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Partisan anger and unrest on the uptick over reopening and civil disorder



BY RAY NOTHSTINE

While there were signs of unity and cooperation in North Carolina during the Covid-19 crisis, discord is once again on the ascent in the wake of the debate over opening back up and civil unrest. A new statewide poll released by the Civitas Institute reveals what anybody paying attention knows; North Carolina, like the nation, is split along partisan lines heading into the November general election.

"It appears that the 'rally round the flag' effect that we saw at the start of the COVID-19 crisis has peaked for both President Trump and Gov. Cooper," said Civitas President Donald Bryson. "A new wave of civil unrest has hit the nation since the poll came out of the field, and the economy has not completely reopened due to COVID-19, so it will be interesting to see how these numbers settle in our August poll."

President Donald Trump's approval initially went up during the Covid-19 outbreak, but "we are starting to see a splinter along partisan lines," notes Andrew Taylor, a political science professor at North Carolina State University. Taylor was a guest analyst for the Civitas virtual poll lunch that analyzed the results on June 3.

According to the May 29 poll, Gov. Roy Cooper still has a significant lead over Republican nominee Lt. Gov. Dan Forest for the governor's race. While his lead is down five points from the previous poll, Cooper still bests Forest 49 to 37 percent. One potential positive sign for

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From the editor

One of the great things about America is the ability to protest and petition government for redress. While that right should always be protected, as should equality under the law, any looting and decimation of property is criminal. The breakdown of order in large urban areas point to long established cultural and political problems in cities where liberal policies have reigned – in many cases – for generations. Unfortunately, many activists and progressive politicians believe that even more government, with them in power of course, will solve our ailments. Beware of any politicians that claim giving them more power will inherently make your life better.

The Civitas Institute continually counters these types of arguments and power grabs. We believe, like our Founders, that government is instituted to protect and preserve natural rights. Your support makes it possible to fight back against the politicized forces that foment crisis in our state all for the purpose of coalescing their power structure and control over the citizenry. Of course, this does not include legitimate protestors, but the professional activists and politicians that believe solutions can be found in centralized power.

The conservative philosopher Russell Kirk has a great line that sums up some of what is going on: "While we won't make a heaven on earth, we may make a hell." It's a reminder that there are moral truths that we should be tethered to so that self-government can flourish and that when we abandon long-established truths, we do so at our own peril. What are those truths? We have texts and a Constitution that tell us exactly that. Ultimately, power rests with the people over the government. We can't progress past that truth because our Founders knew concentrated power leads to tyranny and all forms of oppression.

So many politicians today think they have all the answers and they don't care if they divide or even destroy America to get what they want. Yet, we know better and when we look at some of the division our mass media foments on screens today, we know that our own communities and relationships hardly mirror any of that. We will continue to advance the cause of freedom here at Civitas because we know there is no advancement beyond that. Your help and support is greatly appreciated.

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CYAN MAGENTA YELLOW BLACK

Riots, looting, and violence send North Carolina gun sales skyrocketing

BY DALLAS WOODHOUSE

After two days of riots across North Carolina, when Ed Nicely arrived to open Ed's Gun Shop in the Moore County town of Vass there was already a line stretching into his parking lot.

"Business is busy, super busy. I did not run out during the pandemic, but now we are starting to run out of stuff, and we had 3,000 guns," said owner Ed Nicely. "I have more stuff coming, but I could sell more, if I could get more."

Nicely continued, "I had a lady come in yesterday who had a man barge in her house the night before. Thankfully her dog scared him off. She lives in Aberdeen and this is something she never would have expected. She bought a shotgun, and I showed her how to load it. She said, 'Obviously I would not be here if I was not scared for my life.'"

Nicely has seen people from all walks of life coming into his store. Black and white, liberal and conservative, man and woman, concerned that the police can't protect them. "These are people that have never had guns, never thought they would need a gun," he added.

While the coronavirus has led to some modest increase in gun sales across North Carolina, gun sales have skyrocketed since riots rocked the nation, beginning May 30. Not since the Obama administration have gun sales been



so brisk.

"It is a very politically driven industry," said Brian Sisson who owns The Range at Lake Norman and The Range at Ballantyne, both in Mecklenburg County.

"President Obama, like President Clinton and Democrats who run on gun control agendas, was the best gun salesman we had ever seen, but because Trump is such a strong Second Amendment supporter, people have not been in fear of losing their guns, their ammo and their rights, we have been in a Trump slump."

Sisson says that all changed when people saw the riots in their home state and the inability of government to keep the peace or effectively respond to looting and violence.

"We are hearing a lot of fear. People saying, 'I have always thought about getting a gun, but now is the time.'

"We now are seeing record sales. Conservatives, liberals, everyone are buying guns. Long guns are impossible to get in stock. Rifles and shotguns are selling out and replacements are about impossible to get ahold of. People are frustrated in North Carolina because they can't get pistol permits fast enough. Ammunition is selling out.

"We are selling out all our personal instruction classes, all of our training, even our range time is selling out.

"Personally, I do benefit from revenue being up, but people should not be buying guns because they are fearful about what is going on," said Sisson.

Paul Valone, president of the North Carolina gun rights group Grass Roots North Carolina, says it's a

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Riots, looting, and violence send North Carolina gun sales skyrocketing

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natural reaction for people to take action to protect themselves and their property when they see government fail at one of its core duties: protecting public safety and private property. Making matters worse is their failure to send a clear message that lawbreaking, looting, and violence will not be tolerated.

"The bottom line is, we see shop owners that have lost their livelihoods due to looting, due to civil unrest, and they expected the police to protect them, and that did not happen," said Valone.

Handgun sales went up 94 percent compared to the same period last year, while long-barrel firearm sales are up 65.3 percent, according to a report published in the wake of riots and civil disorder.

"We're seeing many first-time gun buyers. This is just unprecedented. Two things are at work here: The pandemic has forced many to rethink their reliance on others to provide them security," said Justin Anderson, the marketing director for Hyatt Guns in Charlotte, one of the nation's largest gun stores. "Additionally, many people are seeing what government overreach looks like. This is exactly the type of situation the Second Amendment was written to address."

The COVID-19 global pandemic has also played a factor in the increased gun sales. According to Hyatt Guns owner Larry Hyatt, the demand was already putting a strain on suppliers.

"Then you have this looting and rioting causing another demand, and it's really putting pressure on inventory," Hyatt said.

"It is insane. I have been doing this since 2003 and Monday (June 1) was the craziest day I have seen. The gun and ammo sales are through the roof," says Trent Lassiter, CEO of Springhill Outfitters in Selma.

"It is scary. I sit here in my parking lot to protect my business, and people have a right to protect themselves. They buy guns out of fear. Sales are always big in political years. But this time it is not the fear of what the politicians will do. It is the fear of the other man."



CYAN MAGENTA YELLOW BLACK

Want to help the public schools? Help families with children in private schools

BY BOB LUEBKE



It will be a fall unlike any in our lifetime. North Carolina must learn to live with a pandemic and its aftermath. Many questions hang over the reopening of schools this fall. One that deserves more attention than it's currently getting is: How many private school students will transfer to public schools because of the economic fallout from the coronavirus shutdown?

A legislative proposal to add $75 million to schools to address the impacts of Covid-19 on schools and average daily membership (ADM) enrollment growth passed a first hurdle on June 3.

Recently, Ed Choice estimated that a 10 percent migration of private school students to public schools in North Carolina would cost the state $64 million. If you include local county expenses, costs increase to $90.6 million. Likewise, a migration of 30 percent of private school students to public schools would cost the state $191.9 million. If local county costs are included, total costs balloon to $272.0 million.

A recent survey of independent schools in North Carolina found almost half of the private schools surveyed expect enrollment declines of between 5-10 percent in the coming academic year as a result of Covid-related issues.

The impact of such changes on students and schools is significant. Students who transfer schools will face new teachers, and often find themselves having to adjust to new curriculum material. They are forced to leave a situation where they have friends and know most of their classmates and establish new relationships.

The changes are also difficult for schools. A decline in enrollment in private schools is particularly significant. As tuition is the largest component of revenue, the loss of tuition revenue can lead to layoffs, reductions in programming or even school closures. Neal McCluskey of the Cato Institute is tracking the impact of Covid-19 on private school closures. While by no means a complete assessment of all closures, McCluskey notes as of May 29, 44 private schools said that they were permanently closing their doors – at least in part due to the economic downturn from the government's shutdown.

Closures are the most dramatic action. Many private schools that avoid closure will nevertheless also be significantly impacted by enrollment changes. In the independent schools survey previously referenced, one school noted that admission inquiries in March, April and May were 10 percent of what they had been during the same three months of the previous year.

To help provide relief for private schools and families impacted by coronavirus, Rep. Rob Bryan (R-Mecklenburg) recently introduced Senate Bill 857. In a recent interview, Bryan said, "It will help save the state money and provide continuity for families . . . Most families are generally happy with their situation and want to stay in their situation the following year. This is a COVID relief provision."

The bill provides eligible families a one-time $2,500 tax credit, per child, to help those who have children in private schools. In addition, the bill also provides a tax credit of up to $500 per child for eligible families that home school. Tax credits cannot exceed $7,500 for private school families or $1,500 for home school families. To be eligible, married taxpayers must have a household income of $150,000 or less; or a single taxpayer of $75,000 or less. Taxpayers would also have had to receive a federal stimulus check and experienced a decline in adjusted gross income of 10 percent or more. Families whose children are recipients of the Opportunity Scholarship, Disabilities Grant, or Personal Education Savings Account are not eligible to apply.

As expected, anti-school choice advocates oppose the measure. Michael Priddy, acting president of the Public School Forum, told the Raleigh News & Observer, "Senate Bill 857 ultimately diverts those

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CYAN MAGENTA YELLOW BLACK

Changes represent the difference in voter registration between May 2 and June 6, 2020										
County	Total Voters	Total Change	Democrats	Democrat Change	Republicans	Republican Change	Libertarians	Libertarian Change	Unaffiliated Voters	Unaffiliated Change
Totals	6,987,595	5,599	2,529,209	-461	2,090,813	1,600	39,944	166	2,327,629	4,294
Alamance	103,607	-39	36,849	-77	33,717	-14	547	7	32,494	45
Alexander	23,832	15	5,176	-9	10,970	9	92	1	7,594	14
Alleghany	7,210	8	2,163	-3	2,733	7	31	-1	2,283	5
Anson	16,099	-7	10,038	-23	2,548	7	29	1	3,484	8
Ashe	18,553	91	4,526	-4	8,203	53	77	1	5,747	41
Avery	11,505	-48	1,340	-4	6,714	-26	53	0	3,398	-18
Beaufort	32,776	50	11,830	-18	11,258	47	98	-1	9,590	22
Bertie	12,862	-21	8,605	-27	1,470	6	28	1	2,759	-1
Bladen	22,113	-5	10,780	-24	4,468	8	55	0	6,810	11
Brunswick	107,554	469	26,215	59	41,812	235	471	2	39,056	173
Buncombe	195,333	-248	73,960	-98	44,472	-52	1,512	-3	75,389	-95
Burke	55,157	52	15,273	-50	20,737	37	291	4	18,856	61
Cabarrus	141,082	392	42,029	121	49,516	38	937	3	48,600	230
Caldwell	51,393	50	11,320	-15	24,166	33	349	0	15,558	32
Camden	7,747	4	1,782	-2	2,632	1	55	0	3,278	5
Carteret	49,188	-3,168	9,785	-755	22,028	-1,076	225	-22	17,150	-1,315
Caswell	14,825	2	6,886	-7	3,490	6	38	-1	4,411	4
Catawba	103,317	230	22,563	13	44,552	120	460	2	35,742	95
Chatham	54,850	102	20,491	21	13,260	23	263	0	20,836	58
Cherokee	21,339	-36	4,241	-7	9,969	-22	126	-1	7,003	-6
Chowan	9,910	6	4,172	-7	2,684	2	31	1	3,023	10
Clay	8,624	-3	1,614	0	3,844	-2	55	0	3,111	-1
Cleveland	63,648	69	22,827	-49	22,242	52	284	5	18,295	61
Columbus	35,234	41	16,860	-53	8,320	47	82	0	9,972	47
Craven	69,574	125	21,249	-54	25,066	87	407	-1	22,852	93
Cumberland	212,137	638	92,918	146	48,452	216	1,332	15	69,435	261
Currituck	20,701	153	3,559	7	8,205	76	171	0	8,766	70
Dare	28,453	109	7,587	13	9,375	50	188	0	11,303	46
Davidson	107,628	147	23,440	-23	50,983	60	480	3	32,725	107
Davie	29,970	52	4,984	-8	15,393	35	133	-3	9,460	28
Duplin	29,379	-104	12,352	-55	8,362	-31	101	0	8,564	-18
Durham	229,908	-55	125,096	-29	25,802	-36	1,136	3	77,874	7
Edgecombe	34,556	-15	23,017	-100	5,961	69	80	0	5,498	16
Forsyth	259,325	496	102,373	71	73,632	27	1,383	-1	81,937	399
Franklin	44,415	50	16,702	7	13,849	29	251	5	13,613	9
Gaston	141,867	427	41,167	70	54,718	166	840	7	45,142	184
Gates	7,977	35	3,828	-7	1,799	23	29	0	2,321	19
Graham	5,786	-14	1,490	-6	2,678	-6	26	0	1,592	-2
Granville	37,940	42	17,278	8	9,582	21	149	0	10,931	13
Greene	11,015	10	5,601	-11	2,255	11	23	1	3,136	9
Guilford	366,537	-160	161,009	-146	90,775	-28	2,047	-1	112,706	15
Halifax	36,473	-21	22,881	-35	4,580	-1	95	0	8,917	15
Harnett	76,473	163	24,701	25	27,256	63	539	1	23,977	74
Haywood	43,234	-63	14,369	-30	14,022	-16	275	0	14,568	-17
Henderson	82,059	-185	16,913	-44	30,486	-69	482	-1	34,178	-71
Hertford	14,589	-27	10,134	-25	1,434	-1	33	0	2,988	-1
Hoke	30,918	77	13,882	26	6,638	23	235	5	10,163	23
Hyde	3,071	0	1,552	0	537	0	17	1	965	-1

Iredell	122,922	394	28,206	37	51,069	150	641	7	43,006	200
Jackson	27,820	-50	9,426	-10	7,616	-9	190	-3	10,588	-28
Johnston	133,900	413	38,301	96	51,368	195	858	6	43,373	116
Jones	7,182	26	3,105	4	1,992	11	29	3	2,056	8
Lee	36,603	20	13,402	-24	10,695	20	209	1	12,297	23
Lenoir	37,097	-21	18,366	-53	9,688	1	113	2	8,930	29
Lincoln	58,301	122	12,129	-14	26,795	75	298	3	19,079	58
Macon	25,552	-53	5,829	-18	10,791	-24	148	1	8,784	-12
Madison	16,252	-20	5,819	-5	4,297	-10	113	0	6,023	-5
Martin	16,027	-12	8,845	-28	3,294	8	37	1	3,851	7
Mcdowell	27,829	-63	6,897	-17	11,240	-26	153	0	9,539	-20
Mecklenburg	753,817	2,169	325,013	958	164,709	157	5,095	18	259,000	1,036
Mitchell	10,367	-16	1,043	-3	6,179	-8	34	0	3,111	-5
Montgomery	16,127	15	6,220	-16	5,338	20	75	1	4,494	10
Moore	69,676	111	15,868	11	28,651	53	445	10	24,712	37
Nash	66,080	-143	31,210	-99	18,840	-27	235	1	15,795	-18
New Hanover	169,262	200	51,008	-20	52,642	24	1,231	-2	64,381	198
Northampton	13,592	17	9,090	-2	1,411	6	27	1	3,064	12
Onslow	108,584	479	25,022	42	40,374	167	1101	14	42,087	256
Orange	110,599	-15	51,601	-4	14,708	-23	639	-7	43,651	19
Pamlico	9,242	23	3,196	-7	3,357	20	45	1	2,644	9
Pasquotank	27,387	30	11,325	11	6,358	17	168	0	9,536	2
Pender	41,887	94	11,495	3	16,179	34	279	5	13,934	52
Perquimans	8,959	12	3,166	1	2,713	11	34	0	3,046	0
Person	26,150	8	10,957	-26	6,888	13	102	-1	8,203	22
Pitt	120,785	47	51,834	23	30,869	-17	734	4	37,348	37
Polk	15,464	-3	3,909	0	5,599	-3	81	0	5,875	0
Randolph	89,661	159	16,761	2	46,000	87	510	5	26,390	65
Richmond	28,371	-2	13,913	-27	6,200	10	86	0	8,172	15
Robeson	74,138	-73	43,023	-155	10,138	53	202	5	20,775	24
Rockingham	58,639	-8	19,786	-100	21,499	56	262	1	17,092	35
Rowan	92,412	30	24,772	-52	38,433	35	427	5	28,780	42
Rutherford	43,632	-49	12,232	-28	17,442	-12	213	0	13,745	-9
Sampson	36,050	-126	14,195	-83	13,754	-22	134	2	7,967	-23
Scotland	21,224	44	11,190	6	3,734	28	66	0	6,234	10
Stanly	41,211	-7	9,590	-24	18,891	11	152	1	12,578	5
Stokes	30,104	8	6,340	-22	15,200	10	153	0	8,411	20
Surry	44,670	67	11,353	-32	19,690	34	133	3	13,494	62
Swain	9,489	-27	3,369	-13	2,669	-9	39	0	3,412	-5
Transylvania	25,166	-36	6,166	-4	8,100	-18	119	0	10,781	-14
Tyrrell	2,258	28	1,176	4	372	9	9	0	701	15
Union	159,704	393	38,682	61	65,273	113	863	11	54,886	208
Vance	28,561	-6	18,042	-43	4,338	23	73	0	6,108	14
Wake	760,147	1,713	278,335	653	184,125	38	5,371	25	292,316	997
Warren	13,028	-15	8,532	-15	1,915	6	43	0	2,538	-6
Washington	8,095	-4	5,163	-12	1,147	3	19	0	1,766	5
Watauga	45,176	-138	11,932	-42	13,338	-28	478	-2	19,428	-66
Wayne	72,861	-13	29,331	-62	23,846	10	355	2	19,329	37
Wilkes	41,433	4	8,224	-18	21,886	13	143	1	11,180	8
Wilson	55,383	-1	27,441	-67	13,452	27	188	7	14,302	32
Yadkin	23,550	18	3,508	0	13,226	-6	100	1	6,716	23
Yancey	13,426	-30	4,464	-10	4,840	-13	51	0	4,071	-7

Don't punish American taxpayers by bailing out the states

BY RAY NOTHSTINE

It's not difficult to find bad policy examples from government-enacted lockdowns due to coronavirus, yet virtually none are worse than the idea of the federal government bailing out the states.

The latest proposal comes by way of the Heroes Act, a congressional spending proposal that includes $1 trillion in funds for state and local governments to essentially do as they please. A major problem with the legislation is it incentivizes unaccountability and bad behavior by states – potentially allowing the propping up of notoriously mismanaged pension funds and other budget pitfalls entirely unrelated to COVID-19.

"We feel a federal bailout of state budgets would be counterproductive – rewarding states that have made poor financial decisions at the expense of those who have been fiscally responsible," declares a letter of signatories published by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC).

Why should North Carolina's taxpayers, who've elected legislators that have cut taxes and spending and built up a substantial rainy day fund, be called upon to bailout wealthy states like New York and California whose elected officials irresponsibly racked up billions in liabilities?

The entire scheme would be another transfer of wealth from the middle class to states where there are often much higher incomes and bloated government services. All the more problematic given that citizens are fleeing states that have refused to prioritize spending or offer a lower tax climate.

Writing specifically about the Cares Act, Mississippi Public Policy Center President and CEO Jon Pritchett makes the case that federal tax dollars or aid, if bailout legislation goes anywhere, should be in the hands of small businesses and entrepreneurs. They and their employees are the most brutalized by the government mandated shutdowns.

One of Pritchett's overarching points is that private enterprise allocates resources more efficiently than the public sector. "If anyone doubts that rule applies in Mississippi, they only need to look at the way the Department of Human Services deployed resources it received from the federal government," writes Pritchett. A state audit found, among other abuses, that over $1 million in taxpayer funds alone went to former NFL star Brett Favre for speeches and appearances that never happened.



The federal government has already pledged $500 billion in loans for states to meet the coronavirus crisis through the Federal Reserve's Municipal Liquidity Facility (MLF).

Furthermore, the U.S. debt already sits at over $25 trillion, which means $76,000 for every single citizen. Despite the ability to print money, it should pain Americans that the prospect of federal bailouts is even being considered for mismanaged and indebted state and local governments. Nobody mismanages funds like the federal government, and what does all the profligate spending and debt mean? Higher spending and debt lead to the kind of inflationary policies that threaten the savings and retirement plans of American citizens.

Perhaps most important in the entire discussion of state bailouts is America's unique system of government. The point of the framers implementing our brand of federalism at the Constitutional Convention was to prevent the concentration of power and authority at the national level. After all, it was the states that created the federal government, not the other way around.

Instead of becoming even more dependent on federal power, states need to be working to implement spending restraints and detangling themselves from a broken and mismanaged centralized government in Washington D.C. In North Carolina, the Civitas Institute has led that charge with its "A Better Carolina" campaign that prioritizes responsible public spending while championing free market reforms and innovation.

Americans should be skeptical of state governors who appear to be prolonging lockdowns to hasten a bailout for decades of mismanaged budgets. Expanding government programs and power is a sure way to stifle economic recovery and growth. The solution is not throwing more money at the problem. The only real and lasting solution is solved by voters no longer willing to double down on failed policies that pile debt upon debt.

This article originally appeared in The Daily Reflector.

CYAN MAGENTA YELLOW BLACK

Want to help the public schools? Help families with children in private schools

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already scarce and desperately needed public resources toward families who have made the choice to attend private schools and homeschools. . .”

Priddy’s comments are ill-founded and reflect a fundamental misunderstanding of school finances and Covid relief. There are strong reasons why policymakers and all educators should support SB-857.

Civitas does not normally support policies which carve up the tax code. They conflict with good tax policy. However, this case is different. It is entirely appropriate for state government to help families impacted by the government shutdown.

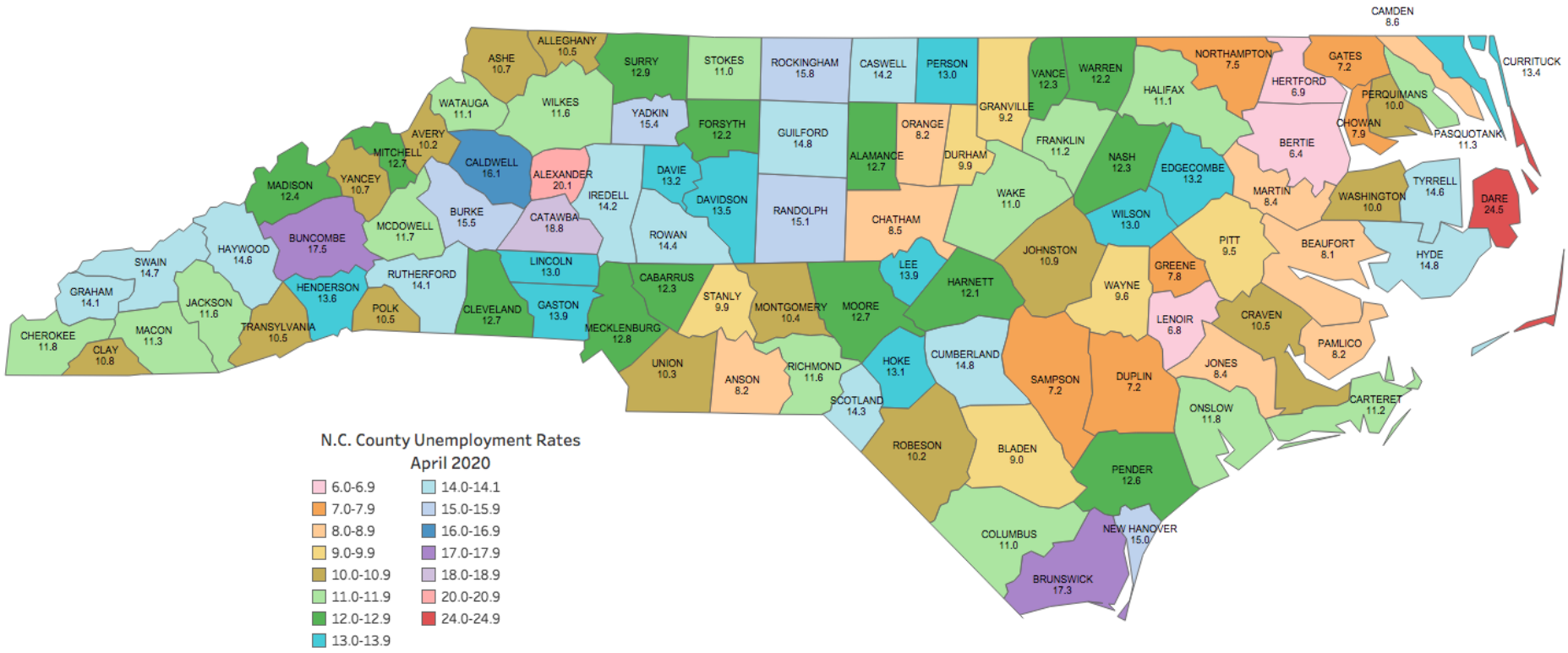
Since government is the author of much of the economic hardship, it bears a responsibility for helping families and children impacted by its policies, no matter where the children attend school. The fact is, families whose children attend public, private and homeschools lost jobs and income. If private school closures or enrollment declines are rooted in government responses to coronavirus, the government has an obligation to help impacted families.

SB-857 can be part of that answer. The legislation not only helps families whose children attend private schools or home schools; it also helps the public schools. Private schools enroll approximately 102,000 students statewide. Those are students who don’t have to be educated in the public schools. According to the Statistical Profile of North Carolina, In 2018-19, the state spent an average of $6,479 per pupil to educate a child in the public schools. Adding local per pupil funding ($2,410) increases total funding per student to $8,889. So, a tax credit of $2,500 per child that keeps a student in their private school saves the state nearly $6,500 in added expenses. The relief is temporary, directed to those families most in need, helps students, helps private schools and ultimately saves taxpayers money.

Coronavirus and the response by state government has changed the landscape of education in North Carolina. The economic fallout is expected to propel a student migration from private to public schools. Such changes can have dire consequences for those on both ends of the migration.

SB-857 can help to moderate these impacts, provide real relief for families and private schools and help to stem a significant — and expensive — influx of additional students to the public schools. For these reasons SB-857 deserves the support of lawmakers, families and educators.





The above map shows the April 2020, (not seasonally adjusted) unemployment rates for all 100 North Carolina counties (data from N.C. Department of Commerce). The unemployment rate increased in all 100 counties due to government ordered shutdowns because of COVID-19.

All 15 of the state's metro areas experienced rate increases. The April not seasonally adjusted statewide rate was 12.5 percent.

The number of workers employed statewide (not seasonally adjusted) decreased in April by 676,373 to 4,090,238, while those unemployed increased by 372,497 to 585,304. Since April 2019, the number of workers employed statewide decreased 781,342, while those unemployed increased 406,392. Seventy-seven counties in the state had an unemployment rate above 10 percent for April.

Dare County had the highest unemployment rate at 24.5 percent, while Bertie County had the lowest at 6.4 percent. Among the metro areas, Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton had the highest rate at 17.6 percent and Durham-Chapel Hill and Greenville each had the lowest rate at 9.5 percent.

Partisan anger and unrest on the uptick over reopening and civil disorder

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Forest is Cooper is technically below 50 percent. President Donald Trump leads former VP Joe Biden 47 to 44 percent in North Carolina. A Civitas poll from early April showed Trump with a seven-point lead over Biden.

"Trump's support seems firmer and stronger than Biden's, though they're both within the margin of error," declared Taylor. The poll revealed that 43 percent of respondents shared that they would definitely vote for Trump while only 36 percent said that they would definitely vote for the former vice president.

In a race that might determine the control of the U.S. Senate in 2021, Republican incumbent Thom Tillis is running two points ahead of Democrat challenger Cal Cunningham. The poll reveals 38 percent of North Carolinians surveyed plan to vote for Tillis and 36 percent support Cunningham. A little over 20 percent are still undecided in this race, a sign that might be troubling for an incumbent.

"Many Democrats think Tillis is the most vulnerable Senate Republican in the country in a climate that is increasingly favoring Democrats," added Taylor.

Republicans have a slight lead of two points in the generic statewide results for state legislature and U.S. Congressional races.

When it comes to the pace of reopening the state and economy during the coronavirus scare, 51 percent of registered voters say it's "about right." Twenty-four percent say it's too slow and 19 percent believe it's too fast. Men are about 8 percent more likely to believe the state reopening is too slow.

When it comes to the timeline of Gov. Cooper's phase two plan, 47 percent call it about right, while 33 percent say it's too restrictive. Fifteen percent believe it's not restrictive enough. Professor Taylor believes the restrictive number is likely to jump as the three-week timeline drags on.

About half of North Carolinians want to see spending cuts over tax cuts when it comes to dealing with a loss of revenue for the budget, while about 20 percent want tax hikes and the rest refused to answer or were unsure.

CYAN MAGENTA YELLOW BLACK

The only safe means of voting is hand-marked paper ballots

BY ANDY JACKSON

The 2020 election season started with clear examples of the folly of our unquestioned faith in technology for voting. As things stand, it may end with the coronavirus fully exposing how wrong-headed election officials were for putting their faith in machines.

Like a lot of political observers, I was dumbfounded by the collapse of results reporting during the Iowa caucus on February 3. That problem was the result of a combination of a coding error in a new app they were using for reporting and insufficient vetting of the system by party officials. Democratic Party officials' reliance on that technological system undermined voters' faith that their votes counted and may have cost Iowa its first-in-the-nation caucus status.

That same misplaced infatuation with technology was on display in the California primary a month later. A $280 million attempt to move Los Angeles County to touchscreen voting resulted in hours-long lines, a tenth of early voting sites not opening on time, and some machines not accepting voters' ballots.

Even worse is when those systems lose votes, such as when a touchscreen system used for early voting in North Carolina lost 4,530 votes in 2004.

To address the touchscreen lost votes problem, many jurisdictions have moved towards ballot-marking devices (BMDs) that do not mark a full ballot but print out a "barcode ballot" somewhat like receipts.

However, BDMs, like all computer systems, are vulnerable to mistaken programming or hacking. In 2016, voters in Clinton Township, just north of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, reported that the touchscreen systems there changed their votes from their preferred candidate to that candidate's opponent. North Carolina and Mississippi voters reported similar problems in 2018 and 2019. While only a handful of voters in those states reported that touchscreen voting machines flipped their votes, there were likely many more voters who had their votes changed without them noticing it.

In theory, voters can examine the BMD printout of their ballots to discover if any of their votes had been changed. However, voters are more likely to be attentive at the point of marking their ballots than they are after the BMD ballots have been printed. An experiment by the University of Michigan found that voters missed over 90 percent of errors on ballots printed by BDMs.



In addition, touchscreen systems put the computer between the voter and the ballot. This makes detecting the source of an incorrect vote more difficult. If a hand-marked paper ballot is incorrectly marked, it is clear that the voter mismarked the ballot. However, if a voter reports an error on a BMD ballot printout, there is no way to tell if the error is due to a hack or malfunction of the BMD system or if it is due to a mistake by the voter. This leaves precinct officials with a choice of either shutting down the BMD machine in question, potentially creating long lines for voters and driving down turnout or continuing to use a machine that may be changing votes without voters' knowledge.

In short, the paper trails created by BMDs are not reliable and leave election administration vulnerable to a host of problems.

Now, the panic over coronavirus is about to expose another problem with touchscreen voting systems.

The fear generated by the coronavirus pandemic has generated calls for expanded absentee-by-mail voting across the country. U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi even tried to require states to use mail ballots as a condition for coronavirus relief.

Mail voting has its own problems. A 2005 report by the bipartisan Commission on Federal Election Reform, led by former president Jimmy Carter, found that mail voting "raises concerns about privacy, as citizens voting at home may come under pressure to vote for certain candidates, and it increases the risk of fraud." Despite those problems, there will likely be increased voting by mail across the county.

And when we do, election officials will not be able to use touchscreen voting systems to count mail-in-ballots.

Rather than subject voters to systems that are vulnerable to malfunction, hacking, and potentially high rates of voter error, and which cannot be used for mail-in-ballots, election officials should switch to hand-marked paper ballots before the general election in November.

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Do-nothing Cooper continues to ignore potential $4.2 billion budget shortfall

BY BRIAN BALFOUR



The General Assembly's Fiscal Research Division released in May its consensus forecast for state revenues for the remaining current fiscal year as well as the fiscal year that starts July 1.

The new forecast predicts a shortfall of $1.6 billion for the remainder of the current fiscal year, and $2.6 billion for the coming fiscal year.

To be clear, this is a very preliminary and uncertain estimate. Actual revenues could turn out to be significantly worse, or possibly better, than what they are projecting at this time. The Fiscal Research Division plans to re-visit revenue estimates in early August.

Most of this year's shortfall can be attributed to the dramatic fall in April revenues, which fell by $1.3 billion compared to last year, a drop of 35%. A similar fall in May revenues may necessitate a more immediate revised estimate.

Making matters worse for the current fiscal year is the fact that the state followed the federal government's lead in delaying the tax deadline from April 15 to July 15. According to Fiscal Research, this may have shifted $1.01 billion in revenue from the current fiscal year to FY 2020-21.

The good news, at least for the short term, is that a decade of responsible budgeting has enabled the state to build up $1.2 billion in its rainy day fund. Another $1.6 billion in unspent funds from the current fiscal year will also help bridge the budget gap.

But that's not sufficient to cover the $4.2 billion budget hole for the biennium.

Legislators have not yet assigned appropriations for $1.9 billion of the $3.5 billion the state received from the national CARES Act, however. Legislators are holding out hope that Congress will amend the act to allow states flexibility to use the funds to backfill budget shortfalls – the original bill mandated that the CARES act funds be used for new, coronavirus related purposes only.

But waiting on a dysfunctional Congress to come to an agreement doesn't sound like a very promising financial plan.

The latest consensus revenue forecast confirms what we knew was coming since the minute Gov. Roy Cooper issued his executive order shutting down "non-essential" businesses on March 27: state revenues will fall dramatically.

Its been two months, still Cooper has done next to nothing to proactively cut spending in order to help ensure the budget balances.

His only action was for his budget office to issue a memo "requesting" state agencies "reduce unnecessary General Fund expenditures for the rest of this fiscal year." If the expenditures are unnecessary, why are they in the budget in the first place? Moreover, the memo focuses on limiting purchasing, travel and training, hiring and pay – but allows for plenty of exceptions. In other words, the memo is toothless, and will make virtually no difference.

How can Cooper continue to be so irresponsible?

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