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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE 03

PREFACE

PAGE 04

MEDICAID EXPANSION: CRUEL, NOT COMPASSIONATE, PART I
MEDICAID EXPANSION: CRUEL, NOT COMPASSIONATE, PART II

BY BRIAN BALFOUR

PAGE 14

*SCHOOL CHOICE IN NC: EMPOWERING PARENTS AND CONFRONTING THE LEFT'S
WORK TO RESTRICT EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS, PART I*
HOW CONSERVATIVES CAN DEFEAT THE LEFT'S WAR ON SCHOOL CHOICE, PART II

BY BOB LUEBKE, PHD

PAGE 24

THE MANY VICTIMS OF ABORTION EXPANSION

BY BROOKE MEDINA

PAGE 29

THE MINIMUM WAGE MYTH

BY BOB LUEBKE, PHD

PAGE 36

ELECTIONS IN CRISIS, PART I
ELECTIONS IN CRISIS, PART II

BY ANDY JACKSON, PHD

PAGE 43

COOPER'S FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PLAN, PART I
COOPER'S FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PLAN, PART II

BY BOB LUEBKE, PHD

PAGE 50

POVERTY, PART I
POVERTY, PART II

BY BRIAN BALFOUR

PAGE 55

LIGHT RAIL: TERRIBLY EXPENSIVE AND INEFFICIENT

BY BRIAN BALFOUR

PAGE 58

THE PUSH FOR CALIFORNIA-STYLE GUN CONTROL IN NORTH CAROLINA

BY RAY NOTHSTINE

INTRODUCTION

A little over two years ago, the Civitas Institute created a series of articles to spotlight what the Left *really* wants for North Carolina.

Acknowledging that the Left has been a minority voice in the state legislature since 2011 the project nevertheless recognized that our state was only one election away from once again seeing the Left back in control. This work is a grim reminder of the harmful policies that make up the political agenda of the increasingly radical left in North Carolina.

Who or what is the Left? For our purposes, the Left consists of individuals or organizations who often espouse progressive ideals. The Left advocates for more state control and less individual freedom. These are powerful forces at work that stand in opposition to many of the ideals and freedoms articulated in the Constitution. Rather than working to enhance individual freedom, the Left is dedicated to creating an administrative state, so that every area of life is under the control of the government.

Civitas opposes such beliefs and actions. These ideals and efforts stand in stark opposition to our founding; which emphasizes natural rights, individual freedom, the importance of religion, and limited government, whose powers derive from the consent of the governed. It's why we continually fight against this worldview.

This fight never ends. The 2019 legislative session proved our warnings to be correct. That's why we've created Wrong Way NC.

Medicaid expansion, limiting school choice, as well as increasing the minimum wage were all on the Left's radar. Meanwhile, our opponents continue to fight against sensible abortion restrictions and limit the right of citizens to self-defense, while the 2018 election season underscored the importance of getting election laws right to protect the integrity of our elections.

The articles included in Wrong Way NC were written in 2017 and 2018 but remain as relevant as ever. Where appropriate, articles have been updated with references to specific bills introduced in the 2019-2020 legislative session.

As the 2020 election rapidly approaches, there is no time for conservatives to become complacent. The Left is telegraphing their agenda and what big-government policies they will impose on North Carolinians.

Wrong Way NC equips grassroots conservatives with a clear description of what the Left really wants for North Carolina, along with persuasive and fact-filled arguments as to why these policies are wrong for the Tar Heel State. We hope you find these materials helpful as we work to make North Carolina a better place.

MEDICAID EXPANSION: CRUEL, NOT COMPASSIONATE; PART 1

BY BRIAN BALFOUR

COVERAGE DOES NOT EQUAL ACCESS TO CARE

Gov. Roy Cooper and other advocates would lead you to believe that Medicaid expansion would provide low-income North Carolinians with top-notch medical care, create tens of thousands of jobs, and magically be paid for by “someone else.”

The reality is quite the opposite. Medicaid expansion would:

- Condemn low-income citizens to an already over-crowded system with little to no access to actual medical care
- Supply inferior care and poorer health results to those already enrolled in Medicaid
- Crowd out Medicaid resources for the needier in favor of childless, healthy adults
- Cost North Carolina thousands of jobs
- Come with a hefty price tag for North Carolina, and increase the national debt
- Trap more people in poverty
- Make healthcare more expensive for everybody

WHAT THE LEFT WANTS

One of the long-held goals of the Left in North Carolina has been to expand Medicaid as provided for in Obamacare. Medicaid is a government program jointly funded by federal and state governments that pays for the medical bills of enrollees. Medicaid recipients consist primarily of low-income households, pregnant women and people with disabilities.

Gov. Roy Cooper’s veto of the legislatively-approved FY 2019-20 state budget was largely due to its lack of Medicaid expansion – an issue Cooper has arguably elevated to his top priority.

Two bills introduced during the 2019 legislative session, [HB 5](#) and [SB 3](#), and both entitled Close the Medicaid Coverage Gap, constitute the latest effort to make those goals law.

The basic provisions of these bills include expanding the state’s Medicaid program to everyone age 19 to 65 not currently eligible for Medicaid earning up to 133 percent of the federal poverty level. The bulk of the expense of expansion would be paid for by the federal government, with most of the state’s cost supposedly to be paid for by a hospital tax.

Fortunately, these bills never so much as saw the light of day in their respective legislative committees. But North Carolinians need to continue to recognize that the Left has not given up on this idea. Expanding Medicaid would have disastrous consequences for those it purports to help, and the state of overall healthcare in North Carolina.

COVERAGE DOES NOT MEAN ACCESS TO CARE

According to estimates provided by [Cooper's budget proposal](#), Medicaid expansion would add close to another 630,000 people onto the already over-crowded program by 2021. The goal of expanding Medicaid to hundreds of thousands of North Carolina citizens is sold as a compassionate way to provide access to medical care for low-income families. The reality, however, is that new enrollees would find access to little more than overcrowded waiting rooms – at best.

Medicaid rolls in North Carolina have ballooned from about 1 million in 2003 to roughly [2.1 million today](#). Adding another 630,000 recipients would push the program over 2.7 million enrollees and mark more than 1.7 million new Medicaid patients in just fifteen years.

How would these changes impact the current Medicaid program?

All this would take place when the number of physicians accepting Medicaid patients is dwindling. According to state Medicaid Annual reports, from 2003 to 2019, the number of physicians enrolled as Medicaid providers plummeted by more than 10,000, from 36,869 to 26,363, a drop of 28 percent.¹

Imagine *adding* the equivalent of the entire population of Durham and Cumberland counties combined to a group of people already fighting over a shrinking pool of doctors.

Making matters worse, a [2012 article in Health Affairs](#) found that one-fourth of North Carolina's physicians will not take new Medicaid patients.

In short, the dwindling supply of doctors is already struggling to meet the demand of the growing ranks of Medicaid enrollees. Expansion would only make things far worse.

The doctor shortage is especially acute in rural areas, where the concentration of Medicaid enrollees is even heavier, making for even lower doctor to population ratios.

This is not politics or ideology – this is simple math. Medicaid expansion in North Carolina would not provide access to medical care to the new enrollees, it would simply give them a Medicaid card with little to no hope of actually seeing a doctor when they are sick.

For example, this [2014 USA Today](#) article looked at the impact in Reno from Nevada's Medicaid expansion. Nevada was one of 26 states to expand Medicaid in 2014, and the article notes that

“many new enrollees have been frustrated by the lack of providers willing to see them,” and that “(p)hysicians and clinics that treat the poor say they've been overwhelmed by new patients.” As Chuck Duarte, the state's former Medicaid chief and director of the region's largest community health center, noted, “We are struggling to keep up with demand for care.”

Research also shows that Medicaid patients – especially children – have far longer wait times to see a doctor or specialist and are more likely to be turned away for treatment by physicians. Trouble finding a regular physician leads Medicaid patients to utilize the highly expensive emergency room for non-emergent care at a higher rate than the uninsured. As one Reno Medicaid enrollee noted in the USA Today article: *“I love it on Medicaid because now I can go the emergency room when I need to and don't have to worry about the bill,”*

An [Asheville Citizen-Times](#) report reviewed the RAND Corporation study showing that emergency room visits are on the rise. The article continued: “It’s often hard for patients on Medicaid-managed care plans to get appointments with primary care providers, with median waits of two weeks, though more than a quarter waited a month or more, leaving them with few options besides the ER, according to the American College of Emergency Physicians. The group also pointed to the nationwide physician shortage.”

“America has severe primary care physician shortages, and many physicians will not accept Medicaid patients because Medicaid pays so inadequately,” said its president, Dr. Michael Gerardi. “Just because people have health insurance does not mean they have access to timely medical care.” (emphasis added)

If the radical Left gets its way and as many as 630,000 more people are stuffed onto North Carolina’s Medicaid rolls, a big question remains unanswered: Who will these people see to get care? Medicaid enrollees already struggle to access care in a timely manner. Imagine how much worse the problem will be when 630,000 more people are added to the program.

The bottom line is this: those advocating for Medicaid expansion want to condemn low-income people into an already overcrowded system that is simply incapable of providing adequate medical care. That’s not compassionate – that’s cruel.

MEDICAID PROVIDES POOR HEALTH RESULTS

Due in no small part to the extremely poor access to care, health outcomes for Medicaid enrollees are subpar.

As Steve Anderson, the Kansas budget director from 2010 to 2013 and former board member in the hospital industry pointed out in [this article](#), “Any discussion of Medicaid should begin with its track record on patient health. On that score, Medicaid is an abject failure.”

“Medicaid recipients consistently fare poorly on medical access and outcomes. Their access to doctors and specialists is significantly lower than those with private insurance. Their death rate in hospitals following surgery is twice as high. And children on Medicaid have much longer waits to see doctors, along with a higher chance of being turned away by health care providers.”

Moreover, a 2011 [groundbreaking study in Oregon](#) showed Medicaid enrollees don’t experience any better health outcomes than the uninsured, and often times experience even worse outcomes.

The study examined Medicaid expansion in Oregon, comparing outcomes for people who received coverage versus a control group that did not have health insurance. It found some limited benefits of Medicaid enrollment, like reduced rates of depression. But in terms of overall health outcomes, there was no difference between the Medicaid group and the control group in terms of blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes, or obesity – all indicators that should have improved over the span of the study.

If the goal of Medicaid is providing better health care to the poor, the evidence suggests it is failing miserably, and the failure comes with a huge price tag.

EXPANSION CROWDS OUT CARE FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE

A [2012 study by the Urban Institute](#) examined the demographic makeup of the uninsured that would be newly eligible for Medicaid under Obamacare's expansion. Nationally, about 4 of every 5 newly eligible for Medicaid would be a working age adult with no dependent children. In North Carolina, that figure is more than 3 of every 4 newly eligible adults.

Furthermore, according to the [Obama administration's own Department of Justice](#), nearly 1 in 3 of those who become newly eligible for Obamacare's Medicaid expansion would have had previous time served in prison or jail.

In other words, the majority of people who would be covered under Medicaid expansion in North Carolina would be healthy, childless adults of working age or ex-cons.

This new group is who would be competing for care – from an exceedingly short supply of doctors --- with the traditional Medicaid population of poor children, pregnant women and the disabled.

And because the federal government would pay for a higher percentage of the cost of the [newly eligible under expansion](#) compared to the traditional Medicaid population, states would favor directing resources to the newly eligible population over the most vulnerable populations.

Part 2 of this article will examine the rest of the negative consequences of Medicaid expansion.

ENDNOTES

1 Figure taken from Medicaid Annual Reports for FY 2003 and FY 2019. Available online at: <https://medicaid.ncdhhs.gov/reports/annual-reports-and-tables>

MEDICAID EXPANSION: CRUEL, NOT COMPASSIONATE; PART 2

BY BRIAN BALFOUR

EXPANSION WOULD COST TENS OF THOUSANDS OF JOBS, DRIVE UP HEALTH-CARE COSTS AND TRAP MORE IN POVERTY

[In Part 1 of this article](#), we explored several of the negative consequences which would arise if North Carolina decides to expand Medicaid per Obamacare. Part 2 will discuss still more damage that expansion could impose and conclude with several alternative policies and options to provide better affordable coverage and care for low-income North Carolinians.

EXPANSION WOULD COST NORTH CAROLINA TENS OF THOUSANDS OF JOBS

Desperate because their past attempts to expand Medicaid have failed, progressives a few years ago began advancing the “Medicaid expansion will create jobs” canard to try to broaden support for expansion of this costly entitlement.

Supporters were emboldened largely by two studies. One [report](#), produced by George Washington University researchers, declared that North Carolina could create 43,000 jobs in five years under Medicaid expansion. That study was largely echoed by a [January 2013 study](#) produced by the North Carolina Institute of Medicine (NCIOM) that came to similar conclusions.

Small problem: The assumptions built into the studies claiming Medicaid expansion would create jobs don’t square with reality. Rather, the facts show that expansion would cost North Carolina tens of thousands of jobs.

The job growth claims in the studies mentioned above are based on the state’s “drawing down” additional federal funds due to Medicaid expansion. As the GWU report describes, “Since most of the cost of a Medicaid expansion would be borne by the federal government, expansion would result in billions of dollars in additional federal funding flowing into North Carolina. These funds will initially be paid to health care providers, such as hospitals, clinics or pharmacies, as health care payments for Medicaid services.”

The income received by health care providers is then spent on suppliers (such as medicine, medical supplies, etc.) and in their community on goods and services such as groceries, clothes and movies. The increased economic activity, according to the theory, would create more jobs.

We’ll leave aside for now the negative impacts from our already deeply indebted federal government having to borrow billions more to fund the Medicaid expansion.

The fatal flaw in these studies is the methodology. In order to “draw down” federal Medicaid dollars, actual medical services need to be provided to Medicaid patients. It is only when doctors actually treat Medicaid patients that

the federal government pays those providers for the services.

And this is where the methodology fails. As noted [previously in Part 1](#), North Carolina's Medicaid system is already overcrowded, with a drastically increasing number of patients chasing fewer doctors.

There is simply no capacity for doctors and other providers to treat an additional 630,000 Medicaid patients. And if you think this massive shift of patients into the Medicaid program will attract more doctors to become Medicaid providers, think again. Across the state, there is a general doctor shortage, and thus doctors currently not seeing Medicaid patients are already at their limits and thus would not have the capacity to take on Medicaid patients.

Indeed, a [2011 survey by the Association of American Medical Colleges](#) found that only 15 states have fewer primary care physicians per capita than North Carolina.

[As reported in 2014 by WRAL](#), "A survey this year by The Physicians Foundation found that 81 percent of doctors describe themselves as either over-extended or at full capacity, and 44 percent said they planned to cut back on the number of patients they see, retire, work part-time or close their practice to new patients."

Such extreme supply constraints tell us that if North Carolina were to expand Medicaid, the newly enrolled would have great difficulty actually seeing a doctor. Coverage will not equal access.

If a new enrollee in the already overcrowded Medicaid program doesn't have access to care, then there will be no services provided. With no service provided, no federal dollars are "drawn down" to Medicaid providers. Many Medicaid patients will either not be able to receive services, or be relegated to the emergency room – and ER's are not ready to handle the influx of patients either (more on that below). The premise behind the studies purporting to show job creation is unsupportable.

But that's not all. Research, and common sense, tell us that expanding Medicaid will also reduce participation in the workforce, resulting in a net loss of jobs.

Studies by the National Bureau of Economic Research, the Congressional Budget Office, and university economists all find that expanding Medicaid eligibility discourages work and is associated with a decrease of jobs. Based partly on this research, the Foundation for Government Accountability [estimates Medicaid expansion could cost North Carolina up to 94,000 jobs.](#)

Academic research on states that have expanded Medicaid [finds Medicaid expansion causing decreases in employment](#) as well.

MEDICAID EXPANSION WOULD BE UNAFFORDABLE

Under expansion, the Federal government would fund 90 percent of the costs of newly eligible Medicaid enrollees.

Even with the feds picking up most of the tab, the price tag for North Carolina's proposed Medicaid expansion would be steep, according to language in [a 2017 bill to expand Medicaid.](#)

The federal share for expansion is projected to be \$3.5 billion per year, with the state portion amounting to \$341 million.

But if the recent past is any indicator, the actual costs will be far higher than that. As reported in 2015 at [Ohio-Watchdog.org](#):

Expanding Medicaid to working-age Ohioans with no kids and no disabilities was supposed to cost \$2.56 billion in its first year and a half.

So much for that.

Kasich underestimated the cost of the first 18 months of his Obamacare expansion by roughly \$1.5 billion. Enrollment was almost 600,000 at the end of June, compared to [Kasich's projection of 366,000](#).

Ohio's Obamacare expansion has cost far more than expected because enrollment and per-member costs have both rocketed past expectations.

Similarly, expansion enrollment [exceeded projections](#) by 322 percent in California, by 276 percent in New York, and by 134 percent in Kentucky.

The state portion of expansion, according to the proposed legislation, would mostly be paid for by a hospital tax – a cost most likely passed along to patients.

Furthermore, there is no guarantee the federal government will cover its end of the costs as promised. With the national debt and unfunded liabilities [exceeding \\$100 trillion](#), the wisdom of relying on federal funds is questionable. Indeed, any additional federal funds required to pay for North Carolina's Medicaid expansion will necessarily add to the national debt.

Add to that the uncertainty over federal funding for Medicaid in federal budget proposals, and the reliance on such substantial federal support for expansion is on shaky ground at best. Even a small drop in federal support could impose substantial additional financial pressure on the state budget.

MEDICAID EXPANSION WOULD STRENGTHEN THE POVERTY TRAP

Like so many government welfare programs, Medicaid expansion would serve to steepen the “welfare cliff.” This is an effect whereby – on the margins – people face losing valuable government benefits if they choose work. Accepting work, or more hours, or even a promotion, would actually make them financially worse off.

The net impact is more people deciding not to work for fear of losing the benefits, causing higher unemployment. Moreover, some people may choose not to pursue higher paying jobs that they may otherwise be qualified for because the higher income would render them ineligible for government benefits that are more valuable than the pay raise.

Such perverse incentives serve to trap people in poverty. When confronted with a decision that makes them financially worse off, many rationally choose against work or a higher paying job. Unfortunately, the longer they

remain unemployed or opt to forgo a higher paying job due to these short-term decisions, the more difficult their prospects are for future career advancement.

This vicious cycle ends up trapping many people in poverty.

MEDICAID EXPANSION DRIVES UP HEALTHCARE COSTS

Supporters of Medicaid expansion have argued that expanding Medicaid coverage would help save money because the formerly uninsured would no longer go to the emergency room for non-emergency situations. But [the Oregon study](#) (first referenced in Part 1 of this article) concluded that Medicaid participants were actually more likely than non-insured people to go to the emergency room. Over the course of the study, there was a 40 percent increase in visits to the emergency room, and a 25 to 35 percent increase in total spending on enrollees.

Moreover, a study [published in 2017 in the Annals of Emergency Medicine journal](#) concluded that emergency room “use per 1,000 population increased by 2.5 visits more in Medicaid expansion states than in nonexpansion states,” and that increases in such visits were largest for “states with the largest changes in Medicaid enrollment.”

Unfortunately, ER’s are not prepared for this new influx of Medicaid patients. A 2015 survey by the [American College of Emergency Physicians](#) found that “70% of member physicians believe their emergency department is not adequately prepared for potentially substantial increases in patient volume.”

New Medicaid patients are more likely to go to the ER than even the uninsured. Because they can’t find a primary care physician that will see them, Medicaid enrollees have no other options to seek care. And because someone else is paying most of the bill, Medicaid enrollees are insulated from the ER’s high costs, unlike the uninsured. Greater use of the more expensive ER drives up overall healthcare costs.

Also, Medicaid [underpays doctors](#). Providers have to increase their rates on privately insured patients to remain profitable. As private insurance plans become more expensive, more people become uninsured, driving more and more of them to Medicaid. The vicious cycle is self-perpetuating.

THE CONSERVATIVE ALTERNATIVE

Medicaid expansion is untenable. It would produce negative effects on those it claims to help, drive up healthcare costs for all North Carolinians, and ultimately make healthcare unaffordable.

So, what are some preferable alternatives to ensure low-income North Carolinians have access to affordable medical care?

- *Reform Medicaid to provide more and better options.* Fortunately, state [legislation passed in 2015](#) will do just that. The plan would change Medicaid from a fee-for-service program to one in which insurance companies are paid on a capitated per-person basis. Companies compete for Medicaid enrollees and offer differing coverage options, providing patients with more choice than the current one-size-fits-all program. Another advantage is that risk of cost overruns would be shifted from the taxpayer to the insurance companies. Provider networks would also be formed, to ensure more complete, patient-centered care. The plan follows similar reforms in Florida, Louisiana and Kansas. [The Foundation for Government Accountability reports](#) that Florida’s reforms resulted in \$1 billion annual savings, with Louisiana enjoying savings of

3.5 percent and Kansas 5 percent. North Carolina's DHHS projects about [\\$400 million in savings](#) in the first five years of implementation. Unfortunately, due to Gov. Cooper's veto of a state budget and a bill that would have funded the transformation, it is being [delayed indefinitely](#).

- *Revise long-term care options to curb costs.* Long-term care is one of the largest cost drivers of North Carolina's Medicaid system. Nursing facility care for the elderly costs the Medicaid program [nearly \\$1 billion per year](#), virtually the same amount as total inpatient costs and only behind prescription drugs and physician payments as the largest Medicaid expenditure. Some ways to curb long-term costs include:
 - Lower the exemption threshold. Medicaid exempts significant amounts of wealth and assets when calculating eligibility. Doing so would ensure that asset-rich people don't crowd out care from the most needy.
 - Educate citizens about the state income tax credit for the purchase of private long-term care insurance. Reenacted in 2007, this credit amounts to 15 percent of the premium costs of long-term care. The credit may not exceed \$350 and applies to married couples earning less than \$100,000, or single filers earning less than \$60,000. The current credit could be improved by increasing it to 20 percent (as in New York), or increasing the maximum amount allowed to \$500 (as in Maryland). Increasing the tax credit would be a more affordable option than paying for future long-term care costs.
- *Create "flexible benefits" insurance – i.e., customized plans that offer families coverage that best suits their needs.* Low-income residents who don't qualify or prefer not to enroll in Medicaid need affordable insurance options. In the health insurance industry, state governments each have a set of services that insurance providers must include in all plans. These state mandates are in addition to the services required by Obamacare. North Carolina [imposes 56 such mandates](#), more than all but 15 states in the country. Mandates add to the already skyrocketing cost of health insurance. NC could pass legislation to allow for flexible plans that allow customers to select coverages that best meet their individual needs. Such options could put health insurance premiums once again within reach of many more North Carolinians.
 - Basic, catastrophic insurance plans would be especially attractive to young people with few health needs. Drawing in more young, healthy people into the state's health insurance pool would help drive down premiums for everyone.
- *Permit families to purchase less expensive, out-of-state health insurance plans.* Another reason health insurance is so expensive in North Carolina is because the state does not permit families and individuals to purchase out-of-state health insurance. Allowing access to out-of-state plans will not only enable more North Carolinians to purchase insurance, but also lead to lower prices for in-state plans because the expanded market would end the state's insurance monopoly. Unfortunately, because of minimum coverage requirements under Obamacare, there is less price variance on health insurance between states. However, these changes would still offer some premium relief that would certainly grow if Obamacare is repealed.
- *Eliminate Certificate of Need Laws.* Certificate of Need laws (CON) force medical care providers to get permission from the state government to expand their facilities, introduce new procedures, and purchase new equipment to provide better service.

[This law](#) restricts the amount of medical care options available for patients, limits competition and drives up costs to patients. Placing strict constraints on the supply of any good or service will inevitably drive up its costs.

CON laws are outdated and need to be repealed.

- *Scope of Practice.* North Carolina has an acute health care provider shortage in its rural areas. In a January 2018 meeting of the [Committee on Access to Healthcare in Rural North Carolina](#), experts revealed that in North Carolina, 20 counties do not have a pediatrician; 26 counties do not have an OB-GYN; and 32 are without a psychiatrist. Moreover, 70 of 80 rural counties in NC are currently designated “medical deserts” for their lack of primary care availability.

Current North Carolina law restricts the scope of care that registered nurse practitioners, advanced practice registered nurses, and physician assistants can provide, while also requiring a certain level of supervision by a licensed physician.

With so few licensed physicians choosing to practice in rural areas, laws restricting the ability of highly-trained medical care providers to supply much-needed care are devastating to rural populations.

Freeing health care providers to perform many of the basic evaluation and treatment functions — currently limited to physicians — would drastically improve rural populations’ access to needed care.

SCHOOL CHOICE IN NC: EMPOWERING PARENTS AND CONFRONTING THE LEFT'S WORK TO RESTRICT EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS

BY BOB LUEBKE

- Educational options for children have expanded greatly in the past two decades
- As school choice has grown, opponents of choice have insisted that choice weakens schools and siphons resources from the public schools

The growth of school choice in North Carolina is one of the most significant educational developments of the past quarter century. Today, nearly one in five students opts out of traditional public schools and enrolls in public charter, private, home school or online schools.¹ Experts believe those numbers will continue to grow. How big has the increase been? Between 2008 and 2019, the number of students attending public charter, private or home schools in North Carolina increased from 200,114 to 356,047, an increase of approximately 78 percent.²

MEETING A NEED AND GROWTH

The modern origins of this expansion can be traced to several developments. In 1996, North Carolina House Speaker Harold Brubaker and Senate President Mark Basnight reached a compromise to allow for the creation of 100 public charter schools; one for each of North Carolina's 100 counties. In 2010, the North Carolina General Assembly lifted the cap on charter schools. North Carolina currently has 196 charter schools enrolling over 110,000 students.

In 2013, North Carolina passed the Opportunity Scholarship Program, which provides means-tested financial aid to low-income students for use towards private school tuition. In 2015 the program enrolled about 1,200 students. By 2019, enrollment in the Opportunity Scholarship Program surpassed 12,000 students statewide. In addition, parents of special needs students in North Carolina can choose to enroll their child in the Disabilities Scholarship Program or the Personal Education Savings Account Program. When we consider the growth of these programs it becomes apparent that few states have done as much over the past quarter century to expand school choice as North Carolina.

Parental choice is the mechanism whereby parents are empowered to decide how and where their children are educated. School choice programs are premised on a single truth: parents are best suited to decide their child's educational needs. Many parents often consciously make job or housing decisions based on school quality and location. But not all parents are able to make those choices for a myriad of reasons. A school may not be the best fit for the academic or social needs of the child or may not affirm the values of the parents. Even a good or higher quality school is not a great fit for every student. Unfortunately, too many families lack the resources to send their child to a school other than one that is struggling.

Parental choice has grown because it fulfills these needs. Parents want the ability to make choices regarding their child's education. A January 2020 Civitas Poll asked, "In your opinion, who is best suited to decide where a child

should attend school?” Seventy-six percent of respondents said that a child’s parent or guardian were best suited to decide; only 8 percent of respondents said the government should decide.⁴

OPPOSITION IN NORTH CAROLINA

Parental choice is a message that most of North Carolina embraces. However, as parents of all backgrounds have come to enjoy the freedom to choose the best educational option for their children, the voices of opposition to school choice have grown ever louder. Whereas proponents see school choice as empowering parents, opponents view school choice as unwarranted competition for scarce resources that leads to a weakening of the public schools. They often view this as an attack on American ideal of the common school, the primary vehicle for the teaching of democratic ideals to our children.

It is interesting however, that for a political organization that claims it fights for the underprivileged and disadvantaged, progressives tend to align themselves with the interests of the educational system – not the interests of students – and more often than not oppose school choice.

It is not difficult to find outspoken opposition to school choice in North Carolina. The rhetoric is heated. As far back as 2008, Rob Schofield of NC Policy Watch was telling other progressives that they should oppose parental choice because it constitutes an all-out assault on public education.

These groups [advocates for parental choice] and individuals are committed to a long-term siege against the public schools in which they intend to push the system to a tipping point – a place at which the traditional model of public education will no longer be sustainable and the “private free market” approach will take its place.⁵

During the floor debate over the Opportunity Scholarship Program – a program to grant vouchers up to \$4,200 to eligible poor and middle-income students to attend a private school – then Representative Rick Glazier (D-Fayetteville) – asked others to oppose vouchers because “public education is one place in our country that remains the place we are united under one set of values.”⁶ Glazier said vouchers will weaken public education and undermine opportunity for the vast majority. Vouchers are “creating a second education system when we can’t even fund the first.”⁷

Disdain for school choice programs runs deep among progressives and other big government proponents. The 2016 Democratic Party Platform highlights the party’s opposition to charter schools and vouchers when it says:

We oppose the implementation of private and religious school voucher programs. Such programs harm our traditional public schools by diluting the financial support for those institutions, making our system less socio-economically diverse and encouraging families to abandon the public-school system that serves everyone. We oppose the use of charter schools to re-segregate our student populations. We support the money following the student to whatever public school they attend.⁸

School choice proponents seek to expand educational freedom to provide parents a means to access the most appropriate educational options for their child. In contrast, progressives oppose choice because of the overall impact on the educational system. In so doing, they elevate the social goals of public education – diversity, equality and secularism – over the goals of individual freedom and liberty to pursue the best possible education, wherever it may be.

GOVERNOR COOPER AND SCHOOL CHOICE

As standard bearer of the Democratic Party in North Carolina, Gov. Roy Cooper embodies this animosity toward school choice. Cooper is an outspoken and longstanding opponent of educational choice. As far back as 1996, Cooper completed a Project Vote Smart NPAT test where he indicated he did not support providing “parents with state-funded vouchers to send their children to any participating school (public, private, religious or technical).” In the same survey, Cooper went so far as to say he opposed public school choice as well, indicating he would not support “a school choice program which allows parents to choose which public school their child(ren) should attend.”

Cooper’s opposition has deepened with the years. On the “Roy Cooper for North Carolina” website, under the education section, Cooper says,

I oppose vouchers that drain money from public schools. I support strong standards and openness for all schools, particularly charter schools. While some charters are strong, we see troubling trends, such as a re-segregation of the student population, or misuse of state funds without a way to make the wrongdoers reimburse taxpayers. We need to manage the number of charter schools to ensure we don’t damage public education and we need to better measure charter schools, so we can utilize good ideas in all schools.¹⁰

Interestingly, when Cooper eliminated funding for the Opportunity Scholarship Program in a proposed budget, he failed to include any additional funds to help defray the costs of moving 6,000 students from private to public schools. Evidently the governor thought that those costs would just pay for themselves and the families whose children had a chance at a better education would simply go back quietly to their old school.

In his message after vetoing the Republican budget in 2017, rather than mention that the Opportunity Scholarship can change lives by providing disadvantaged children access to a quality education, Cooper falsely accused the program of having little accountability. “The budget on my desk siphons taxpayer dollars away from public schools and into private school vouchers with little accountability,” declared Cooper. “It’s a steady erosion of public education.”¹¹

Cooper and other progressives oppose school choice in other ways as well. One of those ways is to ignore it. National School Choice Week at the end of January commemorates the various educational options available to parents and children, so that every child can obtain an education that fits their needs and background. While many other governors issued proclamations in honor of National School Choice Week, Cooper has never issued a proclamation in any of his years as governor.

Moreover, Cooper refused to invite a single member of a public charter or private school to serve on the Teacher Advisory Committee, a group tasked with providing him recommendations on issues to teachers. Aside from Mark Jewell, the president of the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE) – the state’s largest teacher’s union and an affiliate of the National Education Association – all 25 members of the Governor’s Teacher Advisory Committee were public school teachers.

The silence is deafening.

Cooper is not only opposed to parental choice; he has said he is working to end such programs and to stop the

growth of school choice programs across the state.

Cooper wants to stem the growth of charters and wants to better manage charter school growth. Cooper condemned [legislation](#) that allowed four towns to break away from Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and form their own charter schools. Cooper called the legislation “alarming” and said it would lead to “more resegregated schools.”¹²

In 2017, Gov. Cooper sued to overturn a 2016 law that would forward fund the Opportunity Scholarship Program. Forward funding provides funding increases of \$10 million dollars a year through the 2028-29 academic year for the Opportunity Scholarship Program to help the programs plan for stability and growth. Cooper contended that forward funding “unconstitutionally infringes on the Governor’s executive power to prepare and recommend a budget to the General Assembly.”¹³ Last year an appeals court judge disagreed and held that the process of forward funding was legal and justified. Although the court ruled against Cooper, the case demonstrated the lengths the governor was willing to go to curtail expansion of parental choice programs in North Carolina.

FOLLOW THE MONEY

The National Education Association, the parent organization of the largest teachers’ union in North Carolina, the NCAE, has given millions to local and state candidates throughout North Carolina and is one of the biggest political contributors to Democrats throughout North Carolina.

For representing those interests, Cooper and other Democrats have received help in filling their campaign coffers. Cooper has received nearly \$20,000 in direct contributions and teachers unions have also endorsed and promoted Cooper in paid literature directed to influence voters.

The two largest teachers unions, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA), gave over \$1 million to party committees in 2016 and 97 percent of those contributions went to Democrats. Donors like to contribute to committees because they can get around limits on direct contributions to candidates. NEA gave \$350,000 to support then Attorney General Roy Cooper for governor in his close victory over Republican Gov. Pat McCrory. Cooper eventually won by 10,000 votes out of 4.7 million votes cast.¹⁴

It is not surprising that NCAE was the first group to endorse Cooper in December of 2015, even before the state convention. Since 1996, Cooper has received \$19,450 from the NEA Fund NCAE PAC and the American Federation of Teachers.¹⁵

SUMMARY

The growth of school choice across North Carolina is one of the most significant educational developments of the last quarter century. As families have been empowered to access more educational options, opposition to the movement has arisen. Progressives and most Democrats critique school choice by saying it siphons much needed resources and weakens the public schools. Rather than protect the interests of students and families, they see school choice as a threat to its political control of public education. That control is harnessed via Democrats tight relationship with teachers unions, a major political constituency and a significant donor to political campaigns. As such it is no surprise that progressives champion the system over the rights of individuals who want access to a better education.

Sixty some odd years ago, educational leaders said black students didn't have the right to attend a better school because of what it would do to the overall education system. Today Gov. Cooper and his colleagues have chosen that same option. They defend a system of public education that has failed many families. They defend teachers' unions because school choice is a threat to the financial viability of many failing school systems. Children who need and want a better education are the casualties of political posturing. Their losses must be highlighted; their stories underscore the hypocrisy of those who claim concern for the poor or the wishes of families.

Opposition to school choice has failed to counter the democratic impulses which have fueled the growth and popularity of school choice. The case against choice is balanced on the thin reed of political necessity. Nor does it change a fundamental truth: the interests of the educational establishment and teachers unions seldom coincide with the interests of parents and students. All the more reason to fight to expand educational freedom for all families.

In Part II we will describe specific steps for defeating efforts to restrict and eliminate school choice.

ENDNOTES

¹ Nearly One in Five Students are Opting Out of Traditional Public Schools. Does it Matter? Raleigh News and Observer, July 13, 2018.

² Charter school enrollment numbers obtained from Highlights of the North Carolina Public School Budget for specific years. Figures for private and home schools obtained from the North Carolina Office of Non-Public Education for various years.

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⁴ January 2020 Civitas Poll. Available on the Civitas web site: <https://www.nccivitas.org/polling/voters-say-parents-deserve-control-childs-education/>

⁵ Of "School Choice" and "Educational Freedom" Rob Schofield, NC Policy Watch, June 14, 2008.

⁶ NC House Floor debate, June 12, 2013.

⁷ The Insider, May 29, 2013.

⁸ North Carolina Democratic Party.

⁹ Candidate Surveys Project Vote Smart (NPAT), 1996.

¹⁰ Roy Cooper for North Carolina web site. See section on Education.

¹¹ Cooper Cites Lack of Education Funding and Irresponsible Tax Cuts for the Wealthy in Vetoing Budget, Press June 26, 2017, Press Release Office of the Governor, Roy Cooper.

¹² Governor Cooper condemns bill allowing towns to break from CMS, create charter schools, Fox 46 Charlotte web site. Available online at: <http://www.fox46charlotte.com/news/local-news/gov-cooper-condemns-bill-allowing-towns-to-break-from-cms-create-charter-schools>.

¹³ See” Roy Cooper vs. Phillip Berger and Tim Moore, Charlotte Allen and Yolanda Stith, In General Court of Justice Superior Court Division 17 CVS 6465, Brief in Support of Defendants Phillip E. Berger and Timothy K. Moor’s Motion to Dismiss and Motion for Summary Judgement.

¹⁴ A Look at Teachers Union Power & Influence, unpublished manuscript. Peter Cook. July 2018.

¹⁵ Source: North Carolina State Board of Elections and Ethics Enforcement.

WINNING THE BATTLE TO EXPAND SCHOOL CHOICE PART II

BY BOB LUEBKE

- Children deserve access to educational opportunity
- Gov. Cooper is working to restrict educational options for parents and children in North Carolina.
- The public wants expanded educational options. Lawmakers must work to protect and expand education opportunity.

In part I of this article, we showed how, despite growing public support for parental choice programs in North Carolina, Gov. Roy Cooper and left-leaning friends continue to oppose school choice and are working to eliminate educational options for parents and students.

For a governor who takes every chance to convey his concern about education, it appears that for Cooper, education only means public education. Cooper has no qualms arguing for greater state oversight of charter schools or telling the 12,000 recipients of the Opportunity Scholarship Program to go back to the district school they fled because he believes resources are better used by the public education system.

An uncomfortable reality propels these issues: not all children have access to quality educational opportunities. When parents make that realization, they do one of two things. Some parents buy themselves out of the problem by moving to a different school district or enroll their child in a private school. Not everyone, however, has those options. Some students – through no fault of their own – are stuck in failing school districts, with no chance to access better academic opportunities. School choice helps students and families access better educational opportunities. Rather than siding with students and families, Cooper and his allies support an educational system that is resistant to reform and [out of touch](#) with many of its members.

While this is a challenging development, it's not insurmountable. Four steps can help conservatives in North Carolina counter the efforts to limit school choice and expand access to educational options. These include:

REALIZE WE ARE WINNING THE WAR OF IDEAS.

There is no need for school choice supporters to be defensive. Americans embrace choice in every area of life; why not education? According to the 2019 Education Next Poll, public support is up for higher teacher pay and expanded school choice. The percentage of American adults who support voucher programs to cover the cost of tuition for low-income students is up to 49 percent, from 37 percent in 2016. Support for tax credits for donations to organizations that give scholarships to low income students has edged up to 58 percent, from 53 percent over the same time period. Civitas Polls of North Carolina voters consistently show strong support for school choice and expanded educational options. Conservatives are winning the battle of ideas because school choice has many personal and social benefits. For instance, choice can address the [safety concerns](#) that so many families face. Allowing parents to choose their child's school help parents tailor an educational experience that best fits their child's individual needs. Moreover, allowing parents to choose their child's school gets parents more involved in their child's

school and education. Schools with active and involved parents are healthier learning communities and healthier neighborhoods.

Choice also has social benefits. In a meta-analysis of research reviews, Patrick Wolfe of the University of Arkansas found that “participating in a school choice program improves student test scores by the equivalent translate of several months of additional learning.” If you’re still not convinced of the many benefits of school choice, you may want to read “A Win-Win Solution: The Empirical Evidence on School Choice,” published by EdChoice.org.³

TARGET SCHOOL CHOICE ON CONSTITUENCIES THAT CAN MAXIMIZE ITS BENEFITS.

Minorities and residents of rural areas should be especially receptive to these options. Sadly, too many minority and low-income children are trapped in failing urban schools with no option to improve their learning environment.

While African Americans have consistently voiced some of the strongest support for school choice, that support has not translated to their elected representatives. Yes, there have been several exceptions at the state and national levels. But still most Democratic legislators remain strongly opposed to school choice. There is a disconnect there that needs far more recognition in the public square. In addition to greater outreach to minority and low-income urban communities, school choice advocates must also bring a new message to rural areas. The opportunity to personalize education, create new markets and relationships with industry.

TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT SCHOOL CHOICE: IT’S A BIPARTISAN ISSUE.

This is an important point. Many progressives oppose school choice, but there are a growing number of Democrats who will sign on to school choice legislation. They do not represent the majority of the party, but they do support parental choice in the form of charter schools, vouchers or online or virtual learning. In that sense, school choice is a bipartisan issue. It’s a fact, often contested at the state and national level, but school choice supporters must be eager to marshal the facts that say otherwise.

A [Gallup poll question](#) found that more Democrats agreed than disagreed with Trump’s proposal to provide federal funding for school choice programs that allow students to attend any private or public school. As recently mentioned, several Democratic legislators have come out and voiced support for school choice policies in North Carolina.⁴

A 2017 study by Parents for Educational Freedom in North Carolina found that more than 8 in 10 African American voters – most of whom overwhelmingly identify with the Democratic Party – believe that state lawmakers must do more to expand educational options for families in our state. Specifically, 65 percent of African Americans said they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports giving parents more educational options for their children. In addition, 64 percent of a sample of African American voters said parents should have the ability to choose the K-12 school their child attends through a state-funded scholarship.⁵ In October 2017, 33 percent of registered Democrats said they support legislation creating personal Education Savings Accounts.⁶ A March 2016 Civitas Poll of likely Democratic and Republican primary voters found that the parties supported and opposed Education Savings Accounts by nearly identical percentages. Fifty-four percent of Democrats and 55 percent of Republicans supported ESAs. Meanwhile, 28 percent of Democrats and 30 percent of Republicans opposed them.⁷

Indeed, the initial legislation introducing a special needs personal Education Savings Account was bipartisan, sponsored by three Republicans and three Democrats. Yes, Democratic legislators still voice strong opposition to

parental choice issues. However, it's clear that Democratic voters support school choice policies in higher percentages than the Democratic legislators who represent them. For choice to successfully expand, all children must be able to benefit.

Win the battle over accountability. Schools that receive tax dollars need to be accountable and be good stewards of public dollars. The ultimate question has always been: who defines accountability?

The way government ensures that policies are working is through regulation and oversight. It is a top-down, government-centric, view of accountability. Has it worked? Are our schools performing well and using tax dollars wisely? The legacy of such thinking is an ever-expanding administrative state. Gov. Cooper claims that vouchers lack accountability. That's not true. They have the ultimate measure of accountability: parents and students. If families are unhappy with choice schools, they can leave. Moreover, private schools still must comply with state and federal safety and health regulations. In addition, charter schools also must take the same tests as the public schools. Choice schools may not have the same reporting requirements, but why should they? Choice schools are administratively different than public schools and frequently have a different curriculum.

Public school advocates say if choice schools receive state funding, private and charter public schools should have the same requirements and be held accountable in the same way. To do so would be to treat schools that are fundamentally different in the same way; such a policy ignores the reality that the governance, purpose, mission, values, and enrollment of many private or charter schools are different from traditional public schools. These differences do not mean there is no accountability. Rather, it means the accountability structures are different and must recognize those differences.

Private schools are often accountable to regional accrediting bodies to ensure academic quality. Moreover, because of the institution's dependence on tuition, choice or private schools are often more accountable or sensitive to parental concerns than local schools that are administered by elected officials. School choice supporters need to win the battle over how to define accountability with policies that ensure results and protect institutional autonomy. Meeting this need will help the movement grow into the future.

SUMMARY

The steady expansion of school choice in North is a story few states can match. The growing array of educational options have developed in direct response for calls from parents and students for expanded educational opportunity. Expanding charter school enrollment and along with the creation of new voucher, special needs, and ESA programs have helped to foster a healthy school choice market in North Carolina.

These developments empower students and parents. Others think school choice threatens the educational establishment that drains resources from the public schools. Meanwhile, Gov. Cooper and other anti-school choice lawmakers continue to champion the interests of the educational establishment over those of individual freedom and opportunity. It's a chilling reminder of why we must continue to work to expand choice and ensure educational opportunity for all children.

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² See Civitas Polls February 2018, January 2017.

³ A Win- Win Solution: The Empirical Evidence for School Choice, Greg Foerster, published by EdChoice.Org

⁴ African American legislators in NC voice support for school vouchers and charters, Raleigh News & Observer, February 28, 2017. Available online at: <https://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/education/article135485179.html>

⁵ Where Do North Carolina African-American Voters Stand on Parental School Choice? Study by Parents for Educational Freedom in North Carolina, Published 2017. Available online at: <http://pefnc.org/ncblackchoicepoll/>

⁶ Civitas Poll, October 2017. Available online at: www.nccivitas.org

⁷ Finally, Something Democrats and Republicans Can Agree On: ESAs., Robert Luebke, Blog post, Civitas Review, March 24, 2016. Available online at: <https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/2016-5-Win-Win-Solution-WEB.pdf>.

THE MANY VICTIMS OF ABORTION EXPANSION

BY BROOKE MEDINA

“Kristin had come to our center back in 2014 when she found out she was pregnant and chose to end the pregnancy with an abortion. She described how she was traumatized by the experience and that it was excruciating and devastating.

As she sits in the nurse’s room at Gateway sharing her experience, Kristin sobs and cries. ‘I still cannot get the sound of the suction out of my mind. I think about it all the time. It doesn’t go away.’”

– Wendy Bonano, Executive Director of [Gateway Women’s Care](#), a Triangle-based pregnancy and sexual health support center

Under the guise of equity, empowerment, and women’s rights, pro-abortion state legislators have sought to expand late-term abortions, proposing a bill entitled The Whole Woman’s Health Act ([S.B. 588](#) and [H.B. 563](#)).

A number of state senators and representatives have made it clear that abortions past twenty weeks—the gestational age doctors can presently confirm babies [feel pain](#)—should be legal. To add insult to injury, Gov. Roy Cooper barred an attempt to provide clear legal protections for children that survive an abortion in [his veto](#) of the Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act.

The most egregious aspect of S.B. 588, sponsored by Chaudhuri, Van Duyn, and Bryant and H.B. 563, sponsored by Fisher, Cunningham, Meyer, and B. Richardson, both presented this past April, was their lift on the twenty-week abortion ban, virtually eliminating all state abortion restrictions, including late-term D&E procedures.

If you’re unfamiliar with a [D&E abortion](#), it involves dismembering the baby’s appendages and midsection and later crushing his or her skull while using a suction device to remove the brain. The dismembered and crushed baby, referred to as “pregnancy tissue” in this Planned Parenthood description, is then put back together so the abortionist can ensure he or she completed a successful abortion.

MORAL AND SCIENTIFIC CONCERNS

Life begins at conception. Not at implantation. Not when the child feels wanted by his or her parents. And not when he or she has been deemed sentient. This is not just a moral truth ([although it is that](#)), it is a scientific fact based on [basic empirical research](#).

There are two criteria that must be met in order for us to distinguish one cell type from another, helping us assess whether or not life has begun:

- 1. Difference in its molecular composition.** In this case, the joining of a sperm and an egg (gametes) produces a new cell type – a zygote, or one-cell embryo. They are no longer a sperm and an egg. It is a new cell with a different molecular composition.

- 2. Difference in how it behaves.** Within minutes of this fusion, the zygote will begin to block additional sperm from attaching to the cell surface, thus marking the zygote's new pattern of behavior that did not exist when it was two distinct gametes.

Is this newly formed cell akin to a lung or liver cell, thereby rendering it unable to meet the qualifications of personhood all on its own? No. Once the gametes fused to become a zygote, it took on the unique role of organism, "acting in an interdependent and coordinated manner to 'carry on the activities of life.'"

To deny that life begins at conception is to disregard the obvious realities evident in the physical world. The human organism that is formed within minutes of the sperm and egg fusing is a human being in its earliest stages. Most abortion advocates know this, so they typically choose to focus their attention on the tired argument, "My body, my choice" (ignoring the fact that there is a separate body—that of the child—that abortion affects).

At the most foundational level, if these pro-abortion legislators cannot recognize the right to life for one of society's most vulnerable populations—the unborn—they have lost a substantial amount of moral authority by which to speak out on other issues involving human dignity. This is the reason pro-lifers question Planned Parenthood's supposed concern for poor and minority women.

The near constant denial of the unborn's right to life by abortion proponents undermines the human dignity of those that are outside of the womb, too.

At its core, abortion exemplifies the appalling belief that people are only worthy of dignity if they are wanted, healthy, or not a burden to others.

For too long women finding themselves in unplanned pregnancies have had these truths withheld from them by those that have a financial interest in their decision to abort.

LEGISLATORS SHOULD ENACT LAWS THAT PROTECT, NOT DESTROY

For legislators to work against the fundamental truth that children—at every stage—are worthy of legal protection is antithetical to the purpose of statecraft. One of the chief purposes of lawmaking is to institute policies that protect those within its borders and safeguard their inalienable rights, foremost among them the right to life.

Furthermore, to champion these policies as pro-woman is misguided. Legislation that is truly pro-woman will not be anti-child. This isn't a zero-sum situation where women and children must vie one another for rights. To truly care about women is to care about their children and creating a false dichotomy wherein only the woman is the victor is poor policy making and morally reprehensible.

The legislators that pushed for expanded abortion policies in the *Whole Woman's Health Act* were referred to as "pro-women's health candidates" by Planned Parenthood Votes, but it's difficult to see how advocating for late-term, pain-capable abortions is pro-woman.

Thankfully, given the current makeup of the General Assembly, currently possessing Republican majorities in both chambers, the chance of such a bill's passage is slim.

So, why are we addressing this now? Because when the winds of change blow and social conservatives find themselves in the minority, groups like Planned Parenthood and North Carolina-based [Lillian's List](#) intend to expand

abortion to the fullest extent. The North Carolina ACLU has made it clear that they “will continue to build support for the Whole Woman’s Health Act in the years to come.” This is a legitimate concern and we would be wise to treat it as such.

A LITTLE HISTORY

Abortion on demand became the rallying cry for many late 20th century feminists. The equal treatment of women championed by earlier feminists like Charlotte Lozier and Susan B. Anthony was betrayed by pro-abortion feminists, determined to free themselves by what they felt were the intolerable confines of motherhood. In 1919 [Margaret Sanger](#) said, “Woman must have her freedom—the fundamental freedom of choosing whether or not she shall be a mother...”

A couple of decades later, women and men intent on removing the natural causal effect of sex hitched themselves to the aptly named Sexual Revolution. What we now refer to as the Women’s Rights Movement is the fruit of these earlier ideas that children can (and should) be separate from the act of sex.

The legalization of abortion was a monumental victory for second wave feminists. It took two groups that had historically been viewed as the epitome of mutual affection—mothers and children—and inserted a wedge wherein the advancement of the female must be divorced from the care of the child.

Yet, as we learned in history class, revolutions always have victims and victors and the Sexual Revolution was no exception. The victors were, and are, abortionists, “fetal tissue procurement specialists” that are employed by [Planned Parenthood](#), [sex traffickers](#), and [child abusers](#).

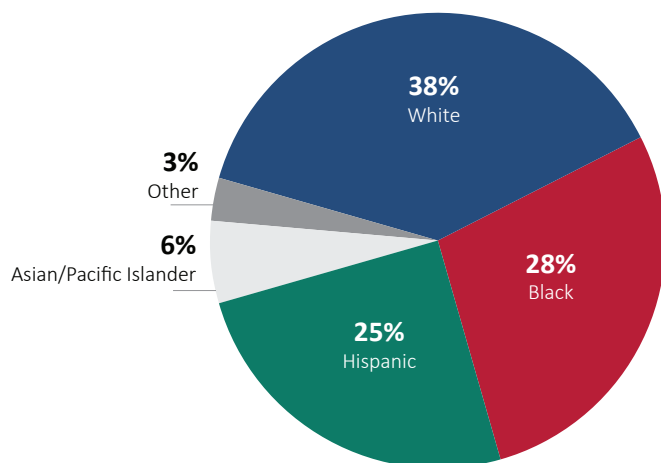
The victims? Women that have been sold the lie that an unplanned pregnancy will ruin them, and the children who will never see the light of day.

It is important to note that abortion affects different populations within our country disproportionately. Particularly minorities and the poor.

According to the pro-abortion [Guttmacher Institute](#), “Abortion has become increasingly concentrated among poor women, **who accounted for 49 percent** of patients in 2014” (emphasis mine).

The CDC found that minority women make up [62.5 percent](#) of abortion clients in our state, despite only comprising approximately [38.2 percent](#) of the population. Even on the national level the racial disparity in abortions is striking.

Proportion of U.S. Abortions, 2014



Source: Guttmacher Institute

Note: Data retrieved from Guttmacher Institute's May 2016 Report found here

Why do we have this disparity? Even a non-cynical observer could conclude that the abortion industry markets its services to both poor and minority women.

CONCLUSION

North Carolina lawmakers should focus on policies that protect children, rather than crafting bills that make it easier to obtain late-term abortions.

For far too long politicians and special interest groups have misused women, and propped up the false narrative that in order for a woman to be successful she needs to have the option to abort her child.

On the other hand, the need for communities to help moms and dads that find themselves in unplanned pregnancies is of paramount importance. There are many women that have experienced the same pain and heartache that Kristin did, and oftentimes this regret could have been prevented if caring support systems were in place.

What can we do to promote a culture of life wherein women and men feel more confident in their decision to bring a child into the world? Even if *Roe v. Wade*, *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, or *Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt*, aren't overturned in our lifetime, we can elevate the idea of family to its rightful place, creating a culture where women feel empowered and supported to keep their babies.

In a nation that champions abortion rights as liberating for women, pro-lifers are needed more than ever, to help women, like Kristin, who have been hurt by abortion. Thankfully there are those on the front lines, like Wendy Bonano of Gateway, doing precisely that.

Because of the care and compassion the employees at Gateway showed Kristin after her abortion, she is now receiving help and support as she recovers from the pain of her past decision, while also preparing to carry her child that is due next year to term.

Imagine what would happen if we insisted that elected officials focus on ways to help women and children, rather than craft policies that hurt them.

Legislators and everyday citizens have the responsibility to uphold the sanctity of life. Through our votes and civic action we have the ability—and responsibility—to make sure they do so. North Carolina should be known as a state that elevates and lifts up women and children, setting an example for the rest of the nation to follow.

THE MINIMUM WAGE MYTH

BY BRIAN BALFOUR

- Raising the minimum wage reduces job opportunities for the least skilled workers
- Minimum wage laws sever the relationship between employers and employees and pays people not according to their value and skills, but according to what someone else says employees should be paid
- The most effective way to reduce poverty is by attacking root causes and by expanding economic and educational opportunity for those most in need

It's a sad story that we hear all too often. A struggling young mother, Maria is working two jobs but is still unable to make ends meet for herself and her two young children in North Carolina. Maria works long hours at a job that pays the minimum wage, \$7.25 an hour. It simply doesn't provide enough to keep a household going. Worse yet, the combination of a low-level education and skills limits Maria's employment prospects to service industry jobs, marked by low salaries, long hours and high turnover.

DOING MORE HARM THAN GOOD?

The most common response to this problem is to raise the minimum wage. Progressive and liberal activists assert people need to be paid enough to meet their needs and have made raising the minimum wage law in states and cities a priority for decades.

It's a feel-good response that enables supporters to signal their alleged compassion for low-income workers, but it intrudes on voluntary labor agreements and harms the very people its advocates claim to be helping.

Imagine that Maria's state increases its minimum wage to \$15 an hour. Unfortunately, her employer can't afford to pay that much for her position, so they fire Maria and instead replace her with technology that is cheaper. And because the higher minimum wage means employers will demand less low-skill labor, Maria can't find another job.

Or her employer cuts back on her hours so she ends up earning less; or is forced to eliminate other benefits like vacation time, health benefits, or job training that would lead to a better future.

A minimum wage increase ends up making Maria's struggles even more difficult than they were before.

MINIMUM WAGE HIKES ARE HIGH ON THE LEFT'S AGENDA IN NC

In recent years, California, Washington, Oregon and the District of Columbia have all increased the minimum wage, as have cities like Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York. It is hard to ignore the strong influence of liberals and progressives in all these areas. It's safe to say if the left had its way, the minimum wage would be increased everywhere. Advocates believe it's the best way to ensure individuals receive a fair wage to meet their basic needs.

It's a view that's held by many on the left in North Carolina as well. Allison Freyer, the director of the Worker's Rights Project at the NC Justice Center, says that raising the minimum wage is good for families and good for busi-

nesses. Freyer writes:

Almost two million North Carolina workers will benefit from raising the minimum wage. And when families can afford the basics — putting food on the table, gas in the car, and a roof over their heads — their whole community thrives. Higher wages mean more business sales, bigger business profits and a growing local economy. Our elected officials in Congress and in the General Assembly should act now to raise the minimum wage.¹

During the 2019 legislative session, Democratic lawmakers in North Carolina introduced several bills that would either expand coverage of minimum wage legislation or increase the minimum wage. These bills included [HB -146, Living Wage By 2024](#). The legislation, introduced by Jean Farmer-Butterfield (D-Wilson) and Kandie Smith (D-Pitt County) would increase the state's minimum wage law in phases until 2024 and then increases would be based on increases in the cost of living. The bill lacked sufficient support to make it out of committee.

[The Economic Security Act \(SB 137\)](#), championed by Senators Valerie Foushee (D-Chatham) and Terry Van Duyn (D-Buncombe) reintroduced a bill that not only raise the minimum wage but would also provide a number of job protections progressives have been seeking for years. Among other things, the bill mandates equal pay for equal work, requires employers to offer paid sick leave and family medical leave and repeals the public employee collective bargaining restrictions. Again, the bill failed to generate sufficient support to make it out of committee for a vote.

Another bill aimed at raising the minimum wage was [HB 366, Raising Wages for NC Workers](#). The legislation, introduced by Representatives Susan Fisher (D-Buncombe), MaryAnn Black (D-Durham) and Pricey Harrison (D-Guilford) would raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour over five years and then provide raises tied to increases in the cost of living. The bill also ends the subminimum wage for persons with disabilities and phased for tipped employees over eight years and also ends the minimum wage exemption for agriculture and domestic workers. HB-46, sponsored by Rep. Susan Fisher (D-Buncombe) was one of several bills that raised the minimum wage to \$15/hour over five years. The legislation also added mandatory paid sick and medical leave.

Although none of these bills had sufficient support to make it out of committee, be assured progressives and other advocates on the left will be back pushing for similar legislation when the General Assembly reconvenes.

Increasing the minimum wage has become a hallmark of the progressive left. The benefits are intended to flow not only to wage recipients but to the political ideologues as well. Legislation to raise the minimum wage is often wrapped around larger coordinated initiatives to enable the left to win rural areas and take back state houses and take away power from conservatives at both the state and federal levels.⁴ Raising the minimum wage is only the tip of the spear.

Increasing the minimum wage may help some individuals in the short term, but there are other problems. There are many compelling reasons to oppose raising the minimum wage to \$15 in North Carolina.

MINIMUM WAGE INCREASE WOULD BE A JOB KILLER

According to an October 2016 Heritage Foundation report, raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour in North Carolina would result in the loss of 367,000 jobs by over five years. Wage increases would apply to 40.5 percent of wage and salary workers in the state, and many employers would have to choose between layoffs, reduced hours,

cutting back on other job perks, or potentially closing shop.⁵ All these conditions would make it harder for less-experienced and less-skilled employees to find work. It's the exact opposite impact the legislation's backers claim it was supposed to have.

But what about elsewhere. Has the \$15 minimum wage had beneficial impacts?

WARNINGS FROM SEATTLE

Seattle was the first major city to adopt a \$15 minimum wage. Increases were phased in over several years. The first phase (2011-2013) raised the wage from \$9.47 to \$11/hour. The second phase (2013-2015) raised the minimum wage from \$13 to \$15 an hour. In analyzing the second phase of wage increases researchers found the new wage increased wages by 3 percent but also reduced the number of low wage jobs by 9 percent. As a result, the total "low wage" payroll lowered the low wage employee's monthly income by \$125 a month.⁶

Commenting on preliminary results from of the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) on the subject, the Washington Post said "some employers have not been able to afford the increased minimum. They've cut their payrolls, putting off new hiring, reducing hours or letting their workers go. According to the University of Washington economists who conducted the study, the costs to low-wage workers in Seattle outweighed the benefits by a ratio of three to one. The average low-wage worker lost \$125 per month because of the minimum wage hike. As you might expect, it's not the results the Left was looking for."⁷

But we don't need academic studies to demonstrate increases in the minimum wage laws don't alleviate poverty. The law has other shortcomings that weaken its appeal.

MINIMUM WAGE, MAXIMUM PROBLEMS

For starters, a minimum wage targets workers – not just the poor. The law fails to realize that many minimum wage workers may not live in poor households. Another obvious problem with increasing the minimum wage is that when politicians increase the minimum wage, the demand for low-skilled labor falls. Fewer jobs are available. How does that help poor people?

Moreover, as the minimum wage is increased, more people are drawn to apply for these low-skilled positions. For instance, college students from well-off families suddenly find it worth their while to work fast food or retail if it pays \$15 an hour. These new entrants can crowd out lower-skilled workers.

Furthermore, North Carolina is a big state with a lot of variety. The cost of living in Charlotte or Raleigh is much higher than it is in Murphy or Manteo. A state minimum wage law is the same everywhere. Why should the minimum wage in a low-cost area be the same as a high cost area? How many small businesses in rural areas would be able to afford to pay \$15 an hour to entry-level workers?

For the left, minimum wage laws are merely a stepping stone to an expanded array of social benefits. In many places, minimum wage advocates are replacing the talk of minimum wage laws with "living wage" laws. These laws are meant to provide enough income to live locally and meet basic needs. Earlier this year the Raleigh City Council adopted a universal living wage policy for its lowest -paid employees.⁸

The living wage policy is not a legal requirement. It's far more subjective. But who defines what expenses should

be included for an individual to meet basic needs? Everyone can agree that food is a basic need. But how much food? What kind of food? And what about other common household items that may not necessarily be a “basic need,” like cellphones or cable?

Who gets to decide these things, and are we comfortable with politicians and bureaucrats exercising this kind of power over the lives of others?

When people complain that they can’t live and provide for a family on \$7.25 an hour, you must remember the minimum wage was never intended to allow low-skilled workers to support a family. The minimum wage does a poor job of raising families out of poverty, because it was not designed to do so.

The biggest drawback with any minimum wage law is that it prohibits individuals from contracting based on agreed terms. If a young person wants to work for \$5/hour, why not let them? If a businessman wants to pay differing wages for lower-skilled labor, why should he be prohibited? Minimum wage laws take away the right to contract labor at voluntarily agreed upon rates. A \$15 an hour minimum wage policy may sound nice; until you understand they decrease the available job opportunities for low-skilled labor, distort prices and incentives and harm the people advocates claim to be helping.

A \$15 dollar an hour federal minimum wage was supported by a majority of candidates vying to be the 2020 Democratic presidential nominee. The push is being made at a time when businesses have been granting significant pay raises and boosting compensation — all without any government mandate (obviously this was prior to the coronavirus economic shutdown).

In a recent column in the Wall Street Journal, economist Lawrence Lindsey notes that according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics most workers’ wages rose a bit more than 10 percent between 2016 and 2019, while those at the bottom of the salary scale saw their wages increase 15.6 percent. Lindsey notes that over the period 2017-18, inequality dropped under the census measure and he expects the same when data is released later this year. So, what is the significance of these trends? Lindsey writes:

It is proof that the best way to create a more equal distribution of income is to have a robust economy and tight labor market. Long-term economic equality can be achieved not by government decree but by sustaining an economy in which the labor market allows the laws of supply and demand to strengthen workers’ position.

A CONSERVATIVE RESPONSE

There is little evidence to support the claim of progressive advocates that increases in the minimum wage help to alleviate poverty. Conservatives have a better response to the question of poverty. It’s grounded in addressing the factors that contribute to the cycle of poverty and helping people get back on their feet. Our response includes reforms in key areas:

TAX REFORM. North Carolina’s decision to let a 1 cent sales tax expire in 2011, reduce income taxes in 2013 and implement reforms for unemployment insurance have had significant impacts on our state economy. The changes have created tens of thousands of jobs, increased wages by hundreds of millions of dollars, and helped propel budget surpluses. Since January 2012, the unemployment rate has declined from 9.5 percent to the 3.6 percent in January 2020. Between 2012 and 2019, over half a million jobs have been added.¹⁰ Over the past five years, North

Carolina's poverty rate has declined for six consecutive years, dropping from 18 percent in 2012 to 14 percent in 2018.¹¹ These changes improve the chances for everyone to secure a job and provide for themselves and their families. The story of how 2013 tax reform improved North Carolina's economy is documented in the Civitas study, [More Jobs, Bigger Paychecks](#).

EDUCATION REFORM. A good education is one of the best ways to fight poverty. Unfortunately, too many children are trapped in schools that will fail to provide a quality education. Charter schools and parental choice programs like the Opportunity Scholarship and Parental Education Savings Accounts offer low- and middle-income students the opportunity to get a good education and an education that best fits the child's needs.

REDUCING BARRIERS TO JOB CREATION. It is easier to create jobs when the regulatory climate is jobs-friendly. In North Carolina the barriers to getting a job and allowing individuals to work have grown far too burdensome. In 2012, Civitas [reported](#) that North Carolina agencies and boards required licenses and other requirements on more than 700 professions. These ranged from doctors and lawyers to barbers and cemetery salespeople. A review of the regulations shows that for the most part, regulations are superfluous and not related to job performance. They only serve to limit entry into the field by people who need jobs. Unfortunately, in the last five years not much has changed to improve this process.

FAMILY POLICY. If families continue to fragment and children are deprived of the resources of two parent families, the struggle against poverty, school dropouts and other social ills will only continue. Marriage should be promoted as the best possible option for raising children and family stability. It's a view that has been supported by history and significant social science research. Changing attitudes regarding sexual norms have undermined what was once universally accepted and contributed to a growing underclass. A public pro-marriage public education campaign spearheaded by a diverse group of leaders can help to reset public norms and expectations. The promotion of parenting and employment skills especially among low-income populations has also proven helpful in lowering unemployment and aiding family stability. Lastly, current policy should reflect the importance of fathers in the lives of children both financially and developmentally. The welfare state has been massively destructive to families, especially low-income and minority families. To that extent conservatives support programs that work to strengthen – not divide – the family and do all they can to include the father in the life of his children. Private organizations like the [National Fatherhood Initiative](#) and [The National Center for Fathering](#) are two organizations that have not only educated millions about the importance of fathers but are deeply involved in putting together families and creating a culture where fathers are needed and valued.¹²

EMPOWERING ORGANIZATIONS. Finally, we should be proud that there are already many organizations in North Carolina committed to working with the poor and committed to ensuring the poor get a fresh start. Organizations like the Salvation Army, Samaritan's Purse, Big Brothers and Big Sisters, local homeless shelters, shelters for victims of domestic violence, and Boys and Girls clubs help not only the individuals involved but all North Carolinians. State government must do all it can to ensure such organizations are not burdened by regulation. State law should welcome the work and growth of such organizations as a sign of a healthy civil society.

CONCLUSION

Calls for the \$15 minimum wage are frequently heard in North Carolina and across the country from political candidates. Progressive and liberal candidates, largely supported by [big union money](#), are behind most of these efforts purporting to aid the poor and disadvantaged and alleviate poverty.

Minimum wage laws “tax” some employers in the form of higher costs to provide higher wages to low-skilled employees. Doing so discourages work, dulls incentives and makes the poor more averse to risk-taking.

If the left is truly concerned about the poor how can it support legislation that literally criminalizes job opportunities for those most in need? The minimum wage takes away someone’s right to work.

Moreover, the minimum wage severs the relationship between employers and employees and skills and wages. People are paid according to the marginal value of their skills and labor, as evaluated by the employer. Minimum wage laws outlaw voluntary work agreements between employers and employees.

Despite the failings and many harmful impacts, progressive groups and candidates from the far left remain undeterred in their support for increasing the minimum wage. If conservatives are truly committed to the poor, they will defeat these efforts and champion solutions that address the root causes of poverty and expand economic and educational opportunity for those most in need.

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ELECTIONS IN CRISIS, PART I

BY ANDY JACKSON

- Progressives have consistently fought against reforms that enhance the integrity of North Carolina elections.
- Even though North Carolinians have consistently supported voter ID, including in a statewide vote, progressives have fought against it.

No other policy and legal area exposes the leftist agenda of liberal Democrats and progressives more than election laws and voting procedures. In its quest to control election outcomes, these groups push programs to compel universal voter registration and universal voting with little or no restrictions or security.

The goal of their actions is total control and power over legislation governing elections and total control and power over administrative procedures developed to guide every aspect of voting. Their actions over the past decade are telling.

FIGHTING AGAINST ELECTION INTEGRITY

Liberal Democrats and their extreme progressive allies controlled our state's elections for well over a century, writing and rewriting the state's election laws to benefit and sustain their long-lasting majorities.

One example is how Same Day Registration (SDR) is handled in North Carolina. After the 2008 presidential election the [North Carolina State Board of Elections \(SBE\) published a report on Same Day Registration to the North Carolina General Assembly](#). The report gave resounding praise for the SDR process while giving only cursory attention to the real problems they encountered. Namely, there was an egregious flaw in the SDR process in 2008. By their own admission, they had to deny 2.4 percent of the registrations of those who voted using SDR.

SDR voters are not required to successfully complete the verification process before the election because there is not enough time to complete the process before certification of the election. So, there are thousands of SDR voters who have had their registrations either removed, denied or put into inactive status – but only after their votes were counted and the election certified. Once an election is certified, the votes stand.

After the 2012 elections, the General Assembly began to make moves to reform North Carolina's election system with commonsense ideas that would help protect voter integrity. In 2013, lawmakers passed comprehensive election reform legislation entitled the [Voter Information Verification Act \(VIVA\)](#). VIVA was the first comprehensive updating of our election laws in decades and included several reforms such as a voter ID requirement and the elimination of SDR.

Organizations on the left, such as [North Carolina Voters for Clean Elections](#) and [North Carolina Center for Voter Education](#), focused all their energy and funding towards rolling back those reforms. The NC Center for Voter Education was later [folded](#) into NC Common Cause. Those organizations and others have continuously fought election integrity measures in the legislature and the courts. SDR was eventually restored and Democrats demanded an expansion of early voting (including SDR) as a condition for supporting reforms needed to [combat absentee ballot fraud](#).

OPPOSITION TO VOTER ID

Time and time again liberal Democrats and progressives hold views that are diametrically opposed to the views of North Carolina's voters and the legislators they elected.

The first real attempt to challenge the left's control over election policy began after the 2010 elections when Republicans won majorities in both chambers of the General Assembly. North Carolina's initial attempt to reform election law took place in 2011, when the state legislature voted in favor of a [voter ID law](#). It should be noted that, at the time of the voter ID law's passage, Republicans did not hold veto-proof majorities during the tenure of Democratic Gov. Beverly Perdue. Perdue vetoed the legislation and later declined to run for reelection.

In 2013, after the election of Republican Gov. Pat McCrory, the legislature approved the aforementioned Voter Information Verification Act (VIVA), which included a new voter ID law.

The fight over voter ID since then has been vicious. Organizations opposing these measures pulled no punches when they attacked elected officials and others who believed that voters should show identification before voting. Voter ID advocates were called racist, bigots and Jim Crow advocates and VIVA was referred to as the voter suppression law or the "[monster law](#)." Damon Circosta, in a 2011 op-ed for the [Wilmington Star News](#), attacked Republicans for having a so-called "war on voting." Circosta, was later appointed to the SBE by Gov. Roy Cooper as the board's "unaffiliated" member and, later still, [appointed](#) as the SBE's Democratic chairman.

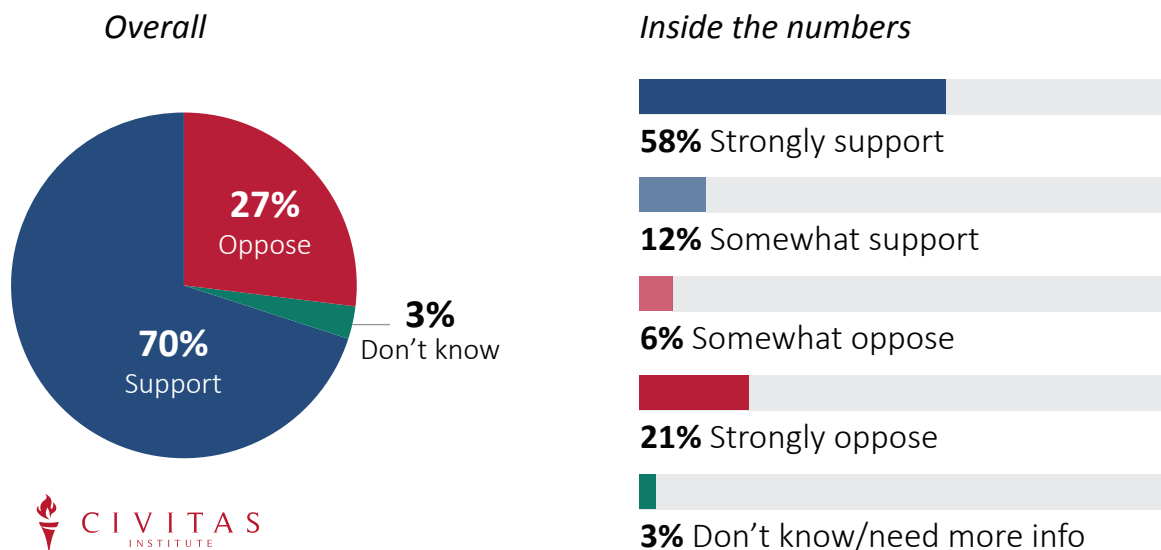
Ultimately, even after lawmakers watered down the voter ID proposal, Republicans lost the fight after years of legal battles, but not before the law was implemented for the 2014 elections. So, did the supposed massive voter suppression and disenfranchisement happen? After all the votes were counted in 2014, the accusations proved to be [nothing more than ugly fabrications](#), as voter turnout [was up among the groups the left claimed the law targeted](#). Indeed, the [November 4, 2014 election set a record for voter turnout](#) in North Carolina. In November early voting increased by 20 percent over the 2010 midterms and rose by 45 percent among blacks. In the [2014 May Primary](#), overall turnout was up 5 percent compared to the 2010 Primary, and turnout surged almost 30 percent among African-American voters.

RUNNING AGAINST ELECTION INTEGRITY AND PUBLIC OPINION

Since then, North Carolinians have consistently favored voter ID while a variety of liberal Democratic and progressive organizations on the left have just as consistently worked against public opinion to stop it.

In a [February 2018 Civitas Poll](#) voters were asked whether they would "support amending the State Constitution to allow the state legislature to require all voters present a valid photo ID in order to cast a ballot?" Included in the poll question was the statement: "The state would provide a free ID to those who can't afford one." Sixty-nine percent of respondents said that they would support a constitutional amendment, while only 27 percent opposed an amendment.

Do you support amending the North Carolina Constitution to allow the state legislature to require all voters present a valid photo ID in order to cast a ballot? (The state would provide a free ID to those who can't afford one.)



1,000 likely voters (30% on cell phones) with a margin of error of +/- 3.10%. Survey was taken February 6-8, 2018.

Figure 1: February 2018 poll on voter ID. Data source: [Civitas Institute](#).

North Carolina’s election system has become a jumble of complicated and sometimes contradictory laws and administrative decisions made by the State Board of Elections often with little or no regard for the public or the legislature. And, according to the liberal Democrat and progressive organizations that fought over reforms, that’s exactly as it should be. There is nothing the political Left fears more than a rule or law that cannot be manipulated or exploited.

In 2018, after years of acrimonious debate, North Carolinians were finally given the chance to let their voices be heard on voter ID. The result was the [comfortable passage](#) of a voter ID amendment to the North Carolina Constitution in a statewide vote of citizens. However, rather than accept the will of North Carolina voters, opponents of this common sense amendment [used activist judges](#) to stop legislation implementing that vote in the courts.

In part two of *Left Turn NC – Elections in Crisis*, we will explore how liberal Democrats, progressives and others on the left use the courts and the State Board of Elections to enhance their power and control over North Carolina’s voting process.

ELECTIONS IN CRISIS: PART II

BY ANDY JACKSON

TOXIC AGENDA – ELECTIONS IN CRISIS: in part 1, I examined how the left, has opposed reforms to enhance the integrity of North Carolina’s elections in a bid to regain power. Winning battles in the courts and infiltrating the State Board of Elections has helped to solidify the Left’s control over our state’s election process.

THE LITIGIOUS LEFT

Since losing their majorities in the state legislature in 2010, the Left has fought most of their election battles in court. Countless lawsuits over election policy and redistricting have cost state taxpayers millions of dollars, but an abundance of [available lawyers](#) and [generous funders — including George Soros](#) – make the Left well equipped to fight.

In 2014, the left took their fight to United States District Court for the Middle District of North Carolina where they challenged certain provisions included in the first comprehensive updating of our election laws in several decades – [the Voter Information Verification Act \(VIVA\)](#). The lawyers came from organizations based both inside and outside of North Carolina, including: the [Southern Coalition for Social Justice \(SCSJ\)](#), [League of Women Voters \(LOWV\)](#), [ACLU](#), [NAACP-NC](#), [Common Cause](#), [Unifour Onestop Collaborative](#) and the [Advancement Project](#), not to mention Eric Holder’s Department of Justice.

The left ultimately won this case when the US Supreme Court let stand a decision by the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, although the decision “[not signify an opinion on the merits of the case.](#)” That rejection of the appeal was based on a 4-4 tie vote by the US Supreme Court, largely because of the death of Justice Antonin Scalia. In previous cases, the Supreme Court upheld voter ID and there is little reason to believe the NC case would have turned out differently.

Even the North Carolina Constitution and the expressed will of the North Carolina people cannot put a stop to litigation over voter ID. Even though voter’s [approved](#) adding an amendment to the North Carolina Constitution in 2018 requiring an ID to vote, activist judges in both [federal](#) and state courts have blocked its implementation.

THE LEFT INFILTRATES THE STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS

Perhaps the strongest weapon in the left’s arsenal over election policy is the administrative staff of the State Board of Elections (SBE).

Beginning in the 1990s, SBE staff took a turn toward political activism. The staff’s foray into policy and politics appeared to grow exponentially after the introduction and subsequent alliance with [Bob Hall](#), a lobbyist and activist leader of the radical progressive nonprofit, [Democracy NC](#).

Hall became a fixture at the SBE and worked alongside former Director Gary Bartlett to introduce and implement election policy [Bartlett allowed Hall to take the lead](#) in the editing, production and printing of the State Board of Elections Voter Guides, which were distributed to every voter in the state. With Hall’s leadership at the SBE, the Left has continued to chip away at the integrity of our election process leaving us vulnerable to increasing

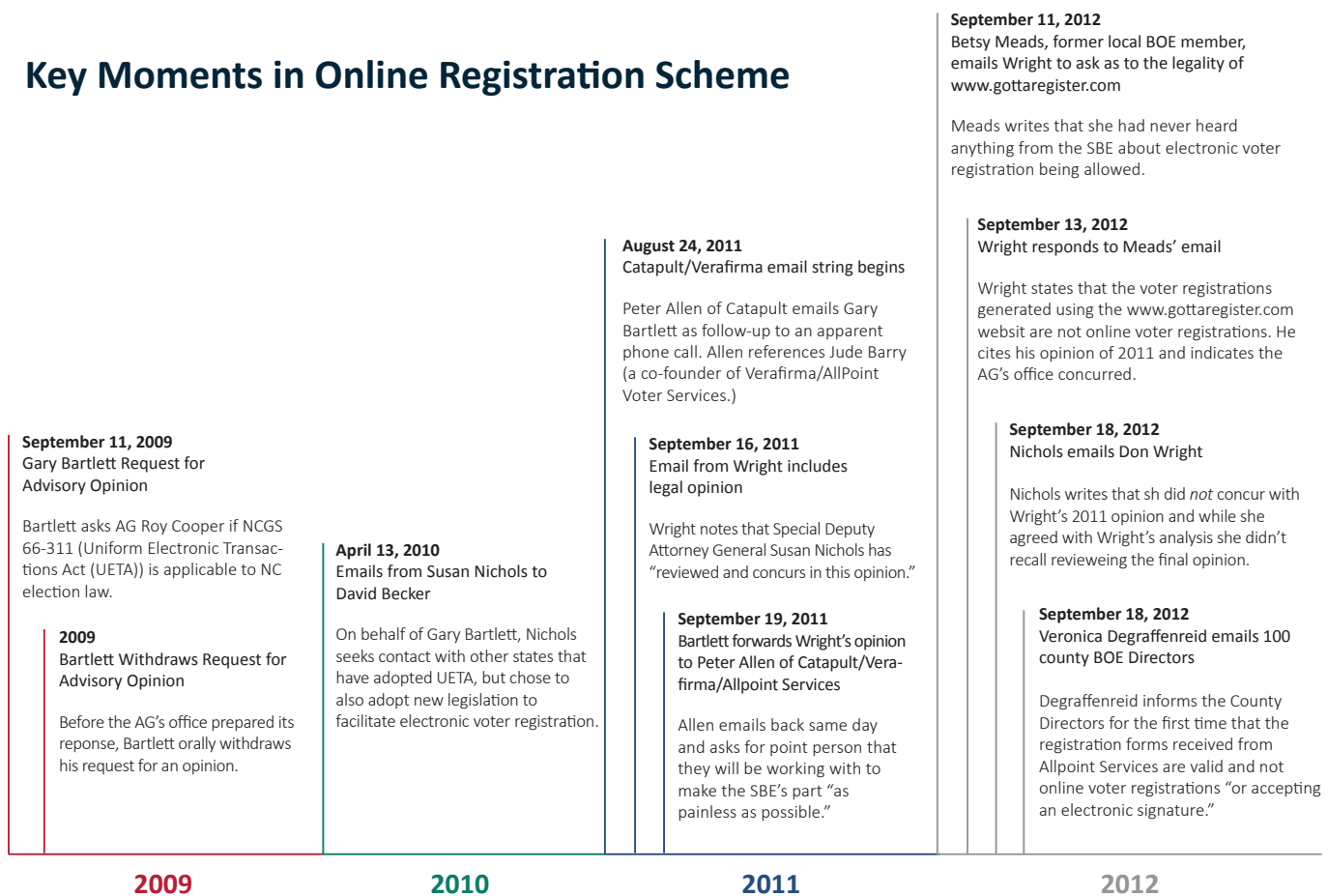
amounts of voter fraud.

When it comes to political activism, Bob Hall taught the SBE staff well. Just before the 2012 presidential election, SBE staff decided North Carolina needed online voter registration. Undeterred by North Carolina law prohibiting online voter registration, and without seeking input from the appointed board or legislators, SBE staff devised a plan allow it.

Following a tip from a citizen, Civitas initiated a public records request and was able to detail the SBE plot to subvert North Carolina statutes which require an actual signature to register to vote in North Carolina.

In a blatantly partisan move, the staff of the North Carolina SBE successfully subverted state law to facilitate online voter registration in North Carolina by the 2012 Barack Obama campaign. The Civitas Institute documented how SBE bureaucrats conspired, with a [private company, working for the Obama campaign](#), to facilitate a form of online voter registration for the 2012 General Election – in violation of state law. In doing so they coordinated with partisans behind closed doors, lied about the NC Attorney General’s Office concurring with the SBE staff on the issue, and dodged oversight by their own board and the legislature. The result was to illegally add thousands of registra-

Key Moments in Online Registration Scheme



tions to the North Carolina voter rolls.

Figure 1: Timeline for illegal online registration scheme at the State Board of Elections.

Even after a Republican governor was elected in 2012, SBE employees continued in their efforts to subvert election law. Immediately prior to the [2016 presidential election](#), several county board of elections employees from

around the state informed Civitas that state employees at SBE were allowing changes to voter registration [without a signature](#).

Bob Hall, Democracy NC and many other left-wing advocacy organizations have provided cover for the SBE in recent years. The activist organizations create bogus reports that show no voter fraud in North Carolina, helping the SBE staff diffuse allegations to the contrary. [A report on the 2016 election](#) by Bob Hall's group Democracy NC, was an attempt to make it harder for citizens to lodge election protests and imply that those that file protests may be the criminals. The so-called report implies that people who commit voter fraud do so by "accident or out of ignorance of the voting rules for probationers, rather than any intent to cheat."

That report was distributed via email link by the SBE to all of North Carolina's county board of elections offices, 15 months after the election. The "report" was made up entirely of anecdotal evidence. That the [SBE would distribute such an unreliable report](#) based on hearsay to all 100 local BOE offices is an indication of their close relationship to the political-left. It is especially strange that the SBE allowed itself to be a distribution service for a Democracy NC document that contracted the SBE's own findings acknowledging some of the fraud that occurred in North Carolina during the 2016 presidential election, including:

- **441** open cases of voting by suspected active felons.
- **41** non-citizens with legal status (green card, etc.) cast ballots.
- **24** substantiated cases of double-voting initiated through tips and data audits. (although SBE admitted in their response to "a few dozen" cases that "remain under review")
- **2** cases of voter impersonation referred to prosecutors.
- Irregularities affecting absentee by-mail voting in Bladen County. (While the case was referred to federal prosecutors, the votes were counted. In the report, the SBE failed to report the number of absentee by mail irregularities, news outlets reported approximately **400** ballots were affected).

The report went on to explain the complexity of determining citizenship, double voting and keeping track of felons – all obstacles in identifying fraud.

MISFEASANCE AND MALFEASANCE BY ELECTIONS BOARDS

What SBE decided to omit from the report is troubling. No mention is made of at least three state and county board of elections employees that were accused of voter fraud. Missing from the report is any mention of the election board employees, including at least one staff member from SBE, who broke the law by committing acts of voter fraud or suggesting others commit voter fraud.

A [Granville County elections employee was charged and convicted](#) with altering records to allow felons to vote. The employee had restored voting privileges to 250 ineligible voters convicted of felonies. In Durham County, a board of elections employee was convicted of [counting about 200 provisional ballots twice](#) in the 2016 primary.

Perhaps the most egregious omission from the SBE report is that one of its own employees encouraged citizens to vote with other people's ballots. [E. Lee Cooley](#), a member of the voter outreach team, told her audiences, among other things;

“... and these are persons who have an interest in that homeless person. So that ballot can go to that near relative who can vote that ballot, in a manner that is in the best interest of that homeless person.”

In one presentation, Cooley communicated to her audience nine times that it is legal to vote someone else’s absentee by mail.

The problems with the state and local boards have continued during Gov. Roy Cooper’s administration. He has [instituted chaos](#) at the top of the SBE by appointing [leftist activists](#) to head the board. In turn, that board has sought to sweep [malfeasance by county board of elections officials](#) under the rug.

The actions detailed in this article have weakened voting integrity in North Carolina. What’s worse is the actions of the agency designed to oversee elections and ensure the integrity of the process and the rule of law do not inspire trust. Given that, the [570 cases](#) of suspected voting fraud the SBE referred to prosecutors between 2014 and 2019 are likely just the [tip of the iceberg](#). We can also expect cases organized attempts to manipulate our elections, like the alleged 2018 absentee ballot fraud in Bladen County, to continue.

With no security measures in place, and the left and Democrats hostile to common sense reforms, the possibility of questionable election results in the future will further damage the integrity of the voting process.

COOPER'S FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PLAN: THROWING NEW MONEY AT AN OLD PROBLEM: PART I

BY BOB LUEBKE

- Is free community college good policy when college is no longer the proxy for talent or a ticket to upward mobility?
- “Free” community college is not free; it merely shifts the burden of costs from students to taxpayers.
- Programs already exist to help low-income students access community college and higher education.
- Apprenticeships, competency based education programs and other educational options offer more effective ways for developing a better-educated workforce.

In 2017 Governor Cooper toured Linamar Corporation, a precision machining and assembly company located outside Asheville, North Carolina. In remarks that day, Cooper talked about his campaign promise of free community college tuition for any North Carolina student. He said:

In my talks with business owners, I hear time and time again that they have job openings, but can't find workers with the skills necessary to fill them. Making community college more accessible means more of our high school graduates can learn the skills they need to get good paying jobs.

According to some estimates, since the recession, 95 percent of new jobs require training beyond a high school diploma. Young people who have no education or skilled vocational training after high school find it increasingly difficult to escape poverty and support a family.

Cooper is proposing to reverse these trends through the NC GROW Scholarship program. Under the program, students who graduated high school and have a 2.0 GPA or better would receive free community college tuition. The NC GROW Scholarship would cover the remaining last dollar of tuition and fees for those who have used other financial aid options. To finance the program, Cooper proposes to use money from the N.C. Education Lottery.

Cooper's idea is not new. Reduced or free college programs have long been embraced by the Left and the Democratic Party. The North Carolina [Democratic Party Platform](#) for 2016 included phrasing supporting the concept of free community college tuition. The NC GROW Scholarship is patterned after a similar program in Tennessee and comes after President Barack Obama proposed a similar federal plan for free community college tuition in 2015. Since then, Democratic Presidential candidates [Bernie Sanders](#) and [Hillary Clinton](#) have voiced their support for the concept and expanded it. States such as Tennessee, Rhode Island and New York – and even cities like San Francisco – have begun their own programs to provide [tuition free college](#). In 2008, Democratic gubernatorial candidate Beverly Perdue proposed offering [two free years of college tuition](#) to help improve North Carolina's work force.

The Left continues to champion many of the plans for free community college or free college tuition. While Republican majorities in the General Assembly have been largely lukewarm towards Cooper's plan Republicans recently came forward with a scholarship plan for free community college tuition. In 2019 Representatives Jeff Elmore (R-

Alexander0, Pat Hurley (R-Randolph), Julia Howard (R-Davie) and Ken Goodman (D-Montgomery) introduced the High Achieving Tuition Scholarship ([HB-128](#)). The program would provide eligible students who met academic requirements up to two years for free tuition at North Carolina community colleges. Although the bill did not make it out of committee be assured the idea of free community college is not likely to go away anytime soon. Parents of all political persuasions would certainly welcome relief from ever-rising tuition costs.

Governor Cooper's free community college tuition program, however, is worse than the problem it allegedly corrects. Yes, we acknowledge that the United States has a shortage of properly educated workers that must be remedied. The most important question is: how does this nation meet that need?

For decades additional education — be it community college or attending a four-year institution — was the way to address those needs. Federal and state financial aid policies encouraged millions of young people to enroll. Since then rising tuition costs have threatened the opportunity for many to attend college. The Left diagnosed the problem as the need to improve access. Hence free community college tuition. This is a faulty diagnosis for several reasons. Cooper touts his plan as an aid to helping students finish school and receive a two-year degree or continue for further education.

The fact is the North Carolina Community College's [Career and College Promise Program](#) already offers three pathways that are directed at helping high school students access tuition-free college or course credit toward a two-year, four-year or technical degree. Students can access free courses in college as early as high school.

In addition to these programs there are other programs designed by local community colleges to reduce the cost of college and increase completion rates. In North Carolina, Brunswick, Isothermal, James Sprunt, Montgomery, Richmond and Sandhills Community colleges have programs put together by public and/or private dollars to offer-tuition free coursework to graduates of local high schools.

Along with public programs, there are private programs designed to do the same. In 2015, Guilford County Schools helped to raise \$35 million to help fund the college education of all graduates. The program is a partnership with the controversial Say Yes to Education program that helps to fund and provide wrap-around services for K-12 students with the goal of getting more underserved populations to college.¹

These realities make it prudent to examine the assumptions behind Cooper's proposal for free community college tuition.

Cooper assumes that college is the engine of mobility for all Americans. That may have been the case at one time, but it is not the case for many today. College is no longer synonymous with talent and a skilled labor force. I wrote about it in 2016:

Some workforce analysts assert that by 2020 two in three jobs will require some higher education to perform. The solution, we're told, is to get more people into school and produce more college graduates.

That makes sense to some, but I'd ask: Is more higher education the only way to get an educated and skilled workforce? Of course, if you're talking about some jobs, that may be the answer. However, we also have labor shortages in fields such as computing, the skilled trades, auto mechanics and health care. Many jobs in these fields pay well, but don't require a four-year degree.

Is there a shortage or merely a maldistribution of students? The sad fact is that for every student in

business, engineering or a pre-professional program, there are others in less marketable areas such as art history, psychology and history majors. That's nothing against those fields or those who choose to study in them. But we need to ask: Will our nation be better if we keep generating graduates who have difficulty finding gainful employment?

Our society values a college degree – maybe too much. Over the last two decades, we've funneled too many young people toward a four-year degree, when the truth is that many probably would have done better elsewhere.

College, unfortunately, has become a proxy for talent. However, the reality is a college education doesn't always translate into social or economic mobility. We tend to overlook the other paths to success, such as starting your own business or becoming an apprentice. We tend to overlook the thousands of individuals who through their own ingenuity, resourcefulness and determination achieved the American dream without ever going to college.

Moreover, newer statistics undercut the idea college is a sure pathway to a good-paying job and prosperity. According to the Economic Policy Institute, wages for university grads are 2.5 percent lower in 2015 than they were in 2000. The research found that the real (inflation-adjusted) hourly wages of recent college grads in 2015 was \$17.94 or just over \$37,000 a year. In 2000, the average hourly rate was \$18.41.²

If college is the not the engine of economic success, a proxy for talent or the engine of social mobility; is making community college free a wise policy?

Free college programs – whether they involve community college or four-year colleges —incorrectly assume that price is the most important variable in determining educational outcome. It's a point that former AEI researcher and now current Senior Vice President for Strategy and Policy at the UNC System, Andrew Kelly made in a New York Times opinion piece:

...[F]ree college plans assume that tuition prices are the main obstacle to student success, looking past problems of educational quality and college readiness. Take community colleges, where federal grants cover the price of tuition for the average low-income student. Despite free tuition, just one-third of students from the bottom income quartile who started at a community college in 2003 finished a degree or certificate by 2009. Two-year students from the top income quartile didn't do much better (42 percent). These numbers suggest that lackluster outcomes are not entirely, or even mostly, a function of tuition prices, but reflect deeper problems. Like the fact that 60 to 70 percent of community college students have to take at least one remedial course, as do 40 percent of those at public four-year institutions. Or the fact that students who attend public four-year colleges with lower graduation rates are less likely to finish than similar peers who attend better schools.³

People have a difficult time completing college for many reasons. When you dive into the data, you find the decision to leave usually derives from a variety of reasons – and oftentimes it's not money. It can be family issues, scheduling, transportation or a lack of counseling or preparation for college. Such realities question the value of such an investment. Funneling dollars to programs with high dropout rates will have little payoff.

Besides being poorly targeted, Cooper's plan offers last dollar assistance to individuals who graduate high school and have a 2.0 GPA. The fact is most low-income students who attend community college can already receive

enough in grants and scholarships to significantly reduce the cost of education. The real impact of Cooper's plan would be to provide additional benefits to middle and upper income students enrolled in community colleges. Governor Cooper's free community college tuition proposal is bad policy and it does nothing to reduce the cost of college. The bet is that free community college would increase access for all. However free tuition is essentially the same as capping tuition at free, which is essentially a price control that limits institutional spending to whatever the public is willing to invest. It doesn't change the institution's cost structure. What happens when enrollment expands but resources don't? California had that happen and turned around thousands of students.

While tuition at community colleges has not increased as dramatically as tuition at four year colleges, the trend-lines are similar. Free tuition program offer no way to reduce or control instructional costs. Cooper's program is silent on the need to trim costs or change how higher education is financed. It also ignores the reality that the current problem of not having a sufficient number of skilled workers is a product of a refusal to innovate, poorly designed programs and bad curricula. In other words; institutions bear responsibility as well. When college bears some of the blame, making college more accessible will not solve the problem.

Part II of this article discusses some of the alternatives policymakers can implement now to control the rising cost of higher education and to develop a more educated workforce.

ENDNOTES

1 Governor Cooper Highlights NC GROW Free Community College Scholarship Proposal in Asheville, Press Release, March 21, 2017. Available online from: <https://governor.nc.gov/news/governor-cooper-highlights-nc-grow-free-community-college-scholarship-proposal-asheville>

2 Why Free College Tuition is a Bad Idea, Robert Luebke, Civitas Institute. Available online at: <https://www.nccivitas.org/2016/16909/>

3 The Problem is that Free College, Isn't Free", Andrew Kelly, New York Times Editorial, January 20, 2016. Available online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2016/01/20/should-college-be-free/the-problem-is-that-free-college-isnt-free>

COOPER'S FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROPOSAL: THROWING NEW MONEY AT AN OLD PROBLEM, PART II

BY BOB LUEBKE

- Cooper's free community college plan is based on flawed assumptions
- North Carolina can take several steps to develop an educated and skilled workforce

Part I of this two-part article discussed Gov. Roy Cooper's plan to provide free community college tuition for eligible students. The plan's flawed assumptions and shortcomings were also identified. In part II we identify alternatives policymakers can adopt to control the cost of higher education and develop a better educated workforce.

People on the Left and the Right agree that we need a more educated and skilled workforce for our nation to compete economically. Where the two sides differ is on the means of how to make that a reality.

We've already chronicled the many reasons why North Carolina should not adopt free community college or free college tuition programs. There are, however, several steps the Tar Heel state could adopt to more effectively improve education outcomes and the overall skills of our workforce.

Address Factors that Drive the Costs of Higher Education. First, legislators need to address the factors that drive up the costs of higher education. The North Carolina State Constitution provides that the benefits of public education ought to be provided "as far as practicable" free of expense.¹ To honor the spirit of the provision, many cost increases have been added not to tuition but to student fees. In addition to tuition, a typical student at a UNC institution now pays athletics fees, health services fees, student activities fees, educational and technology fees, campus security fees and debt service fees. In 2019-20, these fees ranged from a low of \$1,731 (UNC-Chapel Hill) to \$3,093 (UNC-Charlotte), with most campuses somewhere in between.² Those who watch the UNC system or have a son or daughter attending one of the institutions knows that fees have continued to increase as well as the number of fees charged. Fees at UNC-Charlotte are 80 percent as large as the regular tuition charges (\$3,812). Some campuses are lower, but the clear trend in costs is upward. Limits on fee increases and closer monitoring can help to limit cost increases.

Reduce Administrative Bloat. It's no secret that in recent years colleges have begun spending more and more on administration, often to the detriment of academics. There are administrative positions for marketing, sustainability, recruiting, diversity, technology, fundraising, environmental health and so forth.

In their study on trends in higher education, Todd J. Zywicki and Christopher Koopman of George Mason University noted:³

Universities have increased spending, but very little of that increased spending has been related to classroom instruction; rather, it is being directed toward non-classroom costs. As a result, there has been a growth in academic bureaucracies, as universities focus on hiring employees to manage or administer people, programs, and regulations. Between 2001 and 2011, these sorts of hires have

increased 50% faster than the number of classroom instructors. This trend...has become ubiquitous in... American higher education.

Contributing to the high administrative costs is that college administrators are well-paid and since they are usually hired to comply with state and federal regulations, administrators usually have staff to carry out these responsibilities. In 2009, UNC President Erskine Bowles called the unchecked growth of college administrators “an absolute embarrassment” and set out trying to reduce administrative bloat within the UNC System.⁴ His efforts helped, but almost a dozen years later, another effort is needed.

Reform College Finance and Student Financial Aid Policies. Federal subsidies drive up the cost of higher education. A 2015 Federal Reserve of New York [report](#) found evidence for what many had long suspected; federal subsidies are distorting the normal workings of the market. Federal financial aid works to reduce the true cost of higher education to the consumer and also works to inflate enrollment. In so doing it has worked to create and sustain a “bubble” in the higher education market, that will only be resolved by a correction in the market. Financial aid policies should be revised to correct these distortions. For starters, aid policies could be targeted on high need occupation areas to ensure the best returns from the personal and public investment and lower student default rates.

Address the Needs of Community College Students. In addition to redressing factors that have contributed to rising costs in higher education, North Carolina community colleges can do more to encourage young adults to take courses and complete programs. Work and family responsibilities are often the major factors that lead to students dropping out of community colleges. Students on non-traditional schedules find it difficult to attend school on a traditional schedule. A better solution might be to provide mentoring programs, expand online classes or a combination of weekend class or non-traditional options. Such changes can go a long way toward keeping students on track to graduate.

Expand the Array of Educational Opportunities. Apprenticeship programs and academic programs based on the demonstration of competency are two proven ways for young people to learn and gain specific skill sets. Apprenticeship programs in the trades and technical areas are proven ways of addressing the shortage of manpower needs in these areas. In addition, Competency Based Programs (CPBs) ([Western Governors University](#)) offer a different way for students to complete a program and gain skills. CPBs can benefit community college students who have had previous experience but have not earned formal credit. CPBs often work with local industry leaders to identify key competencies within their field and design courses that help to demonstrate those skills. CPBs address head on the concern that college students are not learning relevant skills in the classroom.

Enhance College Preparation in High Schools. One reason for the current difficulty is that too many students leave high school ill-prepared for college or the world of work. Most high schools offer a smorgasbord of courses that lack rigor and are often unrelated to student’s academic interests or career plans. Too many students leave high school with little in the way of useful academic knowledge or useful skills like how to make career decisions or manage money. They lack study and life skills necessary for success in college or the workforce. Fortunately, these deficiencies are all correctable. Thankfully a growing number of school orientation or counseling programs

are folding in courses/sessions to teach life skills such as financial literacy and decision making at modest or reasonable expense to the institution.

CONCLUSION

One of the greatest challenges facing our nation is the need for a better educated workforce. Progressives, liberal Democrats and others clamoring for more government believe the solution is to remove all barriers to education. These groups have introduced free community college and free college tuition programs at the federal and state level. Many states have also approved such programs. Gov. Cooper's free community college program is one such plan. If you're a student or a parent, "free" college programs can sound very appealing – until you look at the assumptions, costs and the impacts.

Nothing in life is free. Simply calling something free doesn't make it free. Cooper's proposal simply shifts who pays the cost of education. In this case, the cost is simply shifted from the student to the taxpayer. These sort of schemes do nothing to address the factors that actually contribute to the ever-rising cost of higher education.

Like most states, North Carolina needs a more educated and skilled workforce. Free community college plans are poorly targeted on students who frequently drop out and already have access to student aid dollars and other similar programs designed to allow access to higher education.

Rather than throw more money at a program that will cheapen education and attract less serious students, North Carolina should resist the allure of free community college tuition. A traditional two or four-year college degree is no longer the proxy for talent or a ticket for upward mobility. The exploding array of educational options such as online and personalized learning, apprenticeships and competency based programs offer students an attractive

ENDNOTES

1 North Carolina State Constitution, See: Article IX, Section 9. Copy available online at: <https://www.ncleg.net/Legislation/constitution/nccconstitution.pdf>

2 The University of North Carolina Tuition and Fees Applicable to All Regular Full-Time Undergraduate Student 2019-20 Available online at https://www.northcarolina.edu/sites/default/files/2019-20_ug_tuition_and_fees.pdf

3 [The Changing of the Guard: The Political Economy of Administrative Bloat in American Higher Education.](#) Todd J. Zywicki and Christopher Koopman of George Mason University

4 UNC to cut more from the Top, ABC 11, Eyewitness News, Available online at: <https://abc11.com/archive/6991947/>

POVERTY - PART 1

BY BRIAN BALFOUR

- Progressive policies to fight poverty have failed
- Welfare programs subsidize poverty and create vicious poverty traps
- Over the last two-and-a-half decades, North Carolina has spent more than half a trillion dollars on welfare programs yet poverty rates have trended upward
- North Carolina families are *roughly five times as likely to be in poverty when there is no father in the home*

Thanks in part to conservative, pro-growth economic policies over the last seven years, North Carolina's economy has been growing at a robust clip, outpacing national and regional averages in many categories.

Yet, far too many North Carolinians continue to struggle with the mental and emotional anguish of being poor. The single mother working two jobs to feed her family, exhausted from lack of sleep and thus risking health problems to make ends meet. The rural family confronting the fact that even as the cost of living increases, their paycheck isn't – prompting agonizing decisions like selling the family farm in order to pay off debts. And there is the gut-wrenching feeling of uncertainty of the unemployed father, unsure when or if he will be able to once again provide for his family.

The psychological, and even physical, toll of living in poverty can place unrelenting stress on one's dignity and relationships, and often causes self-destructive behavior like alcoholism or drug addiction.

That's why it's so important for North Carolina to make a clear-headed, rational evaluation of how to reduce poverty.

THE WRONG APPROACH TO POVERTY

The Left's primary approach to poverty is to subsidize it. An old, and true, statement most people are familiar with goes: "when you tax an activity, you get less of it. When you subsidize something, you get more of it."

This holds true for poverty as well. Unfortunately, the progressive agenda of subsidizing poverty has the effect of creating more of it.

Such an approach to poverty fails to understand how to promote economic growth – which is the only way to lift the living standards of society's least financially well off. As John Chamberlain, the late economic historian [stated](#), "Poverty in society is overcome by productivity, and in no other way. There is no political alchemy which can transmute diminished production into increased consumption."

Productivity gains create a greater abundance of goods and services valued by society, enabling people to satisfy more of their needs and wants. When productivity gains are stunted, the decrease in goods and services disproportionately harms the poorest.

Public policies that better incentivize investments in productivity will help reduce poverty. Policies that disincentivize such investments, or otherwise take resources away from productive investments, will create relative scarcity of goods and services, leading to higher poverty rates.

Following the Left's prescriptions for poverty will only lead to more poverty and accelerate a decline in the standard of living for the poor.

FATHERLESSNESS: THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Any discussion of poverty is incomplete without looking at perhaps the leading cause of poverty in North Carolina, and America: fatherless homes.

According to [2017 American Community Survey](#) data from the U.S. Census Bureau, North Carolina families with at least one child in the home headed by a married couple have a poverty rate of just 8.2 percent. But in households with at least one child in the home headed by a female householder with no husband present, the poverty rate skyrockets to 41.5 percent.

In other words, North Carolina families are *roughly five times as likely to be in poverty when there is no father in the home.*

Moreover, for households with multiple children, one of which is under five years old, headed by a married couple, the poverty rate is 14.5 percent in North Carolina. In similar households except with no father in the home, the poverty rate jumps to a heart-wrenching 60 percent.

It is professional negligence to speak about poverty in North Carolina and ignore these facts.

Welfare programs championed by the Left break up families by replacing a father's paycheck with a government check and benefits. Nationally, since LBJ's Great Society ratcheted up government welfare programs in the mid-1960s, [the rate of unmarried births has tripled.](#)

If North Carolina is serious about poverty reduction, the issue of fatherless homes, and the role that government welfare programs play in increasing that number, must be acknowledged.

NOTE: In Part 2, we discuss the specific welfare programs favored by the Left and why they are the wrong approach.

POVERTY TRAPS, NOT POVERTY REDUCTION

BY BRIAN BALFOUR

So, what policies do Leftist politicians and advocacy groups favor to address poverty in North Carolina? For the most part, the policies the Left advocates for only mitigate the negative financial impacts of being poor. They fail to encourage productive investments that would actually grow the economy and reduce poverty.

Not only do current welfare policies stunt economic growth in a broad sense, they also serve to trap individuals in poverty. By creating so many means-tested welfare programs, low-income individuals are often confronted with a perverse choice: if they take a job, or choose to work more hours, or are offered a promotion with higher pay, they face losing government benefits of substantial monetary value. For many individuals, finding work, or higher pay, makes them financially worse off because the value of lost government benefits outweighs the increased financial reward of work.

Confronted with this situation, many individuals understandably opt to continue receiving the government benefits. Rather than help individuals, the perverse economic incentives created by the “social safety net” instead help to trap aid recipients on welfare. And the longer they remain out of the workforce, or at lower levels of employment, the less employable they become. It is a vicious, self-reinforcing cycle that keeps people poor and dependent on the state.

Following are some of the “anti-poverty” programs favored by North Carolina politicians like Gov. Roy Cooper, Deb Butler (D-New Hanover) and Verla Insko (D-Orange) along with left-wing groups like the [NC Justice Center](#), and why they not only fail to reduce poverty, but in many cases make it worse:

- **Expand Medicaid** – Gov. Cooper has arguably made Medicaid expansion his top policy priority. A lack of expansion is the primary reason he gave for vetoing the legislatively-approved 2019-20 state budget. Expansion is also included in the [North Carolina Democratic Party platform](#). The destructive nature of Medicaid expansion is substantial, and its negative consequences were outlined in previous articles, most notably [here](#) and [here](#). Suffice it to say, Medicaid expansion does not provide enrollees access to medical care, provides subpar health results to recipients, comes with a massive taxpayer price tag, destroys jobs and serves as a powerful poverty trap.
- **Minimum wage/living wage** – For years, the left has been advocating for raising North Carolina’s minimum wage, often going further to demand a “living wage.” The latest such efforts include 2019 bills such as: [HB 146](#) (Living Wage by 2024); [HB 366](#) (raises minimum wage and ties increases to COLA); [HB 832](#) (amend the state constitution to add a minimum wage) and [HB 46](#) (raises minimum wage to \$15 over five years, and among other things also adds mandatory paid sick and medical leave). It too is included in the [Democratic Party platform](#). Minimum wage laws, as documented many times like [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#), harm the very people they are purported to help. Criminalizing labor agreements below a government wage threshold prices the lowest-skilled workers out of the job market; or otherwise results in employers cutting back hours or reducing non-wage benefits for the lowest-skilled workers. Such measures do not reduce poverty, but rather make it more difficult for low-income, low-skilled people to gain valuable work experience and climb out of the poverty trap.
- **Affordable housing programs** – So-called affordable housing programs are also included in the [Democratic Party platform](#). Affordable housing programs typically involve either financial assistance to

renters/buyers or zoning rules forcing developers to sell a certain percentage of their new units at below-market prices. Of course, neither of these policies reduce poverty, but are designed to mitigate the hardships of poverty. Making matters worse, these programs actually increase housing prices and decrease the amount of available affordable housing. Financial assistance to renters or buyers of housing artificially props up demand for housing. Such programs inject more money into the housing market, which drives up prices. Affordable housing zoning requirements mandate that a percentage of units be sold at below-market prices. Such provisions discourage new development, restricting the supply of housing - which drives up prices. Higher prices not only put housing out of reach for the poor, they also place undue financial strain on the middle class. In a [study of low-income housing mandates](#) in the San Francisco Bay Area from 2003 to 2007, economists found that new home construction fell by an average of 30 percent in the first year, resulting in an average 8 percent increase in housing prices. Moreover, even if such mandates don't lower new housing starts, low income housing mandates prompt developers to raise prices on the remaining houses to make up for the lost revenue from the share of houses they are forced to sell or rent at below-market rates. Thus, the real impact of affordable housing policies is less, not more, affordable housing.

- ***Increase/Extend Unemployment Insurance Benefits*** – When legislators reformed North Carolina's unemployment insurance program in 2013, one of the major reasons was to accelerate the state's pay off of a [\\$2.7 billion loan to the federal government](#). The move was roundly criticized by the Left. Indeed, national outlets even labeled the move as overly [harsh](#) and even "[disturbing](#)." Ever since, North Carolina progressives have been calling for [increased benefits for longer durations](#). What the Left ignores, however, is that early repayment of the debt enabled North Carolina to avoid *massive* tax hikes on employers. Estimates suggested that by 2017 employers would be saving [\\$700 million a year in taxes](#), thanks to the early debt repayment. Again, unemployment benefits do nothing to lift people out of poverty, but instead subsidize joblessness. In sum, unemployment insurance creates a vicious cycle: the higher the UI tax on employers, the less money they have to create jobs, and the higher and longer the UI benefits to the unemployed, the greater incentive individuals have to remain jobless. Fewer employers will seek to hire, and fewer unemployed will look for work. Research by [economists of all stripes](#) agree that more generous unemployment benefits increase unemployment rates. Even the New York Times resident left-wing economist [Paul Krugman acknowledges](#) that extended unemployment benefits will likewise extend higher levels of unemployment. In his 2010 economics textbook, Krugman stated "Public policy designed to help workers who lose their jobs can lead to structural unemployment as an unintended side effect." [A 2014 University of Pennsylvania](#) study concluded that North Carolina's UI reforms improved our labor market conditions. Taxing job creators while paying people not to work results in less productive activity and investment, harming the increases in productivity needed to grow the economy and reduce poverty. Expanding North Carolina's UI program will harm the very people advocates claim it will help.
- ***Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)*** – The EITC is a long-time [favorite "poverty-reduction" tool](#) of the Left in North Carolina. A federal EITC is already in place. Advocates want to add a refundable state component as well, which North Carolina eliminated as part of its 2013 tax reforms. The EITC is a tax credit for working people, and the credit is calculated as a percentage of earnings. As the recipient's earnings increase, the amount of the credit likewise increases – up to a maximum amount at which point the credit decreases as income rises and phases out once a certain income level is reached. Many consider EITC to be the least damaging of welfare programs because it seeks to eliminate perverse poverty trap incentives. Nevertheless, it increases the tax burden on non-recipients by forcing taxpayers not eligible for the credit to finance a larger share of government spending. The increased tax rates of course discourage productive invest-

ment and activity, and as a result curtail economic growth.

CONCLUSION

Should leftist politicians once again regain power in North Carolina, we can expect them to double-down on failed “anti-poverty” programs that have been shown to not reduce poverty but to arguably make it worse. The *only* ways certain to lift more people out of poverty are to increase society’s productivity, which comes from productive investment fueled by savings, and take steps to strengthen families, because fatherlessness is so strongly linked to poverty.

Progressive welfare state programs are not designed with this in mind. Instead, their programs subsidize poverty, meaning they generate more of it. Moreover, the perverse incentives introduced by welfare programs serve to trap many in poverty and create a greater dependency on the government.

Poverty is a wrenching human problem. Progressives fail to understand the proper means of reducing poverty, and North Carolina deserves to know the truth. North Carolina is just one election away from the Left once again ramping up their failed government welfare programs. The result will be more of our fellow North Carolinians suffering the emotional, psychological and physical toll of being snared in the poverty trap.

LIGHT RAIL: TERRIBLY EXPENSIVE AND INEFFICIENT

BY BRIAN BALFOUR

- North Carolina leftists continue to long for light-rail projects
- If they had their way, the state's Highway Trust Fund would be raided to pay for such boondoggles
- Light rail is a wildly expensive and inefficient means of transportation, and forces taxpayers to subsidize the transportation of a tiny fraction of the population

North Carolinians are just one election away from once again seeing our scarce transportation dollars being squandered on corruption, roads to nowhere and light rail money pits.

The latest example that foretells how damaging the left's transportation agenda would be is the [failed Durham-Orange Light Rail project](#). After years of planning, federal funds fell through and the project was scrapped.

The whole saga, however, serves as a warning. Originally projected to [cost a total of \\$1.6 billion](#), the line's latest projected [price tag had ballooned to \\$2.7 billion](#) by the time of its cancellation – and that's without the project ever breaking ground.

Light rail projects are notorious for running well over estimated costs. For instance, Charlotte's light rail [exceeded projected costs by about 2-½ times](#).

Moreover, despite the outsized price tag, light rail moves but a tiny fraction of commuters compared to other more efficient means of transportation. Just under 18 miles of rail line (the projected size of the Durham-Orange line) at a cost of \$2.7 billion equates to a cost per-mile of more than **\$150 million**, and that is on the slight chance the project comes in according to projected costs.

The numbers behind such light rail projects are difficult to justify

According to the American Road and Transportation Builders association, 4-lane urban highways can be built for approximately [\\$8-\\$10 million per mile](#).¹ The Durham-Orange Light Rail line would have been about **fifteen times more expensive per mile** than an average four-lane highway.

Furthermore, the Durham-Orange light-rail line was projected to average [622 passengers per hour](#) (light rail ridership often falls short of estimates, too). Conversely, highways can accommodate 2,200 cars per lane per hour meaning a four-lane highway could accommodate 8,800 cars per hour. For the same amount of money, DOT could build nearly *250 miles worth of four-lane highways*. Which option do you think would best mitigate congestion?

In this case, light rail would be **fifteen times more expensive than a 4-lane highway** but would carry only **about 7 percent as many commuters**.

LIBERAL LAWMAKERS WANT TO RAID HIGHWAY TRUST FUND FOR LIGHT RAIL BOONDOGGLES

Undaunted by the financial challenges light rail presents, left-wing state legislators continue to be enamored of light-rail boondoggles and want to eliminate restrictions on the amount they can raid from the state's Highway Trust Fund to finance this inefficient means of transportation.

The latest evidence of this came in 2017 with the introduction of [Senate Bill 170 Remove Limits on Light Rail Funding](#), sponsored by Joel Ford (D-Mecklenburg), Angela Bryant (D-Nash) and Erica Smith-Ingram (D-Bertie).

In 2015, legislators implemented a cap for state funding of light rail projects, limiting state Highway Trust Fund support to 10 percent of the total cost of the project. SB 170 would have eliminated that cap and allowed for unlimited raiding of Highway Trust Fund money to be diverted to light rail.

LIGHT RAIL IS GOVERNMENT CRONYISM AT ITS WORST

The left pushes so hard for light rail in large part because it satisfies key components of their worldview: in this case endorsing government force to enrich cronies at the expense of taxpayers, all veiled under the phony feel-good guise of "helping the environment." Light rail is backed by [Gov. Roy Cooper](#). Supporters range from [transit groups](#), to [environmental groups](#), to [far-left advocacy groups](#).

As with many government boondoggles, light rail projects offer crony developers and contractors the chance to gain billions in revenue – no doubt with an understood obligation to support those legislators who delivered the goods in return. For instance, former Charlotte Mayor Patrick Gannon was arrested in 2014 on corruption charges stemming in part from an incident in which he met and cooperated with an "[undercover agent posing as a developer from Las Vegas... interested in developments along a streetcar and light rail line being built in Charlotte.](#)"

Meanwhile, taxpayers across the state -- many of whom will never ride the rail line -- are compelled to pay for light rail. And the alleged environmental benefits that left-wing politicians pretend to care about are nonexistent, in large part because traffic isn't mitigated due to such low ridership and because [light rail uses roughly the same amount of energy per passenger as cars](#).

THE LEFT'S TRANSPORTATION VISION FOR NORTH CAROLINA

Should the left once again regain control of North Carolina, we should expect more emphasis on light rail and more [roads to nowhere](#).

The left forces taxpayers across the state to finance their ill-conceived schemes, with little concern for the economic damage done by the wasteful diversion of resources away from more productive transportation projects.

As [transportation expert Randall O'Toole](#) of the Cato Institute summarizes: "For the most part, light rail has increased congestion, harmed transit riders, and wasted taxpayers' money."

A BETTER WAY

There is a better way of funding transportation, and we've seen significant improvement in recent years.

Instead of rewarding political cronies and chasing the latest wildly expensive and inefficient fad; developing an objective, strategic evaluation of the state's highest transportation needs offers a better way to proceed. In 2013, the

North Carolina General Assembly established the [Strategic Mobility Formula](#), which allocates available revenues based on data-driven scoring and local input.

According to NCDOT, this new methodology paid great dividends; creating a plan for 2016-2025 that “includes an additional 478 highway projects and is expected to support about 300,000 jobs. That’s 300 more projects (a 273 percent increase) and 126,000 more jobs (a 172 percent increase) than what the old funding formula, which distributed money equally across the state, would have allowed.”

Moreover, means of funding that more closely link payment with actual users is preferred to taxing people to pay for projects that they will never use – like light rail. The gas tax serves as arguably the best proxy of a government user fee, as it requires heavier users of the roads and highways to pay more (toll roads also serve as a fairly straightforward user fee).

Despite its many problems, the progressive infatuation with light rail continues. North Carolina would do well to avoid efforts that divert scarce resources, invite political cronyism and corruption and instead pursue a transportation strategy where cost is tied to use. Such opportunities offer not only the best chance for meeting our transportation needs but also managing environmental issues.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Accesses Sept. 27, 2017; online at: <http://www.artba.org/about/faq/>

THE PUSH FOR CALIFORNIA-STYLE GUN CONTROL IN NORTH CAROLINA

BY RAY NOTHSTINE

- Liberal urban legislators are aggressively calling for more gun control.
- North Carolina is falling behind red states when it comes to Second Amendment protections.
- Government should protect inherent rights; not restrict them.

“The rights of conscience, of bearing arms... are declared to be inherent in the people.”

– [Fisher Ames](#), 1789.

Media sensationalism over school shootings and selective gun violence is fueling an angst among many politicians and some of the citizenry for more gun regulations, including in North Carolina. For anti-gun groups, more regulatory action on firearms is the first step towards moving society in a direction where only law enforcement and a very limited number of citizens are allowed to be armed.

Recent tragedies have emboldened state and local politicians and some citizens, particularly in urban areas, to step up their rhetoric to restrict our inherent right to bear arms – a right with traditionally deep support in North Carolina, especially given the state’s large rural population. A [2017 article](#) notes that North Carolina has a larger rural population than any other state except for Texas, and proportionally has the largest rural population among the 10 most-populous states. Their rights, as well as the rights of all North Carolinians, are placed at risk by an increasing list of demands for gun control.

NORTH CAROLINA GUN LAWS OR CALIFORNIA GUN LAWS?

After the high-profile school shooting in Parkland, Fla. in 2018, Gov. Roy Cooper quickly called for more gun control. In March, Cooper [said](#) the [Jim Crow era](#) pistol approval process managed by the county sheriffs needs to be expanded to include “assault rifles,” a nebulous term for certain semi-automatic rifles. Federal background checks are already required for all firearms purchased from a licensed dealer. Cooper is in favor, too, of raising the minimum purchase age from 18 to 21 for what he deems “assault rifles,” banning bump stocks and implementing gun restraining orders. Ignored is the fact that 80 percent of gun crimes are committed with a handgun by somebody who is not the legal owner.

Cooper, who in the past received an [“A” rating](#) from the NRA as attorney general – to the ire of state Second Amendment activists – is calling on the federal government to ban many semi-automatic rifles, too. “Until the federal government takes action to discontinue the sale of assault weapons to civilians, North Carolina law should be updated to raise the legal age of sale of these weapons to age 21 and require anyone buying them – at a store, online, or at a gun show – to go through the same background check and permitting process as they would for a handgun,” declared Cooper in an article he penned for [Medium](#) in 2018. “There’s no good reason for the current double standard,” he declared. Gun buyers at stores already go through a federal background check, but Cooper’s proposal would strip the rights of young adults to legally purchase many mainstream semi-automatic firearms.

One of the more controversial restrictions is [gun restraining orders](#), reintroduced in March 2019 as a stand-alone bill in the House by Democratic state [Rep. Marcia Morey](#) of Durham.

In Morey's version, the [Extreme Risk Protection Orders](#) give family, "household members" and law enforcement the ability to have firearms seized: Temporarily, at least. The thinking is that the person may pose a clear and present danger to themselves or the public. The gun owner or the accused would then receive a hearing before a judge — no later than 10 days in most cases — to show that they are fit for ownership and not a threat to the public.

While the measure sounds good in theory, the seizure of weapons threatens our long-established understanding of due process. "Well, we call it gun-confiscation orders because it's largely confiscating firearms for people without due process," said [Dudley Brown](#), president of the National Association for Gun Rights.

Furthermore, the legislation lends itself to abuse because former spouses, a co-parent or "dating partner" in another household could potentially use the law as a means of retaliation for domestic conflict or disagreements. "Otherwise, a family member who's angry at an uncle or ex-boyfriend or something can go to a court and have someone stripped of a constitutional right without ever even knowing it," said Brown. "And we think that's fraught with danger."

There are a host of scenarios rife for abuse with gun restraining orders, and more left-leaning states with these laws, such as California, often seek to [expand](#) their scope once they are passed. Even groups such as the [ACLU](#) — no friend of the Second Amendment — calls their expansion a violation of an individual's civil rights. Of course, natural rights inevitably shrink while the state gains more authority to seize weapons under the guise of "safety" and "protection." A frequent [complaint](#) about the legislation is there are no good examples of one's constitutional rights to due process being waived except, in this case, for firearms.

[House Bill 723](#), in 2017, and [House Bill 1060](#) in 2018, are two bills that allow us to see where the Left and many state Democrats in the General Assembly really prefer to go with gun control. [House Bill 723](#), the "Gun Safety Act," would ax the popular "[stand your ground](#)" protections, require all gun owners to purchase liability insurance up to \$100,000 and limit magazine capacity to 15 rounds on most firearms. The bill also repeals reciprocity for out-of-state concealed carry permits among a host of other regulatory restrictions. The scrapping of the "stand your ground" law is particularly odious; in that it puts the burden of proof on an armed citizen for defending their life outside of the home. If passed, the bill's mandates and language would rapidly criminalize many North Carolina firearm owners.

House Bill 1060 from 2018, or the "[Ensure Safe Handguns](#)" law is another reminder of aggressive gun restrictions Second Amendment opponents seek to implement when or if they rise to power in North Carolina. The bill was sponsored by state Rep. Verla Insko of Orange County and other Democrat colleagues, including Reps. Morey and Pricey Harrison of Greensboro. It mirrors the California restriction of only selling handguns the state deemed "safe," instantly [banning the sale](#) of many models of Colt, Smith & Wesson, Kimber, Sig Sauer and others. Citizens who already own banned models can keep them, but they may only be transferred or sold to law enforcement for destruction.

Paul Valone, president of [Grass Roots North Carolina](#), said the [legislation works](#) to "incrementally ban the ownership of firearms, one step at a time." Valone notes, too, that the bill is only feasible if Democrats regain control of the General Assembly. "But people who value the Second Amendment should take note. If Democrats win (control

of the North Carolina General Assembly), we would eat this bill and others just like it.”

Free citizens are warranted in arguing against this legislation, especially given that many national politicians and cultural leaders are calling the NRA and its members “[terrorists](#).” There are even online petitions to declare the NRA a “[terrorist organization](#),” despite the organization having the financial and political backing of millions of Americans. Given the rhetoric today, now is not a good time to cede more inherent rights to the state.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Gun control advocates are harnessing young activists such as former Parkland High School students and media darlings David Hogg and Emma Gonzalez to mobilize [support for more](#) gun regulations. Because most gun control measures are unpopular, activists are setting their sights on [corporations](#) to penalize them for any policy or contribution that they deem [pro-gun](#).

Only 13 percent of North Carolinians in a May 2018 [Civitas poll](#) thought that stricter gun control or gun bans were the answer to protecting students and increasing safety in schools, compared to 56 percent who are in favor of more security measures, including armed guards or more school resource officers. The General Assembly has appropriated [\\$35 million](#) for such school safety measures, a far better option to protect students than more gun control laws.

OUR CAPACITY FOR SELF-GOVERNMENT?

Instead of calling for more government-enforced gun restrictions, North Carolinians would be wise to ask themselves more fundamental questions about our capacity for self-government. James Madison in the Federalist Papers, No. 46, argued that armed citizens are the final line of defense against a tyrannical government. Madison declared, too, that the governments of Europe were afraid to have an armed populace, because they did not trust their own citizenry. Do North Carolinians want to hand over more power to a government that has lost the trust of its citizenry?

RESTRICTING GOVERNMENTS, NOT OUR RIGHTS

Much of the current rift on firearms protections derives from how one views rights, whether they are inherent, as the Founding Fathers intended in the [Bill of Rights](#), or conferred by government. Inherent rights correctly place the restrictions on government and not the people.

The [North Carolina Constitution](#), like the [U.S. Constitution](#), offers broad protections for the right to keep and bear arms. The language “shall not be infringed” is prominent in both documents. Courts have upheld some state and local regulation of firearms. However, even those were narrowed under the 2008 Heller decision by the U.S. Supreme Court. The [Heller decision](#) is aggressively being utilized to overturn some existing gun regulations, because the decision reaffirmed the plain meaning of the Second Amendment text.

Most North Carolina counties have responded to recent legislative proposals to restrict gun rights in Virginia by enacting Second Amendment sanctuary resolutions. At the end of February 2020, 60 counties had passed some form of resolution or statement affirming the right to bear arms. While the resolutions are not binding law, they do point to the looming battle if and when progressives and other hand-gun opponents take control of the General Assembly in North Carolina and make an expected push for more gun regulations.

SOLUTIONS FOR EXPANDING AN INHERENT RIGHT

Despite the efforts of many conservative or “red” states to expand the right to keep and bear arms, particularly under threats of executive orders from former president Barack Obama, there have been no transformative changes to gun laws in North Carolina in recent years. Momentum has largely stalled in the General Assembly.

The state House passed a “[constitutional carry](#)” bill in 2017, but it has yet to receive a vote in the state Senate. North Carolina, unlike many other states, has been unable to scrap the [Jim Crow-era](#) pistol permit system enacted in 1919.

North Carolinians and their elected leaders should work to follow the lead of other conservative-minded states that have expanded gun rights by scrapping the requirement for costly concealed carry permits and support [House Bill 746](#), which passed the state House in 2017 but stalled in the Senate. An updated [bill](#) was filed in 2019 expanding gun rights, which included a repeal for the required concealed carry permit is stuck in committee.

North Carolina would not be breaking any new ground here but only [following the lead](#) of a number of other states that seek to expand Second Amendment rights. Open carry of a firearm is legal in North Carolina, and proponents of “constitutional carry” are right to point out that merely putting a firearm in a pocket should not make something that is legal, illegal. Vermont, one of the most politically liberal states, has allowed permitless carry for over 200 years. West Virginia and Missouri even overrode vetoes of constitutional carry legislation from Democrat governors in 2016.

The Jim Crow-era pistol permit system should be scrapped, too. While the pistol permit is only \$5, it’s unfair to require citizens to pay to exercise an inherent right, and then make it costlier by requiring a one-size-fits-all concealed carry permit process for any citizen desiring to fully exercise that right.

More women, including [black women](#), in North Carolina are choosing to utilize their Second Amendment rights by acquiring concealed carry permits. The percentage of women receiving the concealed carry permit has increased from 21 percent to 29 percent between 2012 and 2017. All levels of government – federal, state and local – should be doing more for those who wish to protect themselves and their families from harm and unwanted violence.

Finally, instead of expanding an inherent right, gun control advocates would rather return to the failed gun control policies of the past. There are over 325 million firearms in the United States and the overwhelming majority of legal gun owners never have a single incident with a firearm. They follow the law because they are already law-abiding citizens. Given that state lawmakers swear an oath to uphold the state and federal constitutions, the citizenry should be vigilant of how legislators are working to help secure “the right of the people to keep and bear arms.”

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