NC Capitol Connection

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Toxic Agenda Aims to Shine Light on True Goals of Political Left

BY RAY NOTHSTINE

The Civitas Institute is launching a comprehensive campaign to educate North Carolinians on the dangerous goals of Leftist policy and ideology for the state and nation. *Toxic Agenda: What the Left Really Wants for North Carolina* is a signature project for Civitas moving forward that delves into a wide array of issues, focusing on the failures, and at times, absurdity of the Left's desire for control over the citizenry.

An additional reason for the need for the *Toxic Agenda* series is that the Left could potentially thrive more and more in a society and culture that becomes increasingly politicized.

The rise of cultural Marxism in many segments of corporate America, academia, and government is empowering the Left to new heights, which includes a propensity to overreach to enact their agenda. And while their power and objectives are currently stymied in North Carolina, this could potentially change after just one election.

"Poisons and harmful chemicals are always required to come with a warning label. We believe harmful, detrimental policies should too," reads a March press release from the Civitas Institute. Civitas President Donald Bryson added that "It's time to have a candid conversation about what progressives want for the Tar Heel State. It's important to read the ingredients when a charlatan is selling snake oil."



While everyday citizens might not be laser focused on specific policy proposals, especially outside of election season, Civitas has the staff and resources to inform supporters and the general public of what they can expect under a progressive political takeover. Furthermore, the need for accountability and transparency is essential since many traditional news outlets continue to grow increasingly partisan, often taking sides or cheerleading for particular agendas and left-leaning political campaigns.

Readers can expect Civitas to cover a host of issues from gun control to abortion expansion to crony capitalism and unethical election policies. "In this [Toxic Agenda] series, we have articles on a range of issues that will affect all North Carolinians, both economically and socially," said Bryson. "There is an essential watch-dog component and civil vigilance to this work as well."

Issues like the dangers of minimum wage myths and the expansion of abortion are already up on the website. Gun control is an increasingly popular issue that will be covered in June. Many other topical issues will be covered with examples that include poverty programs, religious liberty, and school choice.

"Our Toxic Agenda series lays out what to expect if the Left returns to power," says Bob Luebke, director of policy at Civitas. "We chronicle the Left's response to major policy problems and the disasters that followed. Toxic Agenda will not only fuel our love of freedom and our conservative values, but also soberly remind us of the consequences of those who have taken the Left's medicine. In simple terms, consider Toxic Agenda a big long warning label that highlights the discomfort that follows a wrong diagnosis by the Left and the bad medicine that follows."

Thomas Jefferson warned that "The natural progress of things is for liberty to yield and government to gain ground." Civitas is confident that the Toxic Agenda campaign will help to foster a further engaged and educated citizenry, that will hopefully move the needle to roll back regulations and barriers that prevent North Carolinians from flourishing, while preserving freedom.

All of the pieces that have been completed so far can be found at toxicagendanc.org.

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FROM THE EDITOR

We are confident at Civitas that our *Toxic Agenda* series will be extremely beneficial for our readers and garner statewide attention. One statist-minded organization in North Carolina already made an attempt to parody the campaign, perhaps in an attempt to distract from the kind of agenda that they would prefer to see complied with rather than debated.

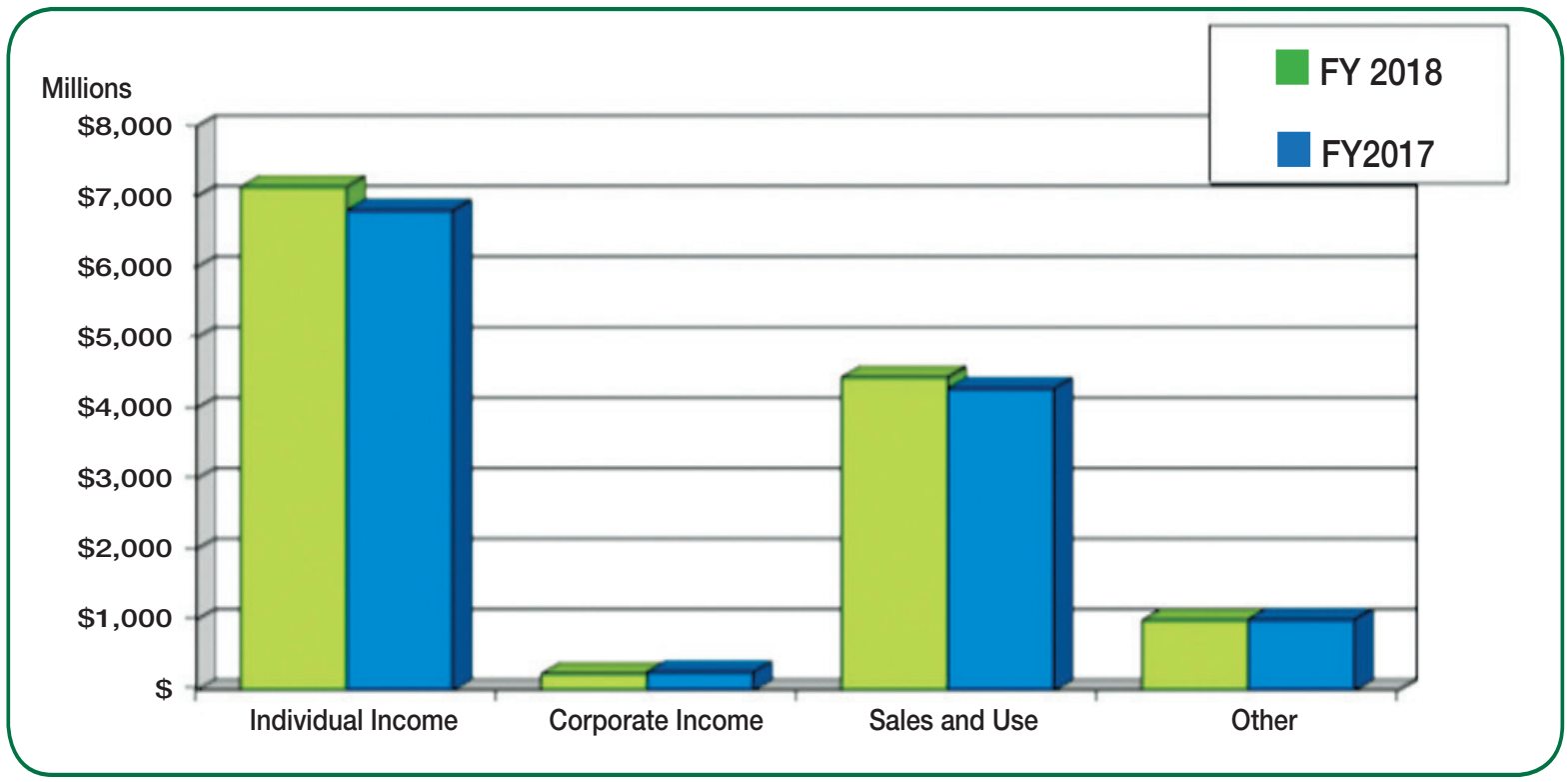
Speaking of discourse and dialogue, I'm pleased with the submission by Civitas President Donald Bryson on contemporary rhetoric in our politics. While apocalyptic and over-the-top rhetoric concerning political disagreements is certainly on the rise, even more appalling is the continued bullying and meltdowns by some for the purpose of silencing dissent. In my mind, it is interesting and essential to pay attention to the work of social justice warrior mobs in their attempt to quell certain speech. The motivation, of course, is to force their own versions of right thinking on the populace. This is easily one of the most concerning cultural threats this nation faces today.

Susan Myrick does a great job in laying out the tight connections Gov. Roy Cooper has with Leftist organizations and individuals across the state. She really highlights the important work of "Mapping the Left" too. Gov. Cooper is fairly popular in North Carolina and I think this is partly true because he is viewed as more centrist than left-wing by many in the state. Cooper has been able to duck the liberal tag somewhat by picking his battles carefully because of GOP dominance in the General Assembly.

There is lots of great content in this issue. The May issue will be especially insightful in that we will offer readers who were unable to attend the Conservative Leadership Conference great coverage of the event. Thank you for your support and for helping us to expand freedoms in North Carolina.

NC Revenue Surplus Now Predicted Above $190 Million

BY DONALD BRYSON



Earlier this year, at least 25 states were projected to face revenue shortfalls as they entered their 2018 legislative sessions.

However, according to the General Assembly's Fiscal Research Division, North Carolina is not one of them. Currently, North Carolina's revenues are $190.6 million above projected revenue.

SOURCE: Office of the State Controller; General Fund Monthly Financial Report. The graph to the right compares the year-to-date tax revenues for the current and prior fiscal years.

That is quite an impressive feat, and a testament to economic growth, when you consider that North Carolina has passed four major tax cuts (2013, 2015, 2016 and 2017) in the past five years.

Even more impressive is the fact that we have seen multiple consecutive years of revenue surpluses (2015, 2016, 2017) in North Carolina.

To be clear, a revenue surplus is not the same as a budget surplus. A revenue surplus occurs when state government accrues more revenue than anticipated. A budget surplus occurs when state government spends less money than anticipated and meets revenue targets.

More Tax Cuts Coming

It is also important to note that corporate and personal income taxes will drop on January 1, 2019. The current corporate income tax rate is 3 percent (the lowest of any state with a corporate income tax) and will drop to 2.5 percent in 2019. The personal income tax rate will drop from 5.499 percent to 5.25 percent in 2019, while the standard deduction will increase for all taxpayers.

Don't believe the fiscal fear-mongering of the progressive Left. North Carolina is in good fiscal health with a bright future.

In March, the Fiscal Research Division (FRD) of the North Carolina General Assembly added another $75.2 million in projected revenue on top of the $190 million.

CYAN MAGENTA YELLOW BLACK

Trump's Tariffs Would Cost US, and NC, Jobs

BY BRIAN BALFOUR

Following through on an unfortunate campaign promise, President Donald Trump announced his desire for 25 percent and 10 percent tariffs on all steel and aluminum imports, respectively. Such a move smacks of crony protectionism, and will unfortunately cost the U.S., and North Carolina, jobs.

Veronique de Rugy, a senior research fellow at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University, expertly described the negative effects these tariffs will have on the U.S. economy in a recent New York Times piece. Declaring that import taxes are "well-known to have devastating effects on consumers," de Rugy also pointed out that tariffs are "quite effective at lining the pockets of shareholders in protected industries."



Photo by Greg Skidmore

By not having to compete with foreign manufacturers of steel and aluminum that may offer less expensive alternatives, the protected domestic manufacturers face less pressure to compete on price or quality to gain market share. Instead of offering customers the best choice, protected manufacturers leverage political favoritism to pad their bottom line.

Moreover, steel and aluminum are used as an input to many products, ranging from cars to six-packs. Producers who use these goods as inputs will be forced to make adjustments to the increased production costs created by tariffs.

For those products in which consumers are less likely to refrain from buying or seeking alternatives in response to a price hike, the higher prices will be passed along to consumers. Upon paying more for these goods, however, consumers will have less money left to spend on other products — harming those industries.

For a significant portion of these products, however, manufacturers will not be able to just pass along higher prices to consumers because that would cause them to lose customers. They will have to seek other ways to cope with the more expensive inputs.

Faced with fewer — and more expensive — choices, industries that produce goods using steel or aluminum as an input will be forced to re-think their supply chain and production arrangements. According to de Rugy, the result is "a shift to sourcing finished parts from overseas, and relocating domestic steel-consuming facilities abroad."

"In other words," de Rugy concludes, "if your company uses steel to make pipes or refrigerators, you may decide to simply produce your own products abroad rather than paying artificially inflated prices on steel in order to make them in the U.S.A."

According to the article, 6.5 million people in the U.S. are employed by industries that rely on steel and aluminum for inputs to their finished product. Displacing a small fraction of these workers due to tariffs would outnumber the 170,000 workers currently employed in the steel and aluminum producing industries Trump desires to protect.

But the damage wouldn't end there. Also harmed would be American companies that export their goods. If other countries reciprocate by placing prohibitive tariffs on American goods, U.S. manufacturers would find fewer outlets for their products. Even without any reciprocal tariffs imposed by other nations on U.S. goods, when foreign nations sell less steel and aluminum to the U.S. due to the tariffs, that means they'll have fewer U.S. dollars with which to buy American-made exports.

Focusing close to home, a recent WRAL.com article detailed what harm Trump's tariffs could bring to North Carolina industries.

"In 2014, the last year a comprehensive state report was published, North Carolina exported $31.2 billion in goods, led by chemicals and pharmaceuticals, machinery, transportation and aerospace equipment, technology components like semiconductors and agricultural products," according to the article. Furthermore, "North Carolina pork exports account for $600 million in trade every year, according to the North Carolina Pork Council."

Poultry and tobacco industries are also mentioned as major North Carolina exporters that could be harmed by a reduction in trade.

The jobs of thousands of our fellow Tar Heel farmers, manufacturers and other workers in industries relying in part on exports could be in jeopardy.

Trump's tariffs are crony protectionism. They will protect a relatively few companies, tax U.S. consumers; and will also likely cost far more American (and NC) jobs than it preserves.

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Tribalism: The Consequence of the Left's Love of Extreme Rhetoric

BY DONALD BRYSON



In early December 2017, as Congress was debating changes to the nation's tax code, U.S. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-California) gave one of the more hyperbolic quotes of the year. In response to the GOP's tax plan, Pelosi said, "This is Armageddon."

Armageddon? The GOP tax bill is the biblically referenced battle that will end the world? Unlikely.

Progressive politicians and politicos have reached the limits of the English language to describe their disdain for people outside of their tribe – i.e. people who disagree with them on policy matters. Pelosi's quote is not the only example of hyper-partisan, over-the-top rhetoric that invokes 'End of Days' and dire straits imagery.

During the 2012 presidential race, then Vice President Joe Biden told a predominantly African-American audience that the policies of a Mitt Romney administration would put them "back in chains."

Recently, in North Carolina, Democratic state Sen. Jeff Jackson compared the lack of conservative resistance to President Donald Trump to the Vichy French government that collaborated with Nazi Germany.

And again in North Carolina, the Rev. T. Anthony Spearman, president of the North Carolina NAACP chapter, referenced Nazi Germany when commenting on one of President Trump's judicial nominees. Spearman likened the nomination of Thomas Farr to the federal bench as, "tantamount to Adolf Hitler wreaking havoc among our Jewish sisters and brothers." Yet at the same time, many noted Farr's outstanding qualifications, including the American Bar Association.

These comparisons were made by elected officials and a leader of a respected organization, and they are all disgraceful. However, as hyperbolic and appalling as the statements are, they are part of a growing trend of extremist rhetoric in our nation's political dialogue.

In his book "The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion," author Jonathan Haidt writes, "People bind themselves into political teams that share moral narratives. Once they accept a particular narrative, they become blind to alternative moral worlds."

Though written five years ago, Haidt describes the partisan political tribalism that we find ourselves mired in now. Such extreme and outlandish language damages debate on serious societal and public policy issues at a time when we need grown-ups to make important decisions for the common good. It ultimately squashes thought and coerces our leaders into silence.

Indeed, why would elected officials or political appointees stick out their necks to propose innovative policies or ideas in an environment where tax policies are compared to Armageddon and banking policy is compared to the evils of slavery?

In this environment, politicians have little incentive to make serious policy proposals. Serious proposals get little debate in state capitals or Washington, but plenty of diatribes. However, good debate makes good policy, and good policy makes good politics. Unfortunately, Americans have not seen either lately, as the 115th Congress has been rated as the fourth least productive in the last three decades, and the lack of production lies squarely at the feet of extreme tribal rhetoric.

If we want to see good policy from our elected officials, the political Left should tone down the apocalyptic rhetoric and engage in rational debate about the proper scope and size of government. Both sides of the political aisle are prone to extreme language from time to time, but the Left seems to be bent on making headlines with accusations that smear character and ruin dialogue. Can you imagine walking into work and claiming your co-worker was a slave-holding racist because they proposed a different sales strategy? It would be absurd and would surely lead to a serious human resources discussion. Isn't it time voters asked for a serious human resources discussion with their leaders? Voters deserve better and shouldn't settle for anything less than civility, inquiry and serious debate.

CYAN MAGENTA YELLOW BLACK

Net Negative

BY PATRICK O'HANNIGAN

Jeff Bezos is not Victor Frankenstein, striving to animate a monster in his laboratory. That said, local leaders doing a happy dance over the idea that his company might build a big new campus in North Carolina would do well to remember that the rest of us have sound reasons to keep pitchforks and torches in good repair.

The Triangle made the finalist list of 20 metropolitan areas vying to host Amazon's second corporate headquarters. Most of the reservations from people who do not welcome that announcement revolve around negative economic impact. More specifically, skeptics question what 50,000 white-collar workers and their families might do to worsen problems we already have with rising home prices, overcrowded schools, and substandard roadways.

Dazzled by visions of a boost to regional prestige, Gov. Roy Cooper and Mayor Nancy McFarland seem loathe to admit that an Amazon project of that size would be a mixed blessing at best.

Last September, Brian Balfour noted that Amazon executives were looking for big tax breaks in any region they might commit to. In January, just after the finalists were announced, Civitas President Donald Bryson turned a gimlet eye on what he called the "national bribing war among states and cities" that Amazon had provoked. His key question then was, "If Governor Cooper and Commerce Secretary Tony Copeland were willing to offer $1.5 billion in taxpayer dollars for 4,000 automotive workers in Randolph County, what will they offer Amazon for 50,000 jobs in Raleigh?"

The self-consciously progressive Indy Week speculated about incentives with which Amazon could be courted, and turned rather surprisingly to libertarians at the John Locke Foundation for sobering thoughts about why a huge influx of well-heeled workers to the Raleigh area might be problematic (Note, please, that the median home price in Seattle, where Amazon has its original headquarters, is $730,000 and rising). Along similar lines, the Wall Street Journal predicted that a hidden cost of incentive packages is that "other companies will demand the same hefty tax breaks conferred on the online retail giant."

Two months after the finalist announcement, the basket of goodies being offered has not yet rounded into focus, so Rick Smith of WRAL TechWire wrote a column complaining about traffic in the Triangle. By way of fixing things like the exodus from RTP on Interstate 40 every weeknight, he plugged a project featuring "autonomous two-person cars" on a "guideway railing system" developed by NC State University alumni.

What many pundits have not mentioned are potential Amazon impacts to "bedroom" communities like Pittsboro, Wake Forest, and Holly Springs. Fifty thousand employees and their families won't all fit into Raleigh neighborhoods. If you think the kerfuffle in Five Points over whether to bulldoze six old homes for the sake of a church parking lot is entertaining, you can count on larger and louder arguments over Amazon initiatives.

For example, alternative energy seems gentle and responsible when it means using vegetable oil to power a bus used as a coffee delivery vehicle, but there's nothing gentle about constructing 100+ wind turbines, each of which has a propeller diameter more than twice the wingspan of a Boeing 747. (Amazon is doing that in West Texas).

Proud as local leaders are of the fact that one in five Raleigh-area workers are already employed in technology, science, or professional services, they seem incapable of wondering whether the bloom is off the rose for parts of the tech sector. As Glenn Reynolds observed for USA Today, "Your computer and phone used to be ways for you to learn more about the world than had ever been possible before in human history; now your devices have turned into tools for governments and corporations to keep tabs on you in ways that have never been possible before in human history."

If they arrive here in force, Amazon executives will be working closely with politicians to the detriment of freedoms that most of us take for granted, such as the freedom to tell ourselves that local policies are set with at least a nod toward impartiality. For example, model airplane enthusiasts are accustomed to frustration at hearings over public park usage, where their interests do not always coincide with those of hikers or cricket players. For the most part, however, no single hobbyist group dominates the others. That dynamic would almost certainly change if a company known for experimenting with things like drone delivery inserts itself into the mix. Suppose Amazon donates drones to every sub-station in the Raleigh police department, or zoning boards look more kindly on Whole Foods than on other grocery chains because Amazon Prime memberships earn discounts there?

With an employer that size calling the shots, the relationship between business and government is more likely to be conspiratorial than adversarial. And the impacts wouldn't stop at business. Amazon's footprint would extend to the need for schools,

(Continued on page 9)

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Changes represent the difference in voter registration between February 24, 2018 to March 31, 2018										
County	Total Voters	Total Change	Democrats	Democrat Change	Republicans	Republican Change	Libertarians	Libertarian Change	Unaffiliated Voters	Unaffiliated Change
Totals	6,904,464	25,957	2,656,566	6,616	2,077,893	8,203	35,193	439	2,134,812	23,931
ALAMANCE	100,247	437	38,127	113	32,896	177	492	5	28,732	368
ALEXANDER	24,302	176	6,191	14	10,785	89	83	5	7,243	96
ALLEGHANY	7,391	36	2,662	6	2,582	19	35	0	2,112	23
ANSON	17,281	32	11,626	14	2,466	14	21	-2	3,168	34
ASHE	18,851	92	5,341	-11	8,031	23	71	1	5,408	57
AVERY	11,693	31	1,415	7	6,879	26	48	0	3,351	12
BEAUFORT	32,952	184	13,231	30	10,725	71	92	-3	8,904	146
BERTIE	13,975	18	10,005	-1	1,549	-1	24	0	2,397	18
BLADEN	22,775	383	12,826	-119	3,771	157	39	0	6,139	107
BRUNSWICK	98,733	268	27,045	57	36,938	147	367	0	34,383	178
BUNCOMBE	193,361	871	74,711	321	46,059	220	1,402	33	71,189	939
BURKE	57,991	270	18,350	37	20,646	102	263	4	18,732	201
CABARRUS	134,630	953	41,237	260	49,081	393	761	26	43,551	794
CALDWELL	54,676	280	14,187	13	24,578	119	357	2	15,554	172
CAMDEN	7,754	163	2,318	-25	2,437	48	46	0	2,953	90
CARTERET	52,001	263	12,077	-9	22,088	111	243	-2	17,593	145
CASWELL	15,511	51	7,876	11	3,423	-119	36	1	4,176	180
CATAWBA	103,658	937	25,879	-31	44,393	326	413	3	32,973	577
CHATHAM	52,344	266	20,593	149	13,161	-19	231	0	18,359	434
CHEROKEE	23,037	196	5,805	-74	9,845	47	129	1	7,258	74
CHOWAN	10,229	56	4,864	-5	2,605	3	23	0	2,737	48
CLAY	8,597	104	1,940	-18	3,567	38	45	-1	3,045	49
CLEVELAND	64,745	241	26,263	90	21,040	142	238	2	17,204	187
COLUMBUS	37,041	277	20,912	-45	7,093	74	59	0	8,977	158
CRAVEN	68,299	587	23,021	30	23,890	197	347	3	21,041	417
CUMBERLAND	213,238	413	97,727	-15	49,033	81	1126	5	65,352	312
CURRITUCK	19,380	195	3,982	3	7,121	83	149	3	8,128	112
DARE	29,422	161	8,779	34	9,075	64	207	4	11,361	127
DAVIDSON	106,897	535	26,657	-164	49,943	89	449	0	29,848	282
DAVIE	29,479	92	5,442	-1	15,000	39	110	-2	8,927	54
DUPLIN	30,026	133	14,005	9	8,159	-22	123	4	7,739	160
DURHAM	220,841	176	122,200	536	27,984	43	1,078	11	69,579	658
EDGECOMBE	38,177	62	26,762	21	6,202	15	82	3	5,131	65
FORSYTH	255,814	1,042	104,362	264	75,891	140	1,230	6	74,331	1,160
FRANKLIN	43,644	265	18,066	21	13,258	84	195	7	12,125	195
GASTON	142,514	625	44,518	114	54,194	231	683	10	43,119	498
GATES	8,574	41	4,576	0	1,763	3	28	2	2,207	36
GRAHAM	6,343	35	1,900	4	2,803	20	20	0	1,620	19
GRANVILLE	38,380	101	18,699	33	9,421	29	142	2	10,118	103
GREENE	11,383	35	6,532	13	2,079	12	22	0	2,750	36
GUILFORD	367,672	865	167,855	927	94,903	411	1,739	19	103,175	1,362
HALIFAX	38,130	122	25,197	12	4,697	17	83	2	8,153	115
HARNETT	73,857	341	26,264	-2	25,734	113	501	3	21,358	223
HAYWOOD	43,940	220	16,511	-9	13,322	75	244	3	13,863	133
HENDERSON	83,481	485	18,071	32	31,452	144	437	1	33,521	372
HERTFORD	15,305	47	11,130	9	1,496	5	35	0	2,644	51
HOKE	31,873	49	15,136	69	6,738	29	192	1	9,807	88

HYDE	3,416	13	1,978	-1	532	1	12	1	894	10
IREDELL	118,265	213	30,114	47	48,949	65	559	4	38,643	191
JACKSON	28,026	91	10,097	19	7,434	28	168	3	10,327	79
JOHNSTON	124,201	295	38,415	78	47,674	97	681	9	37,431	267
JONES	7,247	9	3,539	22	1,819	12	21	-1	1,868	20
LEE	36,177	253	14,676	4	10,283	51	168	3	11,050	203
LENOIR	38,435	97	20,880	23	9,517	65	111	0	7,927	55
LINCOLN	56,764	304	13,954	-73	24,836	70	259	6	17,715	155
MACON	25,627	94	6,525	15	10,384	33	128	4	8,590	72
MADISON	16,832	75	6,545	16	4,393	36	100	2	5,794	53
MARTIN	16,938	65	10,093	20	3,362	24	41	1	3,442	60
MCDOWELL	29,236	202	8,334	-10	11,060	73	151	1	9,691	118
MECKLENBURG	719,115	1,689	315,791	2,196	170,422	584	4,331	66	228,571	3,235
MITCHELL	10,977	23	1,137	5	6,639	17	29	0	3,172	11
MONTGOMERY	16,356	86	7,092	9	5,022	46	61	3	4,181	46
MOORE	66,490	297	16,426	41	27,045	121	338	1	22,681	216
NASH	66,085	128	33,201	135	18,700	87	204	5	13,980	171
NEW HANOVER	166,826	545	52,508	204	52,835	208	1,161	19	60,322	522
NORTHAMPTON	14,537	-27	10,481	62	1,456	11	20	0	2,580	24
ONSLOW	105,272	796	27,499	59	38,176	338	907	14	38,690	503
ORANGE	113,047	176	52,298	277	16,521	18	722	2	43,506	433
PAMLICO	9,638	25	3,811	1	3,120	8	37	1	2,670	17
PASQUOTANK	28,553	201	13,097	30	6,125	60	165	0	9,166	171
PENDER	40,509	383	12,630	4	15,201	157	232	4	12,446	226
PERQUIMANS	9,922	13	4,059	-10	2,660	-1	31	0	3,172	4
PERSON	26,504	40	12,004	-7	6,624	2	97	-2	7,779	33
PITT	121,965	366	55,469	-30	31,844	18	714	7	33,938	311
POLK	15,893	103	4,394	20	5,556	55	81	2	5,862	66
RANDOLPH	91,135	530	18,846	86	45,791	266	437	24	26,061	326
RICHMOND	30,258	125	16,583	28	5,881	41	71	1	7,723	111
ROBESON	74,893	692	48,404	-106	9,821	-61	196	-1	16,472	648
ROCKINGHAM	59,691	203	22,674	-38	20,636	47	217	4	16,164	114
ROWAN	94,249	362	27,895	60	38,177	151	388	6	27,789	265
RUTHERFORD	44,753	516	14,705	-65	16,730	171	219	5	13,099	275
SAMPSON	38,117	152	16,422	16	13,928	68	106	2	7,661	98
SCOTLAND	22,410	39	12,765	43	3,717	18	50	3	5,878	61
STANLY	41,215	335	11,149	-5	18,146	160	141	6	11,779	164
STOKES	30,960	133	7,704	-15	14,976	48	152	3	8,128	67
SURRY	45,475	349	13,726	-22	19,131	124	115	2	12,503	201
SWAIN	10,281	40	3,958	12	2,653	22	32	0	3,638	30
TRANSYLVANIA	25,587	193	6,694	19	8,236	56	117	-4	10,540	160
TYRRELL	2,411	7	1,388	1	355	1	9	1	659	6
UNION	152,883	1,209	39,448	292	63,407	563	682	20	49,346	918
VANCE	29,941	16	19,723	93	4,393	12	68	1	5,757	96
WAKE	718,786	432	267,136	352	188,389	-115	4,645	35	258,616	864
WARREN	13,435	28	9,235	-14	1,798	-3	33	1	2,369	16
WASHINGTON	8,692	21	5,815	16	1,140	9	27	0	1,710	28
WATAUGA	45,570	82	12,100	2	14,027	27	501	1	18,942	56
WAYNE	74,476	229	32,221	97	23,823	117	300	8	18,132	201
WILKES	42,636	88	9,849	-25	21,937	16	139	1	10,711	46
WILSON	55,381	195	29,020	-71	13,655	-10	158	2	12,548	132
YADKIN	23,956	141	4,063	-6	13,244	58	74	1	6,575	76
YANCEY	13,976	73	5123	-14	4,917	24	47	0	3,889	35

The Case for a Bipartisan Board of Elections

BY JACOB COMELLO

The govern-by-litigation craze in North Carolina is alive and kicking. In the latest chapter of the Gov. Roy Cooper vs. North Carolina General Assembly epic in March, a three-judge panel from the NC Superior Court partially ruled against a Republican attempt to restructure the Board of Elections.

The Republicans' original proposal combined the Ethics and Elections boards and expands board membership from five to eight, with four members coming from each major political party in the state. Effectively, the proposal would have created a bipartisan board with equal representation between Republicans and Democrats.

Cooper alleged that the proposed arrangement infringed on the powers of the executive branch and objected to both the board combination and the new membership provisions. The NC Supreme Court weighed in first on the matter and appeared to agree with Cooper, but for clarification the ruling was passed to the aforementioned three-judge panel, which in March invalidated the membership requirements but allowed the boards to be combined.

Between the two decisions, Republicans sponsored House Bill 90, which alters the original eight-member board plan to include a ninth unaffiliated member to break ties. That bill was approved by the General Assembly on February 13th and will likely become law without Cooper's signature. Cooper, however, is determined to keep the Board in its former fashion and has expressed intentions to sue the legislature again.

Formerly, the Board of Elections consisted of five members, three of whom were usually from the governor's party. Changing the structure to a four-on-four composition would, as Justice Sam Ervin wrote in the majority opinion for the NC Supreme Court, hamper Cooper's ability "to 'take care that the laws be faithfully executed' because [he] is required to appoint half of the commission members from a list of nominees consisting of individuals who are, in all likelihood, not supportive of...[his] policy preferences while having limited supervisory control over the agency..."



To begin with, the governor is already required to appoint at least two members to the board who are "in all likelihood, not supportive of" his or her "policy preferences." The only way Justice Ervin's argument holds water is if the two opposite-party appointments were always meant to be merely token gestures for the governor as opposed to intentional attempts to inject opposing viewpoints into the important task of administering elections. That doesn't, however, seem like a likely interpretation of the law.

The bigger problem with Justice Ervin's argument is that the North Carolina General Statutes explicitly sever the Board from "policy preferences" in general, even those of the Executive Branch of which it is technically a part. As per GS § 163-28:

"The State Board of Elections shall be and remain an independent regulatory and quasi-judicial agency and shall not be placed within any principal administrative department. The State Board of Elections shall exercise its statutory powers, duties, functions, authority, and shall have all powers and duties conferred upon the heads of principal departments under G.S. 143B-10" (emphasis added).

The words "independent regulatory and quasi-judicial agency" say it all. The Board of Elections is meant to objectively oversee how elections are administered in the counties and act like a miniature court if any irregularities come to light.

Aside from creating rules that are already consistent with relevant legislation covering the administration of elections, the Board doesn't exercise any policy power. Thus, board members have a job that already implies bipartisanship and should rightly be separated from the "policy preferences" of any governor.

Now, I know what you might be thinking: "Aren't Republicans just trying to force *their own* policy preferences on the Board of Elections, just the same as Cooper is trying to do?" Whether that's true is anyone's guess, but the Republicans who are tied up in this conundrum are *legislators* – thus able to make laws that departments like the Board of Elections and Ethics Enforcement must follow.

The governor's supervisory controls over the Board halt at appointment. Notwithstanding that, the changes Republicans are advocating are structural changes that have no effect on the core functions of the Board. The sitting governor, whether a Republican or Democrat, will still choose all of its members and it will remain an independent regulatory agency as before. Justice Ervin's holding actually espouses the view that the governor should play a more or less active role in the workings of the Board, such that it can execute his "policy preferences." Cooper himself and Mark Joseph Stern of Slate Magazine expressed worries about partisan gridlock on an eight-member bipartisan board, but gridlock goes both ways: it can affect or stall the intentions of both parties.

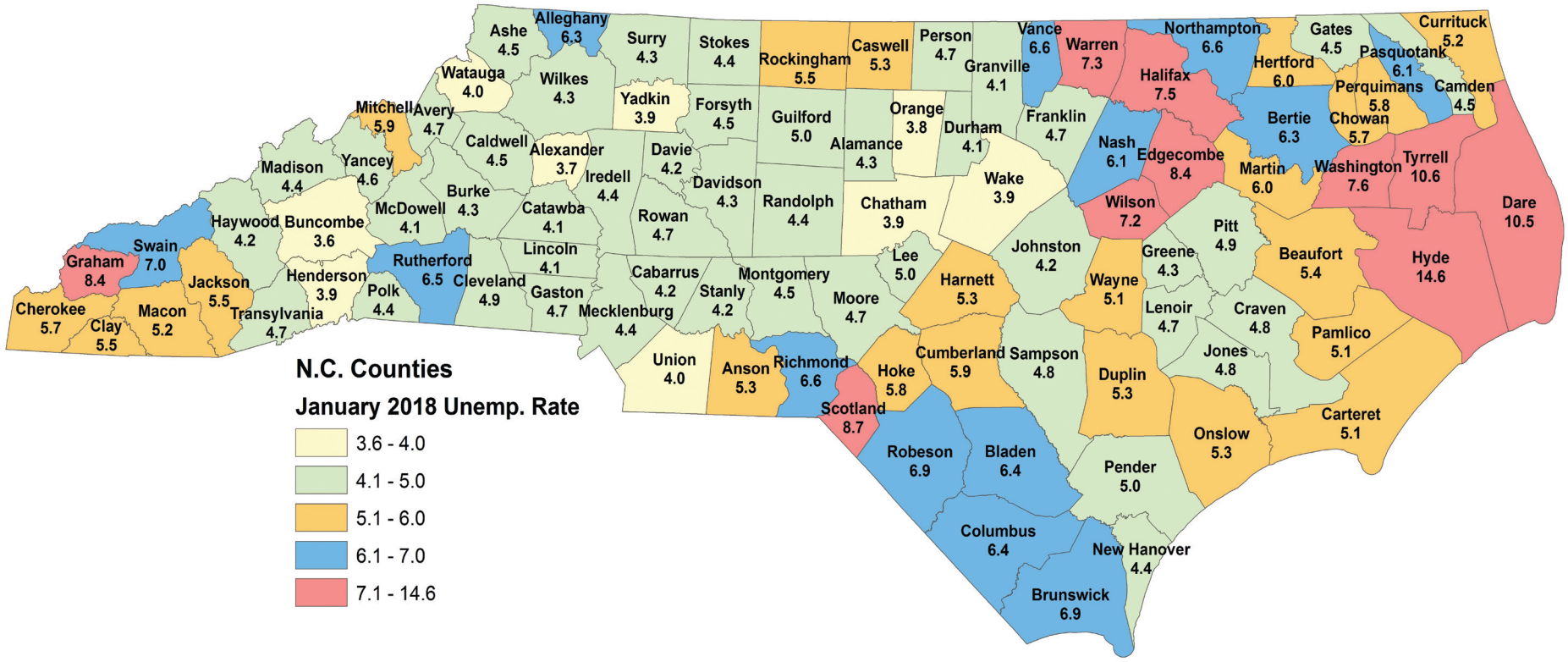
Some, like Colin Campbell at NC Insider, have astutely pointed out that perhaps "legislators should try the [restructuring of the Board] idea as a constitutional amendment – letting voters decide in a referendum." Recent poll data suggests that the citizens of North Carolina would unequivocally choose an "equal-representation-style" bipartisan board over the present configuration.

The Board of Elections and Ethics Enforcement should play an important role in state political procedures. Regardless of how long the litigation drags out, we should remember that it is an independent agency that should value objectivity over anything else.

Disclosure: Outgoing Civitas president Francis DeLuca was one of the nominees for the new Board.

In March the Board was sworn in and Gov. Roy Cooper appointed Damon Circosta, executive director and vice president of the AJ Fletcher Foundation, as the ninth member.

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The above map shows the January 2018, not-seasonally adjusted, unemployment rates for North Carolina counties. (data from N.C. Department of Commerce)

According to the North Carolina Department of Commerce, the December "not seasonally adjusted" statewide unemployment rate was 4.7 percent, up 0.3 percent from the previous month.

Over the month, the unemployment rate increased in 93 of 100 counties, while staying the same in six counties and dropping in one. Forty- seven counties had unemployment rates at or below the state's 4.7 percent rate.

Net Negative

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

staffing and building sites – all potentially expensive questions for taxpayers. Those who think Amazon wouldn't have significant influence over that process are misguided. Piper, meet paycheck – and play that tune. Get the picture?

Amazon has yet to suffer the facepalm embarrassments for which Uber and Facebook made news, (Uber when a self-driving car with an unresponsive human observer in it killed a woman in Arizona, and Facebook when it was caught sharing user data with a political research firm). Nevertheless, it's only a matter of time until the company is embroiled in controversies bigger than whether it strong-arms publishers to release e-books in Kindle-compatible formats to the detriment of the Nook e-reader sold by Barnes & Noble. Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos has the same overweening ambition common to other successful technocrats ("Our goal with Amazon Prime, make no mistake, is to make sure that if you are not a Prime member, you are being irresponsible," Bezos says).

The Human Rights Campaign, a group advocating for LGBTQ rights, has yet to forgive the North Carolina legislature for House Bill 2, and people there seem to hope that Bezos feels the same way. While the Amazon CEO keeps philanthropic impulses close to the vest, any entrepreneur who buys controlling stakes in Whole Foods and The Washington Post can surely be described as an activist, also. Were Amazon to build a headquarters campus in the Triangle, its employees would be courted as hard as its money has been, and the jockeying for position among partisans for competing causes would stoke resentments rather than calming them. The better outcome would be for Amazon to plant its giant footprint elsewhere.

Patrick O'Hannigan is a Civitas contributor, a father of two, and a technical writer and editor. He resides in Morrisville, North Carolina

Cooper Relies on Left-Wing Activists

BY SUSAN MYRICK

More than 50 of Gov. Roy Cooper's appointments are either employed by or are board members of North Carolina progressive non-profits found in the online database Mapping the Left. MTL is a user-friendly online database/webpage that identifies the vast network of left-wing groups and activists in North Carolina, sponsored by the Civitas Institute.

MTL has identified many of Gov. Cooper's appointments to state boards and commissions as progressive/left-wing activists.

When we introduced the website in January 2015, we knew that it would be an ongoing project.

Mapping the Left will never be a finished work. The people and the groups of the Left flow from one position to another. Groups come and go. Alliances shift and reform. We continue to add data and welcome your input to help us make our database as accurate as possible.

To say we were right about the work never being finished is an understatement. When the project was announced just over three years ago, we reported 140 groups, approximately 1,800 activists and seven networks in the debut project. As of today, we have mapped 200 groups, nearly 3,500 individual activists and 13 networks.

Politics and Money

From the start, many of Gov. Cooper's appointments to boards, commissions and his governmental office have been controversial. On December 7, 2016, a month after the election, Cooper announced the appointment of Ken Eudy as his senior advisor.



Eudy was a controversial choice for Cooper on many levels. Just before the 2016 election, Eudy penned an article where he admitted that he did not stand for our military.

"I do stand for the Star-Spangled Banner," decalred Eudy. "But I stay in my seat when thousands of fans stand and cheer men and women in the armed services. My silent protest draws some certain looks or sideways sneers."

Eudy has known Cooper for many years. He too was active in the North Carolina Democratic Party and served as the executive director of the organization in the 1980s.

Eudy was also co-founder of Capstrat, a Raleigh public relations and consulting firm that made millions from lucrative state contracts. Eudy sold Capstrat to Ketchum, a firm used by Russia for public relations contracts for an undisclosed sum in 2013.

Eudy and Capstrat also have ties to Cooper through a nearly $500,000 contract with NC GreenPower, a group that won one of the first grants awarded through Smithfield environment fund grants. The Smithfield grants are the result of an agreement former Attorney General Mike Easley made with Smithfield Foods in 2000 that required the pork production company to pay more than $50 million to fund annual "environmental enhancement grants." That same year Easley was elected governor and Cooper was elected attorney general.

Cooper continued to oversee the Smithfield grant program, handing out millions of dollars in grants to environmental groups until he was elected governor in 2016.

Some think that the Smithfield environmental fund is very similar to the $58 million pipeline fund agreement that Gov. Cooper "negotiated" recently.

Environmentalism

Another Cooper appointee who has MTL connections and is connected to the Smithfield environmental grant funds is Heather Jacobs Deck. Deck was appointed to the Sedimentation Control Commission which was created to;

administer the state's Sedimentation Control Program pursuant to the N.C. Sedimentation Pollution Control Act of 1973. The commission is charged with adopting rules, setting standards and providing guidance for implementation of the law.

Deck is also the deputy director of the MTL group Sound Rivers. Sound Rivers, an environmental advocacy organization, received hundreds of thousands of dollars in grants from the Smithfield fund. Deck frequently communicated directly with the AG's office concerning the group's grant.

In addition to Deck, Hartwell Carson was also appointed to the North Carolina Sedimentation Control Commission. Carson is a member of the MTL group Waterkeepers Carolina. Both Waterkeepers Carolina and Sound Rivers are members of the North Carolina Environmental Partnership (NCEP). NCEP spent $1.6 million on TV ads opposing Gov. Pat McCrory in the 2016 gubernatorial election.

Unions

In a state ranked 49th, among 50 states, in number of employees who are either members or represented by unions, Cooper

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Cooper Relies on Left-Wing Activists

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has appointed at least two labor union bosses to work-related commissions.

MaryBe McMillan is president of North Carolina branch of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), which represents more than 120,000 union workers in the state. McMillan was appointed to the NC Works Commission. According to its website:

The NC Works Commission recommends policies and strategies that enable the state's workforce and businesses to compete in the global economy.

Vernon Gammon, Secretary-Treasurer of North Carolina Teamsters Union 391, was appointed to the Teachers' and State Employees' Retirement System Board of Trustees.

Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation

Other appointments made by Cooper, since taking office, include board members of some of the most progressive and leftist groups in the state. His appointments even have connections with the most influential organizations on the Left in North Carolina, including the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation (ZSR). ZSR is the progressive left's cornerstone in the state and is the biggest funder of left-wing causes. Cooper's ZSR appointments include:

Noah Reynolds, treasurer of the ZSR Board of Trustees, was appointed to the Historical Commission.

Leslie Winner, former executive director for ZSR, was appointed to the Governor's Commission on Access to Sound, Basic Education.

Jose Oliva, a ZSR fellow, was appointed to the Governor's Advisory Council on Hispanic/ Latino Affairs.

Cooper has also looked to the NC Justice Center, North Carolina's largest progressive policy organization, to add to his boards and commissions. The NC Justice Center was picked by ZSR to be the "administrative home" for Blueprint NC. Blueprint NC, the hub of left-wing activity in North Carolina, gained notoriety with their 2013 strategy memo that directed their members to "eviscerate, mitigate, litigate, cogitate and agitate" the state's Republican leadership.

The list of Gov. Cooper's controversial appointments goes on and on and there is only one place that vets the background of the governor's appointments and identifies linkages with leftist organizations in North Carolina. Mapping the Left was created to educate citizens and policy makers about the significant extent of the left's political infrastructure in North Carolina. MTL is a repository of vital information that exposes to public scrutiny the left's networks, its largest funders and linkages to participants in today's North Carolina political battles.

You can see all of the research at www.mappingtheleft.com.

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WCPSS and Student Walkouts: Actions Speak Louder Than Words

BY BOB LUEBKE

In late February, 2,000 high school students walked out of Green Hope High School to demand political change and tougher gun control laws in the wake of a shooting massacre in Florida that claimed the lives of 15 students and 2 teachers.

School officials did nothing to stop the event. In fact, they seemed to encourage it. They pointed to changes made by Wake County Board of Education in the Code of Student Conduct to allow protests, picketing and walkouts on school campuses. What prompted the changes? It seems the changes were largely in response to a 2010 Department of Education investigation that asked whether Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) disciplinary policies discriminated against African Americans. That's a whole other subject and we don't have time to go there. Suffice it to say WCPSS spokeswoman Lisa Luten, summed up the changes when she said, "Participation in a peaceful protest wouldn't qualify for disciplinary action." If a student participated in a peaceful protest, he or she will be marked absent but the bottom line is they won't be subject to disciplinary action.

WCPSS said teachers have been advised not to endorse rallies or encourage students to leave class, but they do talk to students about safety.

It's apparent that WCPSS is trying to clearly position itself in the middle of the debate and appear neutral. It's not working.



On February 27th the News & Observer published, "Why Wake County won't punish students who protest gun violence." It offers no reason why WCPSS won't punish students. It merely declares that protests are acceptable if students protest in a peaceful manner and that WCPSS is doing so to respect the free speech rights of all students. Does that mean 100 friends can miss math class next Tuesday to protest UN refugee policy or the Federal Reserve's monetary policy? If not, how is it not viewpoint discrimination? The WCPSS policy change to allow demonstrations has opened a large can of worms.

WCPSS says it's giving a green light to demonstrations by students. WCPSS also says the demonstrations aren't political. But let's call them what they are — political demonstrations. They are called to take political action and the action is gun control.

WCPSS says it's merely hoping to allow kids to exercise their constitutional rights and to stay safe. Students joined nationwide rallies against school gun violence in March and more are planned in April. "Enough: National School Walkout" event in March was coordinated by the Woman's March Network. A quick Internet search reveals that the Women's' March Network is part of the Action Network. According to the organization's web site, "Action Network is a nonprofit dedicated to building power for the progressive movement, so we don't have clients — we have partners, and we can mobilize your activists together." Action Network is not shy about advertising the organization's politics. Action Network partners include organizations such as the National Education Association, AFL-CIO and Daily Kos.

WCPSS said they won't endorse or encourage a nationwide rally planned for April 20. But as Mark Wright, principal of Apex Friendship High School told the News and Observer, "If they do [ask], I advise them about safety: staying away from traffic and being orderly because their safety is my prime concern."

Let's state something we all agree on: what happened in Parkland was a horrible unimaginable crime that took the lives of seventeen innocent individuals and forever scarred a school and community. Schools should be safe places where parents can trust that their children are in good hands. How we ensure that safety is where people differ and hold deep differences. It's a discussion that has been going on for a long time and one that we need to have.

School safety is an important topic, but what compels WCPSS to provide time during the school day for students to demonstrate? It appears WCPSS is picking and choosing which issues are worthy of protest. WCPSS leaders talk about having conversations at school and home about important topics. It's a worthy goal and most people are fine with those conversations. The jump from conversation to demonstration is an action that lacks justification. Those actions coupled with efforts to propel and advocate for political action while proclaiming a stance of neutrality are actions that many parents find objectionable.

Disagreements aside, WCPSS leaders will continue to say the demonstrations are not political and that their main concern is school safety and to ensure that such actions don't disrupt the schools. In February, 70 percent of the student body of Green Hope High School walked out of the school to demand change. Evidently that doesn't qualify as a disruption. Maybe we should ask the students who didn't participate.

Commenting on recent gun violence in the schools, Jim Martin, a member of the Wake County School Board called for gun control. To date, I have yet to hear clarifications that Mr. Martin's statements don't reflect the views of the Wake County Board of Education.

In the meantime, WCPSS spokeswoman Lisa Luten will continue to tell others that efforts by principals to work with students to make sure walkouts are done safely shouldn't be interpreted as the district taking a position on gun control.

Is all that clear?

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