



YOU DON'T SAY

“She asked me.”

Gov. Roy Cooper, on how he came to introduce Vice President Kamala Harris at the Democratic National Convention. (WRAL News, 8/27/24)

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Bird Flu

Clifton Dowell, State Affairs Pro, 8/27/24

The threat of a deadly new pandemic jumping from animals to humans is scary, but agriculture officials on Tuesday agreed that until a vaccine is developed to protect cows from bird flu, the best defense is simply to keep the number of infections as low as possible.

“I wish I had paid a lot more attention in genetics when I was in college,” Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler said. “But in my mind it’s a numbers game. The more virus that’s out there, the more likely it is to be mutating and spread to other species.”

The virus under discussion by a panel of experts convened by the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services was highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), also referred to by its strain name of H5N1. It was detected in North Carolina in April after infected cows from Texas were added to a dairy herd here. The herd was quarantined and declared virus-free a month later.

Testing by the National Veterinary Services Laboratory has detected [192 infected herds in 13 states](#), said Dr. Eric Deeble, deputy under secretary for marketing and regulatory programs at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Before detecting a new infected herd in Michigan yesterday, he said, the lab had gone two months without a detection. “I know at some point there will be another state,” he said.

U.S. Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Dr. Robert Califf said H5N1 for 20 years has been the No. 1 virus of concern for global pandemics. Historically around the world, when the virus has reached humans the death rate has exceeded 50%, he said. “When we got the message from USDA that there had been this infection of cows in Texas and then that spread, it just set off alarms all across the federal government because it’s been a big concern all along.”

Viruses are tricky, Califf said, because of their constant mutations. Farmworkers in the U.S. who have gotten the virus aren’t becoming seriously ill because the current version attaches to tissue around the eye, causing conjunctivitis. “If it mutates to attach to the lining of the lung like COVID did, we’re going to have a big problem,” he said.

Potential illnesses among humans may be the most worrisome threat, but it isn’t the only threat that H5N1 poses. The panel discussed the importance of protecting the nation’s food supply as well as safeguarding the economics of farming in the state.

“What we know is that high path AI is not going away and we are particularly vulnerable because of the size of our poultry industry,” Troxler said. In addition to the potential loss of valuable livestock, farming revenue is also endangered when the public changes its buying habits based on news reports of disease.

Califf said one of the first FDA studies was to make sure milk and cheese were virus-free. “Pasteurization works,” he said.

Deeble said the USDA has programs to offset the costs that dairy farmers incur for testing their herds, buying personal protective equipment and veterinary care. For dairies where infection is found, the government will pay farmers 90% of lost revenue, he said.

The aim of such programs is to make farmers feel secure about testing cows by reducing the financial risk. Another panelist, dairy farmer and veterinarian Dr. Ben Shelton, said that dairymen are generally dubious of government interventions but that he has only positive things to say about his dealings with agriculture officials in the state.

A number of candidate vaccines are being looked at by the private sector, Deeble said. Until then, identifying sick herds and isolating them is the best practice, he

noted.

Biosecurity — working to make sure viruses and other pathogens aren't spread from farm to farm — is already part of agriculture, Shelton said. With cows being moved from herd to herd, however, some spread is inevitable. "I think it's going to become a standard part of the industry that we just have to deal with," he said.

Endorsement Reaction

Avi Bajpai, *The News & Observer*, 8/27/24

Beth Wood drew rebukes from fellow Democrats over her endorsement of Dave Boliek in the state auditor's race, but the longtime top government watchdog said that anyone who knows her shouldn't be surprised she's backing the candidate she thinks is "best able" to do the job.

Wood's endorsement of Boliek, a Republican, and her criticism of Jessica Holmes, the Democratic incumbent who was appointed by Gov. Roy Cooper to replace her last year, has generated strong reactions since it was reported by WRAL on Sunday.

Wood initially planned to run for another term, but later dropped out and resigned, after she was indicted for misusing her state vehicle for personal errands. She pleaded guilty to those charges, and earlier in the year, to separate hit-and-run charges stemming from a crash in downtown Raleigh.

After deciding to resign as auditor last year, Wood said she recommended to Cooper that he appoint her chief deputy to finish out the remainder of her term, a certified public accountant like Wood who she said "would not have missed a beat had she stepped in until the election."

Instead, Cooper appointed Holmes, a lawyer and former Wake County commissioner who also served as the board's chair. Holmes announced she would be running for the full four-year term on the ballot this year when Cooper named her as Wood's replacement.

Instead of being chosen based on qualifications, Wood said, "I think she was picked because of race and gender, hoping to make her more electable." Holmes became the first Black woman on North Carolina's Council of State when she took over as auditor.

After Wood endorsed Boliek on Sunday, Democrats were quick to reaffirm their support for Holmes, and slam Wood for what they said were political and petty attacks. Anderson Clayton, the chair of the N.C. Democratic Party, said that Holmes understands “the value of a dollar and the impact of government services on our everyday lives,” and said there was no one Democrats “trust more to protect our taxpayer dollars and root out corruption than her.”

Dismissing Wood’s comments, Clayton said Democrats wouldn’t be swayed by the “opinion of a disgraced auditor who misused State property, in direct conflict to the whole point of their job.”

Morgan Jackson, the top political advisor to Cooper, praised Holmes in a statement to WRAL and told The N&O in a statement that it was a ‘tragic situation for Beth Wood to lose her job because she misused state property and was convicted of crimes,” and said Wood was “trying to curry favor with Republicans by attacking her successor in hopes of getting a job.”

“What a truly sad turn of events for her and her reputation,” Jackson said.

In response, Wood said the notion that her comments about the auditor’s race were in pursuit of a job was “BS.” She added, “I have a great-paying job, and I don’t have to go to a Democrat or a Republican for a job.” Wood currently works as the director of rural government services at the Greg W. Isley, CPA, PA firm in Raleigh.

Holmes declined an interview request on Monday, but told The N&O in a statement that she did not seek and would not have accepted Wood’s endorsement, claiming that Wood hadn’t lived up to her longstanding reputation as an unbiased, professional and respected auditor.

“I inherited an incredibly competent but demoralized staff and audits that were several years old, some of which were fiscally irresponsible and or politically or personally motivated fishing expeditions intended to make headlines as opposed to making a difference to ensure the public’s trust in government spending,” Holmes said. “I stand by my approach, and statutory responsibility, to be the state’s ‘independent’ auditor, to be solutions-oriented to prevent fraud, waste and abuse, and to call it out without bias or political puppeteering.”

On Monday, the political action committee for the State Employees Association of

North Carolina endorsed Holmes in the auditor's race.

Boliek has been endorsed by Trump and several top GOP lawmakers, including Senate leader Phil Berger and House Speaker Tim Moore. Asked about Wood's endorsement, Boliek said he thinks it says a lot about his "competency and ability to lead the office" to have her support.

Boliek said that in multiple conversations with Wood, he talked with her about her experience in the office and the philosophy she brought to it, as well as the professionalism in the office and what it needs moving forward. In an interview, he said that he believes the state auditor needs to "leave party politics at the door," and represent "every single North Carolinian, to make sure that their tax dollars are spent correctly and with a return on investment. [[Source](#)]

Broadband Funding

Matthew Sasser, State Affairs Pro, 8/27/24

North Carolina's Broadband, Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) program will launch a challenge process to determine locations that are eligible for BEAD funding on Sept. 3.

Local governments, tribal governments, nonprofit organizations and broadband service providers can issue challenges based on the most recent data reported by the Federal Communications Commission in December 2023.

North Carolina has 236,000 unserved and 150,000 underserved locations in need of broadband access. The state is set to receive \$1.5 billion from the federal government for broadband deployment.

"It's really important to us that we have the most accurate data possible," Emily Gangi, policy director for the Division of Broadband and Digital Equity for the North Carolina Department of Information Technology, said during a quarterly BEAD update on Tuesday. "This is a way for eligible challengers and stakeholders to submit challenges to the mapping data that is available and help us make sure that we have the best maps possible."

A rebuttal phase will open Oct. 15 through Nov. 14 for the submitted challenges. The Department of Information Technology will conduct a final determination phase from November to December, during which the department will sustain or

reject all received challenges and rebuttals and submit the data to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

The pre-qualification process portal for internet service providers that wish to bid on BEAD-funded projects will also open in September, according to Gangi.

“We feel confident, based on the \$1.5 billion that North Carolina is going to receive from BEAD funding, that we’ll be able to achieve both of those two primary goals],” Gangi said of providing access to the unserved and underserved areas.

A third aim of the funding will allocate money to community anchor institutions where people access the internet, such as schools, libraries and health care centers. The Department of Information Technology has compiled a list of 10,000 organizations that meet that criteria.

The state submitted a BEAD five-year strategic plan to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration last year, and it was approved in August 2023. “By 2025, North Carolina plans to become a national leader, ranking in the top five states for high-speed internet adoption,” the plan states.

Maggie Woods, deputy director of the Office of Digital Equity and Literacy, said the Department of Information Technology has developed a “robust” database compiling all the state’s resources, programs and projects focused on digital inclusion, such as public computer labs or sites that offer digital literacy training.

“We hope that it’s a way to be able to connect with programs and resources within your own community,” Woods said. “We’ve heard over and over again that people don’t know what’s happening within their own counties and they want to connect with folks.”

The interactive database is expected to be released in October.

Cooper’s Future

Laura Leslie, WRAL News, 8/27/24

After winning the coveted speaking slot leading into Democratic nominee Kamala Harris' acceptance speech, North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper isn't saying

much about his political future. Cooper, who has known Harris for years — they worked together as state attorneys general — had also been rumored to be on Harris' short list for vice president. However, Cooper told WRAL last month he had taken himself out of the running for that spot.

Still, being tapped to open for a nominee in prime time on the final night of a convention is a plum assignment for any politician, and it's led to much speculation about Cooper's political future.

Some political observers expect him to be in line for a cabinet appointment — perhaps Attorney General or Commerce Secretary — should Harris win in November. Others say he may challenge Republican Thom Tillis for U.S. Senate in 2026.

At an event Tuesday, WRAL asked Cooper how he ended up speaking just before Harris. "She asked me," Cooper responded with a shrug and a grin.

He was less forthcoming when asked to comment on a potential cabinet appointment under Harris. "Look, I'm I'm going to be governor for five more months," Cooper said. "I'm going to run through the tape, I'm going to work with this administration to do everything we can. And when I get to the to the end of my term, I do like public service, I'll see what's next."

Cooper is term-limited from running for reelection to a third straight term as governor. Campaigning to replace him are Republican Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson and Democratic Attorney General Josh Stein. [[Source](#)]

EMPAC Endorsements

Luciana Perez Uribe Guinassi, *The News & Observer*, 8/27/24

The political arm of the State Employees Association of North Carolina has made a slew of endorsements in races for executive office and legislative seats in the state, including for governor and in Triangle-area state Senate and state House races.

SEANC is a 46,000-member association of state employees and retirees that lobbies at the General Assembly for current, retired and future state employees. Meanwhile, the SEANC Employees Political Action Committee (EMPAC), which is member-led and nonpartisan, supports legislators and politicians, including via

campaign contributions. EMPAC has its own treasury that is separate from SEANC.

For endorsements, the PAC attempts to interview each candidate. “Our membership tends to focus on the governor’s race and the treasurer’s race, more than the rest,” but “our members work in all of the state agencies and all of the universities and community colleges and public schools, so they’re interested in all of it,” SEANC Executive Director Ardis Watkins said.

EMPAC on Monday announced its endorsements for Council of State and on Tuesday added its endorsements for legislative races.

At the top of the ticket for Council of State races is the one for governor. In that race, EMPAC endorsed Democratic Attorney General Josh Stein over Republican Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson.

EMPAC endorsed Democratic candidate Wesley Harris for state treasurer over Republican challenger Brad Briner. EMPAC in its news release said it had endorsed Harris in the primary election and would continue to support him in the general election.

One Council of State race that did not receive an endorsement was the one for labor commissioner. That race is between Democrat Braxton Winston II and Republican Luke Farley.

On the lack of endorsement in that race, Watkins said while those candidates were both interviewed, “there just wasn’t a plurality of people that were seeking to endorse either candidate.” “Being a democratic process, with a little D, it can be the case that one person doesn’t emerge as somebody that they want to get behind in the way that Josh Stein was so clearly a full-throated endorsement. Just everyone in the room was excited about that,” said Watkins.

On legislative endorsements, Watkins said there are always at least one or two that surprised her. That’s “part of the beauty and the challenge sometimes of being truly member-run,” she said. For legislative endorsements, SEANC members at the local level make recommendations, which are then confirmed by the statewide committee. “People in the home districts will sometimes have a very different opinion than the staff might have in certain races. But the thing is that our members make those decisions and that we as a group stand behind those decisions and move forward,” she said.

In state House races, EMPAC made 85 endorsements. Of those, 46 were for Republicans and 39 were for Democrats. Many of the endorsements were for incumbents. In the Senate, EMPAC made 35 endorsements, 19 for Republicans and 16 for Democrats. [[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.](#)

Robinson Campaign

Kevin Griffin, *Greensboro News & Record*, 8/27/24

Republican gubernatorial candidate Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson made campaign stops at several Triad restaurants Monday as he looks to close the gap with his Democratic opponent, N.C. Attorney General Josh Stein.

Robinson's first stop of the day was at the Olympic Family Restaurant in Colfax, the community where he resides. The Republican candidate met with enthusiastic supporters in the restaurant as he walked around speaking and taking photos with patrons. Robinson also was scheduled to appear at restaurants in Winston-Salem, King and Reidsville on Monday.

These campaign stops come as polls show Robinson trailing Stein. A High Point University poll released last week put the lieutenant governor 14 points behind Stein among registered voters.

Even with the bad polling, Robinson said Monday he still sees a path to victory in November. “We’re not looking at numbers. We’re looking at people, and we’re going after votes,” Robinson said, “and we know we can still win this race, and we know we still are going to win this race.”

Robinson said success in the campaign will come down to reaching voters with their message and bringing out less engaged residents.

“What’s going to make the difference is making sure we continue to connect with the people and go after those voters last time that did not vote. We’ve got to get those folks out to vote,” he said.

In his time in public life, Robinson has often been identified with his statements on issues like abortion and LGBTQ rights. Though he did not refer to those issues specifically while taking questions from media, he did say he wanted to move on and emphasize the economy and education.

“We’re pushing all the other stuff behind us,” Robinsons said. “We are getting laser-focused on making sure that North Carolina reaches its next great height. That is being done by working on the substantive issues.”

Not all who turned out Monday were supportive of Robinson, however. A small group of protestors with signs stood by West Market Street to show their opposition to his candidacy.

“I think his positions are awful for women, for our schools, for all of the hateful comments he’s made. I see him as sort of a ‘Mini-Trump,’ who I also oppose,” Greensboro resident A.J. Tschupp said. [[Source](#)]

Whistleblower Lawsuit

Gavin Off, *The Charlotte Observer*, 8/27/24

In 2015, a Robeson County poultry farmer filed a federal whistleblower complaint alleging that Perdue Farms retaliated against him after he publicly said Perdue sent him sick birds that the company refused to help treat.

Some died of apparent illnesses just a few days after arriving at his farm, Craig Watts alleged in a whistleblower complaint to the U.S. Department of Labor. Nearly a decade later, Perdue, one of the country's largest poultry producers, is suing Watts and the DOL.

The lawsuit, filed last week in federal court for the Eastern District of North Carolina, challenges the constitutionality of Watts' case.

Over the years, the case was dismissed by an administrative law judge but brought back to life by courtroom fights. "It's much bigger than Craig versus Perdue," said Watts of his battle with Perdue. "It's all Davids versus all Goliaths. And I love the way that story ends, I'll tell you that."

If Perdue's case is successful, it could put an end to whistleblower protections under several national laws, said Dana Gold, director of the Democracy Protection Initiative at the Government Accountability Project. The Washington, D.C.-based organization defends federal whistleblowers, including Watts.

"This is the core of why this lawsuit is potentially seismic," Gold said. "We know whistleblowers are essentially protecting us. We care about planes not falling from the sky. We care about not having a nuclear disaster. We care about not having toxic contamination. And we know employees are in the best position to create compliance with these laws."

Federal statutes not only protect whistleblowers from retaliation, Gold said, but also deter companies from doing wrong.

Since 2018, employees have filed between 2,500 and 3,500 federal whistleblower cases annually, DOL records show. Of the 3,600 DOL cases that judges heard last year, 891, or about a quarter, had a positive outcome for the person who filed the case, according to DOL.

Perdue's lawsuit seeks to stop Watts' case from moving forward again. It alleges that a trial before an administrative law judge violates the company's rights to a jury trial. And it argues that Watts had a contractual relationship with Perdue and therefore the case must be held outside an administrative court.

"Perdue is not asking this court to litigate the merits of Watts' accusations," the lawsuit reads. "Instead, Perdue brings five constitutional challenges to the administrative proceedings."

Poultry farmers like Watts are often contract workers. Companies, in this case Perdue, provide the birds, feed and tell the farmers how the chickens must be raised. [[Source](#)]

Elon Poll

Luciana Perez Uribe Guinassi and Kyle Ingram, *The News & Observer*, 8/27/24

North Carolinians are going into the upcoming election largely dissatisfied with the economy, especially when it comes to the impact of inflation and housing costs on their finances. Nor are they thrilled with the presidential candidate options from either of the major parties. Still, they are interested in voting considering recent events, such as President Joe Biden's withdrawal from the race and the assassination attempt on GOP nominee Donald Trump, according to a new Elon University Poll survey.

"A lot of people were going into 2024 thinking this was going to be a snooze-fest, kind of a boring rematch of 2020," Jason Husser, director of the Elon Poll, told *The News & Observer*. The "volatility that has happened — and by that, I don't mean to say it was good things — but have generated some positive effects of people paying more attention than they would have otherwise," and the poll results have reflected that, he said.

Trust in elections was tepid, and post-election violence was a concern for many.

Violence was also a concern in 2020 — which would be borne out — when Elon asked a similar question. And there are mixed views about how the presidential election will affect democracy.

Asked what would happen to "the basic principles and systems that make up American democracy," 39% of respondents predicted they would be "strengthened," 32% thought they would be "harmed" and 29% thought they would "not be affected to any great degree."

Democrats were more likely than Republicans and independents to predict democratic systems would be strengthened, with independents being the least likely to think so.

Young voters were less likely to think they would be strengthened and more likely

to think they would be harmed. Black respondents were also more likely to think they would be strengthened than non-Hispanic white respondents. The poll had a sample of 800 adults who are 18 and older, residents of North Carolina and registered to vote.

The margin of error for the data was 3.86%, according to Husser. Here's a deeper dive into the results of this new poll.

The poll asked a series of questions about the economy. Asked to grade the state of the current economy at a nationwide, state and local level, the majority of voters across the three categories were not too pleased, with roughly a third, the largest group, giving it a C.

Respondents were also asked whether since Biden took office in 2021 their financial situation had gotten better, stayed the same or gotten worse. Almost half of all respondents said their financial situation had gotten worse, while 21% said it had gotten better. The remainder said it had stayed the same.

Almost 80% of respondents said that inflation had affected them and their family "very negatively or "somewhat negatively." Just over 70% of respondents also said they did not think they could afford to rent or buy a house today like their current one in their area of residence.

Over half of respondents, 56%, also said housing prices in their area were "much higher" than two years ago. Asked to what extent the Biden administration was to blame for the current state of the economy, 42% said it was "very responsible," 26% said "somewhat responsible" and 18% said "not very responsible." The remainder had either not thought about it much or thought he was not at all responsible.

Biden is no longer in the running for reelection, but his vice president, Kamala Harris, has taken his place. Voters surveyed were largely not content with their options for president. The largest group, 46%, had a "very unfavorable" impression of Trump while 29% had a "very favorable" impression of him. The remainder were more lukewarm in their opinion.

Similarly, the largest group of respondents, 42%, had a "very unfavorable" impression of the GOP's candidate for governor, Mark Robinson. Meanwhile, 42% of respondents had a very unfavorable impression of Harris and 28% had a very favorable impression.

Josh Stein, the Democratic candidate for governor, fared better, with 23% of respondents having a “very favorable” impression of him and 19% a “very unfavorable” impression of him. In North Carolina, voters sometimes split the ticket, voting for candidates from different parties across the ballot. Asked how likely they were to split the ticket in terms of the gubernatorial and presidential race, 85% of respondents said they would vote in these races for the same party, while 15% said they would vote for a different party.

Confidence in elections was higher at a state level than on a national level: 48% of respondents believed this year’s election would produce a “fair and accurate” count of the votes cast nationwide. Just under 20% said they did not think there would be a “fair and accurate” tabulation. On a state level, 59% said they thought counts would be “fair and accurate” while 13% said they did not think that. The remainder of the people in both the state and national counts were not sure.

Democrats were more likely to trust the results than Republicans on both counts. For Husser, this is in large part because “North Carolina’s ballot-counting process has gotten a lot of good publicity. North Carolina has a number of restrictions and measures in place.” And voters “don’t necessarily know what other states are doing in that regard,” he said.

Asked about concerns with violence breaking out before the election, 14% of respondents said they were “very concerned” and 31% said they were “somewhat concerned.” But those worries increased when it came to possible violence shortly after the election, with 36% “very concerned” and 38% “somewhat concerned.”

Democrats, at 39%, were more likely to be “very concerned” than Republicans at 25%.

The poll asked a series of questions on a slew of other topics, from abortions to the disclosure of the use of artificial intelligence in political ads. Respondents largely (44%) favored decreasing restrictions on abortions in North Carolina, as well as largely favored (69%) a state law to require political ads to induce a disclosure if using AI. Respondents also thought that the Republican Party, more so than the Democratic Party, had become “more extreme” on its positions on issues since the 2020 presidential election. [[Source](#)]

Rail Sale

Steve Harrison, WFAE Radio, 8/27/24

The city of Charlotte has a tentative agreement to buy the Norfolk Southern freight rail line for \$91 million. The city wants to use the rail tracks for a commuter rail line to Lake Norman.

City staff members on Monday night unveiled the agreement with the railroad, which calls for the city to spend \$74 million to buy the actual tracks from uptown to the Iredell County line. Charlotte would also spend \$17 million on land for the planned Gateway Station in center city. And the city would have an option to buy more of the freight tracks in Iredell County for roughly \$17 million — potentially lengthening the Red Line to its long-planned terminus north of Mecklenburg County.

Charlotte wants to use the tracks for the Red Line commuter rail line from Gateway Station to Huntersville, Cornelius and Davidson and possibly Mooresville. The City Council is scheduled to vote on the purchase on Sept. 3. But the deal comes with a significant risk.

If the city can't get a one-cent sales tax increase enacted by the legislature and local voters, there will be no Red Line. That sales tax proposal is the main funding source for the broader transit plan. And Charlotte will still own more than 20 miles of train track.

Charlotte City Council member Ed Driggs, who chairs the transportation committee, said if the city failed to get a sales tax approved, it could try again. If that failed, it could sell the rail tracks to someone else, although it's not clear who would want to buy them.

Charlotte has planned to build the Red Line for 25 years but Norfolk Southern had refused to sell the tracks or allow Charlotte to use them, claiming they needed the little-used tracks for freight. That changed in the summer of 2023, when negotiations started again after a long stall. [[Source](#)]

Brunswick Schools

Jalyn Baldwin, *Port City Daily*, 8/27/24

Brunswick County is the 19th fastest-growing county in the country and has the

highest-growing population statewide. Currently, around 13,000 students crowd 20 schools in the county, with anticipated growth to be around 19,000 by 2034.

To prepare for increased needs in the next decade, the county is transferring two parcels, totaling 257 acres, to the school district. The goal is to build a new educational complex, comprising an elementary, middle and high school, though no timeline or preliminary designs have been set. Brunswick County commissioners voted unanimously on Aug. 5 to allow the transfer of the land with one condition proposed by Commissioner Frank Williams: The parcels must be dedicated exclusively to school use and cannot be sold.

“Not that they would do that,” he said of the school district. “But I don’t know who is going to be on that board in four years.”

According to Gordon Burnette, spokesperson for BCS, the two parcels on Middle River Road are a desirable location due to their centrality in the county and to meet the pressing need in the area. The parcels are located in Supply, adjacent to the county’s landfill, which, according to a Brunswick Beacon article is set to shutter.

At the commissioners’ meeting in August, County Manager Steve Stone mentioned the county initially planned to expand the landfill onto the two parcels, acquired in 2010. However, the project was abandoned due to costs.

The last new school to open in the district in 2020 was Town Creek Middle School. The \$24.5-million school was covered by the 2016 bond referendum, which also brought in additional classrooms to Lincoln and Town Creek elementary schools, and a K-2 building to Waccamaw School. [\[Source\]](#)

Park Visitors

David Ford, WFDD Radio, 8/27/24

The National Park Service has released a new report showing visitors to national parks in North Carolina grew to nearly 21 million last year, contributing \$4.1 billion to the state’s economy. That’s a 5% bump from the previous year and good news for workers: Visitor spending at the Tar Heel state’s 10 national parks supports more than 38,000 jobs.

Meanwhile, state park visits were up in 2023 as well, and by similar margins.

Piedmont Triad Visitor Center Manager Hosanna Pennell sees the positive economic impacts. But she says overall it's a "mixed bag."

"I've been to a few national parks in recent years," says Pennell. "They are so crowded all the time. They're just overrun, and it can actually be like a negative or a downside to all the tourism boom is that they're just stressed out." Pennell adds that in some cases the additional tourist traffic is not great for the environment.

She attributes the rising numbers to people rediscovering their love of nature in the wake of COVID-era lockdowns, and social media influencers who visit the parks, take spectacular staged selfies and share them with millions of followers in search of their own viral photographs. [[Source](#)]

Water Toxins

Maggie Newland, WNCN News, 8/27/24

It's a hot start to the school year in central North Carolina, and many students will be filling their water bottles or drinking from water fountains to stay hydrated. If those fountains haven't been used over the summer, experts suggest running water through them for several minutes to reduce any exposure to lead.

"We really find lead in our water because there's a certain amount of allowable lead in piping, plumbing and fixtures," explained Jennifer Hoponick Redmon, director of the environmental health and water quality program at Research Triangle Institute (RTI) International. "When you flush water, you pull out the older water that's been sitting and you bring in what would be water that's been moving through the distribution system."

Hoponick Redmon is also the director of the Clean Classrooms for Carolina Kids program, which works with public schools across the state to check water samples for lead. If lead is detected above 10 ppb, the program provides a fix. "We know that early childhood lead exposure affects kids in a lifelong way, and so this program is designed to make sure that we get the lead out of tap water today," Redmon said.

She also recommends flushing all taps used for drinking and cooking, not just after summer break, but even after schools are closed for the weekends, particularly long weekends like next week's Labor Day holiday. In those cases, she says it's a good idea to run the water for about 30 seconds. [[Source](#)]



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.](#)

Supersonic Tests

Chris Burritt, *Business NC*, 8/26/24

Denver-based startup Boom Supersonic said it conducted a second successful test flight in the development of a passenger airline that will be assembled at Piedmont Triad International Airport in Greensboro. Boom's demonstrator aircraft, called XB-1, performed three tests at the Mojave Air & Space Port in Mojave, California, earlier Monday, the company said in a blog post. Following its first flight in March, the demonstrator is progressing through its test program, with a target to conduct a supersonic flight by the end of the year. Business North Carolina profiled the company in its August magazine. [Click here for the report.](#)

Boom aims to bring back air travel faster than the speed of sound 21 years after the final flight of the Concorde. The XB-1 provides the foundation for the design and development of Overture, Boom's supersonic airliner that's going to be assembled in a new factory along Interstate 73 at the Greensboro airport.

Completed this past June, the roughly 180,000-square-foot building will house an assembly line capable of producing 33 Overture aircraft a year, valued at more than \$6 billion. Boom plans to build an additional assembly line on its 65-acre

airport campus that will be able to produce 66 airliners a year. Customers including United, American and Japan Airlines will pick up their planes in Greensboro.

When Boom announced its selection of the Greensboro airport 2½ years ago, it projected it would invest more than \$500 million and create more than 1,700 jobs in its operations through 2030. It aims for the Overture to be certified to carry passengers by 2029. [\[Source\]](#)

Supportive Housing

DJ Simmons, WFDD Radio, 8/27/24

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services is launching a strategic plan to increase and better use supportive housing for people with disabilities. The initiative looks to provide a guide to policies and decision-making over the next five years. According to a news release, this includes supporting the creation of 3,400 permanent housing opportunities through building new units or rehabilitating old ones. These types of homes would support people with disabilities in integrated, community-based settings.

Another goal is securing additional funding for rental assistance and lowering barriers to accessing housing.

NCDHHS is exploring the creation of a structure for accountability and coordination across the state's agencies as part of the initiative. Its launch comes as North Carolina recently received money that would go toward the effort. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development announced in August a nearly \$8 million grant to help create 225 additional affordable housing units for people with disabilities. [\[Source\]](#)

Perquimans Water Access

Kip Tabb, *Coastal Review Online*, 8/27/24

The Perquimans River is a narrow, twisting coastal river that never leaves Perquimans County. It's rarely more than 50 or 60 feet wide until it suddenly opens up just upriver from Hertford, the county seat. As it passes Durants Neck a little more than a mile south of the town, the river becomes a broad estuarine waterway offering a direct route to the Albemarle Sound.

County Manager Frank Heath stood recently on the edge of a wide, bulkheaded boat basin telling Coastal Review about the Perquimans County Marine Industrial Park that, after more than 10 years of false starts and missed steps, finally completed the first phase of the project last year: The \$7 million deep-water boat basin now allows direct water access to the Albemarle sound.

“It’s 350 feet wide, more than a football field in width, and it goes inland 700 feet,” he said. “We do have such spectacular water resources, to me, it makes sense that we start with this.”

For some time, there have been calls to develop the county’s water access.

The basin, Heath explained, is phase one and it took a while to complete that first step in developing the county’s waterfront for commercial use. “We spent quite a bit of energy getting the grants for phase one,” he said. Getting the first phase completed, began Heath said, “12 or 13 years ago” when North Carolina identified Hertford as a secondary marine resource when the Wanchese Marine Industrial Park ran out of space. It was, Heath explained, a much-needed economic lifeline for the county.

“The textile industry left in the 1980s and ’90s, we had several good-sized factories, those shut down,” he said. “We have an agricultural-based economy, which is very important, and we want that to continue to thrive, but we also want other industries to come in.” [\[Source\]](#)

Truist Departure

Chris Burritt, *Business NC*, 8/27/24

Allison Robinson, head of Truist Financial’s community branch banking and emerging markets, is leaving the Charlotte-based company. Robinson is ending her 21-year career at Truist to “explore another opportunity,” Donta L. Wilson, chief consumer and small business banking officer, told colleagues in a memo. Robinson reported to Wilson, who didn’t provide specifics about where she’s going. She had been in her current position since November 2023.

The executive is leaving as Truist is focusing on growth opportunities in its core businesses while maintaining tight cost controls, CEO Bill Rogers said during the company’s second-quarter earnings call last month. The bank reported a profit of \$826 million, or 62 cents a share, compared with \$1.23 billion, or 92 cents, a year earlier.

The company benefited from a \$6.9 billion gain from the sale of its Truist Insurance brokerage business, while it reported \$6.7 billion in securities losses as it repositioned its balance sheet.

Truist emerged as the nation's sixth-largest bank in 2019 from the merger of Winston-Salem's BB&T and Atlanta-based SunTrust. Combining the institutions has taken longer than executives had expected, due to what analysts blamed as unfulfilled pledges for increased growth and cost-cutting. [[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

Thursday, August 29

- 1 p.m. | Agriculture and Forestry Awareness Study Commission, Ed Emory Auditorium, Kenansville.
-

N.C. Government Meetings and Hearings

BOLD ITEMS ARE NEW LISTINGS

Wednesday, Aug. 28

- 9 a.m. | Coastal Resources Commission Meeting, Beaufort Hotel 2440 Lennoxville Road, Beaufort.
- 10 a.m. | North Carolina Rules Review Commission - Rules Review Commission Meeting, 1711 New Hope Church Road, Raleigh.
- 1 p.m. | NC Global TransPark Authority - Executive Committee Meeting, 2780 Jetport Road, Kinston.

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.
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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

Wednesday, Aug. 28

- 8 a.m. | NC Council for Women Hosts State Women's Conference, Keynote speakers include Gov. Roy Cooper and White House Gender Policy Council Director Jennifer Klein McKimmon Conference and Training Center, 1101 Gorman St, Raleigh.
- 1 p.m. | Rachel Hunt and Kentucky Lt. Gov. Jacqueline Coleman to Campaign in Sylva, Jackson County Democrats HQ 500 Mill St, Sylva.
- 3:30 p.m. | Rachel Hunt and Kentucky Lt. Gov. Jacqueline Coleman to Campaign in Asheville, Buncombe County Democrats HQ 951 Old Fairview Rd. Asheville.

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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