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Civitas continues pushback against status quo on education

BY RAY NOTHSTINE



Yet another Civitas Poll revealed strong and broad support for school choice policies. Diverse political populations across North Carolina showed a solid preference for giving parents control over their child's education, rather than government.

The statement "Parents should have the ability to choose where their child attends school" had the support of 86 percent of Republicans, 79 percent of Democrats, and 79 percent of unaffiliated voters. The January poll focused exclusively on school choice issues and oversampled minority households; a demographic often more apt to take advantage of choice policies in education.

The Opportunity Scholarship Program, which offers eligible low- and moderate-income recipients a voucher to attend a private school also had strong support. Seventy percent of Republicans supported the program. Sixty-seven percent of Democrats supported it as well as 62 percent of unaffiliated voters. A second survey with a larger sample of minority voters rated the popularity of the Opportunity Scholarship even higher at 78 percent overall.

"No matter the political background, people want choice," said Bob Luebke, director of policy at the Civitas Institute. "The strong support for the Opportunity Scholarship Program among Republicans, Democrats, and the unaffiliated is something progressives and the Left would do well to take note of. Gov. Roy Cooper's desire to end the popular voucher program puts him at odds with his own constituents and threatens the hope for a better future for thousands of families."

Gov. Cooper is signaling that education will be a major theme for his reelection campaign this

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From the editor

Along with the president himself, soon a bevy of national candidates will descend upon North Carolina to vie for your vote. They will make grand and sweeping promises that they alone can fix the problems in your life. Their solution? Merely more government spending despite a federal debt that is now over $23 trillion.

Amazingly, the only proposals major political candidates who want to replace the current president are offering include even more government. Ultimately, all this unsustainable spending adds up to a more meager existence for us and particularly our children and grandchildren. More private property and income will inevitably have to be confiscated to feed an appetite for reckless spending. And a government that creeps further and further into the private sector of the economy inevitably controls people.

At Civitas we are committed to making the important contrasts between freedom and tyranny. We believe that citizens and families are best equipped to make decisions, leading to continued prosperity and human flourishing. Only a strong and vibrant citizenry can maintain and cultivate the free society.

We know that North Carolina is uniquely positioned to sound the alarm on the failed interventionist policies of the past. Deregulation, tax cuts, and spending restraint over the past decade in our state has completely transformed North Carolina from one of the worst states for business to one of the best. In fact, Forbes magazine has declared North Carolina the top state for business the last three years.

We will continue sounding the alarm that free market state policy reform is not only essential for our well-being but reminds us too that the federal government should look to states like North Carolina for answers. The politicians in North Carolina merely looking to hitch our proverbial wagon to more federal spending and programs are not only out of ideas, they haven't even learned from history.

Our events, publications, and conferences serve to equip citizens to advocate for more freedoms and self-government. This is what was intended at the founding of our state and nation. Almost every argument in the public square today is about answering one question: What is our capacity for self-government? We hope you can join us at the Conservative Leadership Conference this April in Raleigh to build upon that very answer.



CYAN MAGENTA YELLOW BLACK

Budget vetoed by Cooper included 98.1% of the spending in his own plan

BY BRIAN BALFOUR

Contrary to what many on Jones street – or breathless capital news reporters – would have you believe, there really is very little difference between Gov. Roy Cooper's FY 2019-20 budget proposal, the legislatively-approved budget vetoed by Cooper, and the "unofficial" spending plan currently being executed.

Criticizing the Republican budget for misplaced priorities, Gov. Cooper vetoed the legislatively-approved state budget bill last summer. In September, the House garnered the votes to override the veto, but the Senate failed to do the same.

But as a result of a provision in the 2016 budget bill, North Carolina state government is in no danger of a "shutdown" if a state budget has not been approved before the start of the new fiscal year on July 1. Instead, state spending continues at the previous year's budget level.

Last summer and fall, several 'mini-budgets' were passed, along with legislation making further adjustments to state agency baseline budgets, so in reality, state government does have a spending plan in place.

Indeed, the current spending plan, serving in place of an official state budget, will spend 96.9 percent of the amount proposed by Gov. Cooper. The largest difference being that Cooper's proposal included average teacher raises of 9.1 percent over two years, and hundreds of millions additional dollars to pay for it. The current spending plan does not – because Cooper vetoed a separate bill approved by legislators that would have included an average teacher pay raise of 3.9 percent. If Cooper hadn't rejected the legislature's teacher pay proposal, the current spending plan would be close to 98 percent of Cooper's proposed budget.



Moreover, the current plan is slated to spend 98.7 percent of the amount included in the legislative budget vetoed by Cooper.

Interestingly, the budget vetoed by Cooper was scheduled to spend 98.1 percent of what Cooper himself proposed.

The current plan also represents an increase of 2.1 percent over last year's approved budget, a spending increase of just over $500 million dollars.

Indeed, halfway through the current fiscal year, state General Fund expenditures are outpacing last year's appropriations by 3 percent, according to State Controller monthly expenditure reports (actual expenditures last year were less than budgeted appropriations).

All things considered, there is very little difference in the total amount of state spending between the current continuation spending plan and Cooper's own budget proposal. The slim differences scarcely justify the amount of complaints coming from the legislative minority and Cooper's office.

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North Carolina voter registration since 2016: a little more Republican and a little more divided

BY ANDY JACKSON

With the 2020 election upon us, it is natural to wonder how North Carolina's political landscape has changed since the start of the 2016 election. To that end, I will review changes in voter registration over that time using Civitas' Voter Registration Changes page (Carolinaelections.com).

Statewide: A few more Republicans and a lot more unaffiliated voters

Over the period from mid-January 2016 to mid-January 2020, North Carolina added nearly a half-million registered voters (461,773). The net result of all those changes is that the state is slightly more Republican than it was four years ago. Today, there are 104,311 more registered Republicans in North Carolina than there were in January of 2016 (an increase of 5.3 percent). On the other hand, the number of Democratic registrations statewide actually *declined* by 113,157 (a decrease of 4.3 percent). Much of that decline is likely due to people who registered to vote for President Barack Obama but were dropped from the voter rolls because they have never voted or had any contact with their county board of elections since. Altogether, potential voting strength has shifted in favor of Republicans by 217,468 registrations over the past four years. However, Democrats still outnumber Republicans, 2,517,343 registrations to 2,065,181.

Where the parties are gaining ground and where they are losing ground

Perhaps the more interesting question on voter registration changes over the past four years is not *how much*, but *where*. The answer to that question shows that North Carolina's urban-rural divide is still growing, and that Republicans continue to gain in outer suburban counties.

Democratic registration increased in only 10 counties while declining in the other 90. However, their growth in the state's two largest counties, Mecklenburg and Wake, has been huge. Just over 28,000 Democrats have been added to the voter rolls in Mecklenburg while 23,602 new Democratic registrants have been added in Wake. The next highest county for Democratic growth was Durham with 3,903 more Democratic registrations. The other counties that saw increased Democratic registration were urban counties (Forsyth, Guilford), those with suburbs of Raleigh or Charlotte (Cabarrus, Chatham, Johnston) and progressive mountain bastions (Buncombe, Watauga).

Democrat's fortunes declined in most of the state, particularly in the southeastern part of the state and in the western Piedmont. Fifty-eight counties saw a four-digit decline in the number of registered Democrats with the greatest declines in Robeson (7,323),

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CYAN MAGENTA YELLOW BLACK

North Carolina remains one election from going the way of Virginia on guns

BY RAY NOTHSTINE



A January rally in Richmond, Virginia pushing back against proposed gun control laws received a lot of national attention and is spreading to North Carolina. Attendance at the Virginia rally was estimated at 22,000 to 30,000. The Second Amendment sanctuary movement is now moving forward in North Carolina, where more than 20 counties have officially signed on.

In North Carolina, those following the increased gun control laws in Virginia know that there are some similarities to what gun control activists want here. The obvious difference, at least right now, is that the legislature in North Carolina is more conservative than Virginia.

Virginia Gov. Ralph Northum called a special session to secure new laws in the wake of a workplace mass shooting in Virginia Beach on May 31, 2019. Some of the looming measures in Virginia include red flag laws, capping the number of pistol purchases to one a month, and a ban on "assault rifles," a nebulous term often used for certain semi-automatic firearms. New limits on magazine capacity are expected to pass as well. At least three of those proposals are continually introduced in North Carolina, with support from Gov. Roy Cooper.

The NC House can immediately put a halt to the trendy gun control laws that find more favorability in left-leaning states. Republicans in the General Assembly aren't always championing expanding Second Amendment rights though. North Carolina is even falling behind more conservative states, which is now listed as middle of the pack on some surveys ranking favorable gun laws by state. There were missed opportunities to scrap the Jim Crow era pistol permit and pass constitutional carry. Still, most of the NC House Republicans signed a letter in support of Second Amendment sanctuary movements.

Virginia, of course, has an exploding sanctuary gun movement pushing back on the expected laws. Many sheriffs over there, particularly since they are elected, are on record saying they will not support what they deem to be unconstitutional laws in conflict with the Second Amendment.

What stands out more than that is that over 90 percent of counties in Virginia have declared themselves Second Amendment sanctuaries. It shows the power of Northern Virginia, and some of the other urban enclaves, to exert their will on much of the state. Something that is not unimaginable here in North Carolina.

The sanctuary resolutions don't have legal teeth, but they do amount to considerable pushback. One Virginia Democrat lawmaker even insisted that the governor might have to mobilize the state National Guard to enforce the laws. Not likely, given that current firearms that are owned won't be seized, but a wild proposal, nonetheless.

Gov. Cooper most likely wants to keep this grassroots movement on the back burner in North Carolina, preferring to keep the focus on teacher pay and education spending. However, the surge to defend the Second Amendment is something to keep an eye on in North Carolina. Given what has been proposed by some of the Democrats in the General Assembly, we are potentially one election away from many of the same gun control initiatives passing here.

CYAN MAGENTA YELLOW BLACK

Changes represent the difference in voter registration between January 9, 2016 and January 11, 2020										
County	Total Voters	Total Change	Democrats	Democrat Change	Republicans	Republican Change	Libertarians	Libertarian Change	Unaffiliated Voters	Unaffiliated Change
Totals	6,921,884	461,773	2,520,474	-113,157	2,072,180	104,311	40,245	12,207	2,288,985	458,412
Alamance	102,454	8,007	36,643	-1,407	33,335	2,105	560	212	31,916	7,097
Alexander	23,702	131	5,301	-1,430	10,838	463	89	36	7,474	1,062
Alleghany	7,108	-42	2,216	-640	2,657	304	33	6	2,202	288
Anson	16,010	-908	10,139	-1,867	2,460	186	29	12	3,382	761
Ashe	18,307	94	4,582	-1,127	8,027	309	78	30	5,620	882
Avery	11,544	79	1,346	-73	6,722	-151	53	7	3,423	296
Beaufort	32,572	166	11,984	-2,225	11,067	743	99	8	9,422	1,640
Bertie	12,819	-1,193	8,668	-1,800	1,430	4	26	11	2,695	592
Bladen	21,938	-199	10,964	-2,958	4,305	1,237	51	26	6,618	1,496
Brunswick	105,797	17,610	26,031	-468	40,879	8,438	467	157	38,420	9,483
Buncombe	195,393	11,569	73,689	308	44,678	-943	1,533	412	75,493	11,792
Burke	54,576	-1,799	15,475	-3,947	20,316	566	290	58	18,495	1,524
Cabarrus	138,905	15,658	41,403	2,206	49,048	2,189	930	337	47,524	10,926
Caldwell	51,386	-1,754	11,611	-3,690	24,024	319	366	54	15,385	1,563
Camden	7,675	381	1,830	-755	2,575	480	60	24	3,210	632
Carteret	52,086	1,925	10,681	-2,392	22,907	2,085	246	32	18,252	2,200
Caswell	14,711	-419	6,902	-1,411	3,406	-37	37	4	4,366	1,025
Catawba	102,279	2,771	22,679	-4,622	43,944	1,120	459	131	35,197	6,142
Chatham	54,149	6,780	20,318	376	13,131	959	276	71	20,424	5,374
Cherokee	21,412	-1,347	4,298	-2,310	9,959	564	128	31	7,027	368
Chowan	9,895	-215	4,209	-876	2,690	180	31	17	2,965	464
Clay	8,637	46	1,634	-613	3,831	437	55	18	3,117	204
Cleveland	62,898	3,276	23,207	-3,446	21,539	2,986	284	109	17,868	3,627
Columbus	35,114	29	17,236	-4,340	8,057	1,983	74	20	9,747	2,366
Craven	69,047	570	21,424	-3,758	24,757	1,555	414	101	22,452	2,672
Cumberland	209,153	15,402	92,176	-2,508	47,586	2,131	1,322	547	68,069	15,232
Currituck	20,244	2,410	3,590	-714	7,957	1,746	176	55	8,521	1,323
Dare	29,471	1,477	7,995	-1,271	9,494	1,152	224	53	11,758	1,543
Davidson	106,553	6,070	23,433	-4,202	50,401	3,918	483	104	32,236	6,250
Davie	29,583	1,393	4,986	-746	15,176	604	135	48	9,286	1,487
Duplin	29,025	188	12,461	-2,023	8,154	652	104	22	8,306	1,537
Durham	225,623	18,722	122,655	3,903	25,949	-1,867	1,157	272	75,862	16,414
Edgecombe	34,499	-3,327	23,219	-4,264	5,809	-142	79	17	5,392	1,062
Forsyth	256,246	18,948	101,429	1,076	73,338	-522	1,391	392	80,088	18,002
Franklin	43,868	3,297	16,667	-1,638	13,612	1,405	238	68	13,351	3,462
Gaston	140,144	7,608	41,115	-3,852	53,889	3,365	829	315	44,311	7,780
Gates	7,874	-381	3,840	-894	1,736	156	30	11	2,268	346
Graham	5,767	-577	1,503	-593	2,661	-61	26	7	1,577	70
Granville	37,594	1,769	17,349	-1,467	9,384	896	157	37	10,704	2,303
Greene	10,984	-15	5,713	-1,088	2,187	288	21	-4	3,063	789
Guilford	362,817	23,104	159,746	930	90,625	-1,347	2,044	519	110,402	23,002
Halifax	36,356	-1,296	22,977	-2,905	4,528	93	97	20	8,754	1,496
Harnett	75,277	7,928	24,695	-1,646	26,583	3,562	558	147	23,441	5,865
Haywood	43,372	1,666	14,510	-2,989	14,002	1,786	277	104	14,583	2,765
Henderson	82,434	4,425	16,952	-616	30,675	490	490	154	34,317	4,397
Hertford	14,512	-215	10,206	-853	1,392	-38	33	1	2,881	675
Hoke	30,342	571	13,776	-941	6,453	297	227	90	9,886	1,125
Hyde	3,056	-369	1,588	-562	529	27	16	5	923	161

Iredell	121,095	9,782	28,444	-2,571	50,101	4,270	652	180	41,898	7,903
Jackson	27,443	1,671	9,300	-767	7,554	982	197	75	10,392	1,381
Johnston	131,711	18,587	38,019	344	50,410	7,276	839	296	42,443	10,671
Jones	7,086	-247	3,135	-784	1,920	231	24	-3	2,007	309
Lee	36,216	3,385	13,479	-1,187	10,451	1,137	211	89	12,075	3,346
Lenoir	37,059	-1,197	18,574	-3,198	9,629	439	111	29	8,745	1,533
Lincoln	57,594	5,360	12,201	-2,369	26,340	3,991	298	122	18,755	3,616
Macon	25,644	1,419	5,891	-1,075	10,807	1,247	150	61	8,796	1,186
Madison	16,311	307	5,841	-890	4,324	162	113	23	6,033	1,012
Martin	15,990	-939	8,939	-1,731	3,224	56	38	-8	3,789	744
Mcdowell	27,963	168	7,011	-2,000	11,245	1,141	155	56	9,552	971
Mecklenburg	744,706	94,527	320,896	28,326	164,723	4	5,078	1,978	254,009	64,219
Mitchell	10,367	-532	1,054	-79	6,170	-555	35	11	3,108	91
Montgomery	15,971	375	6,308	-1,104	5,161	625	72	33	4,430	821
Moore	68,960	6,455	15,899	-833	28,316	2,610	434	145	24,311	4,533
Nash	65,831	1,996	31,570	-2,101	18,659	667	232	80	15,370	3,350
New Hanover	167,554	8,919	50,452	-2,268	52,365	1,336	1,256	169	63,481	9,682
Northampton	13,445	-1,065	9,140	-1,719	1,481	181	27	12	2,797	461
Onslow	106,187	10,208	24,842	-3,518	39,339	5,369	1081	427	40,925	7,930
Orange	109,381	3,047	50,726	-319	14,855	-1,831	681	86	43,119	5,111
Pamlico	9,153	-224	3,238	-894	3,265	427	44	19	2,606	224
Pasquotank	27,026	-173	11,317	-2,306	6,177	731	166	29	9,366	1,373
Pender	41,266	3,924	11,452	-1,613	15,901	2,351	274	80	13,639	3,106
Perquimans	9,539	-449	3,505	-898	2,767	216	40	3	3,227	230
Person	25,954	312	11,055	-1,539	6,755	614	104	19	8,040	1,218
Pitt	120,156	5,214	51,873	-3,021	30,723	726	753	187	36,807	7,322
Polk	15,465	253	3,912	-644	5,598	346	81	14	5,874	537
Randolph	88,852	-4	16,856	-3,114	45,413	1,236	505	178	26,078	1,696
Richmond	28,201	-1,375	14,107	-3,545	6,030	747	83	20	7,981	1,403
Robeson	73,269	652	43,248	-7,323	9,766	1,089	205	46	20,050	6,840
Rockingham	58,306	119	20,041	-4,293	21,165	1,820	261	75	16,839	2,517
Rowan	91,445	694	24,770	-4,109	37,905	1,261	434	166	28,336	3,376
Rutherford	43,508	212	12,342	-3,972	17,298	2,332	210	47	13,658	1,805
Sampson	36,120	-217	14,407	-2,333	13,681	507	128	38	7,904	1,571
Scotland	20,987	-946	11,197	-1,982	3,645	288	68	23	6,077	725
Stanly	41,023	1,830	9,766	-2,200	18,681	1,743	149	44	12,427	2,243
Stokes	29,838	-238	6,488	-1,919	14,923	591	155	22	8,272	1,068
Surry	44,149	918	11,558	-3,418	19,274	1,667	128	-5	13,189	2,674
Swain	9,473	-571	3,379	-734	2,660	114	39	6	3,395	43
Transylvania	25,311	1,301	6,192	-660	8,166	235	119	5	10,834	1,721
Tyrrell	2,220	-185	1,175	-352	355	43	9	5	681	119
Union	158,019	15,214	38,410	-443	64,770	4,322	858	267	53,981	11,068
Vance	28,462	-854	18,158	-1,880	4,232	29	77	22	5,995	975
Wake	750,141	101,950	274,010	23,602	184,431	3,991	5,499	1,813	286,201	72,544
Warren	12,945	-272	8,561	-881	1,875	241	40	5	2,469	363
Washington	8,146	-354	5,234	-791	1,133	80	21	2	1,758	355
Watauga	45,490	2,161	11,891	251	13,447	-349	493	45	19,659	2,214
Wayne	72,525	11	29,587	-3,392	23,506	422	360	128	19,072	2,853
Wilkes	41,116	-137	8,366	-2,078	21,563	401	145	29	11,042	1,511
Wilson	55,204	708	27,568	-2,027	13,320	-81	182	57	14,134	2,759
Yadkin	23,372	-36	3,532	-855	13,123	91	96	33	6,621	695
Yancey	13,481	95	4,507	-822	4,856	67	53	16	4,065	834

How Gov. Cooper can put an end to cronyism if he wants to

BY BRIAN BALFOUR

For a guy claiming to be against "tax giveaways" to corporations, Gov. Roy Cooper sure seems to be fond of doling out taxpayer dollars to corporations.

Indeed, in his remarks vetoing the legislatively approved state budget last summer, Cooper insisted he objected to the budget because it "values corporate tax breaks over classrooms." And exemplifying many other comments on the subject is a 2017 tweet from Cooper lamenting that "Tax giveaways to corporations and the wealthiest will punch a hole in our budget."

Hopefully Cooper owns a pair of boxing gloves, because he's been doing plenty of that "budget punching" himself.

For instance, in 2019 alone, Cooper brazenly authorized $146 million in taxpayer handouts to corporations, according to the John Locke Foundation. The hypocrisy runs deep.

And what do we get in return for these tax-funded corporate handouts?

According to mounting evidence, not much.

Recent reporting by WRAL found that companies receiving such handouts between 2009 and 2016 have "so far reported hiring just over half the jobs announced" under the state's two largest incentive programs: the Job Development Investment Grant and One North Carolina Fund.

A stunning one-third of the incentivized projects failed to create a single new job.

Furthermore, a new research paper co-authored by Columbia and Princeton University economists released earlier this month concluded that state and local government incentive packages fail to "increase broader economic growth at the state and local level."

The paper further suggests that, in fact, "the welfare effects of these subsidies might be negative on average," meaning they might do more economic harm than good.

Making matters worse, these tax giveaways not only don't boost the economy but create a tremendously unfair economic climate.

Companies are forced out of business, and people lose their jobs because they can't compete against the cronies that get to add taxpayer handouts to their bottom line. How is that fair?

Imagine being a competitor of one of the businesses receiving taxpayer handouts. Your competitors are receiving millions in additional revenue not based on selling their product, but because of political privilege.

And let us not forget that such arrangements create a political environment ripe for corruption. When politicians signal their willingness to dole out millions of dollars to hand-picked businesses, there'll be no shortage of businesses lining up with their hands out. Naturally, those companies offering something of value to the politicians – and not always legal gifts – will go to the head of the line.

Unsurprisingly, the Ivy League authors found in their study that corporate incentive spending increased more frequently in years in which a state's governor is up for re-election.

North Carolina deserves better.

A far better and fair incentive program would be to replace our state's current web of targeted crony handouts and politically motivated tax breaks with the elimination of the state's corporate income tax. Doing so would create the same tax-free environment for all corporations. How's that for an "incentive?"

At 2.5 percent, North Carolina has the lowest corporate tax rate of any state, among states that impose one. It not only produces a tiny fraction of state revenue but represents the most volatile source of tax revenue as well.

A 2019 academic report co-authored by a High Point University economist and an economic consultant, and released by the Civitas Institute, found that eliminating North Carolina's corporate income tax would create 43,000 more jobs over ten years. Furthermore, the state could expect overall average salaries to increase by more than $1,500 during that time.

Cooper should ditch the failed and unfair policy of picking winners and losers in the economy with our tax dollars and replace it with an economic incentive that treats all businesses the same.

It's time to make North Carolina's economy fair and attractive to all job creators. It's long past time to eliminate the culture of corruption in Raleigh that comes with cronyism. Repealing the corporate tax will also improve upon North Carolina's recent economic surge and signal to job creators that the Tar Heel State is open for business.

This article originally appeared in the Greenville Reflector

"A stunning one-third of the incentivized projects failed to create a single new job."

CYAN MAGENTA YELLOW BLACK

Civitas continues pushback against status quo on education

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

year. Cooper vetoed the state budget in June, which included teacher raises of 3.9 percent over two years and additional spending for education. Cooper again vetoed an identical stand-alone raise for teachers in November, calling it "inadequate." He then signed a bill approving raises for other state employees while leaving out teachers in hopes of highlighting his political differences with the Republican majority in the General Assembly.

Cooper continues to try and pick away at support for school choice by claiming it drains money from the public schools, promotes re-segregation, and lacks accountability. Cooper's NCAE allies are adamantly opposed to school choice, seeing its existence as a threat to their political power. "This money's unaccountable, we have no way of knowing whether the students that are going to these private schools are getting the kind of education that they need," declared Cooper in August.

In recent weeks, Cooper has been attacked more aggressively by state and national school choice allies for sending one of his daughters to an elite private school while continuing to oppose school choice in North Carolina.

"It's apparently OK for Gov. Cooper to send his daughter to a private school to get a better education," declared Luebke "but poor families — many of whom are stuck in failing schools — don't deserve an option out?"

According to the poll, 78 percent of North Carolinians are more apt to vote for a candidate who supports school choice policies.

President Donald Trump is expected to make school choice a bigger theme in his political discussions at the White House and on the campaign trail in 2020. Trump spoke at a school choice roundtable at the White House in December, saying that "for decades, countless children have been trapped in failing government schools." Trump added that, "We believe that every parent should have educational freedom for their children."

Readers can find the full poll results and crosstabs at nccivitas.org.

North Carolina voter registration since 2016: a little more Republican and a little more divided

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Catawba (4,622), and Columbus (4,340).

Large Democratic voter registration gains in Mecklenburg and Wake counties were more than offset by Republican gains in the rest of the state, especially in the southeast and in the western piedmont. Republicans have gained registrations more evenly across the state. Eighty-seven counties had a net increase in Republican registrations while 13 had a net decline.

Two of the counties with the highest Republican growth, Brunswick (8,438) and Onslow (5,369) are on the coast. In the Research Triangle region, Wake (3,991), Johnston (7,276) and Harnett (3,562) counties also had strong Republican growth, as did Davidson County (3,918) in the Triad area. The rest of the top 10 counties for Republican growth all border Mecklenburg County: Union (4,322), Iredell (4,270), Lincoln (3,991), and Gaston (3,365).

What changes in voter registration patterns mean for one metro area

Examining the Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia, NC-SC Metropolitan Statistical Area is revealing; the total increase in Democratic and Republican registrations is very close with a slight Republican edge. The story of voter registration changes in the Charlotte metro area is one of shifting party strength within the region rather than the emerging dominance of one party over the other. That is similar to the findings for the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, NC combined statistical area I published last year.

So, what about those independents?

The biggest change since January of 2016 has been the increase in the number of unaffiliated registrations. As of January 2020, the number of unaffiliated registrations increased by 458,412 registrations, bringing the total number of unaffiliated registrations to 2,276,082. The number of unaffiliated registrations overtook the number of registered Republicans in September of 2017 and, if current trends hold, will overtake the number of registered Democrats sometime in 2021. That raises the question of how we expect all those unaffiliated registrants to behave.

There are a couple of theories about why people register as unaffiliated. One holds that they tend to behave like normal partisans but do not register as a party member due to their dislike of the current state of politics or simply as part of a general trend of Americans not joining organizations. This would suggest that the voting behavior of unaffiliated voters would be like those of the partisans around them, with independents in more progressive areas tending to vote Democratic and those in more conservative areas tending to vote Republican. The other theory is that people declare themselves independent in order to avoid the social stigma of being a member of the minority party in their local area. Both of those theories suggest a relationship between geography the voting patterns of unaffiliated voters.

Of the net gain of 458,412 unaffiliated registrations, nearly half (224,611) came in the eleven counties where there was a net increase in Democratic registrations compared to Republicans while the 233,801 came in the eighty-nine counties that had a net increase of Republican registrations compared to Democrats. While a crude measure, the relatively even distribution of new unaffiliated registrations across the state over the past four years suggests that the rise in the number of independents in North Carolina is a political wash.

The bottom line

Changes in voter registration since January of 2016 suggest that Republicans have an advantage compared to four years ago, but that advantage is small and could be overwhelmed by other factors in the general election this fall.

North Carolina's Constitutional path to federal government reform

BY DONALD BRYSON

When the American people were debating whether to adopt our Constitution, North Carolina (a hotbed of anti-federalism) took the lead in ensuring the document was amended to include a bill of rights. Today North Carolina can lead once more by joining the movement for constitutional amendments correcting our dysfunctional and abusive federal government.

Most Americans favor term limits on members of Congress and federal judges. Most support curbs on excessive deficit spending. Most seek a smaller federal government. But Congress refuses to adopt any of these reforms. By joining with her sister states, North Carolina can help trigger what the Constitution calls a "convention for proposing amendments." That is a gathering of representatives chosen by the state legislatures and empowered to propose reforms that Congress refuses to adopt.

This is the story of how, during the Founding Era, North Carolina helped force the adoption of a federal bill of rights. And it did so, in part, by suggesting an amendments convention.

The Constitutional Convention – It didn't happen the way you may have been told.

In 1786 the United States had no Constitution. The states were held together by the Articles of Confederation—essentially a treaty among sovereigns somewhat like NATO. The system wasn't working well.

Late that year, a "convention of states" meeting in Annapolis, Maryland suggested that the states meet again in convention the following May to consider changes in the political system. As a result of this recommendation, Virginia invited the states to meet in Philadelphia the following May. Contrary to a common misconception, this meeting was not initiated by Congress for amending the Articles of Confederation, but by the states for "devising and discussing all such Alterations and Provisions as may be necessary to render the Federal Constitution adequate to the Exigencies of the Union…" (During the founding era, the word "constitution" meant the entire political system.)

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Civitas gives parents and legislators voice at school choice event

BY RAY NOTHSTINE

To coincide with National School Choice Week, the Civitas Institute held an event on January 29 to release results of a special school choice poll and raise awareness for educational programs benefiting students across the state. "As a mom, I know what my kid needs," declared Heidy Gomez, who has three children, two that benefit from the Opportunity Scholarship Program. Gomez came to the United States from Venezuela 17 years ago.

Gomez's statement reflected the release of the poll showing 81 percent of North Carolinians agree with the statement that parents should have the ability to choose where their children attend school. "As a mom and as a Latina, representing a minority, I want to use this opportunity for the other families who don't know about this program and really, to share this information with more families," said Gomez. "I am seeing firsthand how school choice has changed the life of their kids and the life of their families."

Civitas partnered with EdChoice and Drew Catt, director of state research and special projects at EdChoice, for analysis. Over 70 showed up for the release of the poll in downtown Raleigh.

A legislative panel of state lawmakers spoke to some of the challenges of expanding school choice in North Carolina and its overall benefit as well. "Some Republicans say they support school choice, but they don't want to do anything to move the needle," declared Lincolnton Rep. Jason Saine.

Saine encouraged constituents to reach out to their legislators on education and school choice specifically, emphasizing that most feedback they receive is about something going wrong. "And for the folks who support school choice, I would absolutely tell you to reaffirm that with your legislator. Because we don't hear that."

Sen Jim Perry from Lenoir County argued for depoliticizing some of the education rhetoric in the state.

"When it comes to talk about educating a child, I shouldn't know your political party," said Perry. "We tolerate these absurd arguments against trying something different instead of focusing on children, and on outcomes."

Sen. Rick Horner was skeptical that anything additional will be done on school choice in the near future given the political atmosphere and Gov. Roy Cooper's aggressive opposition.

"We already have proof of concept," added Horner. "We've had success, so we need to spread the good word."

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North Carolina's Constitutional path to federal government reform

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Eventually, 12 of the 13 states attended the Convention. For several months, the delegates drafted a proposed Constitution.

Article V

The delegates were justifiably proud of their work, but they recognized that changes might be necessary from time to time: Conditions might alter. The document might be misinterpreted, requiring corrections. Unforeseen abuses might arise. So they added Article V to the document outlining procedures for amendment.

An early draft vested the power to propose amendments entirely in Congress. But on September 15, 1787, as the Convention drew to a close, George Mason of Virginia rose to address what he saw as a fatal flaw in this plan. According to James Madison's notes, Mason "thought the plan of amending the Constitution exceptionable and dangerous." If Congress enjoyed the sole power to propose amendments," he reasoned, "no amendments of the proper kind would ever be obtained by the people, if the Government should become oppressive," as he verily believed would be the case.

And so, under the final version of Article V adopted unanimously by the Convention, either Congress or the states (in a meeting called a "convention") may propose amendments. A convention for proposing amendments is a "convention of the states"—a frequent kind of gathering used before, during, and after the Founding. (The latest was in Phoenix, Arizona in 2017.) Regardless of how they are proposed, all amendments must be ratified by three-fourths of the states (now 38).

On September 17, 1787, the Philadelphia convention adjourned and released the draft Constitution to the public. The Constitution would become effective only if popularly-elected conventions meeting in at least nine states ratified it. The result was a huge national debate. Some states—such as Delaware and New Jersey—were so enthusiastic about the Constitution that they approved it virtually without question. But North Carolinians were more cautious and thoughtful.

North Carolinians and ratification

The attitudes of North Carolinians became evident once the state convention gathered in Hillsborough on July 21, 1788, to consider the Constitution. North Carolinians wanted to be part of the United States, and many of its citizens liked the Constitution. But they thought some necessary protections were absent.

They had two principal concerns. First, they worried that the document did not adequately protect individual rights. As Delegate Samuel Spencer told his colleagues:

There is no declaration of rights, to secure to every member of the society those unalienable rights which ought not to be given up to any government. Such a bill of rights would be a check upon men in power . . . . There ought to be a bill of rights, in order that those in power may not step over the boundary between the powers of government and the rights of the people, which they may do when there is nothing to prevent them.

Second, they were concerned that the federal government would become too big, too powerful, and too arbitrary—thereby threatening the ability of North Carolinians to govern themselves in local matters. (This concern was not primarily driven by slavery because slave owners were a minority in North Carolina.)

The Constitution's advocates thought the document contained enough protections. Thus, Gov. Samuel Johnston pointed out that "The powers of Congress are all circumscribed, defined, and clearly laid down. So far they may go, but no farther."

But most delegates were not so sure. For example, Joseph Taylor told his convention colleagues that the Constitution appeared to create "a consolidation of all the states . . . . Will any gentleman say that a consolidated government will



answer this country? It is too large." And Samuel Spencer agreed: "I can see no power that can keep up the little remains of the power of the states. Our rights are not guarded."

Earlier, some critics of the Constitution had urged that it be re-written before any states ratified it. But when the North Carolina delegates met, the requisite nine states already had ratified. The Constitution was going into effect, no matter what North Carolina did. So how could North Carolina assure that the Constitution was amended to protect the states and the people?

But they had an ace in the hole: North Carolina could refuse to join the Union until amendments were proposed. North Carolina was not a populous state, but it was a large one, and if it stayed out of the Union, the United States would be severed in two. This action would encourage other states to seek the protective amendments North Carolina wanted.

Though, most other states didn't need encouragement. Many of the state conventions that had ratified the Constitution already had suggested amendments. Virginia and New York went further: both submitted applications (demands) for an amendments convention. In other words, the states were saying that if Congress didn't propose a bill of rights, they would do the job themselves.

On August 1, 1788, the North Carolina convention passed a resolution listing

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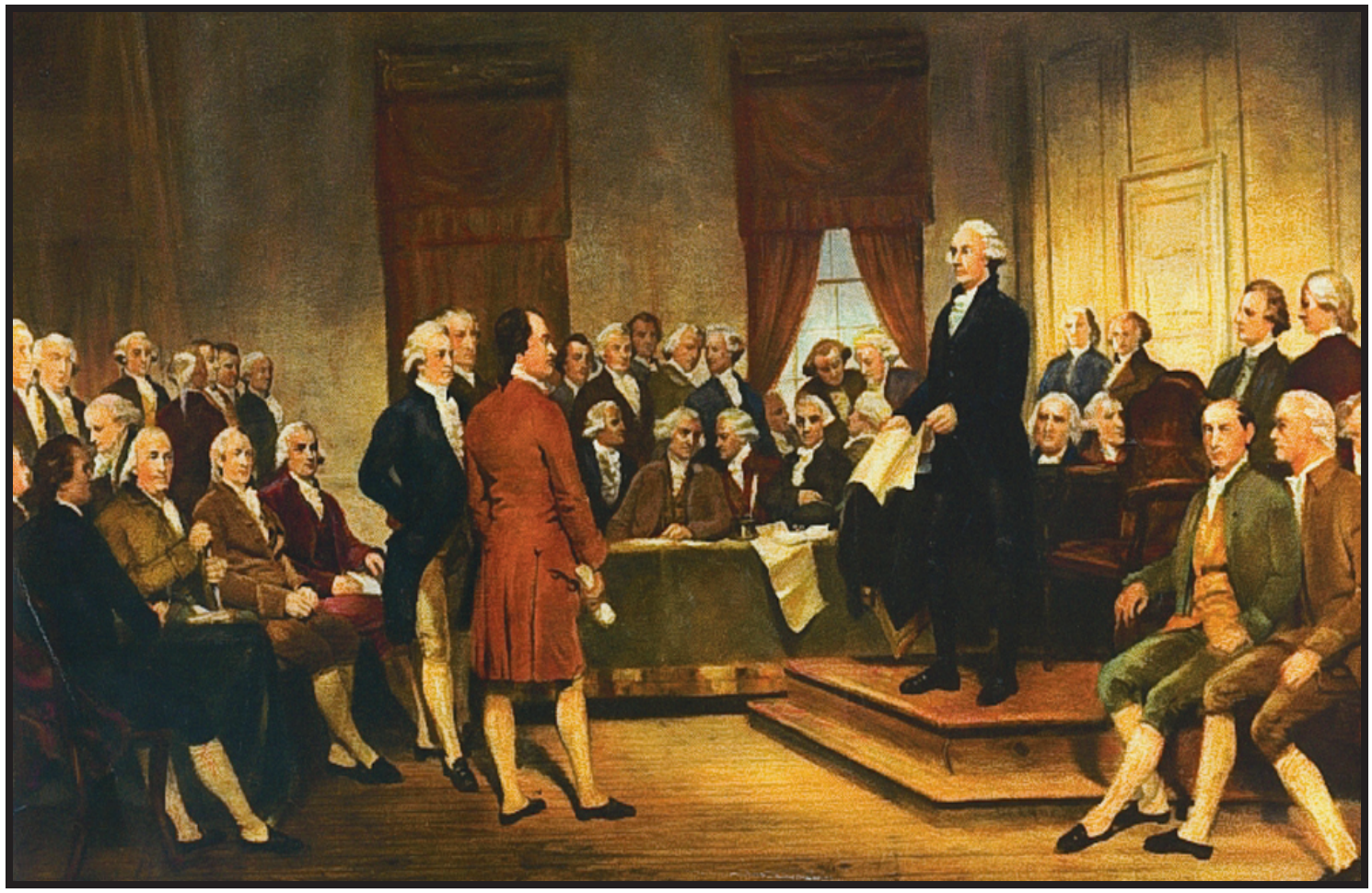
North Carolina's Constitutional path to federal government reform

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the amendments it wanted. They included most of the basic protections we enjoy today. The North Carolina amendments also included one protecting state powers.

The convention resolution asked that Congress or a "Convention of the States" consider those amendments. After adopting this resolution, the convention temporarily adjourned without ratifying the Constitution.

North Carolina's tactic worked. On June 8, 1789, Representative James Madison rose in the new federal Congress to introduce a bill of rights, and Congress formally proposed and amended version of Madison's bill on March 4, 1789. The final form of the Bill of Rights included much of what North Carolina demanded: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, due process of law, trial by jury, protection for the states, and more.



Having won this victory, the North Carolina convention re-assembled in Fayetteville and overwhelmingly ratified the Constitution.

Why this history matters today

In some ways, the situation facing us today is similar to that of 1788-89. We have a good Constitution, but some things are not quite right. History shows that one way to correct them is by constitutional amendment.

But just as the Founders predicted, Congress has refused to propose necessary amendments—in other words, Congress refuses to reform itself. That's why states like North Carolina should take the lead.

States can do this by adopting legislative resolutions ("applications") for a convention for proposing amendments—just as Virginia and New York did—and just as North Carolina suggested—back in 1788-89.

Although several groups are sponsoring form applications, the best is that promoted by the Convention of States Project. It would empower a convention to propose amendments to reduce the size and scope of the federal government, control its overspending, and adopt term limits. The convention could not consider any items outside of those areas, and any attempt to do so would be ruled "out of order."

Responding to objections

Naturally, any suggestion for reforming our federal government will encounter push back from the nation's political, media, and academic elite – as has happened many times before.

The most dramatic example occurred in the 1970s when the states very nearly triggered a convention to address overspending and Supreme Court overreach. Establishment professors, politicians, and media were determined to scare people away from a convention. They claimed the convention would not be controllable. They claimed there was no established law governing the amendment process. They even asserted that a convention for proposing amendments would be a "constitutional convention" that could, essentially, stage a *coup d'etat*.

Those charges were not countered effectively, and even some would-be reformers were terrified by them. The states pulled back.

Today, however, we know protests to an amendment convention were wildly exaggerated. The truth is that, as the Supreme Court has said, a "convention for proposing amendments" is nothing but a "convention of the states"—a very common kind of meeting in American history whose procedures and protocols are well known.

The claim that there is no law governing Article V also was false. In 2018, a legal scholar produced an an entire book on Article V law, outlining the many decided cases and precedents governing the amendment process.

North Carolina was right to promote an amendments convention in 1788, and it would be right to do so today. Our legislature can kick-start the process by approving the application sponsored by the Convention of States Project.

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