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Homeschool population surges; 1 in 5 in NC opt out of traditional public schools

BY RAY NOTHSTINE

Twenty percent of North Carolina's K-12 students do not attend traditional public schools.

"Of the 1.8 million North Carolinians enrolled in K-12 schools, just over 20 percent (around 354,000 students) are now attending public charter, private, or home schools, while attendance in traditional public schools has dipped below 80 percent, highlighting a major shift in educational choice in North Carolina," reads a July press release from EducationNC.

The Division of Non-Public Education (DNPE) estimates that slightly more than 142,000 K-12 students are active homeschoolers. That number exceeds the 102,406 students in private schools, and the 111,604 students attending public charters.

Using different estimates, North Carolinians for Home Education believe the homeschool number is much higher. "DNPE estimates that there are about 1.6 students per homeschool for a total of 142,037 students. NCHE believes that a more realistic estimate is 2.5 students per homeschool for a total student population of 266,720. This represents 13% of the total North Carolina K-12 student population," claims NCHE on their own website.

A combination of North Carolina having relatively favorable laws for homeschooling - a practice still relatively rural and fairly religious - and the unpopularity of Common Core certainly play a role in the rise of homeschooling's popularity. Offering a lower estimate than NCHE, Ed Choice states 7.7 percent of the K-12 population is homeschooled in North Carolina. Amazingly, Arkansas is listed as the second highest state for homeschoolers by percentage in the nation at 3.7 percent.



North Carolina has seen an 84 percent increase in homeschoolers since 2007-2008. A Civitas Poll from January revealed record support for school choice. Ninety-two percent of North Carolinians surveyed believe that parents should have a choice on where their children or child attend school.

That same poll asked nearly 400 parents of school-aged children "if you were able to select the best school for your child and resources were not a problem, what type of school would you select for your child?" Overall, respondents chose other options over traditional public schools. Private schooling was the most popular response at 45 percent, while charter schools were preferred by 13 percent, and homeschool was preferred by 9 percent.

While religious formation in education is still a key reason that many families homeschool their children, secular based instruction at home is on the rise. A story last year in the News & Observer pointed out that while religious based curriculum and home-schools are still a majority, the statewide percentage overall is dropping. According to the News & Observer, starting in 2016, new secular home-school registrants were greater than the number of newly registered religious based instruction for the first time.

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From the editor

The history of human freedom in the world is relatively short. Recently, I was reading the last letter Thomas Jefferson wrote, penned just a little over a week before he died. The words he jotted down while he was near death were written to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. The third president was invited to the national celebration, but illness prevented him from attending. Jefferson praised Americans for not only continuing to observe the anniversary of our independence, but for making the choice to continue to practice and live out human freedom. It's one thing to claim and celebrate freedom, but what good is it if we can't live it out?

With long-held ideals and freedoms constantly under attack, our state and nation face formidable obstacles in preserving a system of government that empowers the people over centralized power. Unfortunately, when we see modern liberalism at work in the world today, we can hardly point to any instances where it calls for the expansion of human freedom. Disarming the citizenry is merely one of the angrier demands of the Left, despite the fact that there are roughly 100 million gun owners in this country. The overwhelming majority are law-abiding citizens who are safe and responsible. They exercise a right daily that was enshrined in our Bill of Rights.

The conservative lawyer and publisher Alfred Regnery noted that "The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were based on the premise that government was the great threat to freedom, and the purpose of the Constitution was to limit the power of government." Americans need to get back to understanding this truth and we at Civitas hope North Carolina is a beacon of light to our neighboring states and the entire Union.

Civitas will continue to fight to expand freedom, not restrict your natural rights. The articles in this issue all point to a common theme: giving North Carolinians more freedom over their lives. We want your families to flourish and for your property to be protected. Unlike so many politicians, we are not interested in power or dictating how you live your life. We hope you will continue to support us in building a state and nation that truly puts people ahead of the government.



CYAN MAGENTA YELLOW BLACK

What the media didn't tell you about the Trump rally

BY LEAH BYERS

President Donald Trump held his first (although almost certainly not his last) North Carolina Keep America Great campaign rally in Greenville on July 17. A couple of us Civitas team members attended the event to provide a conservative perspective on the president's visit for our audience.

If you've seen coverage from the mainstream media about the rally, you've likely heard about the crowd's reaction to the president's comments regarding Congresswoman Ilhan Omar (D-MN). A chant that lasted only seconds gained nearly all the media coverage from the two plus hour event, where the president himself spoke for 90 minutes.

In an interview with ABC11, I gave some brief thoughts on the controversial chant. In the portion of the interview that didn't make it into the brief segment, I commented on the crowd's reaction being not anti-immigrant, but an expression of frustration for Rep. Omar specifically due to her anti-American and anti-Semitic statements. However, the on-going feud between the president and the congressional "Squad" (Reps. Omar, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), Rashida Tlaib (D-MI), and Ayanna Pressley (D-MA)) seems to be escalating in a way that is unlikely to be productive for the good of the nation in the long run.

Now that the elephant in the room has been addressed, here are some things you probably didn't hear about the Greenville Trump rally.

Trump's endorsements for current Congressional races

North Carolina has two special congressional races taking place this fall. The Republican nominees for the districts are each currently serving in the state legislature. Rep. Greg Murphy (R-Pitt) is running for the 3rd Congressional District, following the passing of Congressman Walter Jones last year. Sen. Dan Bishop (R-Mecklenburg) is making a bid for the 9th district seat, for which the 2018 election was overturned amid allegations of absentee voter fraud. The president brought both candidates on to the stage during his speech, fully endorsing them and allowing them to address the crowd. Greenville is in the third congressional district, making this especially impactful for that race. Murphy also spoke before the president's arrival.



Lack of 2020 candidate features

Two notable absences from the night's lineup were Lt. Gov. Dan Forest and U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis. Both politicians were in attendance at the event and got "shout-outs" from the president, but neither came onto the stage before or during the president's time. This seemed odd to many, given that they are both presumed to have big elections in 2020. They both face primary challenges in March.

Trump's policy agenda.

The president spoke on a wide array of policy topics, from immigration to the economy, and from national security to healthcare. As the nation's chief executive, it is unsurprising that he seemed to know a little bit about everything. But he did not attempt to make specific policy promises; a smart move, given the Democratic control of the U.S. House of Representatives. Trump instead focused more of his substantive comments on the 2020 election. If Republicans regain the House next year, the president is much more likely to be able to accomplish his remaining legislative agenda.

Trump as a party leader

The president's remarks were noticeably different from his 2016 campaign strategy. In his first election, part of Trump's appeal came from his status as a political outsider. This year, Trump has taken up the mantle of the leader of the Republican Party. Several times during the speech, Trump compared the two parties, casting a vision for why (he believes) one would lead the nation in the right direction as the other cannot.

Other political content in the president's speech included a discussion of the leading candidates for the Democratic nomination and the comments about the far-left's emerging congressional leaders.

Overall, the event seemed to be a success for the president. The 8,000-person venue was filled to capacity. The president continues to bounce back quickly from his controversies, and this will likely be no different. The media outrage over any given scandal has long-since lost its potency during Trump's presidency. With 15 electoral votes up for grabs in the purple state of North Carolina, the president will likely make many more trips here leading up to November 2020.

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Calls for higher minimum wage more about politics than helping the poor

BY BOB LUEBKE

Democratic presidential candidates Bernie Sanders and Pete Buttigieg continued to urge adoption of higher minimum wage laws at the July Democratic debate in Detroit. Sanders told his colleagues all Americans want and need a living wage and that's why he's fighting for legislation to raise the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour. Buttigieg took the argument to another level when he chastised lawmakers for blocking legislation to raise the wage, invoking scripture: "Whoever oppresses the poor taunts their Maker."

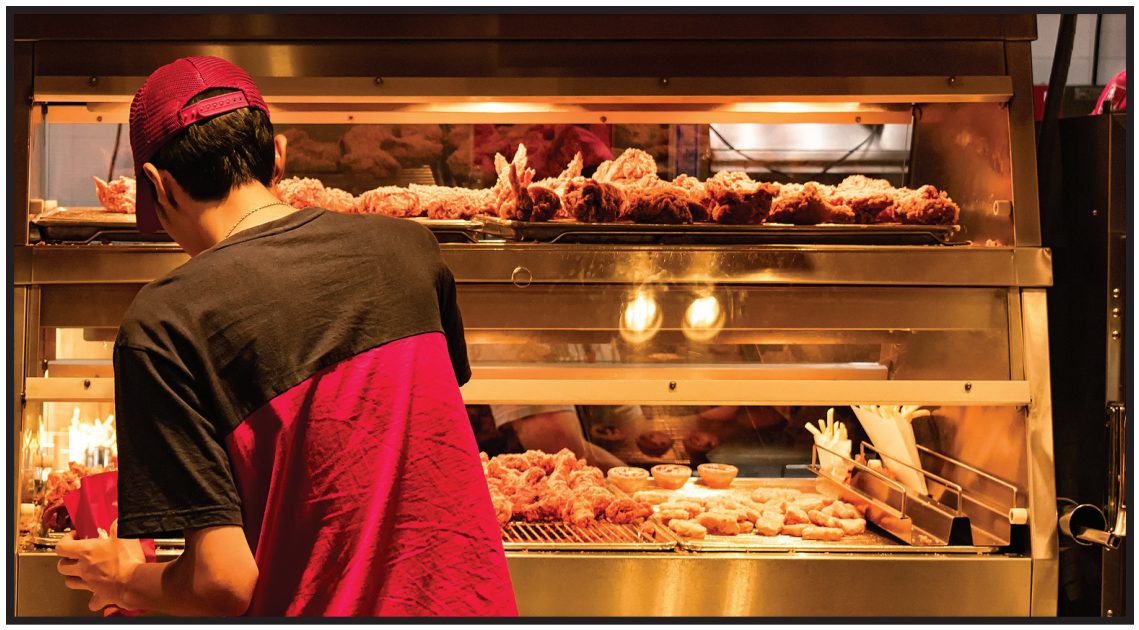
Is a higher federal minimum wage a workable idea? Let's remember that Sanders was forced to eat a generous portion of humble pie when the public found out he was paying his own campaign staff the equivalent of $13 hourly. He raised their wage to $15 by cutting employee hours. Reality crashed in on yet another utopian plan.

Hypocrisy notwithstanding, Sanders, other Democrats and progressives continue their quest to raise the federal minimum wage. The Democratic-controlled Congress passed a bill to raise the federal minimum wage to $15 hourly over the next six years. Here in North Carolina, progressive enclaves like Chapel Hill and Durham spawn organizations like Orange County Living Wage and Durham Living Wage, which are working "to convince employers to pay workers a 'local living wage.'"

Last year, to the surprise of many, North Carolina Republicans enacted legislation to raise the minimum wage for state workers to $15 an hour. Meanwhile, Democrats introduced no fewer than six bills in the General Assembly to either raise or expand coverage of the minimum wage.

For years, Democrats and progressives have viewed minimum wage increases as one of the best anti-poverty programs. A review of the evidence shows advocates couldn't be more wrong; the impact of minimum wage laws is far worse than the symptoms they try to correct.

After Washington state mandated $15 an hour minimum wages several years ago, researchers found that while wages for low earners rose by 3 percent since the law went into effect, total hours worked for low earners declined by 9 percent. The average worker in Seattle making less than $19 an hour has had their income reduced by $125 a month since the law was enacted. The study also found that since the passage of this law, there are



about 5,000 fewer low wage jobs in Seattle.

The higher wage costs for employers are forcing companies to automate, eliminating even more jobs. Don't believe me? Visit McDonalds in Seattle, San Francisco, or New York or any city with a $15 minimum wage. You'll notice the increasing presence of kiosks where customers can place an order without having to talk to an employee.

A recent Congressional Budget Office report estimated that a phased-in $15 an hour federal minimum wage proposal, would likely result in job losses of up to 3.7 million.

The report painted a bleak picture of the proposal noting that "over time as businesses increasingly pass on their higher costs to consumers, the losses in business income diminish and the losses in families' real income grow."

Yes, the $15 an hour minimum wage is a job — and income killer.

Even though negative effects of such proposals continue to accumulate, progressives keep pushing. North Carolina has been fighting such proposals for several years while the evidence against a $15 minimum wage continues to mount. A 2016 study by the Heritage Foundation estimated that implementing a $15 minimum wage in North Carolina would cost the state 367,000 jobs by 2021.

That's a very costly and inefficient anti-poverty program. Let's not forget that some of the inefficiency is rooted in the fact that minimum wage policies are poorly targeted. The reality is not all workers in minimum wage jobs are from poor households. As such, wage increases entice higher skilled individuals —who often do not come from poor households — to apply for higher paying minimum wage jobs and crowd out lower-skilled workers who most need the jobs.

Someone needs to tell Sanders that raising the federal minimum wage is not an anti-poverty program. Nor was it intended to be. There are better ways to help poor and low-income workers.

The United States needs to cultivate a culture that values job creation, job-training and education.

In 2013 North Carolina passed historic tax reform and lowered income and corporate taxes. Those policies combined with controlled state spending have helped to create over 550,000 new jobs, reduce unemployment from 7.9 percent in 2013 to about 4.1 percent today. Those reforms led to a reduction

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CYAN MAGENTA YELLOW BLACK

Milk socialism

BY BRIAN BALFOUR

On July 31, the House Agriculture Committee discussed the possibility of reviving a state Milk Commission. As reported by The NC Insider:

"The new version of Senate Bill 380 introduced during the committee meeting Wednesday would establish a 10-member board that oversees several aspects of buying and selling milk."

The most alarming part of the re-worked bill is the power the commission would have over setting prices not only at the wholesale level but the retail level as well.



The government has no businesses fixing prices for goods in the market, and the negative impacts would be felt well beyond just the milk industry.

I was reminded of a 1950 essay by the great Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises titled "Middle of the Road Policy Leads to Socialism." In one section, Mises describes how fixing prices for one product can have ripple effects that eventually spread throughout the economy and lead to "all around planning by the government – socialism."

The example he used for this one product? Milk.

For instance, Mises wrote, if the government sets a cap on the retail price of milk, "The result is that the marginal producers of milk, those producing at the highest cost, now incur losses."

These producers will divert their resources, like their cows and their labor, for other purposes like cheese, butter or meat where they have a better chance to earn profit. The result is a shortage of milk.

To eradicate the milk shortage, Mises explained, the government must then "add to the first decree concerning only the price of milk a second decree fixing the prices of the factors of production necessary for the production of milk at such a low rate that the marginal producers of milk will no longer suffer losses." In short, the government will try to force down the prices of inputs for milk producers to allow them to make a profit even at the lower retail price.

But the price controls on the inputs used in milk production will squeeze the producers of those inputs. What to do? More price controls, this time on the inputs used to produce the inputs used in milk production. The government's price fixing spreads more and more remote from the original target of retail milk prices.

And even supposedly unrelated industries must then come under the purview of price fixing, because "If some branches were to be left free out of regard for the fact that they produce only goods qualified as non-vital or even as luxuries, capital and labor would tend to flow into them," and the result would once again be milk shortages.

In a world of scarce resources with alternative uses, price fixing in one product or industry has a profound impact felt throughout much of the economy, with the tendency toward, as Mises put it, "all around planning by the government – socialism."

Calls for higher minimum wage more about politics than helping the poor

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

in poverty over the past several years from a high of 18 percent to the current 15.4 percent. Such changes have made the North Carolina economy one of the best economies in the country. According to Forbes, North Carolina has the best business climate in the United States and tops Forbes' Best States for Business ranking for the second straight year. The changes are working.

Reducing barriers to employment can also help to reduce poverty. Too many professions have rules designed to keep out competition and prevent individuals from earning a living. Eliminating licensing requirements and restrictive business regulations can ease the burden on individuals wanting to start their own business.

Lastly, we must continue to improve the public schools. Children trapped in failing schools must have the option to access a better education via a charter or private school. A good education is the fastest way out of poverty.

It's time for Sanders, Buttigieg and other Democratic candidates to take a good long look at the evidence. Lawmakers at the state and federal levels need to recognize the overwhelming costs associated with minimum wage legislation.

This article orginally appeared in the Daily Caller.

CYAN MAGENTA YELLOW BLACK

Changes represent the difference in voter registration between June 22 and July 27, 2019										
County	Total Voters	Total Change	Democrats	Democrat Change	Republicans	Republican Change	Libertarians	Libertarian Change	Unaffiliated Voters	Unaffiliated Change
Totals	6,681,828	27,890	2,473,729	3,615	2,010,764	7,062	37,822	415	2,156,122	16,537
Alamance	98,412	488	35,878	132	32,296	109	528	6	29,673	239
Alexander	23,196	97	5,413	6	10,566	42	86	2	7,123	47
Alleghany	6,912	15	2,252	-13	2,577	20	30	0	2,052	8
Anson	15,624	14	10,093	-24	2,334	9	26	0	3,145	29
Ashe	17,834	61	4,605	-11	7,783	20	72	-1	5,370	53
Avery	11,181	17	1,324	4	6,530	12	48	0	3,276	1
Beaufort	31,402	116	11,928	-43	10,544	77	91	3	8,832	81
Bertie	12,568	31	8,677	4	1,400	13	26	1	2,463	13
Bladen	21,474	27	11,065	-19	4,072	20	44	1	6,288	25
Brunswick	101,097	811	25,459	112	38,866	341	437	12	36,302	345
Buncombe	189,344	826	72,037	210	43,821	134	1,492	18	71,828	454
Burke	52,988	194	15,590	-35	19,594	97	272	0	17,502	132
Cabarrus	132,407	762	39,811	223	47,451	125	866	16	44,194	393
Caldwell	49,881	185	11,630	7	23,262	69	348	3	14,606	102
Camden	7,415	118	1,883	-5	2,436	55	57	1	3,035	65
Carteret	50,124	530	10,692	-10	21,949	244	223	-3	17,252	297
Caswell	14,353	35	6,901	-1	3,211	23	33	0	4,204	13
Catawba	98,793	409	22,415	28	42,769	103	436	6	33,134	266
Chatham	52,189	171	19,921	3	12,712	36	256	7	19,267	124
Cherokee	20,743	112	4,331	-8	9,501	79	126	-1	6,773	42
Chowan	9,582	166	4,221	-5	2,572	54	28	3	2,759	114
Clay	8,339	37	1,646	2	3,627	15	50	1	3,010	17
Cleveland	60,914	238	23,143	-8	20,626	122	273	1	16,849	119
Columbus	33,904	38	17,318	-41	7,358	40	69	-1	9,149	40
Craven	65,847	-121	21,107	-66	23,606	-52	372	0	20,737	-6
Cumberland	202,010	700	90,280	137	45,997	111	1,246	12	64,372	429
Currituck	19,222	405	3,559	48	7,447	187	166	6	8,037	161
Dare	28,383	190	7,916	7	9,088	91	218	2	11,150	89
Davidson	103,229	455	23,235	15	49,051	200	448	8	30,454	227
Davie	28,559	88	4,904	0	14,668	35	121	0	8,851	50
Duplin	28,155	56	12,371	-4	7,878	24	104	0	7,791	36
Durham	218,476	714	119,317	314	25,627	36	1,099	1	72,304	362
Edgecombe	33,706	-8	23,088	-46	5,606	13	78	0	4,923	24
Forsyth	247,019	33	99,123	14	71,790	-132	1,300	5	74,691	146
Franklin	42,147	164	16,463	-13	13,021	82	219	-1	12,416	91
Gaston	134,580	521	40,105	68	51,922	166	764	10	41,719	267
Gates	7,668	30	3,833	-6	1,661	13	29	0	2,143	23
Graham	5,666	-5	1,520	-8	2,621	3	26	0	1,498	0
Granville	36,600	73	17,158	-4	9,073	31	141	-3	10,215	50
Greene	10,815	39	5,807	-73	2,102	40	19	0	2,883	71
Guilford	350,850	706	156,273	173	88,995	26	1,928	25	103,469	470
Halifax	35,377	34	22,728	-36	4,280	29	86	1	8,274	40
Harnett	72,343	273	24,345	19	25,510	76	521	7	21,929	167
Haywood	41,993	204	14,596	-14	13,354	109	261	1	13,758	106
Henderson	79,800	229	16,572	23	29,959	11	476	2	32,751	192
Hertford	14,174	36	10,126	13	1,347	6	34	0	2,659	17
Hoke	29,327	114	13,587	35	6,161	21	199	2	9,354	51
Hyde	3,013	16	1,608	-21	507	10	15	1	883	26

Iredell	116,281	636	27,892	47	48,451	198	620	8	39,261	377
Jackson	26,827	65	9,236	-5	7,302	31	180	4	10,095	35
Johnston	125,590	770	36,989	147	48,506	219	766	9	39,256	391
Jones	6,974	66	3,187	-31	1,862	37	22	1	1,902	59
Lee	34,924	123	13,413	-6	10,119	54	194	2	11,186	72
Lenoir	36,082	377	18,560	-112	9,351	157	104	2	8,062	328
Lincoln	55,192	311	12,046	-1	25,118	170	273	2	17,730	138
Macon	24,848	75	5,912	-2	10,347	32	139	1	8,436	44
Madison	15,969	34	5,815	1	4,249	9	105	0	5,793	24
Martin	15,786	38	9,021	5	3,157	4	38	0	3,565	29
Mcdowell	27,032	89	7,038	-10	10,747	49	146	-1	9,086	51
Mecklenburg	716,371	2,707	310,864	886	161,649	45	4,815	29	238,674	1,719
Mitchell	10,108	28	1,040	5	6,046	0	28	2	2,992	20
Montgomery	15,525	25	6,317	-31	4,937	11	67	0	4,194	45
Moore	66,972	266	15,628	2	27,568	102	392	7	23,359	152
Nash	64,136	171	31,349	18	18,233	43	228	8	14,298	96
New Hanover	162,176	737	49,489	102	51,187	165	1,175	7	60,239	454
Northampton	13,179	3	9,174	-21	1,398	16	25	0	2,578	7
Onslow	100,590	1,620	24,206	217	37,385	580	977	39	37,945	777
Orange	106,157	216	49,319	75	14,651	-13	676	-2	41,460	150
Pamlico	9,060	129	3,294	3	3,157	63	42	1	2,564	59
Pasquotank	25,712	-41	11,170	-36	5,788	-3	148	-2	8,595	0
Pender	39,547	202	11,368	6	15,204	78	242	5	12,708	112
Perquimans	9,194	72	3,455	9	2,645	25	34	2	3,053	35
Person	25,271	68	10,955	-11	6,493	35	97	4	7,718	40
Pitt	116,233	1,605	51,407	330	30,075	378	712	26	33,962	864
Polk	15,067	34	3,898	-9	5,399	10	76	0	5,676	33
Randolph	86,365	259	16,640	21	44,251	93	497	4	24,938	137
Richmond	27,495	49	14,142	-41	5,722	34	82	5	7,528	51
Robeson	70,451	109	43,047	-33	9,164	37	186	2	18,021	102
Rockingham	56,942	142	19,996	-27	20,539	82	241	8	16,143	80
Rowan	88,320	127	24,330	-74	36,664	0	404	6	26,870	185
Rutherford	42,360	298	12,454	3	16,622	153	205	1	13,060	141
Sampson	34,931	95	14,158	14	13,267	45	118	1	7,376	32
Scotland	20,504	43	11,217	-19	3,473	23	66	1	5,731	37
Stanly	39,910	86	9,813	-35	18,145	55	141	-2	11,789	65
Stokes	29,137	100	6,552	0	14,527	44	155	2	7,888	52
Surry	43,015	303	11,673	-25	18,737	139	126	3	12,467	183
Swain	9,183	8	3,372	-18	2,526	11	40	0	3,242	15
Transylvania	24,602	50	6,130	-1	7,992	1	116	0	10,360	50
Tyrrell	2,223	34	1,184	-5	352	13	8	0	679	26
Union	151,307	702	37,247	136	62,488	204	770	15	50,738	340
Vance	27,725	63	18,010	17	4,038	15	63	2	5,603	29
Wake	723,021	3,817	265,849	1,078	181,756	407	5,152	52	269,878	2,249
Warren	12,727	7	8,543	-5	1,774	7	38	0	2,369	5
Washington	8,016	10	5,263	-17	1,063	10	21	0	1,669	17
Watauga	43,161	34	11,269	-30	13,107	14	476	-1	18,295	51
Wayne	70,811	460	29,442	86	22,965	132	354	7	18,010	231
Wilkes	40,052	35	8,432	-55	21,027	-1	144	-1	10,441	92
Wilson	53,144	142	27,023	1	12,841	46	169	-2	13,081	96
Yadkin	22,783	59	3,515	-6	12,847	16	92	3	6,319	46
Yancey	13,205	-12	4,532	-11	4,725	-8	50	1	3,893	6

Is Clarence Thomas's brand of conservatism best for America?

BY RAY NOTHSTINE



Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas was discussed on a recent edition of the Civitalk podcast. A superb piece of journalism titled "The Clarence Thomas Effect" was published recently online at the Atlantic and was the launching pad for the discussion. I've always had an interest in Thomas given that I vividly remember the Thomas – Anita Hill hearings from my childhood. A decade ago, I reviewed his autobiography "My Grandfather's Son" at the Acton Institute. Thomas has had a hard and fascinating life in many respects. Obviously, a lot of daggers are still slung his way given he is a black conservative judicial voice who succeeded the liberal civil rights icon and former Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall. Not only that, he is viewed by many experts as the most conservative member of the high court.

Given all the talk about the future of conservatism in America, I think there's a solid case that Thomas's brand of conservatism is the best going forward. He has a deep understanding of the American Founders, the importance of virtue in our republic, and knows what are and aren't rights. He's obviously a textualist, a judge that champions the original meaning of the U.S. Constitution. He's not a horse trader for votes on the court and sticks to his principles above all else.

Thomas understands freedom or liberty is not just a ticket to do whatever you want but that freedom means responsibility and obligations too. His 2016 commencement address at Hillsdale College was forceful in uplifting that view:

"Today, we rarely hear of our personal responsibilities in discussions of broad notions such as freedom or liberty," declared Thomas. "It is as though freedom and liberty exist wholly independent of anything we do, as if they are predestined."

Former Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia got most of the attention for his dissent following the Obergefell v. Hodges ruling regarding same-sex marriage in 2015. Scalia, of course, had some great lines. However, when it comes to the understanding of rights, this line from Thomas is perhaps the most brilliant:

"Our Constitution—like the Declaration of Independence before it—was predicated on a simple truth: One's liberty, not to mention one's dignity, was something to be shielded from—not provided by—the State."

Of course, the continual distortion of our Constitution has widespread ramifications for man's relationship to the state and his/her understanding of where rights truly originate. This is critical in an era where many are touting wild victimhood and identity politics. For too many, the state is viewed as a master that must dispense the latest whims and desires of the aggrieved. Liberty is in harmony with freedom from government coercion or action and is not a liberty to advance special benefits or favoritism from the state.

Thomas, the longest-serving member of the high court, is getting his due of late. As the Atlantic piece pointed out, his influence is expanding in the larger legal and political culture. That's a good thing. The lessons and truths Thomas touts are timeless and an essential roadmap for the future of conservatism and a healthy American republic.

CYAN MAGENTA YELLOW BLACK

Cooper administration uses veterans to advance big-government agenda

BY LEAH BYERS

Proponents of Medicaid expansion in North Carolina – led by Gov. Roy Cooper – have clearly demonstrated a willingness to distort the narrative to garner support for their side. Advocates for expansion have continually twisted their words to make it seem as though children would benefit from expansion (they wouldn't.) Advocates have capitalized on the tragedy of the opioid crisis to gain political support for their pet policy project. Still, expansion states suffer mightily from the opioid epidemic.

But this time, the Cooper administration has taken the misleading rhetoric a step too far.

Cooper has long claimed that thousands of veterans in North Carolina would be eligible for Medicaid under expansion. The governor originally claimed 23,000 veterans would be affected but his administration has since been claiming that number is now 12,000. These estimates come from two studies by left-leaning research groups, and the vast difference between them should raise eyebrows, but that's a question for another day.

Now, the North Carolina Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) – under the control of the Cooper administration – is doubling down on the narrative that our state's veterans would benefit from expansion. DMVA's August newsletter featured the issue as its top story.



Most of the total population of people who would be newly-eligible for Medicaid under expansion already have insurance (63 percent) or qualify for subsidized plans of which they are not taking advantage (11 percent). But what about the 12,000 veterans? Turns out, Cooper's talking point on this one is even more misleading because nearly all low-income veterans who would qualify for Medicaid under expansion already qualify for health benefits through the federal Veterans Administration (VA) health care program.

The exceptions to VA healthcare eligibility include veterans who received Other than Honorable, Bad Conduct, or Dishonorable Discharges. Most of these categories collectively account for less than 2.5 percent of veterans nationally. Recently, the VA expanded certain health benefits to those groups, as well.

VA health care sets income limits based on cost-of-living differences across counties. The lowest income limits in the state apply to 37 of the 100 counties in the state. Even the lowest county income thresholds for VA health care are significantly higher than the Medicaid expansion thresholds – over $15,000 more for veterans with no dependents, and nearly $12,000 more for a family of four.

In the three highest cost-of-living counties (Wake, Johnston, and Franklin), single veterans qualify for VA health care who make three times the income limit for Medicaid expansion. A veteran in a family of four can make double the income threshold for Medicaid expansion and still qualify for VA health care.

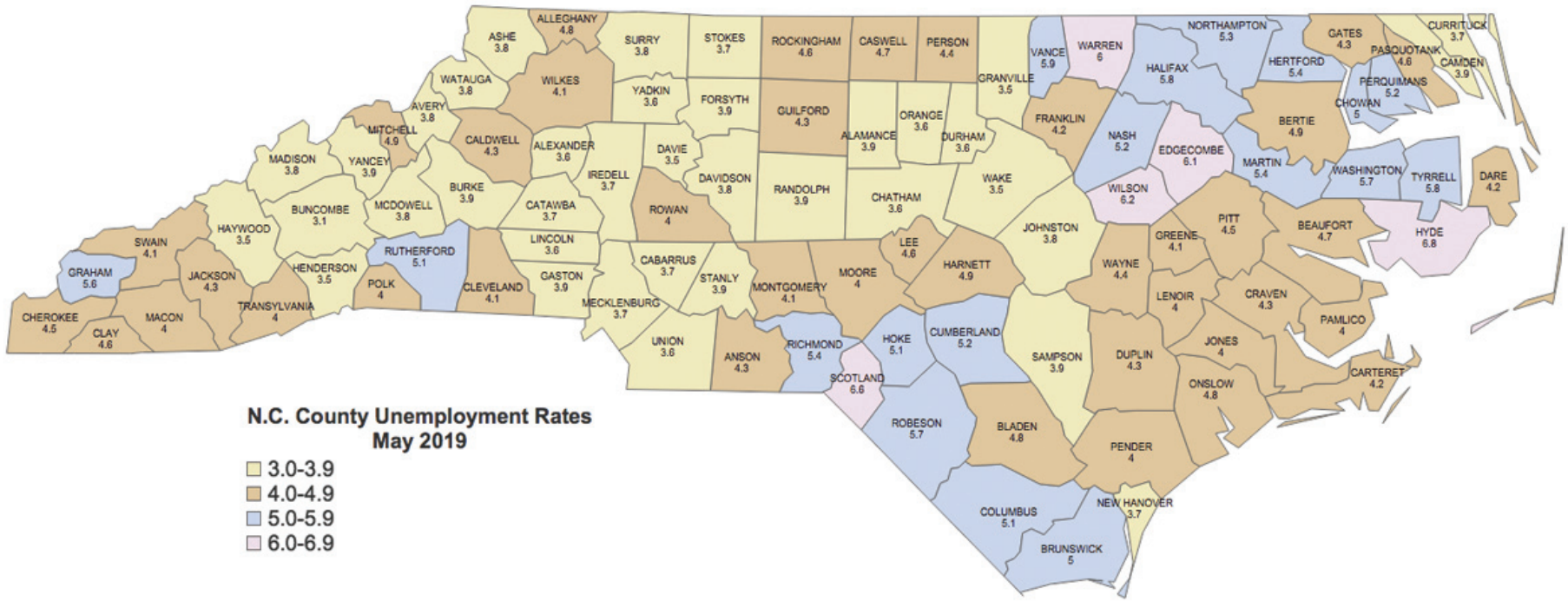
In short, virtually every North Carolina veteran that would be eligible for Medicaid expansion is already eligible for VA benefits.

So, why is the state department that is meant to advocate for the interest of veterans using their platform to advocate for a duplicative program when the necessary help for veterans already exists through the federal government? Instead of using veterans to advance the governor's political agenda, the department should be asking itself how it can better help the estimated 12,000 veterans who would qualify for Medicaid under expansion get connected to the VA health care program to which they are already entitled. If there are, in fact, 12,000 to 23,000 veterans that would be newly insured under Medicaid expansion, the department should be ashamed of itself for failing to help them connect with available resources sooner.

Is it possible that the DMVA doesn't know about these health care benefits? Hardly. The home page for the VA healthcare website specifically directs veterans who need help applying for the benefits to "Find your state's veterans agency." When you follow the provided link for North Carolina, it directs you to the DMVA.

The Cooper administration is shamelessly using the good-will garnered by our brave veterans to advance a big-government agenda. This is inexcusable and only demonstrates that the policy cannot stand on its own merits.

	Medicaid Expansion Eligibility (133 percent Federal Poverty)	VA Health Care Income Limits - Lowest NC Counties	Difference (VA - Medicaid)	VA Health Care Income Limits - Highest NC Counties	Difference (VA- Medicaid)
veteran only	$16,612	$32,230	$15,618	$51,975	$35,363
+ 1 dependent	$22,490	$36,850	$14,360	$59,400	$36,910
+ 2 dependent	$28,369	$41,470	$13,101	$66,825	$38,456
+ 3 dependent	$34,248	$46,035	$11,787	$74,195	$39,947
+ 4 dependent	$40,126	$49,720	$9,594	$80,135	$40,009
+ 5 dependent	$46,005	$53,405	$7,400	$86,075	$40,070
+ 6 dependent	$51,883	$57,090	$5,207	$92,015	$40,132
+ 7 dependent	$57,762	$60,775	$3,013	$97,955	$40,193



The above map shows the May 2019, (not seasonally adjusted) unemployment rates for all 100 North Carolina counties (data from N.C. Department of Commerce). The May statewide unemployment rate was 4 percent. The national unemployment rate in May was 3.6 percent.

The unemployment rate increased in 95 counties for May, decreased in three, and remained unchanged in two. All 15 of the state's metro areas experienced rate increases.

Hyde County had the highest unemployment rate at 6.8 percent, while Buncombe County had the lowest at 3.1 percent.

Among the metro areas, Rocky Mount at 5.5 percent had the highest unemployment rate and Asheville had the lowest rate at 3.1 percent. Compared to last year, four-teen metro areas experienced rate increases and one decreased.

Refund coming to North Carolina taxpayers?

BY BRIAN BALFOUR

An August NC Insider article, a subscription service of the N&O, discusses Sen. Phil Berger's public comments that the state's sizeable revenue surplus should be returned to taxpayers in the form of a refund.

Senate leader Phil Berger says the state's recent $896.7 million budget surplus should be refunded to taxpayers. Berger spoke about the surplus, which came in larger than expected, in an interview last week with the Spectrum News program "Capital Tonight." "I actually think that the right thing to do with that is to send that money back to the people that sent it to us," Berger told Spectrum. "What we ought to be doing is thinking about how we can provide a refund to the taxpayers of the state of North Carolina. If they sent us more money than was needed last year for the budget, then I think they deserve to have some of it back."

According to the article, Berger spokesman Pat Ryan said his office is "still crunching the numbers, but it would probably be a few hundred dollars for a couple filing jointly."

No legislation has been introduced, but Ryan added "If we think there is a path forward, we'll release more information once we've done some more homework."

The ongoing budget stalemate, according to Ryan, may help facilitate action on a refund. "If Gov. Roy Cooper maintains his refusal to sign any budget unless Medicaid expansion first becomes law, and



if the House is unable to override his veto, it would seem to make sense that we return some of this money to the people who sent it to us," Ryan said.

CYAN MAGENTA YELLOW BLACK

Is it time to hit reset on public education in North Carolina?

BY BOB LUEBKE

Opponents of school choice can be an angry lot. Their list of grievances is long; they contend school choice siphons funds from the public schools, leads to a re-segregation of schools, and erodes the idea of education as a shared public good.

Much of the anger of school choice opponents derives from a different understanding of the term "public education." What do I mean?

In North Carolina — as in the rest of the United States for that matter — public education means education developed, funded, controlled, and delivered by the government.

The North Carolina constitution speaks much about the importance of public education and calls on the legislature to create a "general and uniform system of free public schools."

What does uniform mean? Today, North Carolina public schools are required to follow a standard course of study and take the same tests. Schools are financed in much the same way, possessing similar staffing and administrative policies. Of course, this is not to deny differences of degree, but the intent is to make a public-school education uniform; the same in Wilmington as it is in Asheville.

For a long time, the public school system worked well for many. But about 40 years ago, things started to change. The pressures of urbanization, immigration, economic upheaval, and changing moral norms started to not only challenge the foundations of the common school ideal but also to fracture the consensus that helped to sustain public education.

This is not the time to discuss the cause and impact of the changes. Suffice it to say, as these changes occurred, parents sought out other educational options. Milwaukee began the first voucher program in 1990 and Minnesota started the first public charter school in 1991. The school choice movement was born. As these programs grew so did the opposition. Critics drew a hard line between public and private schools regarding the types of benefits they produce.

We're told public schools produce public benefits and are committed to the common good while private schools are not. Critics warn us about the creeping privatization of public education and about the loss of shared experience of public education. That loss can lead to an erosion of shared values and a balkanized society. Critics draw a hard line. In reality, the line is never that clear — especially when public funding is involved at private institutions.

When discussing the benefits of educated children, where the child is educated shouldn't be as important as to why. The most important thing is that, whether it be a private school or public, students are being educated. Individuals motivated by faith and altruism started many of the first colleges, hospitals, and charities in this country. Do we say that private hospitals, because they are privately financed and managed, produce only private benefits?

"It is wrong to think public education only happens in public schools."

Caring for the sick and needy is a very public function that contributes to the health of a community. Likewise with the work of private colleges and charities. Such efforts generate a wealth of public benefits. Our government's decision to assign a tax-exempt status to nonprofits is based on the notion that such efforts are beneficial to the public.

If a well-educated populace creates public benefits, as we are told, it matters not where the children were educated. Private schools create the same social benefits as traditional public schools. Because what happens in private schools is often just as public as what goes on in many public schools, it is wrong to think public education only happens in public schools.

If society should encourage education, why do we exclusively concern ourselves with only those who attend government schools, while ignoring the rest?

In a 2015 decision upholding the constitutionality of the Opportunity Scholarship Program, the North Carolina State Supreme Court ruled that uniformity clause applies exclusively to the public-school system and does not prohibit the General Assembly from developing and funding initiatives besides the public schools. Moreover, the court held that providing additional educational opportunities served a public purpose.

The preface of Article IX of the North Carolina Constitution reads: "Religion morality and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools, libraries and the means of education, shall forever be encouraged."

School choice programs where a child attends private, home, or online schools are another means of education.

The school choice movement highlights two truths which opponents seem to overlook. First, just as every child is different, with different abilities, needs, and experiences, so too are schools. Schools come with different values, missions, leadership, curricula, cultures, students, and faculty. Shouldn't parents be empowered to make the decision of which school is best for their child?

If one of our most important goals is to produce informed and educated citizens who contribute to our society and workforce, our only concern should be finding the best way of doing that. We shouldn't care whether that involves a public or private school. When our policies recognize these realities, North Carolina will encourage education and that education will be truly public.

This article was originally published at ednc.org

The chaos that is Roy Cooper's board of elections

BY ANDY JACKSON



North Carolina State Board of Elections chairman Bob Cordle resigned on July 30 after public outcry over a joke involving cattle sexuality. Cordle dropped the controversial joke at a conference of hundreds of local election officials the day before. He is the third state elections board chair to leave the position under fire in the past seven months.

Cooper appointee Andy Penry resigned as chair of the then-named State Board of Elections and Ethics Enforcement last December after revelations of his partisan conduct undercut his claims of being a fair overseer of North Carolina elections. In an editorial published soon after Penry's resignation, the Raleigh News & Observer pleaded with Gov. Roy Cooper to do a better job with his next pick for the board.

Alas, the N&O's wishes were not to be. His new board chair, Josh Malcolm, quickly came under fire for his numerous contacts with Democratic Bladen County Board of Elections member Jens Lutz just before last November's election and the subsequent resistance to disclosing those contacts until reporters threatened legal action against the state board. Lutz, a former political consulting partner of alleged ballot harvester McCrae Dowless, resigned from the Bladen County elections board in early December and Malcolm removed his name from consideration for the newly reconstituted state elections board in January.

Cordle's resignation comes at an especially sensitive and confusing time at the NC State Board of Elections. After seeking to retain the use of touchscreen voting systems currently used in about 20 North Carolina Counties for months, the board reversed course earlier this week after being presented with evidence of security concerns of those systems. They voted 3-2 for a procedural move that would have eventually resulted in only hand-marked paper ballots being used statewide for the 2020 elections. Just one day later, the board reversed course again after one board member announced that he wanted to change his vote. The board announced on July 30 that they would meet on Thursday, August 1 to certify systems for the 2020 election that include touchscreen voting.

With Cordle, who favored certifying touchscreen systems, gone, the board is deadlocked 2-2 over certification. This means that Gov. Cooper must move quickly to name a replacement for Cordle. It also means that Cooper essentially has an opportunity to influence which election systems will be used in North Carolina for the 2020 election.

For the sake of North Carolina voters, let's hope Gov. Cooper does a better job of picking the next NC State Board of Elections chair this time than he has done on his previous three attempts.

Update: On August 7, Gov. Cooper appointed another hard-core partisan, leftist activist Damon Circosta, to serve on the Board. Circosta is the executive director of the AJ Fletcher Foundation, one of – if not the – biggest funders of leftist activist groups in the state, which helped fund the notorious Blueprint NC. A few days later, Circosta was elected new chairman of the board.

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