civilians, including children. An earlier poll found that 67% of American college students said the attack was an act of terrorism, while only 12% said it was a justified act of resistance.

People who seek to justify such acts of barbarism, who try to explain away genocidal slogans such as “from the river to the sea,” or who try to justify political violence in the United States, de-

serve ridicule and contempt. We should welcome them exposing themselves and their abhorrent ideas to that ridicule.

Also, what they say may have some element of truth, however minuscule, that could help us refine our views.

Let’s neither deny ourselves the pleasure of exposing contemptuous ideas nor the opportunity of correcting our own errors by suppressing speech we may find repulsive.

In addition, deciding that some views can be suppressed implies that some person or group should be given the authority to determine which ideas are worthy of protection and which are not. Ironically, this censorious instinct appears to be at least as prevalent on our college campuses as it is



Do we really want to assign authority to predetermine which speech is permitted and which is not to college administrators at UNCA or elsewhere? To members of Congress? To anyone?

anywhere else in our republic.

Do we really want to assign authority to predetermine which speech is permitted and which is not to college administrators at UNCA or elsewhere? To members of Congress? To anyone?

By empowering those in authority to suppress odious views, conservatives would be setting a trap for themselves. Are we to believe that college administrators, once empowered to censor speech on campus, would not exercise that power more broadly?

Which speakers, radical progressives or conservatives, would those administrators be more likely to ban from speaking on campus? Which groups would administrators be more likely to deny official recognition and funding? Which views would they most likely hold up as deserving protection, and which would they suppress?

So, for those reasons, we must grant the devil the right to speak his mind on our public college campuses, not for his good, but our own.

Andy Jackson is the director of the Civitas Center for Public Integrity at the John Locke Foundation.



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Feast, Fast, Freedom

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actively called “Fast Day.” As the story from Puritan leader Cotton Mather went, the Pilgrims had a series of unsuccessful corn crops, so they set aside a day for fasting and prayer before planting. There was then sufficient rain to help their crops, and they later celebrated their abundant harvest with a feast of Thanksgiving to God.

Both the Fast Day (at planting time) and the Thanksgiving Day (at harvest time) were held for generations after in New England to commemorate this provision. But Fast

Day didn’t quite take off outside of New England. And even in New England, it eventually faded, being finally removed from state calendars in the 1980s and ’90s.

Don’t get me wrong. I love a good feast or party — whether it’s Mardi Gras, Thanksgiving, Easter, Christmas, acknowledging a major milestone, or just a spontaneous celebration of life. But without punctuating these feasts with the traditional accompanying fasts, they start to feel indulgent and lose their oomph.

Interestingly, even without official sanction, balance is spontaneously returning. People, feeling the effect of this excess, have begun to add traditions like Dry January, dopamine fasting, and meatless Mondays. The point of this feast-fast cycle is not just so the good

times stand out against a backdrop of bad. The fasts also provide an exercise in self-restraint — sometimes called the virtue of temperance — so any indulgence remains a choice, not an impulse over which we lose control.

Those who give in to all their natural passions (drives toward eating, drinking, sex, fighting, etc.) often tell themselves that if they really needed to give something up for a greater good, like their health, it wouldn’t be a problem. But allowing these drives to generally have their way forms habits, even addictions, slowly and imperceptibly, until we find it’s not as easy to choose against them as we had assumed.

So it’s not just exterior forces like oppressive regimes that can rob us of liberty, but those inside us, too. Having enough self-con-

trol to choose what prudence dictates in any moment is true freedom. A person who reaches this state of freedom can see a number of goods and choose to order them by exercising their reason and conscience, rather than just being driven by whichever impulse is strongest at that moment. But this virtue comes through exercise and is built over time through practices like fasting.

The founders, and other Enlightenment and Christian thinkers from whose wisdom we built the American culture, were clear that this interior freedom was a prerequisite to maintaining a nation based on exterior freedom. Those who are slaves to their own impulses will abuse their liberty and are also easily manipulated by tyrants. Edmund Burke summarized

this reality by asserting, “Men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites. ... Society cannot exist, unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere; and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters.”

So let’s feast well this holiday season. But then let’s remember to add practices like fasting (whether from social media, food, video games, or anything else that is particularly enticing to us) that can build the self-control needed to maintain all those liberties we are so thankful for.

Revisiting Leandro

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es that decisions regarding education policy and spending are left to the people, through their representatives in the General Assembly.”

Assigning education decisions to judges “prevents the people from deciding how best to administer and provide for the State’s educational system — even if they live in areas where no constitutional violation has ever been alleged,” lawmakers argued.

Yet the state Supreme Court’s own words can steer the case back into its proper lane. “Leandro and Hoke County I require that the Plaintiffs must establish the existence of a violation by clear and convincing evidence before they

can invoke the court’s remedial powers,” lawmakers argued.

“[W]hile Leandro and Hoke County I establish the standard to determine whether the State has complied with its obligation to provide the opportunity to a sound basic education, they reject the judiciary’s ability to upend the role of the legislative and executive branches by answering the political question of how to provide the opportunity to a sound basic education by imposing a specific remedy impacting education policy, appropriations, and budget allocation,” lawmakers concluded.

Hewing closely to lines drawn by its 1997 and 2004 decisions could help the state Supreme Court shift responsibility for education decisions back where it belongs.

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

‘In the Pines’

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invented their own storyline of what our movie was about and attacked that. They seemed oblivious to the irony of the Charlotte Observer, a sister paper of The News & Observer, trying to smear a film that dramatizes the racist past of our state’s oldest newspaper empire.

The Wilmington Star News, a participant in the propaganda campaign of 1898, also editorialized the purpose and content of our film without having seen it.

Thankfully, those who have seen the film know the truth: “In The Pines” tells a great story, and the John Locke Foundation has produced a quality film that has been met with enthusiasm and vastly more accolades than criticism. It has been accepted into dozens of film festivals, win-

ning numerous awards for cinematography, performances, art direction, costumes, makeup, writing, and directing. These awards have come from festivals in North Carolina, the US, and around the world. I’ve spoken about the film in Texas, Tennessee, and New York. It was lauded as far away as Spain, Italy, and Argentina. Viewers consistently ask me in Q&A panels about plans for a feature or a series everywhere it screens.

I am so immensely proud of the talented cast and crew, who came together from around the world, united in the craft of filmmaking to tell a simple but powerful story. They deserve every award they have received, and all of them are ready and able to get started crafting a feature-length film or mini-series.

Audiences always want to see more after they watch “In the Pines” because it does what great drama should do: It takes us on a journey and gives voice to what

it means to be human. Historical dramas like “In the Pines” help us understand our past: the good, the bad, and the ugly. As dramatic art, they help us cycle through powerful emotions. Through this cathartic experience, they build empathy and understanding. We leave the theater and go confidently back into the world to build a brighter future together. Anyone who stands in the way could only be described as an enemy of progress.

If you’re interested in hosting a screening of “In The Pines” or would like to learn more about the film, please email info@johnlocke.org or visit InThePinesFilm.com.

Greg deDeugd is the Creative Director of the John Locke Foundation. He is the producer and host of Policy Pizza and recently produced Locke’s first short film, “In the Pines,” which has gone on to national and international acclaim.

Philanthropy

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decades, with a 3.4% drop in total giving to \$499.3 billion and a 10.5% decrease when adjusted for inflation, according to a Giving USA report. The decline occurred amid economic challenges, including a 20 to 25% stock market decline and an 8% inflation rate. Despite these factors, experts highlight that the results are better than anticipated, considering the tough economic climate created by inflation. Large-scale nonprofits, such as the Make-A-Wish Foundation, are grappling with increased costs due to inflation, leading to calls for alternative forms of support, such as donations of airline miles and hotel points. The downturn in giving raises concerns, especially as the percentage of Americans participating in charitable contributions has decreased.

While the drop we saw in charitable giving in 2022 was rare — it has only happened three times in the last 40 years — it does raise concerns in a political climate where both major political parties are seeking to use the power of government to their own ends, rather than inquiring if different actions are even the proper role for government. The essence of a thriving society doesn’t solely rest upon governmental actions; it equally depends on the collective effort of engaged citizens and the philanthropic ventures they support. The marriage of a free-market economy and the benevolence of philanthropy creates an ecosys-

tem where societal issues find diverse, adaptive, and creative solutions.

At the heart of the argument for philanthropy is the notion that individuals and private entities can serve as influential change agents. The essence of this social investment is not merely a hand-out but a strategic deployment of resources towards endeavors that are often beyond the immediate scope or capacity of governmental action or market-driven interests.

Philanthropy doesn’t undermine the role of the market or government; instead, it amplifies their impact by addressing gaps and needs that might otherwise remain unmet. It acts as a catalyst for innovation and risk-taking, fostering groundbreaking solutions that might not initially yield financial returns but can profoundly impact society in the long run.

Moreover, philanthropy operates with agility, unbound by bureaucratic constraints, enabling rapid responses to emerging issues or underserved areas. It steps in where government support might be lacking or delayed and contributes to long-term sustainable solutions in diverse sectors, from education and healthcare to environmental conservation and beyond.

The critical argument for philanthropy lies in its ability to address issues that can’t be measured solely economically. Social challenges, such as poverty alleviation, equity, and social justice, demand a multifaceted approach that transcends market dynamics. Philanthropy is a driving force for change, supporting advocacy,

community development, and fostering social capital, thus pivotal in shaping a more cohesive and compassionate society.

As individuals and businesses engage in philanthropy, they become more than donors; they become social investors, strategically placing resources in areas that align with their values, goals, and vision for a better future. This social investment mindset is pivotal in creating a more resilient and responsive society.

As the CEO of the John Locke Foundation and the publisher of Carolina Journal, I am privileged to witness the impact of charitable investments in advancing our mission for a better North Carolina. Our organization is deeply grateful for the support of our donors, whose generosity enables us to contribute positively to the state’s welfare. In the spirit of Fred’s timeless quote from A Christmas Carol, I encourage readers not only to consider giving to the John Locke Foundation but to embrace the broader charitable spirit by supporting other worthy causes to support human flourishing.

While governments and the free market play vital roles in shaping societies, the pivotal position of philanthropy as a complementary force must be considered. Not every societal issue requires a government solution, and individual citizens can be social investors, affecting change and progress through their philanthropic endeavors. The power of philanthropy in addressing societal needs while fostering innovation and social change is not just an option but an indispensable pillar for a vibrant and responsive society.



Campaign promises...

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businesses trying to capitalize on the 2023 holidays can’t hire enough help to make ends meet.

As holiday baking traditions fill North Carolina homes this month, flour prices are up 34%, poultry up 25%, and dairy products up 24% since 2020. Due to rising interest rates over the last four years, the mortgage on that median-priced home has doubled.

Inflation is a hidden tax that drives up costs and interest rates for everyone and disproportionately harms the poorest among us.

Listen closely to campaign ads and stump speeches this year. Candidates will attempt to deflect from the impact of inflation or claim it is out of policymakers’ control. Don’t be fooled. It is not.

The inflation we see today is the predictable and direct result of the pandemic spending spree by the federal government, followed by economic policy mismanagement that led to labor shortages and supply chain disruptions. We should be debating these issues on the campaign trails this year. How will congressional candidates get back to responsible governance? Their focus on the myriad of other messages that are clogging our news feeds will not convince voters whose household incomes are dwindling under the current policy priorities.



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