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The 2024 Primary Elections

CONGRESSIONAL
RACES TO WATCH
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WHO'S ON THE
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Page 10

BY CJ STAFF

The 2024 primaries have arrived in North Carolina. From Feb. 15 to March 2, voters can vote early, then Election Day itself will arrive Tuesday, March 5.

Registered Republicans can only take a Republican primary bal-

lot, and Democrats can only take a Democrat ballot, but unaffiliated voters will get to choose where they believe their vote will have the most impact. No matter which ballot one ultimately receives, there are important races on which to weigh in.

At the top of the ticket, Republicans can choose between former President Donald Trump or for-

mer South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley. Democrats will only have one choice — incumbent President Joe Biden.

For North Carolina governor, Republicans will choose among current Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson, Treasurer Dale Folwell, and attorney Bill Graham, while Democrats will mostly choose between Attor-

ney General Josh Stein and former state Supreme Court Justice Michael Morgan.

Other Council of State seats — like lieutenant governor, labor commissioner, and superintendent of public instruction — have high-profile primaries too. Some of North Carolina's newly drawn US congressional districts will al-

so have important races, especially the Sixth Congressional District and First District GOP primaries (see Page 4 for coverage of both of those).

Carolina Journal will be covering each race every step of the way. To see a graphic display of some of the top-of-the-ticket races, see Pages 10-11.

Keeping NC's railroad on track

BY JEFF MOORE

The State of North Carolina is the sole shareholder of a 317-mile rail corridor, winding from Charlotte to the Port of Morehead City, known as the North Carolina Railroad Company (NCR).

That is the short answer, to be sure; the whole story of how NCR came to be is a tale of North Carolina history, political

controversy, and state-sponsored economic development.

State of change

While economic accolades for North Carolina are abundant these days — e.g., ranked as the Best State for Business by CNBC for two years running — those honors were much harder to come by in the 1840-50s. Back then, North Carolina was known as the

"Rip Van Winkle State" because of its reputation for snoozing while neighboring states like South Carolina and Virginia seized upon economic opportunities.

Intent upon waking up from this slumber, in 1848, the North Carolina General Assembly passed legislation authorizing a railroad connecting the Coastal Plain with the Piedmont. The 1849 char-

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CJ FILE PHOTO BY JACOB ENNONS.

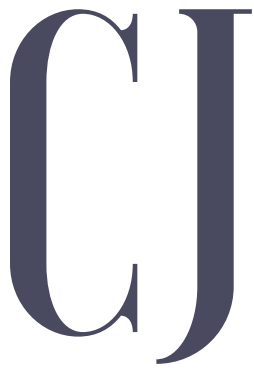
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Facts over messaging: Listen to voters, they have a lot to say

DONNA KING
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



For more than 20 years, thought leaders, policymakers, and readers have turned to Carolina Journal for the latest news and analysis. We thank you for that trust, and thrive on the daily engagement we have with our readers. Starting in 2024, we are stepping it up with the new Carolina Journal Poll. Building on decades of Civitas' live-caller polling right here in North Carolina, the Carolina Journal Poll cuts through messaging to put hard numbers to

the truth and trends behind the news.

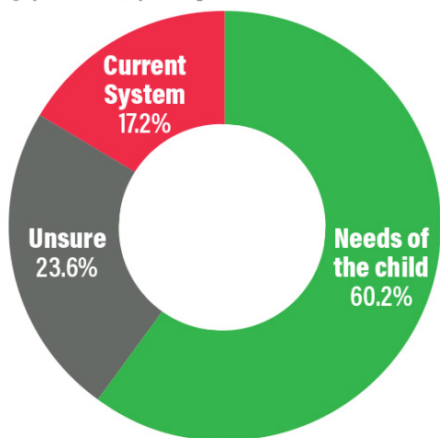
In January, CJ's first poll made headlines showing that a solid majority of North Carolinians (60.2%) prefer a school funding system that ties dollars to the child's needs, often called "backpack funding," over the state's current funding formula. An even higher percentage of teachers (74.7%) would support this change. State-funded Education Savings Accounts enjoy the greatest popularity, with nearly three-quarters (73.6%) supporting them — a marked increase from last January when voter

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Backpack Funding

North Carolina funds public schools using a system of formulas. Some people advocate for a different system in which funding is tied to the needs of the child. In your opinion, which model is the better way for NC to fund public schools?

- Funds tied to the needs of the child
- Current system using formulas



CYGNAL THE CAROLINA JOURNAL POLL
Cygnal Polling, on behalf of The Carolina Journal, surveyed 600 likely general election voters from January 21-22, 2024 with a margin of error of ±3.99%.

Primary Elections



SEE PAGES 10-11 to see who's on the ballot.



IMAGE VIA WIKI COMMONS USER BJOERTVEDT.

Silent crisis: America's \$34 trillion national debt

DONALD BRYSON
PUBLISHER



The United States' national debt is above \$34 trillion, but leaders in Washington do not notice. Instead, they're focused on more important things, like the national security threat of foreign garlic or maintaining funding for a United Nations aid organization, some of whose workers may have been involved with the Hamas attack on Israel on Oct. 7.

Sadly, it's more and more difficult to take Congress seriously at a time when our domestic and international challenges are becoming more serious. Now, the United States finds itself grappling with a monumental issue that threatens the very foundation of our economic stability: a staggering national debt that is already above 122% of US gross domestic product.

The ominous implications of this financial burden demand urgent attention, yet the deafening silence from both major political parties leaves the nation teeter-

ing on the precipice of a fiscal catastrophe.

The latest data from the US Treasury Department, revealing the record-breaking debt, should serve as a wake-up call to a nation already reeling from political divisions. The urgency of the matter must be addressed, as failure to address this growing crisis may result in parts of the government shutting down due to the lack of an annual budget. This scenario would further deepen the existing turmoil.

The trajectory of the national debt has surpassed projections set just a few years ago. While both the Trump and Biden administrations inherited unprecedented national debt, they each resorted to heavy borrowing to facilitate economic recovery, and the aftermath has been far from the anticipated success story.

The escalating national debt is closely tied to government overspending, as highlighted by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office. In 2023, the spending deficit represented 5.8% of GDP, highlighting a concerning trend. Although the spending deficit is

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Election integrity in NC

PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

BY THERESA OPEKA

Election integrity has been on voters' minds more since the 2020 election, both across the United States and in North Carolina. The subject was discussed at the John Locke Foundation's recent Carolina Liberty Conference.

The "Past, Present, and Future of NC Elections" panel discussion was hosted by Andy Jackson, director of the Civitas Center for Public Integrity.

It featured Jim Stirling, research fellow at the Civitas Center; Kristen Eastlick, senior vice president of Capital Research Center; and Becky Arps, research director of Americans For Citizen Voting.

Stirling told the audience that there have been major improvements to election integrity in North Carolina since the 2020 election. Perhaps the biggest change, he said, was the elimination of "Zuck Bucks," the sending of private money to election boards.

"Zuck Bucks" refers to The Center for Tech and Civic Life, funded by Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and led by Democratic Party operatives.

"People were funding these county boards in a way that advantaged one party over another," he said. "Democrats had a much larger voting increase than Republicans did in these specific counties that accepted the money."

Eastlick said her group, Capital Research, believed this appearance of partisanship is what got CTCL in trouble. So much trouble, she said, that they changed their name to the United States Alliance for Election Excellence.

They then focused on only 10 counties across the nation, two of which were Brunswick and Forsyth Counties, as core counties. Both counties dropped out of the group in January.

Voter ID, which was approved by voters in 2018 in North Carolina and has been the subject of various lawsuits, was finally implemented in municipal elections in 2023 and will be fully implemented this year.

Another victory for election integrity, Stirling said, was moving the mail-in ballot deadline from a three-day grace period following Election Day to Election Day being the final day for acceptance.

"That is a massive improvement for North Carolina be-



Jim Stirling of Locke's Civitas Center for Public Integrity presents on election integrity at the 2024 Carolina Liberty Conference.

cause we saw the gamesmanship that was played by the Board of Elections after the sue-and-settle plans as well as the numbered memos," he said.

Both the mail-in ballot deadline and the "Zuck Bucks" ban (along with codifying the number of poll watchers and same-day voter registration verification) were part of Senate Bill 747, which is the subject of a lawsuit filed by the Democratic National Committee and the state Democratic party.

Stirling said same-day registration verification is important because of what he called "ghost voters" — people who had voted but weren't verified for their location.

"When you register to vote in North Carolina, you are sent a card and sent it twice to make sure that you live in that location," he said. "If you did same-day registration in

a certain time period, you would not get that registration card by the time the ballot was counted and your vote would be counted,

but they wouldn't verify your address."

Registered unaffiliated voters have grown significantly since the 2020 election, growing nearly half a million, followed by Republicans at 169,000.

Stirling said that unaffiliated voters tend to follow the county's voting patterns. For example, Wake County unaffiliated voters will mostly vote Democrat, and Johnston unaffiliated voters will vote Republican.

Redistricting maps also come into play. They have

changed twice due to lawsuits, but after the denial of an injunction against the Senate maps, they, including the state House

and congressional maps, will be used in this year's election cycle.

Eastlick said her organization is seeing an increase in the growth of public policy organizations that use charitable dollars to benefit one party or another.

In 2020, charitable giving by 501(c)(3)s was \$34.7 billion, far overshadowing "dark money" (such as Zuck Bucks) at \$86 million. With a representative sample of "hard dollars" (PACs), "outside money" (super PACs), "dark money," and "charitable giving," right now, it's 10 to 1 Democrat-aligned giving versus Republican-aligned giving, Eastlick said.

She said charitable public-policy organizations putting money into get-out-the-vote efforts to register new voters goes back to the 2012 election between Mitt Romney and eventual winner Barack Obama, with most of the money coming from foundations like Carnegie.

But the long-term angle was to develop election reforms like no voter ID, automatic registration, and early voting, which were implemented in the 2020 election.

Eastlick also mentioned that a lot of the funding work is done through a political affairs firm called Arabella Advisors.

"The way it works is that that center circle runs all of the groups around the periphery," she said. "New Venture Fund, a 501(c)(3); Sixteen Thirty Fund, 501(c)(4); and Hopewell Fund and Windward Fund, both 501(c)(3)s; all engage in these public policy campaigns, but as fiscally sponsored projects."

Eastlick said that Democratic lawyer Marc Elias' groups, including Democracy Docket, shuffled almost \$100 million among the groups.

In the 2020 cycle, they got \$3 billion in revenue, more than the Republican National Committee, DNC, and all of state parties combined.

She also said they are trying to find ways for election boards to get FEMA money.

Arps said her organization is working with grassroots groups and legislators to amend state constitutions to say that only US citizens can vote in state municipal elections because the US Constitution doesn't say that noncitizens can't vote.

She said a poll done in 2022 shows 79% of people across the country said only citizens should vote, including 85% of those who identified as nonpartisan and 56% of Democrats.

The poll said 66% of North Carolinians favored only citizens voting, including 63% of those who identified as Democrats.

Arps and Eastlick agree that many noncitizens are trying to do the right thing.

"If there are really no incidents of noncitizens voting, why do we have files of noncitizens telling the federal government they don't want to vote?" said Eastlick. "I can't vote. Please take me off the list."

A question was raised if the "genie could be put back in the bottle" in terms of regaining trust in election integrity.

Stirling said the "genie" has been out of the bottle for several years, with disinformation and misinformation being part of our election process.

He said there is a reason why people are now more engaged in politics.

"I think the reason we're seeing more of it is because people are more politically inclined now," he said. "Since 2016, people became far more engaged in it and far more invested in politics than they previously had. So I don't think it's so much a symptom of a change in American politics, but a change in our culture to begin with."

If there are really no incidents of noncitizens voting, why do we have files of noncitizens telling the federal government they don't want to vote?

- Kristen Eastlick, senior vice president of Capital Research Center

4 2024 PRIMARY ELECTIONS

NC PRIMARY ELECTIONS INSIGHTS

1ST CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Competitive primary, possibly general in NC-1

BY JEFF MOORE

Congressional District 1, which includes all or part of 19 counties in the northeastern part of the state, is considered the only real swing district on the new North Carolina congressional map. Incumbent Democrat Rep. Don Davis and Libertarian candidate Tom Bailey have no primary challengers and will move forward to the November ballot for the general election.

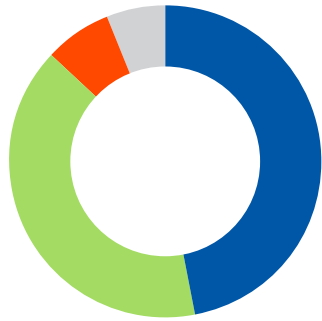
But 2024 will see a competitive Republican primary on March 5 between Laurie Buckhout and Sandy Smith, the 2022 Republican nominee, for the chance to challenge Davis in November.

In recent electoral history, NC-1 was a relatively safe district for Democrats. However, after post-census redistricting, the general election race has become more competitive. The Cook Political Report 2024 House Race Ratings rate NC-1 a “Toss-Up,” as do other election ratings outfits. It is one of the poorest of North Carolina’s congressional districts, with a median household income about 80% of the statewide average and a poverty rate about 30% higher than the statewide average. The district is racially diverse, with a population that is 47% white, 40% black, and 7% Hispanic.

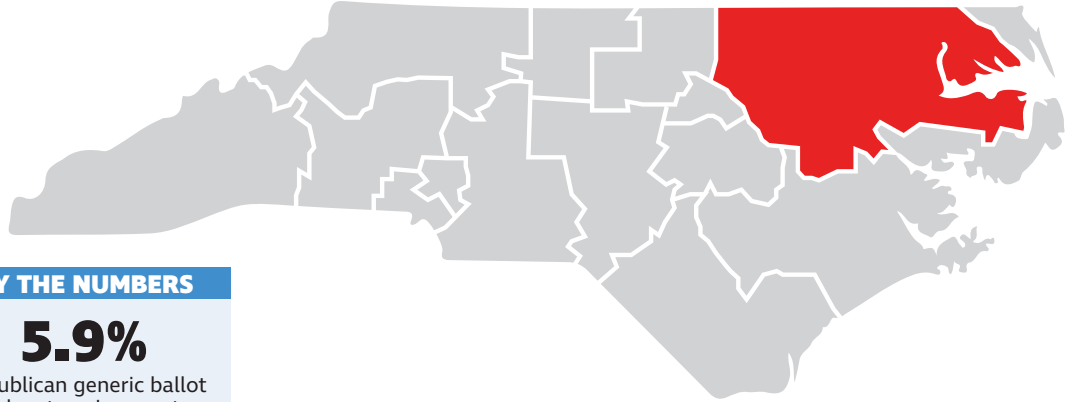
Smith, of Nash County, describes herself as a business executive, entrepreneur, and real estate investor. As the previous Republican NC-1 nominee, Smith’s campaign has been active across the district in recent years. Endorsed by former President Donald Trump in 2022, Smith lost the 2022 general election to Davis by approximately 12,000 votes out of nearly 258,000 votes cast (~4.5%).

Racially Diverse

NC-1 is 47% white, 40% black, and 7% Hispanic.



■ WHITE 47% ■ HISPANIC 7%
■ BLACK 40% ■ OTHER 6%



BY THE NUMBERS

5.9%

Republican generic ballot advantage in recent Carolina Journal polling

Smith describes herself on her campaign website as an “unapologetic America first, Pro-Life, Pro-Guns, Pro-Military, freedom-loving patriot fighter running for U.S. Congress in North Carolina’s 1st District.”

Adding, “I’m a fighter who’s not afraid to stand up for what is right and we need to do every-

thing we can to drain the swamp. I made history by swinging my district 25 points towards the Republicans and now it’s time we finish the job we started and take back our country in 2024.”

Buckhout, of Edenton, is a former military officer and first-time candidate. A retired Army colonel, Buckhout ended her 26-year military career as chief of electronic warfare for the US Army after serving in myriad leadership and staff positions. After retiring from the Army in 2010, Buckhout founded Corvus Consulting, a strategic consulting and services group, and served as its CEO until selling the business in 2019.

Buckhout describes herself

as a “proven conservative fighter running to defend North Carolina families” and to “put an end to the Biden agenda.” According to her campaign website, Buckhout promises to “fight for America First policies” such as securing the border and “rebuilding America’s military,” and pledges to “stand with our veterans.” Buckhout is endorsed in this primary by Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn (ret); the chair of the North Carolina Freedom Caucus, Rep. Keith Kidwell, R-Beaufort; and chair of the NC House Agriculture Committee, Rep. Jimmy Dixon, R-Duplin.

NC-1 now enjoys consensus “toss-up” status, after years spent as a safe seat for Demo-

crats. Election trends for the district have certainly been affected by recent redistricting as well as softening support for top-of-the-ticket Democrats, such as President Joe Biden. While North Carolina Republicans are expected to net at least three seats in Congress across the state’s delegation (currently split 7R-7D), NC-1 represents a potential fourth pickup for the GOP.

A recent Carolina Journal Poll showed Republicans with a growing generic ballot advantage of 5.9% when it comes to General Assembly races. As such, the winner of the March 5 primary in NC-1 may have wind at her back in a toss-up general election.

NC PRIMARY ELECTIONS INSIGHTS

6TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

6 Republicans, no Democrats in NC-6

BY KATHERINE ZEHNDER

In North Carolina’s Sixth Congressional District, six candidates are running for the seat currently held by Democrat US Rep. Kathy Manning, who is not seeking re-election. All six candidates are Republicans, as Democrats did not see much hope for victory in the new more right-leaning district.

The candidates running are Addison McDowell, Bo Hines (Republican nominee endorsed by former President Donald Trump in the 13th in 2022), Christian Castelli (Republican nominee in the last cycle), Dr. Mary Ann Contogiannis, Jay Wagner (former mayor of High Point), and Mark Walker (congressman from 2015 to 2021).

Walker, who previously served the district, is running again for his old congressional seat.

Before serving the Sixth District in Congress, he was a Baptist minister in Winston-Salem and Greensboro.

“Walker has been endorsed by another influential GOP-aligned group, CPAC, which highlighted Walker’s consistent conservative voting in Congress,” wrote Dallas Woodhouse, state director of American Majority.

“Walker is currently the best-known candidate in the district, having represented some of it for six years, as well as from his previous statewide campaigns for US Senate and governor, the latter of which he dropped to run for Congress.”



Christian Castelli
MILITARY OFFICER



Mary Ann Contogiannis
PLASTIC SURGEON



Bo Hines
BUSINESS OWNER



Addison McDowell
POLITICAL AIDE



Jay Wagner
MAYOR OF HIGH POINT



Mark Walker
CONSULTANT

Hines was endorsed by Club for Growth. In 2022, when Hines was the nominee in the 13th District, he was endorsed by Trump but lost the general election to state Sen. Wiley Nickel, a Democrat.

One of the key issues Hines is running on, as evidenced by his first TV ad, is border security and immigration reform. Other key issues that Hines is running on include free speech, election integrity, the economy, infrastructure, and Second Amendment rights.

Another young candidate, McDowell, was able to secure Trump’s endorsement over Hines this cycle. McDowell, more recently, was also able to secure the support of US Sen. Ted Budd. McDowell formerly worked as a constituent liaison in Budd’s office.

On Dec. 12, 2023, McDowell announced his candidacy and was endorsed by Trump that night. McDowell also worked on US Rep. Richard Hudson’s (R-NC9) campaign.

As evidenced by his first TV ad, border security is also one of the key issues on which McDowell seems to be building his platform.

Other issues McDowell is running on are “protecting jobs” and “defending the Second Amendment,” according to his website.

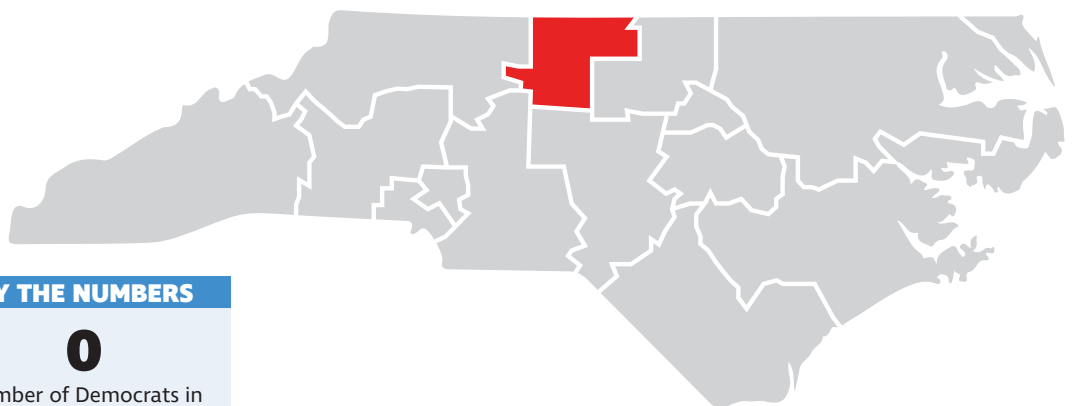
Castelli won the GOP primary for the Sixth District last cycle, but the seat was not as heavily contested. Castelli’s background is largely in military special forces. He served in uniform for 22 years, until he retired in 2012. Castelli was an Army airborne ranger and earned his green beret in 1998. He was then selected to attend the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government, from which he graduated in 2004 with a master’s degree in public administration.

Then he served in prominent roles with the Department of Defense. Wagner has served as the mayor of High Point since 2016. Wagner has been an attorney for 25 years and is a partner at Fisher-Wagner law firm.

Contogiannis has lived in the district since she was two years old, grew up there, and has been practicing medicine for the past 25 years.

All six candidates are running on border security and immigration reform as critical issues in their platforms.

Without any candidates running on the Democrat side, the winner will be the presumed general election winner.



BY THE NUMBERS

0

Number of Democrats in NC-6 primary. The GOP winner goes to DC

Moore, Berger join SCOTUS filing to keep Trump on ballot

BY KATHERINE ZEHNDER

State House Speaker Tim Moore, R-Cleveland, and Senate Leader Phil Berger, R-Rockingham, joined an amicus brief in January filed at the US Supreme Court. Moore, Berger, the Arizona legislature, and attorneys general for 25 other states aim to keep Donald Trump on the presidential election ballot.

The attorneys general from Indiana and West Virginia filed the brief ahead of Feb. 8 oral arguments. This follows recent attempts in North Carolina as well as Maine and Colorado to remove Trump from the primary ballot.

In response to these attempts, US Sen. Thom Tillis, R-NC, announced that he will soon be introducing the Constitutional Election Integrity Act to prevent just this kind of thing from happening again.

In late December a petition was filed by a Stokes County resident to keep Trump off the primary ballot.

The petition cited the 14th Amendment and “alleged inciting insurrection,” even though Trump has never been charged or convicted of insurrection.

“The State Board of Elections denied the petition, but not as full-throated as they should have,” Moore told Carolina Journal in an exclusive interview. “The NCGA stands united on this brief. We will not allow voters to be denied voting for Trump or anyone else. On behalf of a Republican majority of the House of Representatives, we believe that it is imperative that voters across the country have the right to vote for Trump, or whom-ever they want to vote for. At the



In late December a petition was filed by a Stokes County resident to keep Trump off the primary ballot.

end of the day, it is up to the voters. This is one of the biggest examples of tyranny I have seen.”

In this state, Democrat voters only have the option of voting for President Biden in the primary.

“The Democratic Party objected to this, but the board of elections went along with it,” Moore added. “Election officials are unilaterally telling voters they don’t have the right to vote for Trump. While Trump is a victim, the biggest victims here are the voters.”

Trump seems to have majority support, not only in the state, but across the nation, Moore said.

“From poll numbers I have seen, the state is very supportive of President Trump. At the end of the day, it should be up to voters of

every state to make that decision,” said Moore.

A decision from the Colorado Supreme Court to remove Trump from their state’s ballot is now before the US Supreme Court.

“Because this decision is from the highest tribunal in Colorado, it is important that the US Supreme Court settle this issue and settle it quickly. If several states remove candidates, they will arbitrarily determine the outcome of the election. This is unprecedented,” said Moore.

The amicus brief states several issues with the Colorado court decision, including allegations that it disregards congressional procedure, invites chaos into elections, misconstrues the Constitution,

and eliminates voter choice.

“The case before the US Supreme Court is asking the Court to strike down states acting in a rogue way. We have joined the brief because this area of law needs to settle quickly and uniformly across the country,” said Moore.

The brief states that another problem with the Colorado court decision is that it “thrust courts into places where they don’t belong.”

“For any court to do this, including a federal court, is a rogue court, by ruling someone ineligible to serve without any due process. This state court is getting involved in federal process and exceeding its constitutional authority,” said Moore.

Both the North Carolina pe-

tion and the Colorado court cite insurrection as the grounds for disqualification. However, Trump never has been charged with or convicted of insurrection.

The brief asserts that the Colorado court’s definition of insurrection is “standardless and vague.”

“Congress has not enacted any enabling legislation that would apply here. Yet the Colorado court went ahead and acted on its own. That choice was wrong,” states the brief.

Moore says this case is important to the preservation of free and fair elections.

“Voters want to make sure their vote counts, without cheating or interference from outside governance,” he told Carolina Journal. “We want elections to be open and free, and free of fraud. When it comes to voting, when it comes to elections, it should be easy to vote but hard to cheat. This issue is about the very beginning before the ballots are printed and the first vote is cast.”

According to Moore, 2024 will be pivotal, particularly for the state’s Democrats.

“This Democratic Party is off the rails in leftist land that we have never seen. They are so unhinged and about trying to maintain power that they are trying to predetermine the outcome of the election before the first vote is cast,” said Moore.

“They are denying their own party’s voters the opportunity to vote for anyone other than Joe Biden. I hope it is a wake-up call for a lot of Democrats. The Republican Party is about free and fair elections and allowing the voters to choose. They still have time to change parties before the election.”

House calls to secure NC amid border crisis

BY BRIANNA KRAEMER

The North Carolina House of Representatives has called on Gov. Roy Cooper to step up and address the southern border crisis impacting the state’s health and safety. The move comes after the Supreme Court ruled that federal agents can remove razor wire that Texas installed, sparking 25 Republican state governors to band together in support of Texas.

All 72 Republicans in the North Carolina House sent a letter to Cooper urging him to stand in solidarity with Texas as the state works to defend the border and protect American citizens. The House supermajority warned that they will take steps to handle the open border with Texas if the governor fails to act.

“Unchecked, this crisis threatens our basic security and freedoms,” the letter reads. “We will not sit idly by while this President’s failure causes ruin to this great State and our nation as a whole. ... Our state must stand in solidarity with Texas and Governor Abbott and support his efforts to defend our southern border and protect our citizens. This body urges you to stand with Governor Abbott and speak out in support of his actions to protect his state.”

About 125 North Carolina National Guardsmen are working with the border patrol in Eagle Pass, Texas, where Speaker Tim Moore, R-Cleveland, visited months ago. During a press conference, he recalled watching im-



This is a clear and present danger to our country. So why are we as the state legislature weighing in? We’re doing it because while Texas may be the direction folks are coming in, North Carolina is now essentially a border state.

- Speaker Tim Moore, R-Cleveland

migrants walk right across the border, get detained for a very brief period, receive money, and then get sent on their way and told to come back for a court date five years later.

“These are folks who volunteered for this assignment,” Moore said regarding the NC National Guardsmen sent to the border. “These are men and women who are taking time from their careers and their families here because they believe in the mission, and we appreciate your service.”

Texas has worked to halt the influx of illegal immigrants and drugs entering the country, but the Biden administration has sued, delayed, and removed physical barriers.

Moore said the federal government has willfully abandoned its



A Border Patrol agent drives along the US/Mexico border in California.

duty to protect our nation’s sovereignty by allowing the border to remain open. Calling every state a border state, he pointed to the direct impacts.

Since President Biden took office, 11,788 North Carolinians have died from fentanyl, a number that has at least doubled in the past few years. Additionally, North Carolina recently ranked as the ninth-worst state in the country for human trafficking cases. Foreign actors, traffickers, cartels, and gangs are all ongoing concerns as young, military-aged males enter from all parts of the world, including the

Middle East, Russia, and China.

“This is a clear and present danger to our country,” warned Moore. “So why are we as the state legislature weighing in? We’re doing it because while Texas may be the direction folks are coming in, North Carolina is now essentially a border state. Because the folks don’t just stay in Texas. They move all over the country. And we have a situation like we’ve never seen.”

Lawmakers say the letter serves as a chance for Cooper to enact measures that protect North Carolinians. But if Cooper doesn’t help as requested, the General Assem-

The letter’s signatories asked Cooper to take three main steps:

1. Halt any discretionary cooperation with the federal government to place and house illegal migrants in North Carolina.
2. Commit to signing legislation that mandates cooperation with Immigration and Customs Enforcement by local police departments to remove illegal immigrants who are committing crimes.
3. Deploy additional National Guardsmen to assist Texas at the border.

bly has a backup plan come April, the start of the legislative session:

“We believe it is a critical issue. ... We’re hoping the governor will take action. If not, the North Carolina General Assembly is prepared to do so when we come back into session,” Moore stated.

Republicans in the North Carolina Senate sent a unified message to Biden in January regarding his obstruction of Abbott’s ability to guard the southern border. In the letter, senators called on the administration to “stop thwarting Texas from effectively guarding the southern border.”

6 NORTH CAROLINA

3.5% of NC ag land foreign held

BY KATHERINE ZEHNDER

In North Carolina, upwards of 700,000 acres, or 3.5% of agricultural land, is foreign held, according to a report by the Congressional Research Service.

This is in parallel with the national trend of US foreign holdings of agricultural land. In 2022, US foreign holdings of agricultural land grew by more than 8%, according to a report by Reuters.

The Government Accountability Office in January released its report to Congress concerning the foreign investments in US agricultural land and the systems used to collect, track, and share this information.

In 2021, US foreign holdings of agricultural land grew to approximately 40 million acres nationwide, a 40% increase since 2016, according to the GAO report.

The report also found that the US Department of Agriculture does not share updated and timely data on foreign investments in US agricultural land as collected under the Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act of 1978.

Agencies on the Committee on Foreign Investments in the United States, which include the Department of the Treasury and the Department of Defense, identify and review transactions that could pose risks to national security, such as the proximity of foreign-held land to a military installation.

The annual publication of selected AFIDA information is

BY THE NUMBERS

700,000

Acres of land in North Carolina owned by foreign entities, according to Congress.

available to CFIUS agencies to assess national security risks.

However, the DOD indicated in the GAO report that the AFIDA information they use needs to be more specific, more updated, and updated more frequently than on an annual basis.

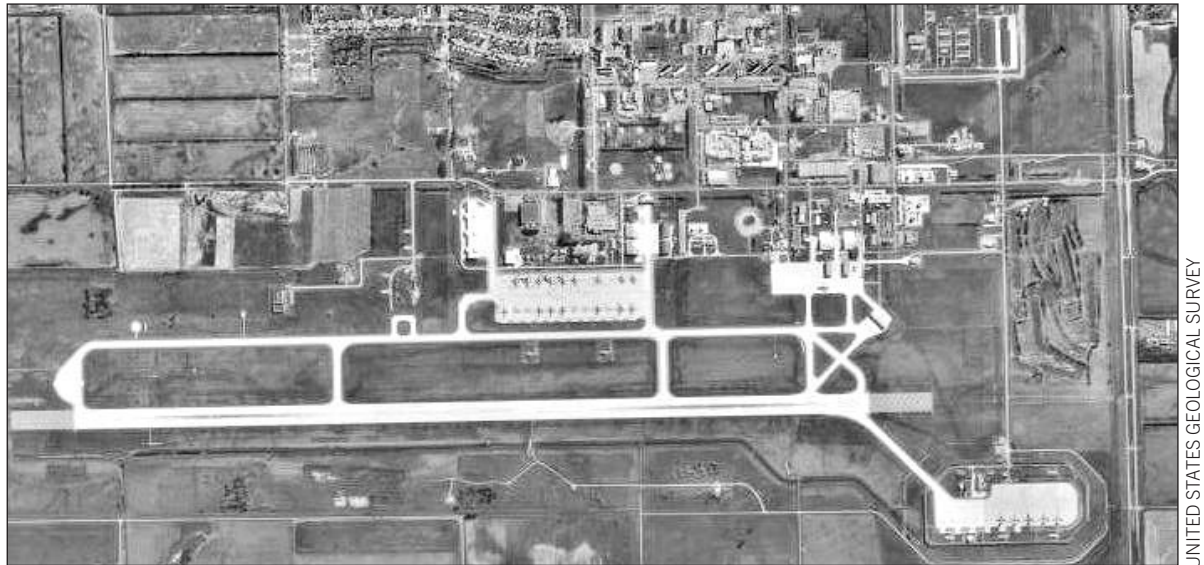
"Sharing current data could help increase visibility into potential national security risks related to foreign investments in US agricultural land," according to the GAO report.

Foreign holdings of US land can pose national security risks, particularly when such holdings are near a military site, the DOD said.

The GAO report found errors with the AFIDA data through calendar year 2021, such as the People's Republic of China, the largest land holder, being counted twice.

In 2022, members of Congress expressed concerns about Chinese-owned cropland near Grand Forks Air Force base in North Dakota, particularly given sensitive drone technology in use at the base.

Agricultural land is not the only land in North Carolina owned by foreign entities. The site of a potential future Influx Care Facility, which take in unaccompanied minor migrants, in Greensboro is



Grand Forks Airbase in North Dakota. Foreign holdings of US land can pose national security risks.

UNITED STATES GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

tied to a previously publicly traded Chinese company.

"We certainly don't want to lose control of our ag lands that are so vital to feeding us, and we want to be sure our military bases are protected," Steve Troxler, North Carolina commissioner of Agriculture, told Carolina Journal in an email. "Not only are we concerned about foreign-owned land, but we are very concerned about the development of ag land in North Carolina that is happening at a rapid rate."

Under AFIDA, foreign individuals who acquire or transfer agricultural land are required to report the transaction to the USDA.

The problem arises, however, with the enforcement of this law.

During a March 2023 congressional hearing, Tom Vilsack, then-US secretary of agriculture, reported that the USDA is reliant on foreign individuals to self-report AFIDA information, according to the GAO report.

Despite the amount of foreign-owned agricultural land in the state, North Carolina is one of only seven states with a downward trend in foreign held land, according to the USDA report.

Last fall, state lawmakers filed House Bill 463, the NC Farmland and Military Protection Act.

The primary sponsors of the bill are House Speaker Tim Moore, R-Cleveland; Rep. John Bell, R-Wayne; Rep. Jeff Zenger, R-Forsyth; and Rep. Jennifer

Balkcom, R-Henderson.

While North Carolina law permits a certain level of foreign investment in land within the state, this bill "would prevent certain foreign governments from acquiring certain North Carolina real property," according to the National Agricultural Law Center.

After passing unanimously in the House, the bill was referred to the Senate Committee on Rules and Operations in April 2023 and is again eligible for consideration in the Senate during the upcoming legislative session.

"Everyday we are learning how vulnerable we have become with foreign adversaries purchasing agricultural land, not just in North Carolina but across the country,"

Chapel Hill school board defies Parents' Bill of Rights

BY BRIANNA KRAEMER

The Chapel Hill-Carrboro school board unanimously voted not to comply with North Carolina's new Parents' Bill of Rights in January, citing moral conflicts, but legal experts are cautioning of the potential "chaos" that could come from disregarding state laws.

North Carolina's Parents' Bill of Rights law passed in 2023 after the Republican legislative supermajority voted to override Gov. Roy Cooper's veto. Part of the new law requires schools to notify parents if a student changes their name or pronouns, and it also prohibits the discussion of gender identity, sexual activity, or sexuality in kindergarten through fourth grade.

The two rules have become contentious points for some of the state's largest school districts, with the Chapel Hill-Carrboro school board publicly dismissing the laws.

During the board's public testimony, several high school students urged officials to reject the Parents' Bill of Rights. One young woman said kindergarten through fourth grade are "crucial developmental stages for children's brains, where they start to evaluate themselves and the people around them." Another student said "there is no argument to be made that gender identity is any less important than a core class when it holds such a valuable piece of today's societal puzzle."

Board Chair George Griffin said the law is "just morally wrong, and we're not going to do



Public comments during Chapel Hill/Carrboro Board of Education meeting.

this way." He argued that someone needs to "stand up for what is right." Thus, the board decided to allow classroom instruction about gender identity and sexuality in grades kindergarten through fourth grade, breaking with the Parents' Bill of Rights. The board is also looking to school administrators when it comes to handling pronoun and name changes instead of looking to the state's guidelines.

Lawmakers promptly noted

that the school district's move is illegal, including Senate Majority Whip Jim Perry, R-Lenoir.

"Law is the foundation that provides order and allows us to coexist together as a society. Disregard for law leads to anarchy," Perry wrote on social media.

North Carolina school board officials took an oath of office to uphold the laws passed by the legislators under Article VI of the state Constitution. Elected or appointed officials swear to "support

and maintain the Constitution and laws of the United States, and the Constitution and laws of North Carolina not inconsistent therewith."

Bob Luebke, director of the John Locke Foundation's Center for Effective Education, called Griffin's comments "deeply troubling," clarifying that personal opinions are not above the law.

"Does Mr. Griffin believe he has a right to violate that oath because he needs to 'stand up for what's



Law is the foundation that provides order and allows us to coexist together as a society. Disregard for law leads to anarchy.

- Senate Majority Whip Jim Perry, R-Lenoir

right'? Would Mr. Griffin agree it's OK for parents or teachers to stand up and call out textbooks as 'morally wrong' and say 'we're not going to do it this way'? Conflating the rule of law to individual preference offers a quick trip to chaos," Luebke warned.

Luebke said he expects the board's policy to be challenged and to fail in a legal battle. As a candidate for attorney general, US Rep. Dan Bishop, R-NC8, forewarned on X that if he's elected to office, officials who "think they're above the law are going to find out."

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Catherine Truitt fired back at the board, calling the illegal decision "unacceptable."

The board will vote on the matter again in an upcoming meeting. Other school boards in progressive, often urban, areas have also discussed how to get around the new law.

Opportunity Scholarship success poses challenge

BY DAVID BASS

A major expansion of school choice got underway in North Carolina when applications for the larger Opportunity Scholarship Program opened Feb. 1. But that doesn't mean the voucher program won't face challenges. That's due, in part, to the potential for increased demand combined with lagging funding to fulfill the scholarships in the upcoming school year.

Supporters and members of the media often label the expanded program as "universal school choice."

It is universal in the sense that every family with a school-aged child in the state can now apply for a scholarship. Access to those scholarships, though, will remain limited by the amount of money budgeted for the program.

Opportunity Scholarships are the state's voucher program meant to defray the cost of a private-school education for families that choose such a route.

The program has been around since 2013 and has steadily grown in popularity.

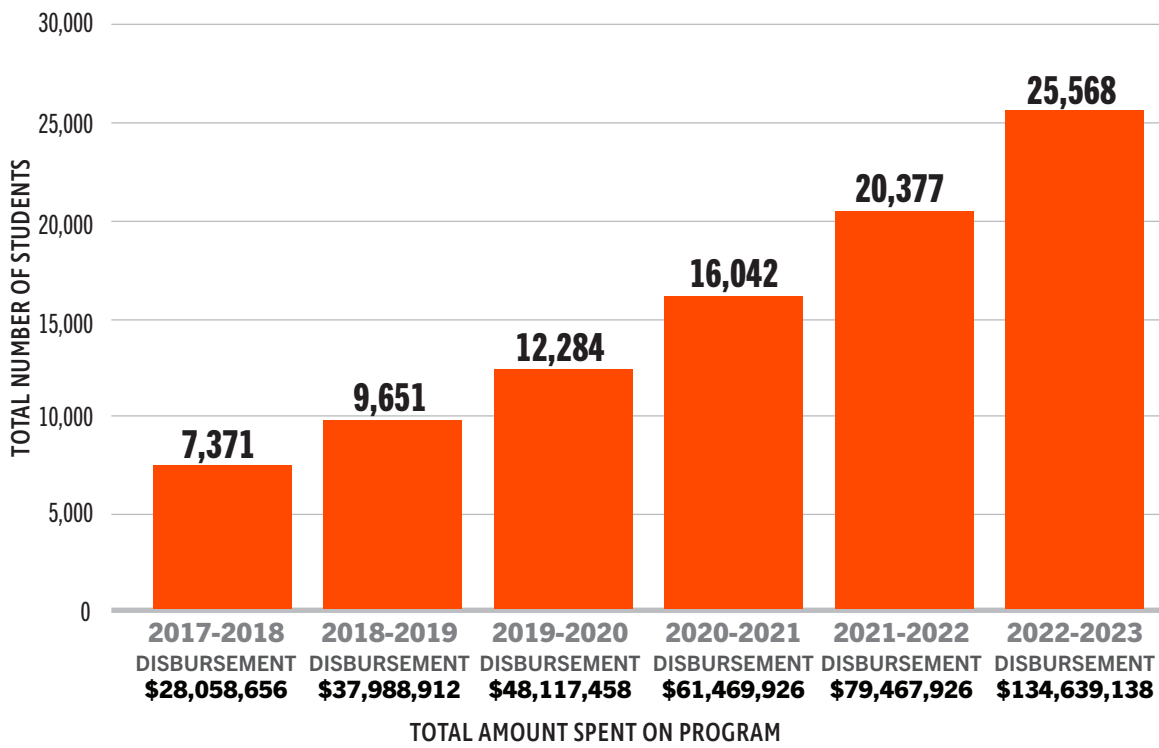
The number of students receiving Opportunity Scholarships has more than doubled since the 2019-2020 school year and the beginning of the pandemic.

In response, lawmakers passed a massive expansion in 2023 that opens scholarships to all families, regardless of income, and expands the piggy bank for the program to more than \$505 million in a reserve fund by the 2031-2032 school year.

But a funding problem could crop up in the short term.

Lawmakers appropriated \$177 million for the program's reserve fund for the 2023-2024 school

Program growth over time (2017-2023)



SOURCES: DATA FROM NC STATE EDUCATION ASSISTANCE AUTHORITY WEBSITE (NCSEAA)

year, an amount that increases to \$192 million for the 2024-2025 school year.

The following year, the program gets a significant funding uptick to \$416 million.

The question: For the upcoming school year, could demand outstrip the funding available, given the modest increase in spending coupled with the expansion of families who qualify?

The new approach

There is already evidence that demand for the program is spiking. Shortly after the application

window opened at midnight on Feb. 1, the North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority's website crashed due to too much traffic, as people rushed to apply.

To answer the question on demand outstripping supply, it's important to understand how the new system works.

Families already receiving Opportunity Scholarships get first priority for renewals. The priority window for new families to apply is Feb. 1 to March 1.

The lowest income tier gets first priority on receiving scholarships — income of \$57,720 a year or less for a family of four — and each applicant is entered into a

random lottery.

The next tier — those making \$115,440 annually for a family of four — get the next priority, also by lottery. Assuming any funds remain, students in the third and fourth tiers are offered scholarships in a lottery as well.

These income levels have drawn the most scrutiny: For the third tier, it's those making \$259,740 or less for a family of four, while the fourth tier is any household income above the third tier maximum amount.

The awards are announced to the winning families in early April. Students who aren't awarded are added to a waitlist and are con-

Eligibility Requirements

1. At least 5 years old by Aug. 31 or at least 4 years old by April 16 and approved for Kindergarten according to State guidelines
2. Lives in North Carolina
3. Has not graduated from high school
4. Has not enrolled in a post-secondary institution full-time

Application Deadlines

Feb. 1 - March 1, 2024: Priority window for applications

After March 1, 2024: Applicants are put on a waiting list if funds remain

Early April: Awards are announced

May/June: Any awards for the waitlist are announced

sidered for a later award — likely announced in May or June.

Running out of money?

As of Dec. 13, 32,170 students were receiving Opportunity Scholarships for a total allocation of \$95 million for the fall semester.

According to the North Caroli-

continued PAGE 12

Sports betting to begin in NC early March

BY CJ STAFF

The North Carolina State Lottery Commission voted unanimously to allow mobile sports betting on March 11 at noon.

Gov. Roy Cooper signed House Bill 347 into law last June to authorize sports betting in the Tar Heel State. During the bill signing at the Spectrum Center in Charlotte, where the Charlotte Hornets play, Cooper said, "This is a historic moment for the state of North Carolina, and this will benefit our economy for generations to come."

The commission had a window from Jan. 8 to June 15 to initiate mobile sports betting as per the state law. The state law permits a maximum of 12 online sports betting companies to function within the state. Sterl Carpenter, deputy executive director of Gaming Compliance and Sports Betting, said nine companies have already submitted information to the state.

"The commission has received voluminous application materials from nine entities that want to become operators in the state," said Carpenter. "Review of those license applications, and the applications for service providers and suppliers, are well un-

derway at this time."

On March 1, 10 days before betting can begin, approved companies can start allowing users to create accounts and deposit money. The approved timeline will allow betting just in time for the NCAA March Madness tournament on March 19.

According to a survey by The American Gaming Association, March Madness is the most popular time for sports wagering, with a quarter of all American adults (68 million) planning to bet on the tournament last year.

Details on in-person betting have not been finalized by the commission at this time.

Information on approved companies will soon be available on ncgaming.gov.

May 14, 2018

The United States Supreme Court struck down the federal ban on state authorization of sports betting.

June 1, 2023

House Bill 347 passes the North Carolina Senate.

June 7, 2023

North Carolina House concurs with the Senate and the bill is ratified.

June 14, 2023

Gov. Roy Cooper signed the sports wagering bill into law.

March 1, 2024

Approved companies can start allowing users to create accounts and deposit money.

March 11, 2024

Legalized online sports betting officially begins in North Carolina.

March 19, 2024

NCAA March Madness tips off.



CJ FILE PHOTO BY JACOB EMMONS.

Charlotte cracks down on crime

BY ZACH ROUNCEVILLE

In the aftermath of a shooting of five people during New Year's Eve celebrations in Uptown Charlotte that also led to injuries of three police officers, Charlotte City Councilman Tariq Bokhari has proposed, and hopes to ultimately implement, a crime task force for the city designed to prevent such incidents in the future, particularly among juveniles.

In terms of where the proposal for the task force stands, Bokhari said he has made it official with other city leaders and they are receptive to the idea.

"I have made the proposal for a CLTCC task force on crime official," he told Carolina Journal in an emailed statement. "The response from fellow council members has been cautiously optimistic, and we have had several meetings strategizing next steps. Many recognize the necessity of such a task force, though there are varying opinions on its scope and approach. As for the public reaction, there's strong support. Our community wants action and accountability, and this task force represents a step towards that. It's about bringing together diverse perspectives to formulate strategies that are not only effective but also sustainable."

Bokhari said the primary objectives of the task force are to focus on crime analysis and recidivism rates, working closely with city leaders in law enforcement and other organizations.

"The primary objective of the task force would be to conduct a thorough analysis of the



Charlotte City Councilman Tariq Bokhari, center, meets with NC House Speaker Tim Moore, R-Cleveland, right, and congressional candidate John Bradford, left, on the Crime Task Force.

crime patterns in Charlotte, focusing particularly on repeat offenders and the factors leading to recidivism," said Bokhari. "The task force should be empowered to work closely with law enforcement, the General Assembly, judicial systems, and community organizations to develop data-driven strategies."

Under the "Raise the Age" initiative, which became effective in 2019, nonviolent offenses alleged to have been committed by those up to 19 years old will be heard in juvenile court instead of the adult criminal justice system.

"It's not just about law en-

forcement; it's about rehabilitation, community engagement, and preventive measures," Bokhari said. "The goal is to create a multifaceted approach to reduce crime and enhance public safety effectively. Concepts are already being vetted like revisiting the effectiveness of 'Raise the Age' legislation, to a scorecard approach for magistrates, to laws holding parents more accountable for the repeat criminal actions of youth."

The "Raise the Age" legislation and scorecard approaches were discussed in more detail during a meeting Bokhari re-

cently held with NC legislators John Bradford and Tim Moore. Bokhari thought the meeting was successful and intends to have the General Assembly involved.

"With the support of Tim and John along with other folks in the Senate, and now with the attention we've garnered on the crime task force, I think there's a scenario where we could potentially overhaul the magistrate system with this scorecard approach," Bokhari said. "I think that's got a lot of potential."

The task force plan also has the support of the Mecklenburg County District Attorney's of-



I have made the proposal for a CLTCC task force on crime official.

- Charlotte City Councilman Tariq Bokhari

office. In a statement to CJ, Michael Stolp, who serves as its community liaison coordinator, said the office is willing to work with Bokhari on improving public safety in Charlotte.

"We are grateful for Councilman Bokhari's interest in promoting community safety, and, to the extent there's a willingness to sit down and work on public safety issues, we are more than ready to actively engage," he said. "In the meantime, we'll continue to work with our law enforcement and community partners to advance public safety, today and every day."

Detering crime in the Queen City

Addressing rising criminal activity in Charlotte has been an issue for many years. City leaders and other stakeholders in crime prevention have had to deal with a host of problems including retail theft and rising levels of crime among juveniles, the latter of which increased in 2023. Bokhari said the statistics are in-

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SCOTUS rejects NCSU professor's DEI case

BY CJ STAFF

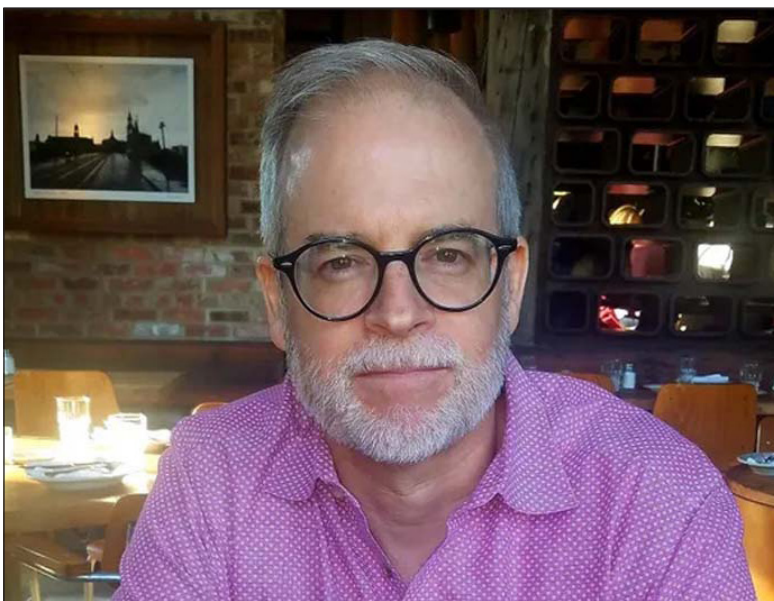
The US Supreme Court has declined to take the case of Stephen Porter, a North Carolina State University professor who claimed he faced retaliation for critical statements involving social justice and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The high court rejected Porter's case on Jan. 22 without comment. A split 2-1 panel of the 4th US Circuit Court of Appeals had ruled against Porter in July 2023.

"The court below ruled that a public university professor's statements criticizing the prioritization of racial diversity over academic rigor in faculty hiring and evaluation were unprotected by the First Amendment," Porter's lawyers wrote in October in a Supreme Court petition. "Instead, it held that these statements were made pursuant to the professor's job duties and were thus unprotected under this Court's decision in *Garcetti v. Ceballos*."

"The court further held that because the professor's statements were not 'a product of his teaching or scholarship,' they were not entitled to protection under the Fourth Circuit's exception to *Garcetti* for speech related to scholarship and teaching," Porter's lawyers added.

"Resolving the uncertainty around the scope of public university professors' free speech rights is essential to ensuring that American academic institutions are not ruled by an ideo-



Stephen Porter, a professor at North Carolina State University, alleged retaliation for his critiques of DEI ideology.

logical orthodoxy that ruthlessly eliminates dissent from its ranks," the petition continued. "Public university professors who question the primacy of so-called Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion ('DEI') constantly find themselves subject to retaliation that must have a remedy at law."

"If this retaliation goes unchecked, public universities will rapidly lose any semblance of ideological diversity and will be unable to function as the quintessential marketplace of ideas that is 'one of the vital centers for the Nation's intellectual life,'" Porter's lawyers wrote.

State Justice Department lawyers representing the university responded to Porter's allegations in December.

"In this case, he claims that the University has retaliated against him for his protected speech," the Justice Department brief argued. "But as the Fourth Circuit correctly held, Porter failed to plausibly allege any violation of his First Amendment rights."

"Porter nonetheless seeks this Court's review, claiming that the decision below implicates a divi-

sion among the courts of appeals on three issues. But these alleged splits of authority are illusory," the state lawyers argued.

Porter sued the university in federal court in September 2021. He argued that his constitutionally protected statements prompted retaliation from NCSU.

"Appellant's Complaint alleges that he has been outspoken in recent years concerning the focus on 'so-called 'social justice' affecting academia in general' and 'his concern that the field of higher education study is abandoning rigorous methodological analysis in favor of results-driven work aimed at furthering a highly dogmatic view of 'diversity,' 'equity,' and 'inclusion,'" wrote Judge Stephanie Thacker for the 2-1 4th Circuit majority that ruled against Porter in July.

"In this vein, Appellant identifies three statements or communications he made between 2016 and 2018 which, in his view, are protected speech," Thacker wrote. "According to Appellant, he was eventually subject to adverse employment actions in retaliation for these three communications."

In spring 2016, Porter questioned adding an item about diversity to student course evaluations. He suggested "that the proposal had been made without proper research," according to the majority opinion. A 2017 report from NCSU's Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity la-

beled Porter a "bully."

Porter cited a second communication that took place in 2018. When an Inside Higher Ed article criticized a faculty search committee led by one of Porter's colleagues, he sent a link to the article in an email to all department faculty members. Porter wrote, "Did you all see this? ... This kind of publicity will make sure we rocket to number 1 in the rankings. Keep up the good work, Alyssa!"

The third communication took place in September 2018. Porter published a post on his personal blog accusing the Association for the Study of Higher Education of becoming a "woke joke." The post focused on topics for an upcoming ASHE conference. "According to Appellant, this research demonstrated that the focus of the conference had shifted from general, post-secondary research to social justice," Thacker wrote.

"Appellant's post concluded with his commentary, 'I prefer conferences where 1) the attendees and presenters are smarter than me and 2) I constantly learn new things. That's why I stopped attending ASHE several years ago,'" according to the 4th Circuit opinion.

In October 2018 Porter contends his supervisors started the process of removing him from his department's Higher Education

continued PAGE 12

NC-owned railroad

continued from PAGE 7

ter called for the railway to extend "from the Wilmington and Raleigh Railroad where the same passes over the Neuse River in the county of Wayne, via Raleigh, and thence by the most practical route, Salisbury, in the county of Rowan, to the town of Charlotte in the county of Mecklenburg."

Passage of the 1848 North Carolina Railroad bill was not easy. Our state's current urban/rural divide may be mild in comparison to the stark division of interests between the eastern and western parts of the state in those times. Passage came down to a slim margin of approval in the NC House and an even slimmer margin in the NC Senate — one vote. That one vote ended the political career of state Sen. Calvin Graves; the proposed corridor did not run through his district. The influential Democrat was never again elected to political office.

The structure of the railroad legislation set up what we refer to today as a public-private partnership. Other private railways existed on north-south corridors, but NCRRR proponents aimed to connect the whole state, east to west, to truly enable development of an intra-state economy. The bill allocated \$2 million from the state to purchase stock on the condition that \$1 million be raised via stock sales to private citizens. Graves, former Gov. John Motley Morehead, and others toured the state to pitch investors on an investment they hoped would bring North Carolina into the modern age.

While the official charter of NCRRR routes it from Charlotte to Goldsboro, the NC General Assembly also incorporated in 1852 the Atlantic & North Carolina Railroad. This line, spearheaded by NCRRR president and former Gov. John Motley Morehead, connected Goldsboro to a 600-acre peninsula suitable for a coastal port called Shephard's Point, in Carteret County. The resulting planned community was named Morehead City. (NCRRR and A&NCRRR merged officially in 1989.)

By 1850, the capital was raised, and the North Carolina Railroad Company was born. Construction began in 1852 (from Goldsboro in the east and Charlotte in the west), and after appealing to the legislature for an additional \$1 million due to construction cost overruns, the North Carolina Railroad opened in 1856.

Growth

With the railroad operational, financial success came quickly. Revenue increased each year, and along with it, government revenue, as the state was the largest stockholder (75% of outstanding shares). This burgeoning commercial activity gave rise to towns most of us are familiar with: Burlington, a midway point at which NCRRR established its company shops; Thomasville; Mebane; High Point; Durham; Clayton; Selma; and even Morehead City.

The rail connections were a boon for expanded trade. As farmers imported new fertilizers, crop yields in wheat, cotton, and tobacco took off. Newly es-



North Carolina Railroad stock certificate.



NC Train makes stop in Burlington, North Carolina.

THE NC RAILROAD COMPANY

The 317-mile railway stretching from Charlotte to Morehead City, known as the NC Railroad Company, is a private corporation whose stock is 100% owned by the State of North Carolina.

established towns like Durham and High Point became hubs of the tobacco and textile industries, and heretofore unprofitable markets for crops and materials were opened up to opportunistic producers and entrepreneurs.

Indeed, North Carolina flourished commercially during this period, shaking off the sleepy Rip Van Winkle label and beginning to stand on an invigorated economic footing until the advent of the Civil War. While tracks and infrastructure suffered disrepair and outright destruction during the War, railroad traffic itself increased markedly. By 1867, damages were repaired, and new equipment was purchased, a valuable asset for North Carolina to leverage during Reconstruction and into the 20th century.

Operation & Ownership

While building a railroad

to connect the Old North State proved critical for economic development, keeping the trains running on time may have been less attractive. Perhaps spurred as well by natural suspicions around which connected politicians may have been unduly benefiting from the NCRRR's quasi-governmental creation, the company signed a 30-year lease for Richmond and Danville Railroad (R&DRR) to take over operations and equipment on the corridor. R&DRR was later acquired by Southern Railway (now Norfolk Southern), a JP Morgan venture, in 1894, and a new 99-year lease was entered into.

The lease arrangements have changed a few times, each between NCRRR and now Norfolk Southern, culminating in the current trackage agreements. Ever since, the NCRRR has operated more as a real-estate asset, leasing out exclusive freight-service

rights.

So, the bifurcated ownership structure that marked NCRRR from its formation remained. That is, until 1998, when the state bought out the 25% of private stockholders, and NCRRR became an only slightly less complicated entity: a privately-run business wholly owned by the state of North Carolina. At the time, NCRRR was valued at \$289 million.

Instead of cash dividend payments to shareholders (the state), the NC General Assembly passed legislation in 2000 enabling reinvesting those dividends into improving corridor infrastructure and maintenance. Yet, even in the 2000s, many lawmakers may have been surprised to learn the State owned a railroad. In 2012, curiosity ran over, and the state legislature directed the Program Evaluation Division (PED) of the General Assembly to con-

duct a comprehensive evaluation of NCRRR, "a discretely reported component of the State of North Carolina, of which the State is sole shareholder."

The report highlighted the historical, financial, and operational details of NCRRR. It also made certain recommendations for the state to realize a better return on this convoluted partnership. In it, PED suggests NCRRR has benefited from its unique relationship with the state of North Carolina, but that the state really hasn't profited financially from the arrangement.

While the 2012 report observed the state is quite limited in its oversight of NCRRR, owing to its status as a private corporation, it advised against selling NCRRR or the corridor to private interests as "these valuable rail assets and their long-term earnings potential would be lost" to the state. Further recommendations included requiring a one-time dividend and annual dividend equal to 25% of income thereafter, strengthening reporting requirements for NCRRR, and requiring them to sell non-essential properties with proceeds directed to the General Fund.

Next step?

In the decade since the program evaluation, an effort that presumably satisfied then-lawmakers' curiosity about the state-owned railroad, NCRRR has continued its mission to maximize value across the corridor within which it operates.

Take a look at recent annual reports and you'll find NCRRR investments that track with the most notable economic development announcements over the past two years. It shows how state spending (taxpayer spending) on big economic-development "wins" like Vinfast and Toyota Battery is often more than meets the eye.

In NCRRR's 2022 annual report, the most recent available, NCRRR lists an investment of \$1 million toward the site of Vinfast's Randolph County production facility and a \$35 million investment contributing toward the Greensboro-Randolph Megasite that will be home to Toyota's new battery plant. The same report lists 2022 operating losses and net losses of \$16,629,142 and \$58,336,316, respectively.

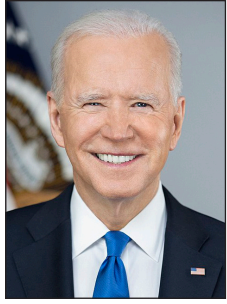
Investments like these could make a lot of sense from the railroad's perspective, but the bottom line is isn't exactly clear when considering NCRRR's ownership structure. Partnerships between public and private interests were not exactly unique when NCRRR was formed and they are hardly rare in modern day. What is unusual, by NCRRR's admission, is the unique partnership of a privately owned corporation, whose stock is wholly owned by the state, that has endured for more than 150 years and grown to include the North Carolina Department of Transportation and other taxpayer-supported entities.

Where the next step is for NCRRR is a matter of inertia. It's hard to stop a train, after all, especially one that's been building momentum in this unique economic development arrangement for over a century. It must then rely upon lawmakers' willingness to again examine whether the state of North Carolina owning a railroad is what's best for the people of North Carolina or if an evolution toward private ownership of this historical uniqueness might leave them better off.

2024 PRIMARY ELECTIONS 11

DEMOCRATS

PRESIDENT

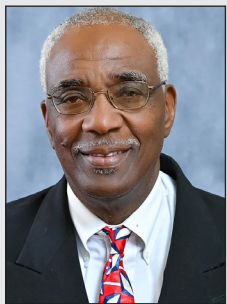


Joseph R. BIDEN, JR.

FUN FACT

President Joe Biden's middle name is "ROBINETTE"

GOVERNOR



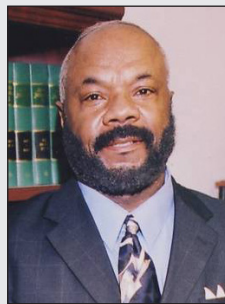
Gary FOXX



Michael R. MORGAN



Josh STEIN



Marcus W. WILLIAMS



Chrelle BOOKER

LT. GOVERNOR

- Rachel Hunt
- Mark Harrison Robinson
- Ben Clark

SEC. OF STATE

NO PRIMARY

STATE AUDITOR

NO PRIMARY

STATE TREASURER

- Gabe Esparza
- Wesley Harris

SUP. OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

- C.R. Katie Eddings
- Maurice (Mo) Green
- S Kenon Crumble

ATTORNEY GENERAL

- Satana Deberry
- Tim Dunn
- Jeff Jackson

AGRICULTURE COMMISSIONER

Sarah Taber (UNOPPOSED)

LABOR COMMISSIONER

Braxton Winston II (UNOPPOSED)

INSURANCE COMMISSIONER

- Natasha Marcus
- David Wheeler

DISTRICT 1

Donald Davis (UNOPPOSED)

DISTRICT 2

- Deborah Ross
- Michael Camero

DISTRICT 3

NO DEMOCRAT CANDIDATE

DISTRICT 4

Valerie Foushee (UNOPPOSED)

DISTRICT 5

Chuck Hubbard (UNOPPOSED)

CONGRESS

DISTRICT 6

NO DEMOCRAT CANDIDATE

DISTRICT 7

Marlando Pridgen (UNOPPOSED)

DISTRICT 8

Justin Dues (UNOPPOSED)

DISTRICT 9

Nigel Bristow (UNOPPOSED)

DISTRICT 10

Ralph Scott Jr. (UNOPPOSED)

DISTRICT 11

Caleb Rudow (UNOPPOSED)

DISTRICT 12

Alma Adams (UNOPPOSED)

DISTRICT 13

Frank Pierce (UNOPPOSED)

DISTRICT 14

- Pamela Genant
- Brendan K. Maginnis

HOW DO YOU WIN A PRIMARY?

To become the party's nominee, the candidate must be the top vote-getter and have at least 30% of the vote plus one. If no candidate reaches the vote percentage necessary to become the nominee in a contest on the ballot, a runner-up can request a second primary to be held on May 14, 2024.

All information courtesy of NC Board of Elections



VOTER ID: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Voters without an acceptable ID can get a free photo ID from their county board of elections. Voters can also get a "No Fee ID Card" from the North Carolina Division of Motor Vehicles.

All voters will be allowed to vote with or without photo ID. If the voter does not show an acceptable ID, the voter may vote with an ID Exception Form and provisional ballot, or vote with a provisional ballot and return to the county

elections office with their photo ID by the day before county canvass.

Permitted exceptions to the photo ID requirement include the following: The voter has a reasonable impediment to showing photo ID (lack of transportation, lost or stolen ID, disability or illness, family responsibilities, etc.); the voter has a religious objection to being photographed; or the voter was a victim of a natural disaster within

100 days of Election Day.

When a registered voter cannot produce a photo ID, the county board of elections must count that ballot if the voter properly completes the ID Exception Form or brings an acceptable ID to their county board of elections before the county canvass.

Voters who vote by mail will be asked to include a photocopy of an acceptable ID inside the photo ID envelope that comes with

their ballot. If they are unable to include a photocopy of their ID, they may complete an ID Exception Form with the absentee ballot return envelope. Photo ID is not required for military or overseas voters who vote using special absentee voting procedures that federal law makes available for such voters.

For more information, see the North Carolina State Board of Elections website.

DEI case rejected

continued from PAGE 8

Program Area. The department also excluded him from other opportunities, including a new Ph.D. program area.

Porter argued “he has been effectively siloed into a Program Area of Study that is drained of students and resources. According to Appellant, this has severely compromised his ability to perform critical job duties, such as advising Ph.D. students, leaving his future at NCSU in jeopardy,” Thacker wrote.

A trial judge ruled against Porter. “The district court held Appellant ‘failed to plausibly allege a First Amendment retaliation claim’ because he failed to ‘plausibly allege that he ha[d] suffered adverse action or that any allegedly protected speech was the ‘but for’ cause of any alleged adverse employment action,’” Thacker wrote. “In doing so, the district court assumed, but did not decide, that the three communications identified by Appellant were protected. Upon review, we have no trouble concluding that at least the survey question incident and the faculty hiring email were unprotected speech.”

“As to the ‘Woke Joke’ blog post, even assuming, as the district court did, that it amounted to protected speech, Appellant fails to allege a sufficient causal connection to state a claim for retaliation,” the 4th Circuit majority opinion stated.

“Appellant’s complaint makes clear that he was removed from the HEPA because of his ongoing lack of collegiality — not because of the content of his blog post,” Thacker wrote.

Thacker and Judge James Wynn affirmed the trial court’s decision to dismiss Porter’s case. Judge Julius Richardson dissented.

“It is now well-settled that ‘citizens do not surrender



It is now well-settled that ‘citizens do not surrender their First Amendment rights by accepting public employment. Today, when a state employer retaliates against its employee for speaking as a citizen on a matter of public concern, the First Amendment demands that the state justify its action.

- Judge Julius Richardson

their First Amendment rights by accepting public employment,” Richardson wrote. “Today, when a state employer retaliates against its employee for speaking as a citizen on a matter of public concern, the First Amendment demands that the state justify its action.”

“Stephen Porter, a professor at North Carolina State University, says that the University retaliated against him for his protected speech. My friends in the majority say otherwise,” Richardson added. “They hold that much of Porter’s speech was not protected at all, and that — for his speech that was protected — Porter has not drawn a plausible link to the adverse action that he suffered.”

“My friends err at both steps,” Richardson concluded. “Porter was indeed speaking as a citizen on a matter of public concern. And — based on his complaint’s allegations — it is plausible that the University retaliated against him because of it. The University thus must put forth evidence to justify its action. But, at this early stage of litigation, the government has not made that showing. So we should allow Porter’s suit to proceed.”

Scholarships

continued from PAGE 7

na State Education Assistance Authority, or NCSEAA, those funds are approximately half the amount available for the entire school year, meaning the demand is now approaching \$200 million for the current school year.

The bottom line: While applications are likely to go up due to the universal nature of the program beginning this year, the funds are only marginally higher.

According to data from the Department of Non-Public Education, there were 126,768 students enrolled in private schools for the 2022-2023 school year.

About one-in-five of those students were receiving an Opportunity Scholarship.

That leaves ample demand for new scholarships, not even factoring in families enrolled in alternatives to private schools who might want to make a switch — but again, limited funding.

Many of the students enrolled in the program currently roll over to the next year as well.

For example, in the 2022-2023

school year, 83% of students continued on to receive a scholarship the following school year, according to data from NCSEAA.

Former state lawmaker Paul “Skip” Stam, a key architect of the original Opportunity Scholarship bill in 2013, cautioned that the current set up could pose political challenges this year for the legislative Republican majority.

“High income parents will not actually get the voucher for years, but every ad run by Democrats will feature millionaire parents on the dole, while grandma in a wheel chair is being thrown off a cliff,” Stam wrote in a letter to lawmakers in November.

Robert Luebke, director of the Center for Effective Education at the John Locke Foundation, pointed out that the supply of private schools in the state is another potential hurdle.

“We need for the supply of schools to catch up with the demand,” he noted. “That’s why a phased-in approach is best as the state adjusts to universal school choice.”

Scholarships are popular

The most recent Carolina Journal poll of likely NC vot-

ers put support for Opportunity Scholarships at 64% to 26% opposed.

The scholarship program is helping parents like Kara Millard of Raleigh choose a better school for their child.

Millard applied for the scholarship in spring 2022 for her daughter who was entering kindergarten for the 2023-24 school year. She called the scholarship “life-changing” in a phone interview.

“I wouldn’t have been able to afford the private school tuition on my own,” Millard said. “It meant my daughter could stay at the school she was already going to for pre-K. I had more freedom to choose where she went to school, instead of just going where she was assigned.”

“I talk to so many parents who don’t know about the scholarship, and they feel stuck,” she added. “The fact that there is a scholarship available is huge — relieving some of the financial burden with inflation and everything. It gives parents hope that they have to keep their kids in a situation that’s not good for them.”

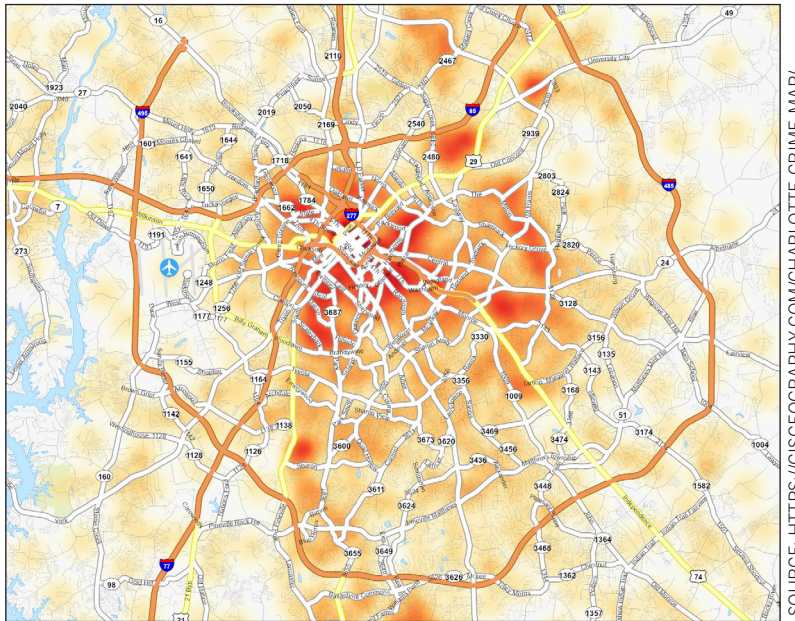
Task force

continued from PAGE 7

dicative of a problem which needs solving.

“The data speaks for itself,” he said. “We’ve seen a 14% increase in crime in 2023, which is a significant and concerning trend. Property crimes exceeded 38,000 last year, well over 5,000 more than 2022, and juvenile arrests rose by an astounding 34%. This isn’t just a perception; it’s a reality that’s affecting the daily lives of Charlotte’s residents.”

Crime prevention is sure to be a hot-button topic for large urban centers in North Carolina this election cycle as well.



Charlotte crime map.

SOURCE: [HTTPS://GISGEOGRAPHY.COM/CHARLOTTE-CRIME-MAP/](https://gisgeography.com/charlotte-crime-map/)

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POLICY PIZZA



STATE BUDGETS











EDUCATION

"I APPRECIATE THE CREATIVITY BEHIND POLICY PIZZA. LET'S GRAB A SLICE AND DIVE INTO SOME CRITICAL TOPICS!"

YOUTUBE USER

OPINION



NC voters want better public safety

DAVID LARSON
OPINION EDITOR



NORTH CAROLINA started the year off with a bang, sadly, many of them. Those celebrating the New Year in Charlotte scrambled to flee a mass shooting downtown, as a gunman opened fire at Romare Bearden Park. Five were injured, and the police later arrested 19-year-old Daevion Crawford for the incident. Mayor Vi Lyles released a statement calling the shooting “horrific.”

The night before, Sergeant Philip Dale Nix, an off-duty police officer with the Greensboro Police Department, was killed when he tried to intervene as three teens stole beer at a Sheetz gas station. The three teens were arrested and charged.

But the remaining city of the state’s three largest, Raleigh, wasn’t any more fortunate on bad head-

lines regarding violence, as data came out showing Wake County broke its single-year homicide record in 2023, with 56. Raleigh was also ranked the 15th worst city in the nation for homicide by WalletHub for the year.

Thankfully, 2023 saw an overall trend down nationwide on homicide. After a historic spike between 2020 and 2022, murder rates declined by 13%. But it’s not enough to get the issue off the front of most voters’ minds.

A late September Civitas poll found that two-thirds of North Carolina voters considered public safety to be a top concern for them. White and Hispanic voters considered drug use to be the biggest public-safety concern, while black voters saw violent crime as the top concern.

“As North Carolina continues to experience a population and investment boom, municipalities will have both the opportunity and challenge of ensuring that pub-

lic safety investment is prioritized,” said Locke CEO Donald Bryson at the time. “We’ve seen the decline in states with cities like San Francisco and Chicago, where crime goes unpunished. State and local leaders need to be proactive in ensuring our state remains safe and trusted as a good place to do business and raise a family.”

Interestingly, some notoriously chaotic West Coast cities like San Francisco and Seattle are seeing organic citizen-led movements for better public safety.

And they’re starting to yield real results. Seattle just elected six self-described “moderate” city council members, seizing majority control after many years of far-left rule.

The new council members said in a King 5 Seattle interview that public safety is their top priority and that they want to encourage a positive relationship between the city’s elected officials and the police.

One of the new members said the lack of public safety often came down to a “permissive environment,” where elected officials and prosecutors made excuses for crime rather than trying to fix it.

The same holds in our state, where, even in smaller cities like Asheville and Chapel Hill, citizens are becoming frustrated with the “permissive environments” in their own community.

And similar to the situation in Seattle, even though North Carolina voters don’t seem to be satisfied with public safety where they live, they do not directly blame their local police force — with 57% rating local law enforcement as doing an “excellent” or “good” job, 24% saying “fair,” and only 10% saying “poor.”

Most citizens know that their local police are stretched thin and that they are being met with increasing hostility. Police departments need more officers and resources, not blame. The kind of

community policing and broken-window policing that are needed to actually create an environment of peace and stability are impossible when they are understaffed and are forced to prioritize major crimes.

Voters see this and lay blame elsewhere, like on politicians. Just because it’s true “that government is best which governs least,” it doesn’t mean we should skimp in those limited areas rightly delegated to government, like law enforcement. Voters also, of course, blame weak prosecutors for sending many criminals back on the streets, and, of course, they blame the criminals themselves for choosing to ignore laws and harm innocent people.

It turns out people want to be able to shop, raise kids, go to public events, and generally live their lives without the threat of violent crime or the nuisance of intoxicated drug users around every corner. Legislators and other public servants should take note.

Don't subsidize a new baseball team

JOHN HOOD
CONTRIBUTOR



Will North Carolina snag one of two new Major League Baseball franchises? That's what Gov. Roy Cooper, Carolina Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon, and other civic and business leaders are hoping. They're prepping a bid for a team to be based either in Raleigh or Charlotte. As soon as MLB announces its process and timeline, they'll try to make their Carolina baseball dream a reality.

I couldn't care less, frankly. I don't follow professional sports closely — and even if I did, my interest would be in football, not baseball. Still, it's a free country. If MLB does decide to expand to 32 teams and a North Carolina ownership group uses its own resources to go after a franchise, fine by me.

That's not what will happen, however. The prospective owners will demand that taxpayers subsidize their team by building a ballpark for it. They'll argue that such a project will expand our economy and create new jobs. This is, in a word, false.

"Sports stadiums are provably ineffective economic develop-



CJ FILE PHOTO BY MAYA REAGAN.

ment tools," writes John Mozena, a fellow with the Better Cities Project. "Once you look past rosy economic impact predictions and the glittering stadium renderings, the evidence of decades' worth of real-world results from across the country is crystal clear: Stadiums strike out when it comes to economic development."

Last September, the Journal of Economic Surveys published a comprehensive review by three university professors of more than 130 academic studies of the issue. The results "confirm the

decades-old consensus of very limited economic impacts of professional sports teams and stadiums," the authors wrote. "Even with added nonpecuniary social benefits from quality-of-life externalities and civic pride, welfare improvements from hosting teams tend to fall well short of covering public outlays."

In other words, it costs taxpayers more to subsidize a sports enterprise than they get back in benefits.

Some taxpayers don't mind, of course. They are superfans who regularly attend games and

derive personal enjoyment from following the team. But most residents compelled to subsidize the stadium don't fit this description. The only way the math works for them is to benefit indirectly — by attracting legions of free-spending fans from elsewhere, or to raise the national profile of their community in ways that promote growth and development.

That's always the promise. It's rarely the result. "Nearly all empirical studies find little to no tangible impacts of sports teams and facilities on local economic activity," the professors concluded, "and the level of venue subsidies typically provided far exceeds any observed economic benefits."

On other issues, competing philosophical camps may hurl competing studies at each other. That's not the case here. In 2016, three scholars affiliated with the left-of-center Brookings Institution wrote that "decades of academic studies consistently find no discernible positive relationship between sports facilities and local economic development, income growth, or job creation."

Tim Carney, a senior fellow at the right-of-center American Enterprise Institute, made a similar point in a 2022 column. "A city or county does not see net

economic growth from subsidizing stadiums," he wrote. "This is one of the most consistent findings in economics."

Now, I wasn't born yesterday. And I'm hardly new to the stadium beat. Although the case against sports subsidies is solid, I knew full well that advocates of a Carolina team will lobby aggressively to grab our money to fund their pet project. Some politicians will fold quickly (as Gov. Cooper already has). But others will understand that a tax dollar spent on a baseball park represents a tax dollar not spent on a core public service, or not available to taxpayers to spend on a good or service of their choice.

Fiscal conservatives should be ready for a long fight. We should block any attempt to use state revenues or regional authorities to subsidize a ballpark. And we should urge our city and county officials not to get distracted by shiny objects like sports franchises. They have far more important issues to work on.

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

Cooper's environmental commission tactics look like 'power grab'

MITCH KOKAI
CONTRIBUTOR



GOV. ROY COOPER has spent much of his time in office complaining about "power grabs" from Republican leaders of the General Assembly.

Some might attach the same label to the Democratic governor's recent actions regarding North Carolina's Environmental Management Commission.

The story starts last August. That's when Cooper vetoed Senate Bill 512. It shifted appointment powers for various state boards and commissions. In most cases, lawmakers took appointments away from Cooper.

Republican lawmakers voted to override the veto in October. The matter could have ended at that point.

Instead Cooper filed a lawsuit. He invited the judicial branch of state government to wade into a political fight between the executive and legislative branches.

The governor argued that disputed portions of SB 512 violated the state's constitution under all circumstances. In other words, his lawsuit challenged the law on its face. Lawyers label that type of claim a facial challenge. State law requires a three-judge Superior Court panel to consider those cases.

A unanimous bipartisan



IMAGE VIA GOV. ROY COOPER'S SOCIAL MEDIA.

three-judge group delivered Cooper a partial victory on Nov. 1. The judges blocked appointment changes to three of five boards Cooper had targeted.

The judges did not apply their injunction to the EMC. Cooper could continue to challenge EMC appointment changes as his lawsuit moved forward, but duly selected representatives of the judicial branch would not block those changes before a trial.

Given that ruling, SB 512 took effect for the environmental group. Two of Cooper's nine appointments to the 15-member board shifted to Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler.

Cooper still had seven appointees, compared to six for state legislators and Troxler's

two. Even with the changes, executive branch appointees outnumbered those of the General Assembly.

The story could have ended there, at least until Cooper's lawsuit headed to trial.

But the governor would not accept that outcome.

The new EMC voted on Jan. 11 to drop a lawsuit against the Rules Review Commission, a body appointed entirely by legislators. The two commissions had squabbled over rules environmental regulators proposed for a chemical called 1,4-Dioxane.

On the same day as the EMC vote, Cooper's lawyers headed back to court. They supplemented their lawsuit with complaints about the vote's impact.

"Control of a working majority of the EMC has been reallocated to Commissioners who do not share the views and priorities of the Governor concerning execution of North Carolina's environmental laws, as evidenced by the EMC's recent vote purporting to dismiss critical litigation protecting the EMC's rulemaking authority," Cooper's lawyers wrote.

"To prevent irreparable harm to the Governor's constitutional obligation to ensure faithful execution of the law, and to preserve the status quo of the subject matter involved until a trial can be had on the merits, a temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction preventing the EMC from dismissing its lawsuit against the North Carolina Rules Review Commission is necessary," the governor's lawyers added.

Rather than returning to the three-judge panel, Cooper's lawyers sought a hearing the same afternoon before a single Wake County judge. The governor's team argued that one judge was appropriate since he now challenged SB 512 as it was applied to the EMC. In other words, his case was no longer a facial challenge.

Despite objections from legislative lawyers, Judge Rebecca Holt granted Cooper's request. Within hours of the EMC's action, the governor successfully enlisted one member of the judicial branch to block a state board vote that bothered him.

All Jan. 11 activity took place outside of the public spotlight. Court orders shortening the public notice for Holt's hearing — and scheduling the hearing itself — appeared publicly the following day. There was nothing typical about the way courtroom action played out.

But more than just the Jan. 11 timeline raises concerns.

Most of us expect members of state boards to base their decisions on facts in front of them, along with expertise they bring to the table. Cooper appears to expect his appointees to vote the way that he dictates.

Why else would he argue that a vote to drop a lawsuit demonstrates that "he has in fact lost control of the EMC," as his lawyers argued, and that "the EMC has exercised its control inconsistent with the Governor's views and priorities"?

Cooper's legal team worked actively to undermine a three-judge panel's decision about EMC appointment changes. His lawyers appeared to use his position as the state's chief executive to short-circuit the normal schedule of deliberate judicial action. Cooper's representatives argued that the governor should have the authority to dictate outcomes of EMC votes.

One might describe this course of action as a power grab.

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

Buc-ee's shows the market at work

JON SANDERS
CONTRIBUTOR



An indelible image of people struggling under socialism is bread lines — people waiting hours, even days, for the bare minimum of food. The lesson they teach about free markets versus socialism is this: Under socialism, you wait for bread. With a free market, the bread waits for you.

Government doesn't know how to make bread. Not bake it; make it — which involves choosing the right land for growing the wheat; planting and nurturing wheat; milling the flour; manufacturing or finding and producing yeast, salt, and sugar, and so forth; getting all those ingredients to market; and then, only at the end of all those processes and more, baking it. A free market sees people with specialized knowledge doing all the separate tasks and subtasks independently.

Adam Smith explained how not knowing how to make bread could result in bread via the profit motive: "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest."

Smith explained that people looking out for their own interests has the byproduct of increasing social welfare (the stated goal of socialism) because in looking out for their own interests, they must look out for others' interest so as to bargain with them: "Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want."

The most successful among us anticipate what you want and offer it to you in order to be more assured you'll give us what we want. The successful will trade



Buc-ee's location in Daytona Beach, Florida

goods and services for your dollars, making you happy, so they can use those dollars to trade for others' goods and services, increasing their own welfare, too. They don't need to know how to produce all those goods and services themselves.

The government opts for orders, overregulation, and incentives

Buc-ee's is a successful gasoline and retail business, and — much to the excitement of many in the community — it is poised to open its first North Carolina gas station in Mebane. Anticipating travelers' needs and offering them what they want is what Buc-ee's does. It combines a very large gas station (Mebane's would feature 120 pumps) with a massive retail store offering groceries, clothing, toys, sundries, and gifts along with many food options, including its famous brisket. Importantly for road-trippers, it is also known for having very clean

bathrooms.

Buc-ee's saw that travelers on long road trips needed not only fuel and food, but also reliably clean facilities and even a way to break the boredom without making a bunch of stops. Buc-ee's does so well that, for many travelers, it is a destination in itself. The market approach to meeting travelers' needs differs from the government approach. Some government leaders (including President Joe Biden and Gov. Roy Cooper) think people shouldn't have the cars they have, because they're gasoline-powered, and prefer they buy electric vehicles instead. They want refueling stations to provide EV recharging ports.

Most importantly, they seek to use the power of government — orders, overregulation, incentives (money taken from taxpayers and given to consumers who do their bidding), and disincentives (laws and regulations making politically unfavored consumer options harder to obtain) — to bring these changes about.

• **Biden seeks to make EV sales reach two-thirds of new automobile sales by 2032, using US Environmental Protection Agency regulations to force the "transition." Cooper wants to make EV sales half of new sales by 2030, using executive orders and hope.**

• **The federal government has already been giving people tax incentives worth \$7,500 to buy EVs. Even so, the New York Times reported that only 5.8% of new car sales — and only 2% of new truck sales — are for EVs. The government blames the lack of consumer interest on a lack of EV charging infrastructure.**

• **The misnamed "Inflation Reduction Act" bestowed highly generous government tax incentives on charging stations and made them retroactive and transferable.**

• **The "Bipartisan Infrastructure Law" of 2022 created the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Formula Program and allocated over \$4 billion to it for funding EV charging infrastructure through 2026. (It will almost certainly be extended.)**

Cooper has described several ways he would use taxpayer dollars to build EV charging stations, not only with state money and NEVI grants, but also with grants "by other federal programs under the BIL and IRA."

Incidentally, it takes around 2–3 minutes to fill a gas-powered car's tank completely. Meaning it takes about as long to drive up, select a fueling station, enter payment information, unscrew the cap, and engage the nozzle as it does to refuel. In stark contrast, what the government calls a "fast" EV charging station takes "30 minutes or so" to get your battery just 80% full (about 100–200 miles of range).

Where government starts by considering only its wants, Buc-ee's and other market competitors (Sheetz, Wawa, etc.) start by considering your wants. So the government doesn't have to regulate, order, or incentivize retail gasoline stations into existence. For those with government's preferred choice in vehicle — including Biden's energy secretary, WRAL, and unfortunate drivers stuck in Chicago's EV charger "car graveyards" — they wait for recharging.

There are plenty of refueling options for gas-powered cars. Gas stations wait for you.

Jon Sanders is director of the John Locke Foundation's Center for Food, Power, and Life.

Why I, a college professor, signed onto Freedom Conservatism

ANDY TAYLOR
CONTRIBUTOR



A FEW MONTHS AGO, I signed Freedom Conservatism's "Statement of Principles." I was eager to join the dozens of lawyers, journalists, think tankers, and academics who had done so. I fear the document's 10 tenets are losing their grip on the American psyche as our politics descend into scorched-earth tribal warfare between progressives and the authoritarian elements on the right. The freedom agenda particularly needs friends now.

As a college professor, I see my endorsement as an important act of inspiration and instruction. Many critics of higher education believe I should remain politically neutral. Professors' intervention in public affairs on issues as varied as transgenderism and the terrorist attack on Israel appear designed to shape the minds of America's next generation, remaking the country as a woke dystopia.

My politics are transparently right-of-center, but my signature invites the armies of left-wing professors in the humanities and social sciences — like my own political science — to divert their fo-



IMAGE BY WILLIAM ZHANG VIA WIKIPEDIA COMMONS.

cus from liberal education to liberal politics. With, at many places and in many disciplines, perhaps 40 progressive and socialist professors for every conservative on the faculty, legitimizing academic participation in politics can only help the left.

But it is because freedom conservatives are so outnumbered on campus that I did this. I believe strongly in free expression and open inquiry; indeed the Free and Open Societies Project I direct at my institution, North Carolina State University, is devoted to it. The way to elevate the intellectual climate and diversify views

is to demonstrate the courage to stand up for ideas. The way to combat the progressive hegemony is not to surmise you can impose neutrality on the politically motivated, but to check their domination and transform college into a true marketplace of ideas.

It may not make me popular, but I think it is important to persuade — indeed inspire — the many students with conservative sensibilities to exercise their liberties. Besides, constructing an argument with logical coherence and empirical evidence to participate effectively in freewheeling debate with adversaries on issues

critical to our future is exhilarating. Keeping your head down until you collect your diploma (or in my case, pension) neither brings personal fulfillment nor prepares you for the rough-and-tumble of the real world.

My signing was also an act of instruction. I was teaching by doing. College students today have little knowledge of the advice the giants of freedom conservatism have given us. As John Stuart Mill argued, you should practice your freedom of thought and not feel forced to conform out of guilt or fear. The only way you can illegitimately harm someone, he added, is physically. Our own James Madison explained we serve a greater good, and protect liberty, when we stand up to rapacious majorities.

Of course, my endorsement of freedom conservatism is itself instructive. The "Statement of Principles" is worthy of a public display of support. I embrace freedom — of conscience and thought, expression and speech, worship and action. I believe government has a role, but it is limited. No group should use state power to bludgeon or expropriate compatriots who oppose them. I see our founding documents — including the Declaration of Independence that Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr.

believed fully captured the American spirit — as a "promissory note."

We should discharge our responsibility and have the confidence to understand our ideas are universal, at home at any time in any place. We need not be defensive or nostalgic, and we should certainly not confine our quintessentially American values to the dustbin of history.

I share Edmund Burke's views about the importance of institutions such as the family, church, and civic organizations. But they should not be exploited as instruments of division, to turn members against nonmembers. They are where we find deep human connection. Freedom conservatives recognize others' humanity and individuality. We do not contrive for them abstract identities to some distant and faceless mass.

That is why I signed the "Statement of Principles." I know there are other professors in the humanities and social sciences who share these values. I invite them to join us, and inspire and instruct their own students.

Andy Taylor is a professor of political science and director of the Free and Open Societies Project at NC State University's School of Public and International Affairs.

Primaries: the ice baths of electoral politics

JEFF MOORE
CONTRIBUTOR



No one seems to like them; the parties endure them; the voting public suffers them; the cynical resent them; and candidates would wish them over yesterday if assured victory. Yet they are necessary as an absolutely critical part of the whole electoral process. We're talking, of course, about primaries.

On March 5, North Carolina will join a bevy of other states holding primary elections for the two major political parties on what's colloquially known as "Super Tuesday," the day when the greatest number of states hold said elections.

Primary election day itself really marks the end of what is likely the most uncomfortable stretch of any electoral calendar. In an era in which politics can be "toxic" to relations in general, primaries turn the conflict into an intra-family affair, a domestic dispute. Family, friends, and neighbors who are usually simpatico in all their ranting and raving now may find themselves diametrically opposed to each other.

"How could he like him?!" one may wonder when confronted with the primary preference from a usually like-minded friend. "Just when you think you know someone, you find out she supports [enter nonpreferred primary candidate here]!"

Competitive primaries are replete with mudslinging, character assassinations, seemingly irreparable infighting, and may-



be even broken friendships. Focused more on active, engaged voters than a general election, primaries often incentivize a race to one end of party extremes or the other. The discomfort doesn't come without reward, however, and the benefits earned from passing through primary season outweigh the relatively truncated stretch of misery. By a lot.

It reminds me of a popular trend that offers a similar setup — definite short term suffering, for enlivening long-term benefits — ice baths — also called "cold-exposure therapy."

Though practiced for millennia in certain parts of the world, the ice bath trend has had quite the spike in popularity with the advent of internet health experts-turned influencers. By now, you've almost certainly either shivered your way through one yourself or know someone who has incorporated the practice into their routine — and won't stop talking about it.

There's lots to talk about.

Modern health scientists now have a granular understanding of how the ancient practice of cold water exposure affects the brain and body to contribute to better health.

To wit, a mere few minutes in uncomfortably cold water increases energy and focus as the brain reacts by producing epinephrine and norepinephrine; enhances your mood by spurring a prolonged release of dopamine; increases metabolism as your body burns calories in overdrive to warm up; and, not to be discounted, builds mental fortitude as you exert disciplined control over deep-seated reflexes telling you very convincingly to, "Get out!"

Even the biggest advocates for cold water therapy will tell you that the end is the best part. That's when the suffering yields to flourishing, the paradox being that you only achieve the latter after enduring the former. Such is life.

And so it is, too, with prima-

ry elections. For all the suffering primary campaign season brings, it also has plenty of benefits. While they may only be felt after the ballot is decided, their genesis is in the depths of the primary campaign. It is there that candidates are beckoned to remove the dressings of party unity, to differentiate themselves as individuals, and to test their mettle in a contest whose results are determined by only the most zealous of judges.

The benefits go double for the electorate, despite (or because of?) the apparent agony that precedes them. In suffering a competitive primary, engaged voters get to exert unmatched influence over what kind of nominee represents their party, the policy issues that are prioritized, and who best puts those policies in play through a general election victory.

It is only after that point that general election candidates, activists, and voters are free to train their politicking toward a



When you lose [a primary election], you either sit and pout somewhere or you go out and help the winner.

- Bob Dole

common target. But as they do, it is with a battle-hardened stance that was earned during the combat of the primary.

Many voters decry the two-party system in the United States for reliably producing what they deem as two bad choices from which to pick a leader. If only there were a third way, a third party, or a proportional system, critics say, then voters could more confidently and accurately cast their votes for representation.

I'd argue most of that impulse can and would be satisfied by a more purposeful overall participation in the suffering that is primary election season. The greener grass of Europe's proportional representation isn't as quite as verdant when one realizes all they have is primaries, so to speak; the final "general election" results are usually decided in the halls of power through backroom coalition building.

So let us embrace the suck. While they promise misery and an undeniable urge to escape for more comfortable environs, voluntary exposure to primary election seasons are good for the mind and body politic. Jump in.

Jeff Moore is deputy editor of Carolina Journal.

Access denied

Carolina Journal reporter denied entry to Biden event

CJ EDITORS

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN visited North Carolina on Jan. 18 to tout the success of "Bidenomics," as evidenced by all the good things happening economically in this state. Naturally, Carolina Journal intended to cover the president's remarks. Unfortunately, our reporter was denied entry.

Why? Event staff gave an explanation that the president's visit to Abbots Creek Community Center in Raleigh was actually a "political event" that was "invite only," not a public one. If this is the case, perhaps he was there more as Candidate Biden, not President Biden.

The rejection was taken in stride by our reporter. After all, Biden's invite-only campaign event remarks were still accessible — they were live-streamed on the White House YouTube channel.

This raises a few questions. Who controls the invitation list for such (non)public campaign events? If Biden's event was an exclusive campaign event, why was it streamed on White House.gov and not JoeBiden.com?



President Joe Biden exiting Air Force One as NC Gov. Roy Cooper waits.

Where is the line drawn between official public events and closed campaign events when it pertains to a visit from the president of the United States of America?

Mind you, Biden's visit was not without impact. On a week-day afternoon, roads around

the event space, a public community center, were closed for hours leading up to and during his remarks. Multiple schools were trapped inside the restricted zone. Students from the local public high school were trapped on buses in traffic for more than

two hours. One private school made the difficult decision to close for the day, instead of subjecting parents to the logistical nightmare that accompanies such a visit.

The shutdown wore on as Biden and Gov. Roy Cooper made planned stops at a fundraiser and at the local Cook Out burger restaurant for ice cream. Traffic diversions were instituted, commerce disrupted.

These costs are understandable when dealing with an official visit from the president of the United States. Does the same hold true for invite-only campaign events that exclude undesirable reporters?

Maybe Biden's campaign team thought to themselves, "When in Rome..." Indeed, Go-Cooper has engaged in this exact practice, repeatedly. Using COVID as an excuse to rely solely on virtual press conferences, the Cooper team controlled who was able to ask questions of the governor. As you might imagine, questions from Carolina Journal reporters were consistently screened out from behind the digital curtain.

Only when the guise of

COVID caution became too obvious a charade to support the practice did Cooper return to in-person press conferences.

Biden's remarks in January focused on jobs "created," infrastructure investments, and "Bidenomics" bringing costs down for Americans. Notably, Biden did not use the term "Bidenomics," likely because it has begun to have a negative association for Americans struggling under the weight of rising costs.

Biden leveraged one of the strongest state economies in the nation, marked by an impressive growth in people and prosperity, one that has been earning accolades nationwide, to tout his own, very different, economic agenda and record.

If we'd been granted access, we may have asked the president, "Does North Carolina's economic success stem from the described success of 'Bidenomics,' or more from a decade-plus of tax reforms, streamlined regulations, and a business-friendly focus... spearheaded by free-market conservatives?"

It's a shame our Carolina Journal reporter didn't get the chance to ask it.

Eliminate licensure to solve 'teacher shortage' and reduce classroom radicalism

DAVID LARSON
OPINION EDITOR



OVER RECENT YEARS, the education establishment has been crying out about a rise in teacher vacancies in classrooms across North Carolina. But things are a bit more complicated.

For example, in The Charlotte Observer's late 2023 article on North Carolina's alleged teacher shortage, it admits:

"School districts opened the school year with 3,584 teaching vacancies, a nearly 20 percent drop from the previous year, according to a survey from the N.C. School Superintendents' Association. But Jack Hoke, the association's executive director, said the drop only occurred because schools hired 1,400 more 'residency license teachers' [those who haven't finished official licensure] than the prior year."

So it turns out the vacancies are being filled at a rapid rate. They are just being filled with people who are not licensed in the traditional way. The article also notes that in the last decade, there has been a 51% drop in enrollment at North Carolina's "traditional teacher preparation programs," largely run through the university system. This means traditionally licensed teachers are going to be in shorter supply going forward, so more "residency license teachers" are likely going to be stepping in.

Many don't want to even consider these new nontraditional teachers as fully teachers, though. In another article from last year, Kris Nordstrom of the NC Justice Center, a progressive nonprofit, said:

"At the beginning of the last school year, North Carolina faced an unprecedented teacher shortage. On the fortieth day of the 2022-23 school year, 5,095 classrooms were vacant. In other words, nearly one in every 18

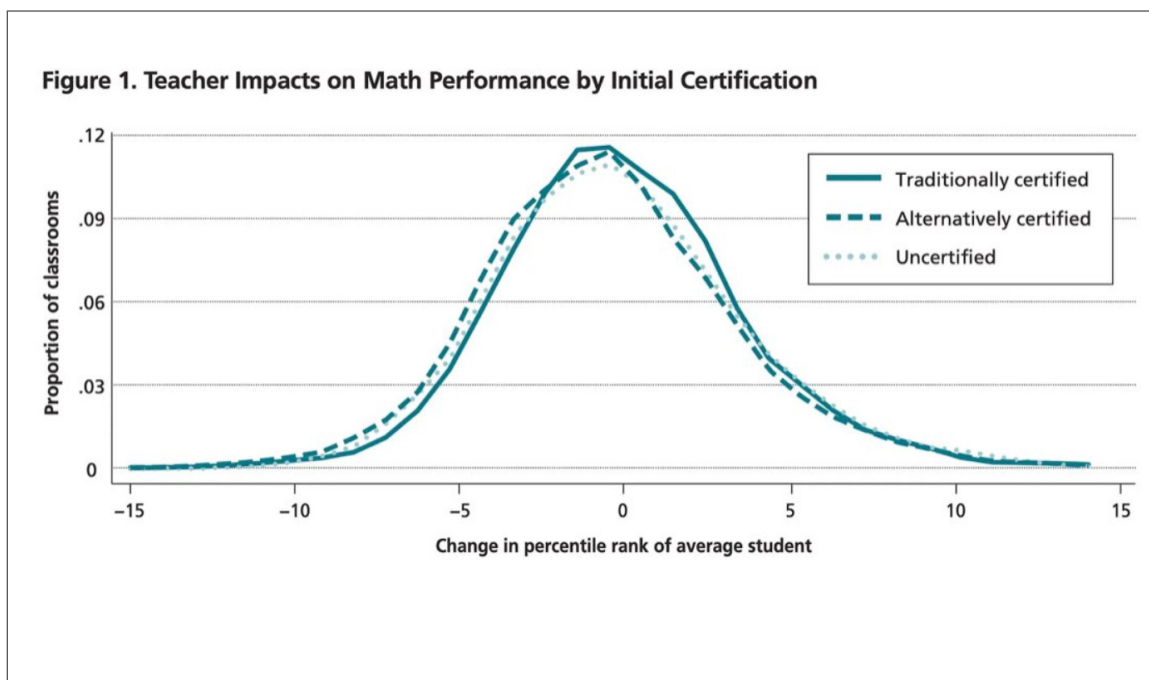


Image shows performance of Los Angeles teachers hired with traditional licenses vs those hired without.

SOURCE: MATTHEW YGLESIAS.

classrooms lacked an appropriately licensed teacher."

You'll notice that in the second sentence it doesn't say they lack teachers, only "appropriately licensed teachers." A footnote at the bottom of the article says, "The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction defines a teacher vacancy as 'an instructional position (or a portion thereof) for which there is not an appropriately licensed teacher who is eligible for permanent employment.'"

That's important information moving forward if you see and hear comments about the teacher shortage crisis. Many of the classrooms have teachers. They just don't have the licensing that the education establishment considers "appropriate."

But does that matter? Bloomberg columnist Matthew Yglesias recently wrote about a Boston University study that found that, after using many unlicensed teachers during the COVID pandemic, unlicensed teachers in Massachusetts had "similar range and levels of effectiveness (as measured by educator evaluation scores and stu-

dent growth percentiles)," similar rates of retention and intent to remain in the profession, and were actually "more racially/ethnically diverse" and better fit to specific district needs when compared to licensed teachers.

Yglesias said this data from Massachusetts matched a similar pre-pandemic study that found almost no difference in performance between licensed and unlicensed teachers in Los Angeles, as seen in the graph above. What it did find was a large difference in pay, favoring those with licenses.

Some readers responded to Yglesias' research by saying getting rid of licensure might not impact student performance, but it would reduce teacher salaries. However, requiring people to take on mountains of college debt and spend four of their most productive years in college just to get a boost in pay (a boost that elected officials could give them anyway) doesn't seem like solid economic reasoning.

So what if North Carolina did away with teacher licensure requirements and let school districts decide who to hire

for themselves? As far as I can tell, the main effect would be that school systems would have much less red tape when hiring and would have more potential candidates — all of this likely leading to fewer vacancies, even if the Department of Public Instruction decides not to measure it that way.

An added benefit of this approach is it could reduce the radicalism and activism by public school teachers that drives many parents to look elsewhere to educate their children. Education schools are notorious for being among the most radical campus departments. The less time future teachers spend in them, the better.

You might assume teacher training mostly consists of lessons on classroom management and learning styles, but there is a lot of activism being inculcated as well. When Republican state Sen. Michael Lee was awarded for bipartisan work in education, the UNC Wilmington School of Education faculty and student body came together to disrupt the proceedings.

A mob of future teachers

tried to ruin the event in any way they could think of, including chanting and staging a walk-out. They even followed the senator and his family to their car afterwards, where they surrounded them screaming profanity. The protest was organized in part by a UNCW professor, Caitlin Ryan, whose area of scholarship focuses on injecting "LGBTQ Inclusive Literacy Instruction in the Elementary Classroom" and "Navigating Parental Resistance" to that work.

In addition to making hiring easier and reducing radicalism, eliminating the necessity for schools of education at universities, by not requiring teacher licensure, could also help free up space in university budgets, allowing them to reallocate resources to other more productive programs.

As a broader point, occupational licensing for most professions is unnecessary and wasteful. It more often serves as a gatekeeping mechanism, which reduces the supply of workers as well as the products and services they would have created.

Of course, there's a good argument for licensing in occupations where there's a high risk of death and injury (to the worker and those they're serving), like for heart surgeons and airline pilots. But even then, do we think any airlines are going to let someone fly their planes without being absolutely certain they've gone through sufficient training? No, and their insurance provider is unlikely to let them.

Most professions, including teaching, can provide on-the-job training, easing people in, testing their strengths, judging their fitness from experience and ability. Evidence seems to suggest that teaching falls into this category. That doesn't mean it's not a difficult or important job. But someone with knowledge of the subject matter and skill in managing children can, according to the Boston University data, successfully teach. And we shouldn't stand in their way.

GOT AN OPINION?

Carolina Journal accepts guest opinion articles from our readers. We cover state politics, economics, law, and culture from a limited-government and free-market perspective but will consider high-quality articles that are relevant contributions to the conversation. Please aim for between 600 and 900 words and send along a one-paragraph bio and a headshot for us to publish the piece under.

Please email any submissions to opinion editor
David Larson | dlarson@carolinajournal.com

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



Trump/Cooper counties are key to victory in 2024

DALLAS WOODHOUSE
CONTRIBUTOR



North Carolina Republicans desperately want to break the Democrats' hold on the governor's mansion and other key Council of State races, including the important attorney general's race. Democrats are hoping to keep these and expand their success. For either side to achieve their goals in 2024, they must improve vote totals in counties that were won by Democrat Gov. Roy Cooper in 2020 but were also won by Republican President Trump in 2020 and/or Republican Ted Budd for US Senate in 2022 — call them “Trump/Cooper voters.”

After beating incumbent Pat McCrory in 2016 by 11,000 votes out of 4.6 million cast (0.22%), Cooper scored a relatively comfortable 51.5% to 47% win over then Lt. Gov. Dan Forest in 2020.

We have noted that one of the key 2024 NC political questions is, “What will Trump/Cooper voters do?” Trump won North Carolina by 1.3%, and Cooper was re-elected as governor 51-47%.

This means roughly 5-6% of voters split their tickets at the top, a common formula for Democrat dominance in races for the governor's mansion over the last half century. Many of those Trump/Cooper voters cast ballots for Republican Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson, too. How these voters lean in the governor's race and other statewide races is likely to be the deciding factor.

These are the nine key counties where this dynamic will be in play:

Nash and Wilson counties

These two counties just east of the Triangle are pretty good at cultivating future Democratic governors.

Many winning governors have come from these two rural eastern North Carolina counties that hug Interstate 95, like:

- Jim Hunt: 1976-1984 & 1992-2000 (Wilson County)
- Mike Easley: 2000-2008 (Nash County)



CJ FILE PHOTO OF GOV. ROY COOPER BY MAYA REAGAN

• Roy Cooper: 2016-2024 (Nash County)

Democrats will likely nominate Attorney General Josh Stein from Orange/Wake County for governor, in a break from picking eastern North Carolina Democrats for governor. Will Stein change the winning formula for Democrats? These two counties will be key.

We have previously noted the importance of Nash County this year. Nash has been closely divided for some time.

In 2016, Trump won the county, with just 84 more votes than Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton.

Nash was one of only two counties that Trump won in 2016 but lost in 2020. Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden came out ahead in Nash County by just 49 votes.

Since that time, the county has seemed to move red.

Budd beat Democrat Cherie Beasley for US Senate, 53% to 46%, as all the key races in Nash went red in 2022.

Nash 2020

- Joe Biden (D) 49.6% over Donald Trump (R) 49.1%
- Roy Cooper (D) 53% over Dan Forest (R) 46%

Nash 2022

- Ted Budd (R) 52% over Cheri Beasley (D) 45%

Wilson 2020

- Joe Biden (D) 51% over Donald Trump (R) 48%

- Roy Cooper (D) 54 % over Dan Forest (R) 44%

Wilson 2022

- Ted Budd (R) 50% over Cheri Beasley (D) 47%

Scotland and Anson counties

Scotland County and neighboring Anson County cover an area where the GOP has made recent gains. Scotland is one of the only counties that voted for Clinton (53-43) in 2016 and switched to Trump in 2020.

Scotland 2020

- Donald Trump (R) 50% over Joe Biden (D) 48%

- Roy Cooper (D) 52% over Dan Forest (R) 46%

Scotland 2022

- Ted Budd (R) 52% over Cheri Beasley (D) 46%

It is important to note that these are small counties with small overall populations. Scotland only had 15,000 voters.

Robinson won the county with 436 more votes for lieutenant governor than Forest received in losing Scotland.

It's not much, but for the GOP to win the governor's mansion they will need to pick up these potentially available 300-500 votes.

Anson County has normally been a Democratic stronghold. In 2016 and 2020 it elected Democrats across the entire ballot. However, Budd won 51-46 in 2022. Is this a trend or a midterm election blip?

Granville County

Granville is just north of Raleigh, with towns like Oxford and Creedmoor. Budd won 53% to 45% in 2022, for a net plus of 1,820 votes over Beasley.

Trump won 2020 by a similar percentage, with a net plus of 2,000 votes over Biden. However, Cooper won the county in 2020 by 345 votes.

Lenoir, Martin, and Pasquotank counties

These three are all small counties in eastern North Carolina that have split the top of the ticket in recent elections.

Pasquotank: Biden won by 62 votes out of nearly 20,000 cast in 2020. Cooper bagged a 612-vote victory that year. However, Budd picked up an 836-vote victory two years later with 6,000 fewer votes cast.

Martin: Another extremely small county. Less than 9,000 votes cast in 2022, in which Budd won by 876.

Trump won by 621 in 2020, but Cooper also won by 123 votes.

Lenoir: There were only 28,000 votes cast in 2020, and Trump won by 985. Cooper also won, but by 302. Budd in 2022 won by 2,580.

New Hanover County

We put this county in a slightly different category than the other, more-rural counties.

New Hanover is the state's largest swing county, as the home of Wilmington, eastern North Carolina's biggest city. It is also one of only two counties that voted Trump in 2016 and Biden in 2020.

In 2020, New Hanover County flipped Democratic after voting Republican in the previous five presidential elections.

In total, 66,138 people in New Hanover voted for Biden, with 63,331 voting for Trump. So 50.2% of the people voted for the Democrat, 48% voted for the Republican, and the remaining 1.8% voted for another candidate.

Not only was New Hanover one of two counties that flipped from red to blue from 2016 to 2020, but it is also one of two North Carolina counties that was red in 2008, Obama's successful run in North Carolina, and blue in 2020.

In 2020, New Hanover split across several major races. Democrat US Senate candidate Cal Cunningham bested US Sen. Thom Tillis by 287 votes, or 0.22%.

While Republican US Rep. David Rouzer won New Hanover 51% to 48%, the county also voted for Cooper (53%) over Forest's 45%. Budd lost in 2022, 49-47%, for a net loss to Beasley of 1,773 votes.

Performing better in these mostly small counties will not guarantee victory on a statewide basis for either party. However, it will be an important piece of the puzzle.

Silent crisis...

continued from PAGE 2

supposed to decrease temporarily to 5.0% by 2027, it will begin an upward trajectory, soaring to a worrisome 10.0% of GDP by 2053. Such levels have been surpassed only during World War II and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The root cause lies in the persistent gap between spending and revenues, with the total deficit exacerbated by mounting interest costs. The primary deficit, excluding interest expenses, remains at 3.3% of GDP in both 2023 and 2053, underscoring the critical role that unchecked government spending plays in driving the alarming growth of the national debt over time.

Picture a family with a \$100,000 annual income, and currently, their credit card debt has skyrocketed to \$122,000. The family's mounting debt is intricately linked to their habit of overspending. However, the family's current trajectory means that, despite making some payments, their credit card debt is increasing by \$5,800 annually.

To afford this mounting financial burden, the family must divert an even more significant portion of their income toward interest payments on their loans, further straining their financial stability and limiting their capacity to invest in their family's future — such as retirement or college savings. Just as this family must grapple with the urgent need to address their spending habits to ensure long-term economic well-being, our nation must do the same.

It is disheartening to note that, despite the severity of the situation, the temporary agreement reached in June 2023 by Republican lawmakers and the White House to lift the nation's debt limit until January 2025 has not been followed by concrete actions addressing the root causes of the crisis. This short-term fix only postpones the inevitable, allowing the debt to continue its relentless ascent.

The Congressional Budget Office's projection that publicly held debt could reach a record 181% of American economic activity by 2053 should set off alarm bells. The lack of a comprehensive, bipartisan strategy to tackle this issue is a testament to the negli-

gence of both major political parties.

But further than the fiscal implications, the skyrocketing national debt poses a significant national security threat due to its economic implications and the alarming concentration of debt in the hands of foreign entities, particularly China. With China holding a substantial \$868.9 billion of US debt, the risk of economic turmoil becomes palpable. If China suddenly decided to dump all its US debt holdings at once, the repercussions would be severe and far-reaching.

Such a move could trigger a rapid spike in American interest rates, causing borrowing costs to surge for the United States. This interest spike would likely lead to a domino effect across financial markets, resulting in a devaluation of the US dollar, which would impact international trade markets in several ways. A weaker dollar would make American exports more competitive while raising prices for imported goods, potentially improving the US trade balance but contributing to even more domestic inflation. Global supply chains and business strategies would shift in response to currency fluctuations, and the risk

of currency wars could emerge as other nations adjust to the changed economic landscape. Additionally, changes in capital flows and potential central bank actions would further shape the dynamics of international trade markets, affecting investors and economies worldwide.

In an era of intense partisanship, it is disconcerting that the national debt crisis is not receiving the attention it deserves. Instead of engaging in meaningful discussions and formulating long-term solutions, politicians seem more inclined to ignore the problem and grapple with each other over the next 30-second soundbite on Fox or MSNBC.

Our national government needs serious people to take on the issues of governing — not endless hearings that achieve nothing, and not an endless list of programs that only we cannot afford.

Last year, I signed the Freedom Conservatism Statement of Principles because the national debt "is an existential threat to the future prosperity, liberty, and happiness of Americans."

Ignoring the national debt crisis is not an option; it is a collective responsibility that transcends party lines. The consequences of



In an era of intense partisanship, it is disconcerting that the national debt crisis is not receiving the attention it deserves. Instead of engaging in meaningful discussions and formulating long-term solutions, politicians seem more inclined to ignore the problem and grapple with each other over the next 30-second soundbite on Fox or MSNBC.

inaction are too severe to be ignored, and the time to address this critical issue is now, before the nation's economic foundation crumbles beneath the weight of its debt.

Donald Bryson is CEO of the John Locke Foundation.

Facts over messaging

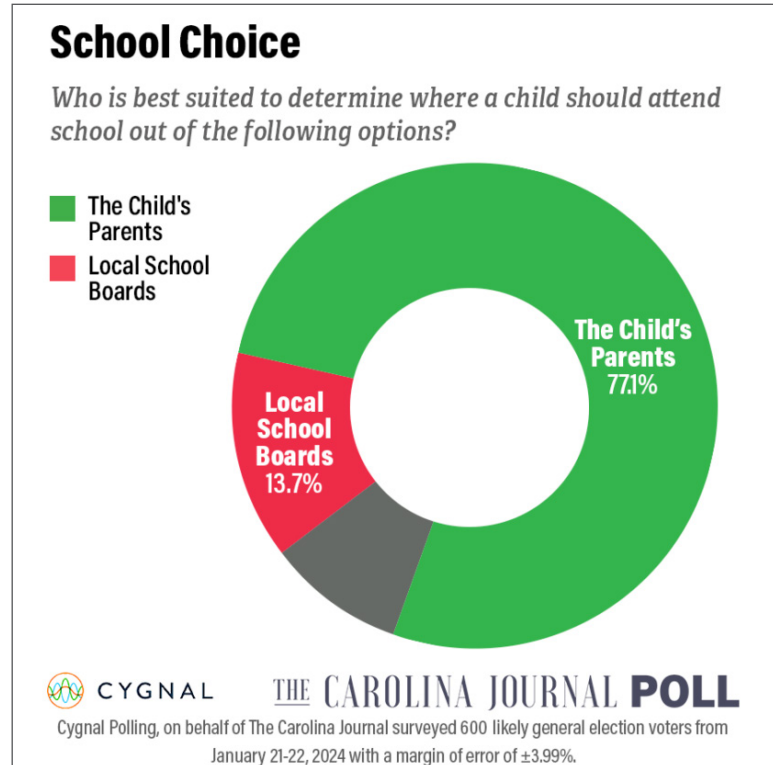
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support was 68.8%. The state's Opportunity Scholarship Program is similarly well-liked, with 64% supporting the program.

We also uncovered some public confusion in one of the state's most popular school choice options, the charter school program. While two-thirds of North Carolinians support charter schools, fewer than half of voters (44.8%) knew that charter schools are public schools, and only 46.7% knew that charter schools cannot charge tuition under state law. Still, 59.1% of people would like more charter schools in their area.

What about the overall management of the education system? Well, we found that 64% of respondents want to elect their state Board of Education. Breaking it down, Republicans are more likely to support this change (73%) than Democrats (57%).

What does this mean in 2024? We asked the same thing. The pages here examine the high-stakes election in 2024, who's running, and what voters are talking about

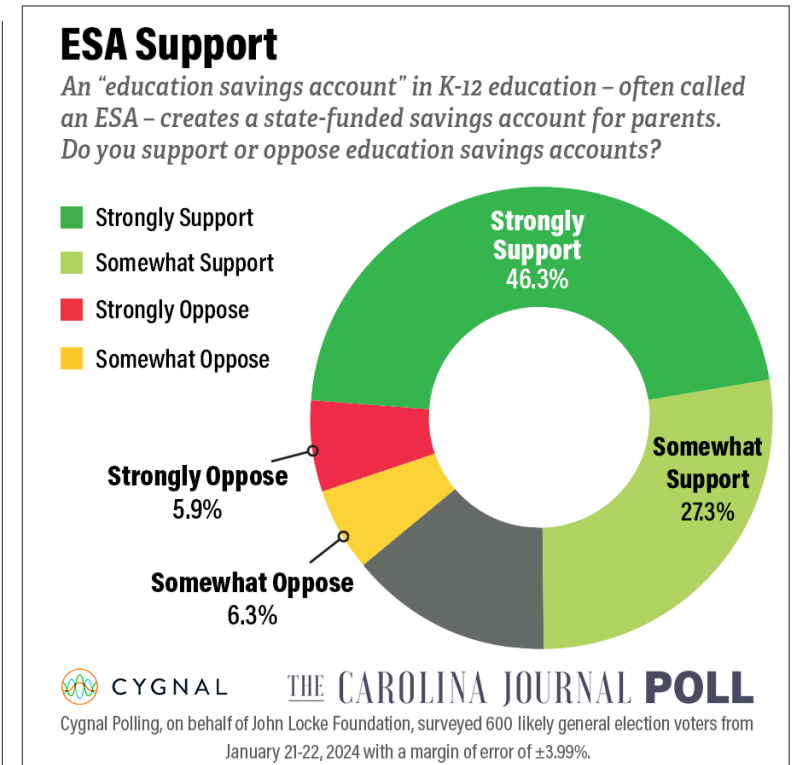


as they head into the primary election on March 5 of this year. The majority aren't happy with the direction of the country as a whole, even though North Carolina itself has enjoyed higher wages, more growth, and more economic stability over the last decade.

The share of voters who believe the country is on the "right

track" has dropped five points from 28.5% in November to 23.5% in January. More than two-thirds of voters believe the United States is on the "wrong track."


Will this be reflected in this year's election? It's likely, and candidates and their teams are working hard to get information and messaging into your hands. We



encourage you to read Carolina Journal for the latest, but also to read other sources of information. Check out what's happening in your local community and who is running for the state legislature and judiciary, read other polls, and weigh the arguments in op-eds of all types. Please add our YouTube show, "The Debrief," to your quiv-

er each week for Carolina Journal's take on the context behind the headlines.


Ultimately, it's the policy that candidates support that should be the focus — not the flash, the messaging, or the money. An informed consumer of news and public policy is an informed voter and the strength of a free nation.



THE

DEBRIEF

THURSDAYS @ 7:30PM

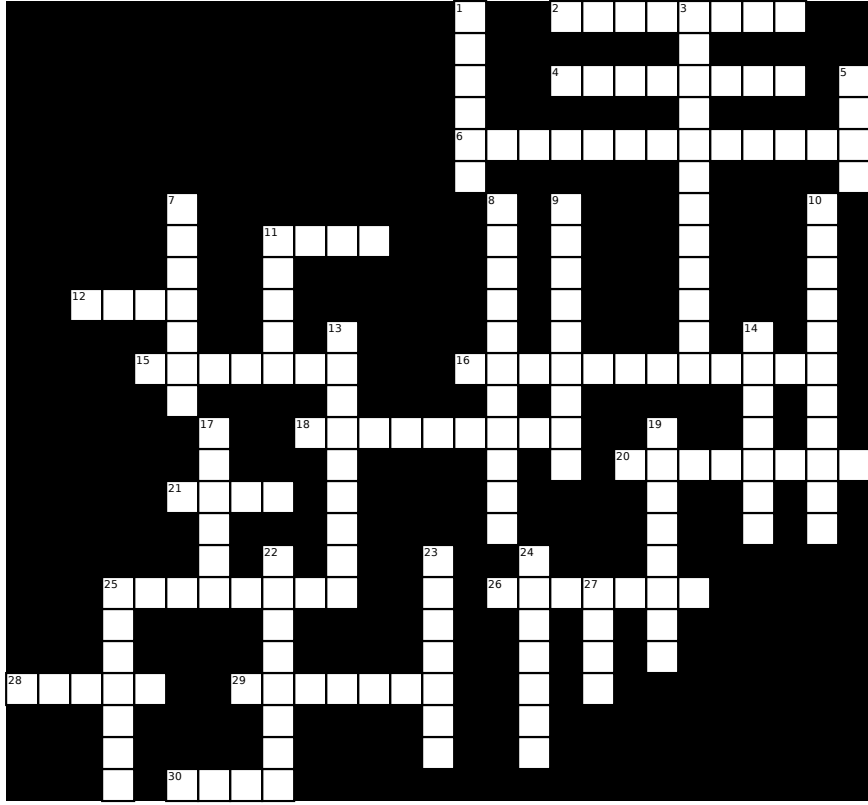


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CAROLINA JOURNAL'S WEEKLY RECAP OF MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS IN STATE POLITICS AND PUBLIC POLICY.

20 CROSSWORDS & CARTOONS

NC HISTORY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 2 Hall of Fame baseball player that hit his first home run in Fayetteville, NC
- 4 Outer Banks island famous for Blackbeard's death
- 6 The last name of the first US President from North Carolina 11 the 11th president, born in Mecklenburg County
- 12 Mascot of the minor league baseball team based out of Durham, NC
- 15 North Carolina pickle company
- 16 Carnivorous plant native to Hampstead
- 18 Theme park on the NC-SC line
- 20 North Carolina state bird
- 21 North Carolina state beverage
- 25 America's largest home
- 26 The capital of North Carolina prior to Raleigh
- 28 North Carolina based snack company that produces the popular "Toast Chee" crackers
- 29 North Carolina island famous for the "Lost Colony" of the 16th century
- 30 North Carolina state mineral

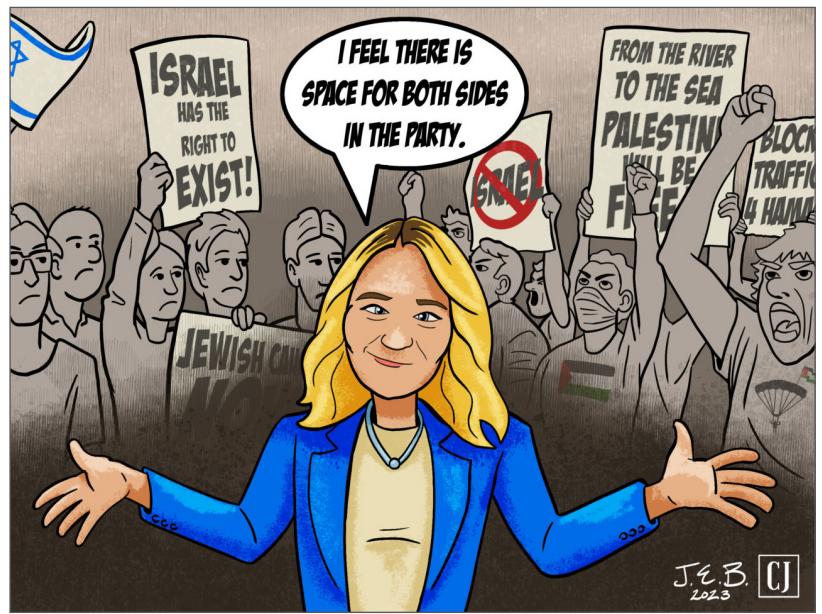
DOWN

- 1 The Charlotte Convention Center is home to what hall of fame?
- 3 North Carolina born race car driver known as 'The King'
- 5 North Carolina state tree
- 7 What number was North Carolina to ratify the Constitution
- 8 North Carolina state fruit
- 9 Home of the 2024 US Open
- 10 North Carolina state vegetable
- 11 1893 New Bern drugstore drink
- 13 Hot sauce originating in North Carolina
- 14 North Carolina state rock
- 17 Last name of the brothers who were "First in Flight" in the Outer Banks
- 19 Mount Airy was the inspiration for this town in Andy Griffith
- 22 North Carolina state flower
- 23 Name of the North Carolina hockey team when it was in Connecticut
- 24 North Carolina based candy company that produces soft, red and white striped peppermints
- 25 Former mascot of the Charlotte Hornets
- 27 Color of North Carolina mountain parkway

Texas Embassy



Picking Sides



Age Verification



Same Clowns

