



NCINSIDER

STATE AFFAIRS

YOU DON'T SAY

“North Carolina’s loss is New Mexico’s gain.”

Robyn Tomlin, chief news officer for The McClatchy Co., on the departure of N&O executive editor Bill Church, who is leaving to edit the *Santa Fe New Mexican*. (*The News & Observer*, 8/29/24)

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Reader's Note

State Affairs Pro, 8/30/24

The NC Insider will not be published on Monday, Sept. 2, due to the Labor Day holiday. Normal publication will resume Tuesday.

State Revenues

Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan, *The News & Observer*, 8/29/24

North Carolina collected about as much money as it spent this year. That means the state’s tax revenue is “steady,” the state’s budget director told *The News & Observer* on Wednesday.

That’s good news and not-as-good news. The days of repeated years of budget surpluses may be over, said State Budget Director Kristin Walker. “Right now things are steady. That’s what I would I would say: they are steady,” she said.

She also predicted North Carolina will experience “sluggish revenue growth” in coming years. Here’s what to know:

- North Carolina’s revenue was \$33.69 billion for the 2023-2024 fiscal year, which ended June 30. That’s just 0.1% below the budgeted amount of

\$33.73 billion.

- During the previous three fiscal years, revenue exceeded budgets by 10% or more. The Office of State Budget and Management reports that past tax collection was so much higher than expected because of “unprecedented federal support for the economy and a rapid recovery from the pandemic, characterized by growing wages, business earnings, and retail sales amid a two-year period of rising prices.”
- Tax cuts are a factor in the “sluggish” prediction. Sales tax revenue was \$156 million above budget, OSBM reports, but individual and corporate income tax revenue was \$155 million below budget. Falling inflation is another reason, according to OSBM.
- Even so, for the new fiscal year that started July 1, “We are expecting \$471 million more than what we expected last year,” Walker said.

The General Assembly went home this summer without passing a compromise budget adjustment bill. That means the 2023-2025 budget remains in place.

The House and the Senate each passed their own version of a budget adjustment bill, but leaders never came to an agreement on a final version of the bill. State employees and most teachers received raises this year at the rate in the two-year budget plan.

In June, House Speaker Tim Moore suggested the summer recess would be a “cooling off” period. That hasn’t ended, though he told The N&O last week that he and Senate leader Phil Berger had spoken recently. [\[Source\]](#)

Female Legislators

Michael Hyland, CBS 17, 8/29/24

Before state Rep. Gloristine Brown committed to running for the General Assembly, she described feeling “really scared.” Brown spoke about her experiences as a female politician and trying to empower other women to run for office Wednesday at the North Carolina Women’s Conference. “What will I have to do?” she said. “The fight that you have to deal with when you come into this arena because it’s mostly men.”

When state Rep. Gloristine Brown took office in 2023, she was part of the largest group of female legislators in state history. When the session began, women held 29% of all seats in the state legislature.

A [report by the North Carolina Council for Women](#) found it may not be until 2084 that women achieve parity with men in the General Assembly. “I think it’s going to take women realizing it can be done,” Brown said.

After the election, state Rep. Erin Pare told CBS 17, “The key takeaway here is we have women who have such a diverse background of experience and talents and skill sets and that is all contributing to a better debate.”

Maggie Barlow, co-founder of the political consulting firm Maven Strategies, pointed to a variety of challenges faced by female candidates that can be barriers to recruiting more to run, such as fundraising, family obligations, and finding support.

“Women feel like they’ve got to take all these steps first, make sure it’s their time to run,” she said. “We try to encourage women to say now is their time to run. As those women run for local office, it encourages other women to run for all levels of office.”

In the 2020 presidential election, female voters outpaced male voters when it comes to participation, [according to data from the NC State Board of Elections](#). About 77% of registered females voted that year compared to 74% of males. Overall turnout that year was about 75%.

The NC Council for Women’s report found between 2015 and 2020 that even though women were voting at slightly higher rates, their representation in elected office declined. “State government should look like the people it serves and protects,” Gov. Roy Cooper told the crowd at the conference. Cooper also spoke about efforts to appoint a diverse cabinet to lead state agencies. [\[Source\]](#)

Mission Health Contradiction

Joel Burgess, *Asheville Citizen Times*, 8/29/24

HCA Healthcare, the owner of Mission Health, made statements in its annual report that contradict what it has told a court about its trouble with federal regulators, the North Carolina Attorney General's Office has said.

Assistant Attorney General Llogan R. Walters said in an Aug. 28 letter that HCA either failed to explain in its annual report how it violated Medicare and Medicaid rules – or it “misstated its position” to N.C. Business Court.

Dogwood Health Trust, formed to handle the \$1.5 billion in proceeds of the for-profit HCA's 2019 purchase of the nonprofit Mission, is also responsible for ensuring the company follows the purchase agreement.

In July, an independent monitor hired by Dogwood reported that HCA was potentially out of compliance with the agreement regarding issues of emergency and oncology services, Medicare and Medicaid compliance and charity care. Dogwood passed on the findings to the office of AG Josh Stein for review. Stein is suing HCA over the purchase agreement, particularly allegations that it failed to maintain promised levels of emergency and cancer care. Stein is also the Democratic candidate for governor, running against Republican Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson.

It was during that review that Walters, the assistant AG, said the office found another potential problem. In his Aug. 28 letter written to Dogwood Board Chair John F.A.V. Cecil, Walters noted that HCA said in its annual report that it had followed Section 7.13(h) of the purchase agreement. That section requires all facilities to "remain enrolled and in good standing in the Medicare and Medicaid programs," the state prosecutor said.

"But HCA told the Business Court that Section 7.13(h) requires Mission Hospital to 'comply with the (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services') Conditions of Participation," he said.

The Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services determined in 2023 that Mission Hospital had not complied with the conditions and, in fact, assigned an "immediate jeopardy" status, saying some failures had resulted in patient deaths. The hospital has since come back into compliance.

"HCA did not dispute that conclusion," Walters said, adding that unless HCA "misstated its position" to the court, it should have self-reported the noncompliance with Section 7.13(h) of the purchase agreement. The Citizen Times reached out Aug. 29 to Dogwood. [[Source](#)]

Park Projects

Governor Roy Cooper announced \$17.9 million in grants to fund 46 local parks and recreation projects across the state through the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) on Thursday. The Parks and Recreation Authority approved the grants at an Aug. 23 meeting.

“These awards through the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund and the Accessible Parks Grant will bring tremendous impact to communities across North Carolina by providing more parks, more trails and more accessible recreation,” said Governor Cooper.

Local governments applied to PARTF to fund land acquisition, and development and renovation of public park and recreation areas. Every year, the Parks and Recreation Authority allocates to municipalities and counties 30% of PARTF’s total funding. A maximum of \$500,000 can be awarded to a single project, and the awardees must match funds at least dollar-for-dollar for the grant amount.

This year, the Authority considered 40 grant applications requesting a total of more than \$15.1 million. Of those, 22 projects were funded at the full request and one project was awarded partial funding, all totaling over \$9.5 million.

A separate source of funding, the Accessible Parks Grant program, was appropriated \$12.5 million in the 2023 budget to provide matching grants for local parks and recreation projects to benefit people living with disabilities. The program allows for either the construction of special facilities or the adaptation of existing facilities to meet the unique needs of persons living with disabilities, enabling them to participate in recreational and sporting activities, regardless of their abilities.

The grant is administered through PARTF and recipients are selected by the Parks and Recreation Authority. Twenty-three applications were submitted, and all were selected for the first round of funding, for a total of over \$8.3 million.

“North Carolinians love their parks and recreation areas,” said N.C. Department of Natural and Cultural Resources Secretary D. Reid Wilson. “These projects will enhance quality of life, improve health, and strengthen local economies.”

PARTF celebrated its 30th anniversary earlier this summer, on July 16, 2024, with a [proclamation](#) from Gov. Cooper. The fund is administered through the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation. Local grants are awarded annually by the Authority at its quarterly meeting in August.

“Over the last 30 years, PARTF has provided more than \$800 million in improved state parks, local parks, and coastal access,” said State Parks Director Brian Strong. “These awards continue a wonderful year celebrating the impact of

PARTF on North Carolina residents. We look forward to new and updated parks, facilities, and trails in the coming years from this year's grantees."

A second round of funding for the Accessible Parks Grant will open in September. Over \$4 million in funding will be available.

Mecklenburg Mailers

Steve Harrison, WFAE, 8/29/24

The North Carolina Republican Party has sent hard-hitting campaign mailers to voters in two competitive Mecklenburg County state House districts. The mail pieces say the Democratic candidates are supported by those who want to legalize prostitution and hard drugs.

Mecklenburg has two House races that — for Democrats — are keys to breaking the Republican legislative supermajority. In southeast Mecklenburg, the GOP has sent a mailer urging people in District 105 to vote for incumbent Tricia Cotham. It says that Democrat Nicole Sidman is "backed by radicals...who...want to legalize prostitution and hardcore drugs like heroin and meth."

Stephen Wiley, caucus director for the state's House Republicans, said that language comes from the state Democratic Party platform. The platform states a "concerted review of all laws should be conducted to remove discriminatory practices, including decriminalizing sex work, gambling, homelessness, and narcotics use."

"We're just highlighting what their own party platform says," Wiley said. "So, if they don't like what's on there, they shouldn't have supported the party platform."

The platform calls for decriminalization — not legalization. When a drug is decriminalized that usually means law enforcement can't arrest someone for it. Instead they can usually only write citations. Sidman said the ad is not serious. "They have a Photoshopped picture (of me)," she said.

When asked whether she supports decriminalization of hard drugs, Sidman said we need a holistic approach and that "study after study shows that just throwing people who have drug addiction into jail doesn't help them and doesn't stop the problem. We need to stop the people who are selling the drugs, stopping the people who are bringing in the drugs ... and not focus on criminalizing people who need our help."

A similar mailer was sent to north Mecklenburg voters in District 98, where Democrat Beth Helfrich is competing against Republican Melinda Bales in an open seat. That mailer went further. It said she "supports" legalizing hard drugs and prostitution. Wiley said the GOP made that leap because Helfrich sought out and received the endorsement of the Progressive Caucus of the state Democratic Party. The caucus supports decriminalization. Helfrich said the mailer is a "cheap shot." [[Source](#)]

POLICY COVERAGE IN NORTH CAROLINA SUPPORTED BY



Strengthening NC's health care workforce

Each year, more than 20,000 military members return to civilian life in North Carolina. However, for veterans with medical training, there is no simple process to transition into civilian medical practice. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (Blue Cross NC) and the University of North Carolina School of Medicine have created an innovative program that addresses our state's provider shortage by training veterans to enter the medical workforce as physician assistants (PA). To date, Blue Cross NC has invested \$2.4 million into the program to help our heroes connect to careers in health care and improve access to care across North Carolina. [This program is one of many ways we're working to make health care more affordable, easier to navigate, and accessible to all.](#)

Walz Visit

Danielle Battaglia & Korie Dean, *The News and Observer*, 8/29/24

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz visited Raleigh Thursday to greet volunteers, raise money and order a milkshake, making his first trip to North Carolina as a candidate for vice president.

Walz arrived in Raleigh from Georgia after recording his and Vice President Kamala Harris' first on-air interview together with CNN's Dana Bash. N.C. Gov. Roy Cooper greeted his fellow Democrat when he arrived and immediately took him to get milkshakes at Cook Out.

“This is my first time at Cook Out, but Gov. Cooper told me this is the place to go for shakes,” Walz told nearby reporters.

He ordered a mint chocolate chip shake, and Cooper got M&M. They then traveled to a campaign office in Raleigh where volunteers were making calls for Harris and Walz.

Cooper and Walz know each other from their work as governors. Walz was chair of the Democratic Governors Association when Harris selected him as her running mate.

He has since resigned as chair of the association to focus on the campaign and was succeeded by Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly.

“I think Vice President Harris made the absolute perfect choice” in selecting Walz as her running mate, Cooper said before introducing Walz to the phone bank volunteers. At one point, Cooper also was considered a contender for that position, but he removed himself out of consideration.

“That is high praise coming from Roy Cooper,” Walz said as he stepped to the center of the room to speak to volunteers.

On a chalkboard wall of the campaign office that was covered with sayings, Walz added his own: “Never underestimate public school teachers,” a nod to his career before going into politics.

Walz’s visit Thursday came just hours before CNN aired Harris and Walz’s first televised interview. The Harris campaign has been repeatedly criticized over the last month for failing to do any interviews with reporters, making this a highly sought-after event by national reporters. [[Source](#)]

Teacher Shortages

Rebecca Noel, *The News & Observer*, 8/29/24

As students settle into classrooms for the 2024-25 year, kids from low-income families are more likely to face high numbers of teacher vacancies, new data show. An analysis from nonprofit North Carolina Justice Center shows every 10% increase in a district’s share of students from low-income families is associated with an increase of 1.1 classroom teacher vacancies per 1,000 students. The

average district-level teacher vacancy rate for a low-income student in North Carolina is 11% higher than it is for a student who is not low-income.

It's not just true in small districts. Wake County Schools Superintendent Robert Taylor released a statement to parents Wednesday saying that teacher shortages across the state are "mostly impacting our schools with the greatest needs." "Much work remains to close the gaps that persist among our students of color and students with economic hardships," Taylor wrote. "Simply put: we can't close those gaps without a highly trained teacher in every classroom."

And it's not just North Carolina. In 2022, 55% of U.S. public schools in high-poverty neighborhoods had at least one teaching vacancy, compared to 40% of public schools in low-poverty neighborhoods, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. "In many states, in schools where there are high concentrations of students in poverty, it is more difficult, on average, to attract and retain teachers," said Kris Nordstrom, senior policy analyst at North Carolina Justice Center.

Teacher vacancies can mean larger class sizes and teachers spread thin as experienced educators are tasked with assisting newer teachers. Education experts consistently rate the presence of a quality teacher in every classroom as the most important in-school factor in determining academic achievement.

[\[Source\]](#)

Judge Recusal

Laura Leslie, WRAL, 8/29/24

North Carolina Democrats blasted Republicans on the North Carolina Supreme Court Thursday for ruling that Justice Phil Berger Jr. should not have to remove himself from a case concerning his father, Republican Senate leader Phil Berger Sr.

The case involves the power to appoint state and local elections boards. That power is currently held by Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper. Republican legislators passed a law to give that power to themselves instead, and Cooper is challenging that law in court.

Senate Leader Phil Berger, R-Rockingham, and House Speaker Tim Moore, R-Cleveland, are named as defendants in the case. Cooper's attorney requested that Justice Phil Berger, Jr., recuse himself because of his father's involvement.

Justice Berger said he believed he could be fair and impartial. He declined to recuse himself, but asked the other six high court justices to decide.

In a ruling released Aug. 23, Democratic justices Allison Riggs and Anita Earls pointed out that the state's code of judicial ethics says judges should recuse themselves from cases involving family members.

But their four Republican colleagues on the high court ruled that Justice Berger should not have to recuse himself because Senator Berger's involvement in the case was in his official capacity as Senate President Pro Tem, not on a personal level. Democrats are calling the ruling unethical and corrupt.

"Phil Berger Sr. is bringing the cases that are near and dear to his heart before the court again, and he wants people to believe that his son, Phil Berger, Jr., will be fair and impartial," NC Democratic party chair Anderson Clayton told reporters Thursday. "The reality is, the court is now serving as a rubber stamp for the North Carolina General Assembly."

Neither Justice Berger nor Senator Berger responded to WRAL News' request for comment.

Rep. Marcia Morey, D-Durham, is a retired judge. She said Justice Berger should recuse himself, regardless of the court's ruling, under the ethics code that governs judges.

"We had recusals even if a judge was a Facebook friend of a lawyer who would appear in front of them in a case," Morey said. "Public perception of our courts is at an all-time low, and it's because of issues like this that we're facing today."

WRAL News also asked the North Carolina Supreme Court for a response. A spokesperson for the high court said it does not comment on pending cases or rulings. The state Republican party also did not respond to a request for comment. [\[Source\]](#)

Ballot Access

Kyle Ingram, *The News & Observer*, 8/29/24

Despite suspending his presidential campaign, third-party candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. will remain on North Carolina's ballot in November, the State Board of Elections decided on Thursday. The board's Democratic majority agreed that it

would be impractical to remove Kennedy's name now, given that over half of the state's counties have begun printing absentee ballots, the first of which will be sent out on Sept. 6.

"Given the fact that we have a short deadline to turn these around, the amount of ballots that's been printed, the cost that local counties would incur to reprint the ballots — with all those things in mind I move that he remain on the ballot," board member Jeff Carmon, a Democrat, said. The two Republicans on the board disagreed, saying they believed the board had the authority to delay the statutory deadline for absentee ballots being sent out.

After spending months fighting to achieve ballot access and even defending his candidacy in court, Kennedy's newly certified "We The People" party asked the state board to withdraw Kennedy's name from the ballot on Wednesday. The request came a week after Kennedy announced he was suspending his campaign and endorsing Republican former President Donald Trump's campaign instead.

During his announcement, Kennedy said he would remain on the ballot in noncompetitive states, but would seek to withdraw his candidacy in major battleground states. Citing internal polls, Kennedy said he wanted to be removed from those ballots because his candidacy would help Democratic nominee Kamala Harris and harm Trump. [[Source](#)]

Rockingham Speedway

Jimmy Potts, *Richmond County Daily Journal*, 8/29/24

NASCAR will return to Rockingham Speedway for the first time in more than a decade with Easter weekend of 2025. The Richmond County Board of Commissioners announced the NASCAR Craftsman Series Truck Race and Xfinity Series Race will return the weekend of April 18-19.

"On behalf of the Richmond County Board of Commissioners, we are proud to welcome NASCAR and the fans back to The Rockingham Speedway," Richmond County Commission President Jeff Smart stated in a news release. Opened in 1965, Rockingham Speedway was originally a flat oval track before renovations four years later gave the Speedway its iconic D shape and high banking turns. The track last hosted a NASCAR race in 2004, but hosted races associated with the NASCAR Truck Series until 2012.

In 2021, state officials announced the track would receive \$9 million of a \$45 million state program to renovate North Carolina's motorsports venues. To draw national racing circuits, Rockingham Properties, LLC repaved the track, replaced the grandstands, added new stadium lighting and renovated multiple race-related facilities. [[Source](#)]

Cooper Visit

Governor Roy Cooper visited Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro where he met with base leadership and joined officials on a tour of the base including the 333 Fighter Generation Squadron of F-15E Strike Eagles on Thursday.

The Governor was joined by North Carolina Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Secretary Grier Martin, Colonel Morgan Lohse Seymour Johnson Air Force Base Commander and other base leadership as he learned about current base operations and opportunities for the state to partner with Seymour Johnson Air Force Base to better support our military.

“Seymour Johnson and other military installations across North Carolina are doing important work not only protecting our state and our nation, but also uplifting critical issues like access to child care and public education,” said Governor Cooper. “North Carolina is proud to be the most military and veteran-friendly state in the country and we will continue working with our military partners to support service members and their families.”

“North Carolina is committed to supporting the entire family and community,” said North Carolina Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Secretary Grier Martin. “Today’s visit is an opportunity to show our support, strengthen our relationship, and find solutions to any challenges our community may be facing. Just as the Air Force motto proclaims, Aim High ... Fly-Fight-Win, this is our pledge to the Airmen and families Seymour Johnson AFB that call North Carolina home.”

The Governor and Secretary Martin joined base leadership for a mission control briefing covering base operations and challenges faced by active-duty service members and their families. The Governor also received a tour of the 333 Fighter Generation Squadron of F-15E Strike Eagles on flightline and had lunch with active-duty service members.

During lunch, the Governor spoke with service members about the challenges they face on and off base including securing high-quality child care and public education.

Seymour Johnson Air Force Base is a 3,300-acre installation and home to over 4,000 active-duty service members and 6,000 family members. The 4th Fighter Wing is the host unit at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base and accomplishes its training and operational missions with F-15E Strike Eagles.

Governor Cooper is committed to supporting North Carolina's veterans. In February, the Governor hosted a veterans roundtable to discuss how the state can better support members. In May, the Governor visited Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune where he viewed construction on base and met with military leaders and service members. Governor Cooper also visited Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point in August where he participated in the North Carolina Commanders' Council Meeting and joined officials on a tour of the installation.

The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs works to ensure veterans and their loved ones are aware of and maximize benefits and resources available to them. Through their 13 Veteran Services Offices across the state, DMVA provides free services and helped veterans claim and receive more than \$45 million in compensation in 2023.

DEI Compliance

Korie Dean, *The News & Observer*, 8/29/24

Public universities in North Carolina have just days left before they must finalize and certify their plans to comply with the UNC System's repeal of diversity, equity and inclusion requirements. Under the new DEI policy, approved by the UNC System Board of Governors in May, all 16 public universities and the North Carolina School of Science and Math — the public high school that is part of the system — must submit reports to system President Peter Hans on or before Sunday, Sept. 1.

Those reports, which will be public documents, must include information about any cuts to jobs or spending that university leaders have implemented as a result of the policy, as well as how any "savings" from those actions will be spent on student success efforts.

The new policy, titled “Equality Within the University of North Carolina,” emphasizes nondiscrimination and institutional neutrality — the idea, enshrined in state law, that campuses and their leaders should not weigh in on political or social issues — over the previous policy’s ideals of diversity and inclusion.

Legal guidance on the policy, published in July, did not explicitly call for DEI offices to be eliminated. But the document made clear that the offices and their employees would be scrutinized as campuses worked to implement the policy, and at least two campuses have justified closing their DEI offices by expressly saying the guidance required them to do so.

But other campuses have taken another approach, keeping some aspects of their DEI offices intact under new names and reorganized structures. As the Sept. 1 deadline approaches, at least three campuses have completely closed their DEI offices as a result of the policy: UNC Wilmington Chancellor Aswani Volety announced in a campus message on Aug. 8 that the university would close its Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion and eliminate its chief diversity officer position.

UNC Charlotte closed its three DEI offices as a result of the policy: the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, the Office of Identity, Equity and Engagement and the Office of Academic Diversity and Inclusion. No employees were laid off as part of the changes.

Instead, 11 full-time employees were reassigned to new positions at the university, The Charlotte Observer reported. WUNC reported that Appalachian State University closed its DEI office. When asked by The N&O to confirm that report, App State spokesperson Anna Oakes said the university would not share information about the university’s efforts to comply with the policy until after the Board of Governors’ September meeting.

The system policy only requires Hans, the UNC System president, to review the compliance reports from campuses — not the Board of Governors. Agendas for the board’s September meetings have not been released, making it unclear whether the board intends to discuss or review the reports at that time. Oakes did not respond to additional requests for comment. [[Source](#)]

Construction Workers

Brian Gordon, *The News & Observer*, 8/29/24

Companies that construct North Carolina's buildings, highways and utility infrastructure say continued difficulties finding workers have caused project delays this summer.

Of 27 contractors in the state surveyed by the Associated General Contractors of America, more than half (59%) attributed development postponements to labor shortages. The annual workforce survey, released Wednesday, collected results over July and August. Most of the North Carolina respondents employ more than 50 workers, while five reported having more than 500.

Nearly every North Carolina firm noted they had openings for hourly positions and four out of five reported open jobs for salaried roles. This isn't a new trend; around three quarters of North Carolina companies said it was just as hard to find talent in 2023. Asked what obstacles kept them from filling these jobs, contractors said the top two reasons were new hires quitting before or shortly after being hired and an overall dearth of qualified workers.

This mirrored the results from the national survey, which polled 1,496 U.S. contractors. "The most likely path to addressing construction workforce shortages is for the federal government to adopt better workforce policies," Jeff Shoaf, the association's CEO, said during a briefing Wednesday.

Such policies, the association said, should include greater investment in workforce development and increased opportunities for legal immigration. In a summary analysis, AGC of America stated, "it costs more, takes longer and is less certain if a project will start on time because our nation hasn't encouraged students to pursue careers in construction or allowed people to lawfully enter the country to work in construction." [\[Source\]](#)

Forsyth MAT

Santiago Ochoa, WFDD, 8/29/24

Forsyth County is now offering medication for opioid use disorder during emergency response situations caused by overdoses and related mental health crises. Medication Assisted Treatment, or MAT, uses a mix of behavioral therapy and drugs like methadone and Suboxone to help people with an Opioid Use Disorder combat their addiction.

When Forsyth County's Mobile Integrated Healthcare Section started offering MAT last month, it joined the University of North Carolina and Monarch, a

specialty mental health care provider as some of the only organizations offering the service in the state.

Bert Motsinger, the section's manager, said the added service brings a much-needed resource to an often disenfranchised portion of the population and makes room for helping people beyond just a medical emergency.

"We've done four total administrations thus far. We were talking with Wake County and they were averaging around 100 a year so we're still on track to do right what they're doing and they're a little bit larger than us," Motsinger said. "I think as the word gets out there's just going to be more and more demand for it and more need for it and I'm probably going to have to hire some more staff."

The initiative offers Medication Assisted Treatment induction and follow-up until the county is able to connect individuals with a community MAT provider. It is funded in part by money from the county's opioid settlement. [[Source](#)]

Presidential Polling

Ashley Anderson, CBS 17, 8/29/24

A lot has changed since CBS 17 reported former President Donald Trump leading in all seven swing states against President Joe Biden in [April polling numbers](#). A new poll from CBS 17/Emerson College/The Hill released Thursday morning reflects a much tighter race between Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris.

North Carolina is in the group of swing states leaning toward Trump, the poll finds, with 49% of voters decided on Trump, 48% decided on Harris and the remaining 3% responded undecided or voting for another candidate. In just one state—Pennsylvania—the two are tied. The other six are an even split with three favoring Harris and three favoring Trump.

"The race between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump continues to be tight, within each state's margin of error," said Spencer Kimball, executive director of Emerson College Polling.

States where Harris has the slight edge over Trump are Georgia (49% to 48%), Michigan (50% to 48%) and Nevada (49% to 48%). In addition to North Carolina, Trump has the advantage with Wisconsin voters (49% to 48%) and Arizona where

he has the 3-point lead (50% to 47%). In Pennsylvania, it's an even split with 48% for each candidate.

"There is also a stark gender divide, similar to that of 2020," Kimball said. "In six of the seven swing states, Harris leads Trump among women, however, in Arizona, Trump has a two-point edge on Harris among women voters, a group that broke for Biden by about three points in 2020 according to exit polling."

The poll also looked at top gubernatorial and Senate races in the swing states and where voters stand. In North Carolina, Attorney General Josh Stein (D) holds a six-point lead (47% to 41%) over opponent and current Lt. Governor Mark Robinson (R).

Methodology and acknowledgements: Data was collected between August 26-28, 2024 with a North Carolina sample size of n=775, with a credibility interval of +/-3.5%. The survey was conducted by Emerson College Polling and sponsored by Nexstar Media. [[Source](#)]

Southport ETJ

Bob Liepa, *The State Port Pilot*, 8/29/24

Southport's loss of its extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) comes with a cost, but it may not be nearly as high for the city as some fear.

City Manager Stuart Turille Jr. presented an analysis of the fiscal impact of the change and came to the conclusion that it is not significant.

"I'm trying to be as unbiased as I can be," Turille said in his report to the Southport Board of Aldermen Aug. 20 at the Southport Community Building. "If I see drastic ETJ impact, I would certainly tell you all. But what the data (is) showing to me at this time is the ETJ workload/financial loss is not that significant ... it's about six to eight percent and, in the scope of things, it's not a major revenue impact."

Southport lost its ETJ authority over development regulations outside of the city limits July 1 as a result of action taken by the North Carolina General Assembly. That left the planning authority in the former ETJ for density and use for the approximately 1,911 acres and 615 tax parcels in Brunswick County's hands.

Facing a pressing Sept. 1 deadline to enact zoning in the former ETJ or see the land become unzoned, the county planning board approved zoning for the territory on Aug. 12.

The planning board's decision stands if no written appeal was filed by Tues., Aug. 27. If an appeal was received in the allotted time, it goes to the commissioners for a public hearing and that body's consideration.

Development services is the department that could be most affected. The number of building inspections done over the past three fiscal years shows ETJ inspections amounting to 8%, 7% and 8% of total inspections, starting in 2021-2022. [[Source](#)]

POLICY COVERAGE IN NORTH CAROLINA SUPPORTED BY



Provider Support

Our state faces a shortage of doctors and nurses, leaving many North Carolinians without access to primary care services. Blue Cross NC is bridging that gap by supporting the health care workforce to improve access to care. We're helping doctors focus more of their time on patients by easing the administrative burden and providing clinical support. Through our industry-leading Blue PremierSM program, participating doctors and hospitals have earned almost \$438 million in shared savings, allowing them to expand their practices and serve more patients. By improving access to health care and supporting our state's health care workforce, we're giving more North Carolinians the opportunity to be healthy. [Learn more here.](#)

Whistleblower Lawsuit

Sarah Krueger, WRAL, 8/29/24

North Carolina received hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding in 2018 to upgrade its Medicaid system. The cost of that system has at least doubled, according to state auditors, and it's still not online.

Former Department of Health and Human Services IT worker Rob Morehead was there at the beginning of the implementation. He raised red flags about what he felt was mismanagement of the project that led to delays and a ballooning cost. His concerns cost him his job. The state agency fired him.

Fast forward to 2024. Morehead won his Whistleblower lawsuit against the state's Department of Information Technology, the agency's leader, Jim Weaver and Morehead's former boss at DHHS, Charles Carter.

"[It's] definitely a victory," Morehead told WRAL Investigates reacting to the monetary settlement he received. "Once you see the evidence stacked up against you, it pretty much sets the stage for a settlement."

WRAL Investigates first interviewed Morehead in 2022 after he filed his lawsuit based on the North Carolina Whistleblower Protection Act. He also sued for wrongful termination and defamation of character. A judge dismissed the last two claims, but ruled Morehead could sue under the Whistleblower Act.

Early on, Morehead saw troubling signs about the implementation of those upgrades and the soaring cost. Six years later, the system still isn't online.

"The system should have been installed by June of this year, 2024. We're still nowhere near having that system installed," he told us, based on information he's receiving from former co-workers who are still there.

"The people of North Carolina and beyond should know, they need to know, their taxpayer dollars paid for this audit," Morehead said about his frustrations.

WRAL Investigates asked the auditor's office "Why this audit hasn't been released? Was it ever completed?" The response-- "It is the policy of the Office of the State Auditor that we will neither confirm nor deny that an audit or investigation is in progress or has been requested."

The investigator from the auditor's office also noted at the time that the \$257 million cost had more than doubled during the failed rollout. [[Source](#)]

Blood Donor

Harrison Grubb, CBS 17, 8/29/24

The first presumptive case of West Nile Virus in the Triangle is being reported by the CDC.

The agency says it came from a blood donor in Durham County. Across North Carolina, there have been three confirmed cases, with a case in each of Buncombe, Cleveland, and Rutherford counties.

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services says there were also three probable cases of the virus in Columbus County. According to DHHS, most people infected with WNV don't develop any symptoms. The CDC says only about 20% of patients have a fever or other symptoms, including headache, rash, and gastrointestinal symptoms.

Less than 1% of cases, the CDC says, develop serious and potentially deadly symptoms. DHHS says only neuroinvasive, more serious illnesses that impact the brain and spinal cord, are reportable in North Carolina.

So far this year, the CDC has reported 289 cases of WNV across the country.

[\[Source\]](#)

Brunswick Phones

Eliot Duke, *The State Port Pilot*, 8/29/24

Brunswick County Board of Education adopted a new policy this month that bans personal technology devices for the entire day in all elementary and middle schools, as well as the COAST (Center of Applied Sciences and Technology).

Under the new policy, teachers no longer can allow students to use cellphones in their classrooms for instructional purposes and only administrators have the discretion to permit usage for emergencies.

Cell phones also are banned at county high schools during all class periods, with principals having the authority to permit usage during non-instructional times such as lunch or class changes.

Brunswick County Schools (BCS) achieved a one-to-one environment with Chromebooks and Superintendent Dean Cole told the board at its Aug. 13 meeting that students already have everything they need to learn.

“All of our apps and platforms are loaded on the Chromebooks,” Cole said. “We can monitor them remotely. It’s no longer a need for students to have access to a cellphone during the school day whereas maybe there was a need in the past.”

[\[Source\]](#)

Fayetteville Police

Evey Weisblat, *CityView*, 8/29/24

Fayetteville Police Chief Kemberle Braden announced Thursday the arrest of Sgt. Brian Gerber, marking the third Fayetteville police officer to face criminal charges in the past year.

Gerber was arrested Thursday morning after being charged with 12 felony counts of obtaining property worth more than \$20,000 on false pretense while employed as an off-duty police security guard at the Marketfair Mall on Skibo Road, Braden said at a press conference.

Gerber joined the Fayetteville Police Department in 2017, Braden said, under the tenure of former Police Chief Gina Hawkins. Two other officers — arrested in October and November of last year — were also hired by Hawkins. (Hawkins, who faced criticism throughout her tenure, left the role in January 2023. Last August, she threatened to sue the city if it failed to settle over an alleged hostile and discriminatory work environment; the city ultimately agreed to a \$200,000 settlement).

Braden said Gerber, who had been assigned to the department’s patrol division, is in the process of being formally dismissed. Braden acknowledged Thursday the “two previous officers that were arrested for criminal activity during [his] tenure.” The police chief also highlighted his recent efforts to “stay vigilant to make sure that our supervisors stay on top of the actions and activities of our officers to correct behaviors before they become unethical or illegal.” [\[Source\]](#)

Chancellor Salary

Brian Murphy, *WRAL*, 8/29/24

New University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill Chancellor Lee Roberts will make slightly less than previous Chancellor Kevin Guskiewicz in base salary, according to terms of his new contract.

WRAL obtained a copy of Roberts' contract through a public records request.

Roberts, who was the university's interim chancellor since January, was selected as permanent chancellor on Aug. 9 by UNC System President Peter Hans and approved by the Board of Governors. Guskiewicz is now the chancellor at Michigan State.

Roberts has a base salary of \$600,000 and can earn a bonus up to 100 percent of that base salary based on performance after 12 months of service, interim time included. He is provided with a primary residence and that includes utilities, maintenance and housekeeping and groundskeeping services. Roberts will receive \$900 per month for a car allowance.

UNC will make a one-time payment of \$25,000 to defray any transition costs. Guskiewicz, who had been chancellor since February 2019, earned a base salary of \$620,000 and a similar benefits package. Guskiewicz earns an annual base salary of \$975,000 at Michigan State. [\[Source\]](#)

Moving On

Martha Quillin, *The News & Observer*, 8/29/24

Bill Church — who joined *The News & Observer* and *The Herald-Sun* as executive editor in September 2021 and led the newsroom through the end of a pandemic, two national news events and a host of efforts aimed at expanding the audience for local coverage — is leaving for a new post across the country. Church will become executive editor of the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, a move that will take him back to a family-owned newspaper and place him and his wife, Darla, closer to children and grandchildren in Texas and Oregon. Robyn Tomlin, chief news officer for The McClatchy Co., which owns The N&O, brought Church to Raleigh to fill the position she vacated when she was promoted. “Bill has been an incredible steward of The News & Observer during a time of tremendous change in the media industry.” [\[Source\]](#)

NC Insider Legislative Report

LB: LEGISLATIVE BUILDING. LOB: LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING

HOUSE CALENDAR

Monday, Sept. 9, 2024

- House Convenes at 12 P.M.

SENATE CALENDAR

Monday, Sept. 9, 2024

- Senate Convenes at 12 P.M.

HOUSE & SENATE: Reconvening allowed under provisions of [SB 916](#), if no sine die adjournment previously adopted.

- Monday, Sept. 9 to Wednesday, Sept. 11
- Wednesday, Oct. 9
- Tuesday, Nov. 19 to Friday Nov. 22
- Wednesday, Dec. 11 to Friday Dec. 13

Legislative Studies and Meetings

LB: LEGISLATIVE BUILDING. LOB: LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING

Friday, Sept. 6

- 10 a.m. | General Statutes Committee, 544 LOB

N.C. Government Meetings and Hearings

BOLD ITEMS ARE NEW LISTINGS

Tuesday, Sept. 3

- 1:30 p.m. | The Accountability Committee of The North Carolina Partnership for Children meets, The meeting will be held via Zoom. You may contact Yvonne Huntley at 984.221.1242 or email at yhuntley@smartstart.org for additional information.

Friday, Sept. 6

- 10 a.m. | The Finance and Audit Committee of The North Carolina Partnership for Children meets, The meeting will be held via Zoom. You may contact Yvonne Huntley at 984.221.1242 or email at yhuntley@smartstart.org for additional information.

Tuesday, Sept. 10

- 8:30 a.m. | The Fund Development Committee of The North Carolina Partnership for Children meets, The meeting will be held via Zoom. You may contact Yvonne Huntley at 984.221.1242 or email at yhuntley@smartstart.org for additional information.

Tuesday, Sept. 17

- 10 a.m. | The North Carolina Partnership for Children Board of Directors meets. You may contact Yvonne Huntley at 984.221.1242 or email at yhuntley@smartstart.org for additional information.

UNC Board of Governors

23 S. WEST STREET, SUITE 1800, RALEIGH

Wednesday, Sept. 11

- Meeting of the Board of Governors, TBA.

Thursday, Sept. 12

- Meeting of the Board of Governors, TBA.

Thursday, Oct. 17

- Meeting of the Board of Governors, TBA.

Wednesday, Nov. 13

- Meeting of the Board of Governors, TBA.

Thursday, Nov. 14

- Meeting of the Board of Governors, TBA.

N.C. Utilities Commission Hearing Schedule

DOBBS BUILDING, 430 NORTH SALISBURY STREET, RALEIGH

Monday, Sept. 16

- 1 p.m. | Public and Expert Witness Hearing - Application Pursuant to G.S. 62-133.2 and Commission Rule R8-55 relating to Fuel and Fuel-related Charge Adjustments for Electric Utilities | [E-2 Sub 1341](#)
- 1 p.m. | Public and Expert Witness Hearing - Application pursuant to G.S. 62-133.9 and Commission Rule R8-69 for Approval of Demand-Side Management and Energy Efficiency Cost Recovery Rider | [E-2 Sub 1342](#)
- 1 p.m. | Public and Expert Witness Hearing - Application Pursuant to G.S. 62-133.8 and Commission Rule R8-67 for Approval of CEPS Compliance Report and CEPS Cost Recovery Rider | [E-2 Sub 1343](#)
- 1 p.m. | Public and Expert Witness Hearing - Application pursuant to G.S. 62-110.8 and Commission Rule R8-71 for Approval of CPRE Compliance Report and CPRE Cost Recovery Rider | [E-2 Sub 1344](#)
- 1 p.m. | Public and Expert Witness Hearing - Application pursuant to G.S. 62-133.2 and Commission Rule R8-70 relating to Joint Agency Asset Cost Recovery Rider | [E-2 Sub 1345](#)

Tuesday, Sept. 17

- 10 a.m. | Expert Witness Hearing - Application for General Rate Increase for Piedmont Natural Gas Company, Inc. | [G-9 Sub 837](#)
-

Other Meetings and Events of Interest

BOLD ITEMS ARE NEW LISTINGS

Friday, Aug. 30

- **11a.m. | Gov. Roy Cooper visits Chimney Rock State Park and shop in Chimney Rock Village to highlight small businesses and record-breaking tourism numbers in North Carolina, 1638 Chimney Rock Park Rd, Chimney Rock. Contact: krisanne.bonifacio@ncparks.gov**

Friday, Sept. 6

- No time given | The 2024 N.C. Mountain State Fair opens at the WNC Agricultural Center in Fletcher. Runs through the 15th, and more information is available at <https://www.wncagcenter.org/p/mountainstatefair>

Friday, Sept. 27

- 2024 Lumbee Powwow, Lumbee Tribe Cultural Center, 638 Terry Sanford Drive, Maxton.



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