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NC Opportunity Scholarship expands in era of education uncertainty



downs have created major unexpected expenses for things like child care, lost work hours, and supplemental materials for virtual learning,” declared Senate Leader Phil Berger. “I can’t think of a better place to send taxpayer money than back to the taxpayers trying to cope with government-mandated school closures. Who in the world could be against this?” The big news for supporters of educational choice is that an expansion of the Opportunity Scholarship Program in North Carolina was rolled into the relief package. Cooper has been a longtime opponent of the program and included recommendations to close the program in the last three budgets he submitted to the legislature. The Opportunity Scholarship offers up to \$4,200 annually in tuition assistance to lower income households to enroll in non-public schools. The new law raises the eligibility requirement from 133 percent to 150 percent of the free or reduced lunch income threshold. More North Carolina families will be

BY RAY NOTHSTINE

A Coronavirus relief package passed with overwhelming support in both chambers of the General Assembly and Gov. Roy Cooper signed the legislation on September 4. One of the key provisions included not penalizing school districts financially that experience enrollment declines during periods of remote learning. School district funding is largely tied to school enrollment. Lawmakers are also using the \$1 billion in federal funds from the Cares Act to send out a one-time payment of \$335 to families with one or more children in the household. “School shut-

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From the editor

The expansion of the Opportunity Scholarship Program and other school choice programs is a big step forward for education in North Carolina. My dad was an Air Force pilot, so I moved around a lot and attended many different schools growing up. Some of them were great and honestly, some of them were embarrassing. Planned Parenthood came to my health class in 7th grade in Hawaii and some of the stuff they taught us was beyond inappropriate for our age. They taught us how to use dental dams along with other contraceptives and asked us all kinds of questions about our sexual history. I considered myself a knowledgeable kid at the time, but I had never heard of dental dams before that day. At that same school, I had a math class where the

teacher just let us copy each other and grade our own work the entire semester. When I moved, I was woefully behind in the subject and it took me years to catch up. The Planned Parenthood encounter might be an extreme example for many North Carolina schools but it's a reminder that parents should have choice about the kind of worldview that shapes their children. Obviously, parents need flexibility and options too, even a good school is not a great fit for every child. There are obviously a lot of problems with education today and many of those problems have little to do with teachers. In many instances, a giant bureaucracy can easily stunt learning and innovation. The belief that merely pouring more money into the same system, or proclaiming something like, "if

only we had billions more to spend – outcomes will improve" is still prevalent among so many so-called experts. It's my hope that as bad as the Covid-19 pandemic has been, particularly concerning the government response, that more reforms and positive creative destruction accelerates change. Opening up opportunities to less advantaged populations and families in our state is not just good policy but it signals that, ultimately, human freedom and dignity is not just for those that can afford it. We often wonder why we see so much chaos and absurdity in the news but then see reports from US News that over two-thirds of Americans can't pass the citizenship test. Given the lockdowns and all around uncertainty, will there ever be a better time to expand choice in education?

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Murder most foul; justice denied

BY PAUL "SKIP" STAM

May I introduce you to some of the first-degree murderers who had their death sentences indefinitely postponed by our state Supreme Court on June 5. All of these are from Randolph County in chronological order.

Kenneth Bernard Rouse
Date of Death Sentence:
03-23-1992

Rouse stabbed Hazel Broadway to death while she was working at a convenience store. He was sexually assaulting Ms. Broadway's body while the knife was still in her neck. An Asheboro police officer responded to the convenience store after a call from a citizen who noticed Ms. Broadway was not at her check out station. The officer discovered Rouse with Ms. Broadway's body in the back of the store and covered in her blood. Rouse was also convicted of armed robbery and first-degree rape.

NOTE: Rouse was suspected of murdering another older woman prior to Ms. Broadway. DNA testing many years later matched him to evidence left at the scene of that murder. Since he was on death row, Rouse has not been charged in that murder.

James Edward Williams
Date of Death Sentence:
11-03-1993

Williams brutally beat and then strangled to death Elvie Marie Hamlin Rhodes. Ms. Rhodes' body was found by hunters. An investigation revealed that she was murdered in her home. Large amounts of



blood and blood spatter were located. The autopsy revealed that Ms. Rhodes was beaten severely about the upper body and died from a combination of blunt force trauma and strangulation. Williams' fingerprints were found in the victim's stolen car. Williams attempted to blame a woman he was in a relationship with for the murder.

Jeffrey Clayton Kandies
Date of Death Sentence:
4-24-1994

Kandies raped and beat to death Natalie Lynne Osborne, age 4. Kandies was the boyfriend of Natalie's mother. After murdering Natalie, he hid

her body in a closet. A huge search for Natalie was conducted over several days. When her nude and beaten body was discovered in a plastic bag in the closet of her home, Kandies claimed he had accidentally ran over her with his vehicle. The autopsy revealed that Natalie had been brutally beaten and raped. Kandies was also convicted of first-degree rape of a child.

Jason Wayne Hurst
Date of Death Sentence:
03-17-2004

Hurst robbed and murdered Daniel Lee Branch. Branch was a hard-working family man, married with children. He needed cash and was selling sev-

eral firearms he owned in order to raise money. Hurst contacted him through a mutual acquaintance and expressed interest in buying the firearms. Branch agreed to take Hurst and another man to a remote field to demonstrate that the firearms worked. As Branch walked into the field to set up a target, Hurst shot him with a pump shotgun. Branch fell and then got up and began to run for his life. Hurst shot him again and Branch fell. Hurst then walked to him and stood over Branch as he begged for his life. Hurst shot him a third time in the face. Hurst then

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removed the keys to the car from Branch's pocket and took the car and guns, traveling to West Virginia. Before leaving the area, he sold some of the firearms. Apparently, Hurst's motive was to obtain the means to see a girlfriend.

John Scott Badgett

Date of Death Sentence:

05-06-2004

Badgett robbed and murdered J.C. Chriscoe in the older man's home. Badgett was homeless and Chriscoe had agreed to let him stay in his home temporarily. Badgett stabbed Mr. Chriscoe in the throat and by his own admission followed him around the house as he bled to death, even knocking him down when he tried to call for help. Badgett claimed self-defense, alleging that Mr. Chriscoe became irate and irrational and was yelling at him. After murdering Chriscoe, Badgett came back to the house on subsequent days stealing and selling items from the house. Badgett had been convicted of manslaughter years before by stabbing that victim in the throat at the same location (at the Adam's apple). Badgett had a violent history of stabbing and beating other persons while in custody.

Alexander Charles Polke

Date of Death Sentence:

02-07-2005

Polke murdered Randolph County Sheriff's Deputy Toney Clayton Summey and shot and wounded Deputy Nathan Hollingsworth, while

they were in the performance of their duties. Deputies Summey and Hollingsworth went to Polke's home to serve an order for arrest for failure-to-appear on minor matters in district court. Polke fought with Deputy Summey at the front door and obtained his duty weapon from the holster. He then shot Deputy Summey several times, killing him. Polke then fought with Deputy Hollingsworth and attempted to murder him as well with Deputy Summey's pistol. Polke shot and struck Deputy Hollingsworth in the upper arm as they exchanged

SKS rifle that had been modified to fire fully automatic. He drove to the residence of the victims at night where he cut power lines to the house and burst in killing both victims. One was asleep on the couch. In recorded phone conversations, Wilkerson bragged about the murders, stating he felt like a Navy SEAL.

Could you tell which ones were black or white? I couldn't but five are white, one is Black and one is listed in military records as white but now claims a small percentage as an American Indian. All obtained a new lease on life because of the Racial

Vanessa also lived. Trull kidnapped Vanessa Dixon from her apartment, transported her into a secluded area and raped her while she was tied to a tree. He then murdered her by cutting her throat. Vanessa's badly decomposed body was discovered by hikers many days after she went missing. The autopsy revealed that she had been raped. DNA testing matched the semen to Gary Trull. He was also convicted of kidnapping and first-degree rape.

STATE v. RAMSEUR

On June 5, 2020 the North Carolina Supreme Court reinstated the Racial

row inmates to seek to have their sentences commuted to life without parole if they could prove that racial bias may have tainted their trials." Similar statements were made by NC Policy Watch and on NC Spin. These reports may have been induced to report it this way because the State Supreme Court opinion written by Associate Justice Anita Earls stated: "Here the right is to challenge a sentence of death on the grounds that it was obtained in a proceeding tainted by racial discrimination, and, if successful, to receive a sentence of life without parole. Repealing the Racial Justice Act took away that right," State v. Ramseur, No 388A.10 June 5, 2020 Slip opinion p 31.

These characterizations of the Racial Justice Act are false. Let me explain, first in summary and then, in detail. Long before the Racial Justice Act was passed in 2009 the law was: "a finding that race was the basis of the decision to seek or impose a death sentence may be established if the court finds that the State acted with discriminatory purpose in seeking the death penalty or in selecting the jury that sentenced the defendant, or one or more of the jurors acted with discriminatory purpose in the guilt-innocence or sentencing phases of the defendant's trial."

But the Racial Justice Act provides that a remedy is available to white

"Trull kidnapped Vanessa Dixon from her apartment, transported her into a secluded area and raped her while she was tied to a tree."

gunfire at close range. In all his records, including military records, Polke was listed as white. He now claims some small percentage of American Indian heritage for the purpose of his Racial Justice Act claim.

George Thomas Wilkerson

Date of Death Sentence:

12-20-2006

Wilkerson murdered Casey James Dinoff and Christopher Cameron Voncannon. Wilkerson was a violent drug dealer and he believed that one of the victims owed him a small amount of money for a drug sale. He obtained an

Justice Act. In addition, there was a Gary Allen Trull who was also white. Trull had his death sentence postponed by the Racial Justice Act so long that he has now died of natural causes.

Gary Allen Trull Date of

Death Sentence:

11-19-1996 (DECEASED)

Trull murdered Vanessa Dixon. Trull died while on death row. Trull had previously been convicted of a brutal first-degree rape in Guilford County and sentenced to life. He was paroled and settled in Randolph County in an apartment complex where

Justice Act for these first-degree murderers on death row. There has not been an execution in North Carolina since 2006. Most of these first degree murderers were sentenced to death long before 2006. Effectively the decision of the state Supreme Court lengthened the moratorium on the death sentence by another 5-10 years.

Let's see how this happened.

Public reporting on this decision has been wrong. On June 5, WRAL published an article online which said that the Racial Justice Act "allowed death

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The impact of COVID-19 on North Carolina Agriculture - it may not be what you think

BY MICHAEL HARDEN

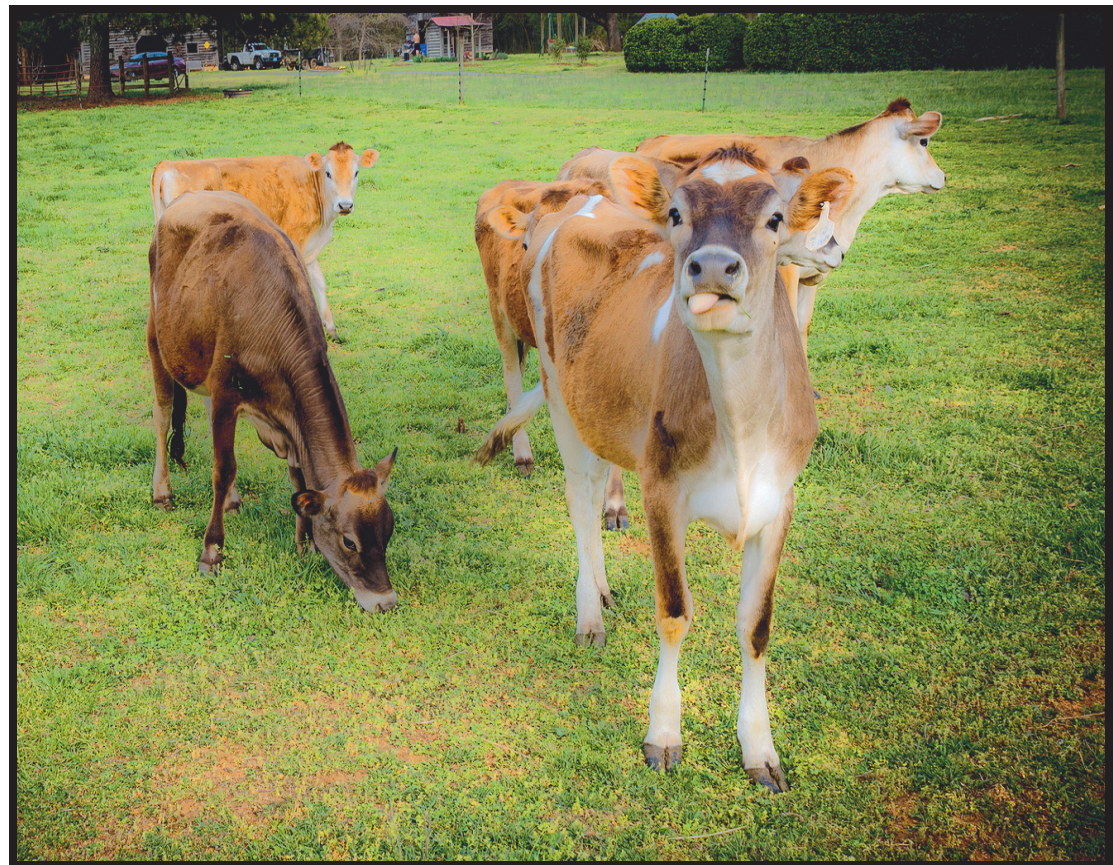
The arrival of COVID-19 paired with destructive “solutions” at the hands of many local and state governments will no doubt be felt for years to come. We’ve all heard the stories and likely know someone whose life has been forever altered either by the loss of a job or unneeded closure of their business. Like many calamities throughout history however, we often find later that a silver-lining emerged that redefined normal for some. No doubt 2020 will have those as well, whether it be the mass acceptance of video conferencing and teleworking or better sanitation measures at restaurants and other public places.

However, one of the most significant and long-lasting changes will likely be how people obtain food for their families and its impact on retailers on main street that have existed for generations.

Even prior to Covid, over the past few years we have seen a dramatic shift in food and how we access it. The onslaught of

subscription-based companies like Blue Apron, that deliver ready-to-cook ingredients and recipes, and delivery services like Door-Dash and UberEats have also removed a barrier for many consumers by delivering food from a favorite restaurant that normally doesn’t offer a delivery service.

However, despite significant innovations over the past few years it seems that many in America and particularly North Carolina are longing for the ways of years past and are either producing some of their own food for the first time or are seeking out local farms to provide for their families. This trend is unlikely to slow after the pandemic and that is good for producers and local economies across our state. Shopping neighboring farms will not only keep your dollars turning over locally, thus helping everyone, but it will help to ensure that future disruptions in the market are mitigated due to less dependency on national and some-



times international supply chains.

The Civitas Institute is currently conducting a study of the impact of COVID-19 on small farms in North Carolina. Although data collection is not yet complete, early analysis shows that over half of small producers responding have seen an increase in sales while some have seen no change at all. However, the most staggering data point thus

far is how few have seen a decrease in sales over last year. Although a portion of many farms sales were to restaurants, many of those farms quickly transitioned to other market streams like farmers markets and on-farm sales.

Although the negative impact of COVID-19 has been catastrophic for far too many, the rush by consumers to “know their farmer” by buying direct will perhaps be

considered a renaissance in local food, the likes we’ve never seen before. As we continue to pray for those affected and fight those that want to needlessly keep our economy closed, let’s venture out this weekend to a local farm or farmers market and help our neighbors feed our state. After all, we will need them to be strong and vibrant if and when the next disruption happens.

Changes represent the difference in voter registration between August 8 and September 5, 2020

County	Total Voters	Total Change	Democrats	Democrat Change	Republicans	Republican Change	Libertarians	Libertarian Change	Unaffiliated Voters	Unaffiliated Change
Totals	7,100,738	55,833	2,549,307	11,133	2,134,217	24,621	42,312	959	2,374,902	19,120
Alamance	105,391	982	37,265	249	34,402	421	576	6	33,148	306
Alexander	24,117	216	5,106	-19	11,228	166	100	3	7,683	66
Alleghany	7,320	70	2,131	-5	2,821	54	31	1	2,337	20
Anson	16,287	111	10,017	-4	2,689	84	31	1	3,550	30
Ashe	18,863	163	4,497	-3	8,432	131	79	1	5,855	34
Avery	11,956	140	1,388	16	6,957	86	57	3	3,554	35
Beaufort	33,175	175	11,790	-2	11,560	150	105	3	9,720	24
Bertie	12,933	60	8,591	9	1,508	24	31	1	2,803	26
Bladen	22,341	118	10,709	-22	4,651	86	61	3	6,920	51
Brunswick	109,658	740	26,475	50	42,862	413	518	18	39,803	259
Buncombe	200,925	1,612	75,648	464	45,703	486	1,545	32	78,029	630
Burke	56,276	678	15,258	20	21,411	424	301	3	19,306	231
Cabarrus	144,027	1,670	42,808	472	50,440	581	988	24	49,791	593
Caldwell	52,190	536	11,243	-15	24,790	428	362	7	15,795	116
Camden	7,886	72	1,766	-2	2,722	47	59	2	3,339	25
Carteret	50,000	443	9,847	39	22,496	262	247	11	17,410	131
Caswell	15,040	129	6,852	-4	3,631	84	41	1	4,516	48
Catawba	105,060	970	22,713	120	45,449	586	496	13	36,402	251
Chatham	55,894	449	20,765	109	13,569	148	282	12	21,278	180
Cherokee	21,934	282	4,214	10	10,416	194	125	2	7,179	76
Chowan	10,015	68	4,152	7	2,761	43	31	-1	3,071	19
Clay	8,847	72	1,632	14	3,979	49	58	2	3,178	7
Cleveland	64,586	554	22,662	-8	22,978	393	309	11	18,637	158
Columbus	35,704	249	16,737	-71	8,744	239	89	1	10,134	80
Craven	70,726	741	21,394	139	25,626	395	453	18	23,253	189
Cumberland	216,044	2,295	94,018	766	49,649	739	1,464	58	70,913	732
Currituck	21,108	248	3,564	16	8,467	150	187	9	8,890	73
Dare	28,963	267	7,657	36	9,622	129	198	7	11,486	95
Davidson	109,399	935	23,486	38	52,174	639	504	9	33,235	249
Davie	30,538	335	5,051	31	15,716	202	139	0	9,632	102
Duplin	29,776	238	12,358	42	8,612	137	106	5	8,700	54
Durham	233,441	2,009	126,975	1,046	26,036	181	1,189	17	79,241	765
Edgecombe	34,773	187	22,963	37	6,128	84	87	2	5,595	64
Forsyth	262,184	1,734	103,295	572	74,172	476	1,446	14	83,271	672
Franklin	45,391	514	16,827	95	14,276	265	276	8	14,012	146
Gaston	145,146	1,784	41,584	265	56,413	1,001	915	28	46,234	490
Gates	8,105	66	3,839	12	1,862	29	33	1	2,371	24
Graham	5,898	28	1,416	-23	2,803	41	21	-3	1,658	13
Granville	38,339	265	17,249	25	9,786	129	155	0	11,149	111
Greene	11,052	7	5,522	-29	2,325	31	22	-1	3,183	6
Guilford	370,865	1,956	162,440	680	91,609	524	2,118	18	114,698	734
Halifax	36,872	289	22,840	25	4,733	118	105	8	9,194	138
Harnett	77,932	852	24,897	151	27,927	415	592	14	24,516	272
Haywood	44,731	431	14,224	-21	14,894	263	292	5	15,321	184
Henderson	85,036	786	17,470	129	31,540	356	521	12	35,505	289
Hertford	14,655	47	10,094	-15	1,463	24	35	0	3,063	38
Hoke	31,638	389	14,070	128	6,885	122	250	6	10,433	133
Hyde	3,109	28	1,544	3	560	15	17	0	988	10

Iredell	125,630	1,468	28,439	136	52,442	810	702	39	44,047	483
Jackson	28,148	195	9,319	-21	7,800	81	193	8	10,836	127
Johnston	137,503	1,914	39,031	425	52,807	822	943	50	44,722	617
Jones	7,217	35	3,080	-4	2,039	35	31	-1	2,067	5
Lee	37,209	305	13,476	50	10,981	152	223	2	12,529	101
Lenoir	37,413	225	18,320	7	9,871	120	121	5	9,101	93
Lincoln	59,855	868	12,212	37	27,715	549	319	11	19,609	271
Macon	26,439	327	5,832	29	11,315	177	150	4	9,142	117
Madison	16,566	25	5,807	-24	4,468	33	110	1	6,181	15
Martin	16,125	84	8,790	2	3,373	43	39	1	3,923	38
Mcdowell	28,636	246	6,765	-28	11,824	199	158	4	9,889	71
Mecklenburg	765,241	4,774	329,886	2,043	165,571	711	5,326	94	264,458	1,926
Mitchell	10,688	138	1,082	26	6,381	86	36	1	3,189	25
Montgomery	16,315	98	6,165	-18	5,499	95	77	-2	4,574	23
Moore	70,962	748	16,034	100	29,294	418	476	10	25,158	220
Nash	66,736	348	31,219	40	19,188	185	260	5	16,069	118
New Hanover	171,670	1,410	51,585	347	53,404	570	1,316	22	65,365	471
Northampton	13,619	30	9,018	-24	1,458	24	32	4	3,111	26
Onslow	111,345	1,273	25,432	217	41,632	670	1213	35	43,068	351
Orange	110,608	111	51,697	140	14,657	43	645	8	43,609	-80
Pamlico	9,409	88	3,182	-15	3,490	68	44	0	2,693	35
Pasquotank	27,781	244	11,374	43	6,565	125	177	7	9,665	69
Pender	42,699	547	11,502	43	16,621	273	300	7	14,276	224
Perquimans	9,212	222	3,176	11	2,853	119	36	2	3,147	90
Person	26,605	282	10,974	31	7,141	166	110	7	8,380	78
Pitt	121,414	251	51,953	47	31,095	125	752	10	37,614	69
Polk	15,908	115	3,943	4	5,805	69	90	1	6,070	41
Randolph	91,208	879	16,764	10	47,051	629	530	-2	26,863	242
Richmond	28,603	130	13,775	-60	6,430	140	90	6	8,308	44
Robeson	74,355	286	42,522	-134	10,613	308	201	-2	21,019	114
Rockingham	59,587	420	19,885	50	22,053	242	283	6	17,366	122
Rowan	93,882	851	24,788	64	39,412	571	473	19	29,209	197
Rutherford	44,541	380	12,057	-40	18,178	301	214	3	14,092	116
Sampson	36,441	240	14,172	10	14,007	160	143	3	8,119	67
Scotland	21,436	160	11,137	20	3,881	98	69	2	6,349	40
Stanly	41,684	238	9,514	-34	19,262	208	165	5	12,743	59
Stokes	30,592	271	6,282	-7	15,576	205	158	0	8,576	73
Surry	45,330	385	11,243	-46	20,154	297	147	4	13,786	130
Swain	9,706	70	3,317	-5	2,800	46	45	2	3,544	27
Transylvania	25,723	206	6,254	49	8,321	102	126	8	11,022	47
Tyrrell	2,270	20	1,173	2	380	9	9	0	708	9
Union	162,703	1,427	39,215	234	66,517	694	926	28	56,045	471
Vance	28,807	139	17,996	0	4,522	115	82	4	6,207	20
Wake	770,898	4,207	282,534	1,664	184,797	490	5,708	111	297,859	1,942
Warren	13,123	61	8,472	-13	2,013	43	40	-1	2,598	32
Washington	8,116	18	5,120	-14	1,199	37	18	0	1,779	-5
Watauga	45,429	613	11,962	147	13,413	163	461	0	19,593	303
Wayne	73,626	456	29,302	35	24,306	292	372	8	19,646	121
Wilkes	42,183	492	8,182	-12	22,408	334	158	9	11,435	161
Wilson	55,769	219	27,390	13	13,645	95	201	9	14,533	102
Yadkin	23,952	265	3,503	6	13,499	186	113	6	6,837	67
Yancey	13,675	39	4,412	-22	5,014	44	54	1	4,195	16

Cooper and Cohen ignore mounting evidence against lockdowns

BY BRIAN BALFOUR

As North Carolina remains confined to Gov. Roy Cooper's lockdown 'Phase 2.5,' many questions remain unanswered. Cooper and DHHS Secretary Mandy Cohen have been criticized for their lack of transparency, and their staged, friendly press conferences.

Both claim to be following the "science and data," but neither is equipped to answer the pressing question: is the lockdown doing more harm than good?

Secure in the knowledge that the media will not ask them about the negative consequences of the prolonged lockdown, Cooper and Cohen can focus exclusively on tracking cases, hospitalizations and deaths from Covid while ignor-

ing the devastating trade-offs suffered by North Carolinians from their efforts to "contain" the virus.

Cooper, an attorney and long-time politician, and Cohen, educated in internal medicine and public health, both lack training that would empower them to perceptively consider and weigh opportunity costs and trade-offs involved with their policies.

Make no mistake, there is growing evidence that the prolonged shutdown is causing more harm to North Carolinians than good.

Deaths of Despair

Cooper's and Cohen's efforts to protect the public's health from Covid-19 come with significant negative health consequences

of their own.

Researchers have predicted as many as 75,000 deaths of despair nationally (i.e. suicide, substance abuse) resulting from the lockdowns. A May study released by WellBeing Trust and the Robert Graham Center projected nearly 2,500 additional deaths of despair in North Carolina due to the lockdown.

Lockdowns are especially cruel on our young people. Center for Disease Control Director Robert Redfield said in a July Buck Institute webinar that suicides are claiming more lives of high schoolers than Covid itself.

"But there has been another cost that we've seen, particularly in high

schools," Redfield said. "We're seeing, sadly, far greater suicides now than we are deaths from COVID." Redfield also noted the spike in drug overdoses, "We're seeing far greater deaths from drug overdose that are above excess that we had as background than we are seeing the deaths from COVID."

According to the American Medical Association, "More than 35 states have reported increases in opioid-related mortality as well as ongoing concerns for those with a mental illness or substance use disorder in counties and other areas within the state." Sadly, North Carolina is among them.

Statewide data for North Carolina is not readily available, but an August 7 article in RockinghamNow reports "Drug overdose calls more than doubled during the pandemic, compared to the same time frame last year, according to statistics kept by the Rockingham County Sheriff's Office."

An August North Carolina Health News article reported that "The state has seen a 15 percent spike in opioid overdoses since the pandemic began."

And according to a

recent Asheville Citizen Times article, "Statewide data shows symptoms of depression and anxiety have tripled amid the pandemic, according to Victor Armstrong, executive director of the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services."

A disturbing 25 percent of young adults nationally age 18-24 have considered suicide in the past 30 days, as reported by Politico recently, a rate significantly higher than past surveys.

The government shutdowns have unleashed devastating mental health and substance abuse problems, many of which are turning deadly. Lives lost and shattered, especially among our youth who face little risk of infection and minute risk of significant symptoms.

When will Cooper and Cohen acknowledge and reckon with these heartbreaking consequences of their actions?

"Disease surge" from lockdowns

Because of the hospitals shuttering non-COVID treatment and screenings, and people's irrational fear of going to the doctor or hospital, doctors have warned of a "disease surge"

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Cooper and Cohen ignore mounting evidence against lockdowns

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causing additional deaths that could “end up rivaling or exceeding deaths due to Covid-19.”

According to CancerHealth.com, “screenings for breast, cervix and colon cancer are down between 86% and 94%” as of May. Also, a report by Human Data Science estimated “More than 80,000 diagnoses of five common cancers may be missed or delayed by early June because of disruptions to health care” due to COVID lockdowns and restrictions. Of course, early diagnoses of cancer can lead to earlier treatment and a higher survival rate. Delayed screenings can translate into more deaths.

The longer the lockdown, the more these types of deaths are likely to mount. How many of our loved ones will suffer? Will Cooper and Cohen ever be asked about this?

Heavy job losses

Mental health and substance abuse problems are associated with unemployment. Forcing the closure of thousands of businesses across the state for months no doubt has contributed to such problems noted above.

According to the Local Area Unemployment Statistics reported by the NCCommerceDepartment, the number of seasonally-adjusted employed North Carolinians fell from a pre-Covid 4.93 million in February to a low of 4.08

million in April. The number of unemployed more than tripled from 182,606 to 615,512 in May. The more than tripling of the number of unemployed drove up the state’s unemployment rate from 3.6 percent in April to 12.8 percent in May.

Slow and gradual reopenings of businesses have dropped the unemployment rate to 8.5 percent for July, and increased the total number employed to 4.5 million.

The stress and anxiety caused by losing one’s job combined with the uncertainty of Cooper’s haphazard and unpredictable phase plan has contributed to the rising public health crises like substance abuse and rising suicide rates.

Are Cooper and Cohen intentionally ignoring these effects, or just ignorant of them? Neither answer speaks well of their leadership.

Growing Inequality

For a group that constantly claims to champion “equality,” Cooper’s and Cohen’s shutdown has significantly exacerbated racial inequality.

The shutdown has resulted in a significant number of business closures, disproportionately harming black-owned small businesses. A June report by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that the number of African-American business owners nationally dropped from 1.1 million in February

2020 to 640,000 in April.

The roughly 42% drop in black-owned businesses due to the lockdown dwarfs the 17% decline experienced by white-owned businesses. Immigrant businesses saw a decline of 36%. There’s little reason to believe that North Carolina’s experience differs from these trends.

Furthermore, job losses from the lockdown struck the black community much more severely.

Naturally, the economic devastation will increase poverty. A July article by the far-left NC Policy Watch quotes Lisa Gennetian, an associate professor of early learning policy studies in Duke’s Sanford School of Public Policy, as saying that “some estimates suggest that child poverty could grow by 5 million children” nationally, with Gennetian adding “Children of color will be particularly hit hard.” How many of those children thrust into poverty in North Carolina due to Cooper’s shutdown will never climb back out?

In short, the Cooper shutdown has exacerbated racial wealth inequality in North Carolina, a blow that may take a generation to recover from.

And the negative educational consequences of Cooper’s and Cohen’s muddled plans for school re-opening — which to a large degree left most school districts with no realistic option other

than to start schools completely online — potentially ensures racial wealth inequality is made worse for the next generation.

As reported by Policy Watch in late June, students could lose as much as 30 percent of reading gains and 50 percent of math gains from the previous year, due to the “Covid slide.” More specifically, the educational achievement gap for Black and Hispanic students could increase by another 15 – 20 percent. Will anyone ask Cooper and Cohen when they think this gap will be made up?

Policy Watch also reported an expected spike in high school dropouts as a result of extended disruptions to learning, with Black and Hispanic students dropping out at disproportionate rates.

Imagine the future for Black and Hispanic students who fall further behind and drop out of school in larger numbers. What will their life look like in 10, 20 or 30 years? What kind of neighborhood will they be able to live in? What sort of future will they be able to provide for their children?

Cooper’s and Cohen’s shutdown may be temporary, but the negative consequences can become generational. Have they taken any of this into consideration?

Conclusion

Neither Cooper nor Cohen has any training

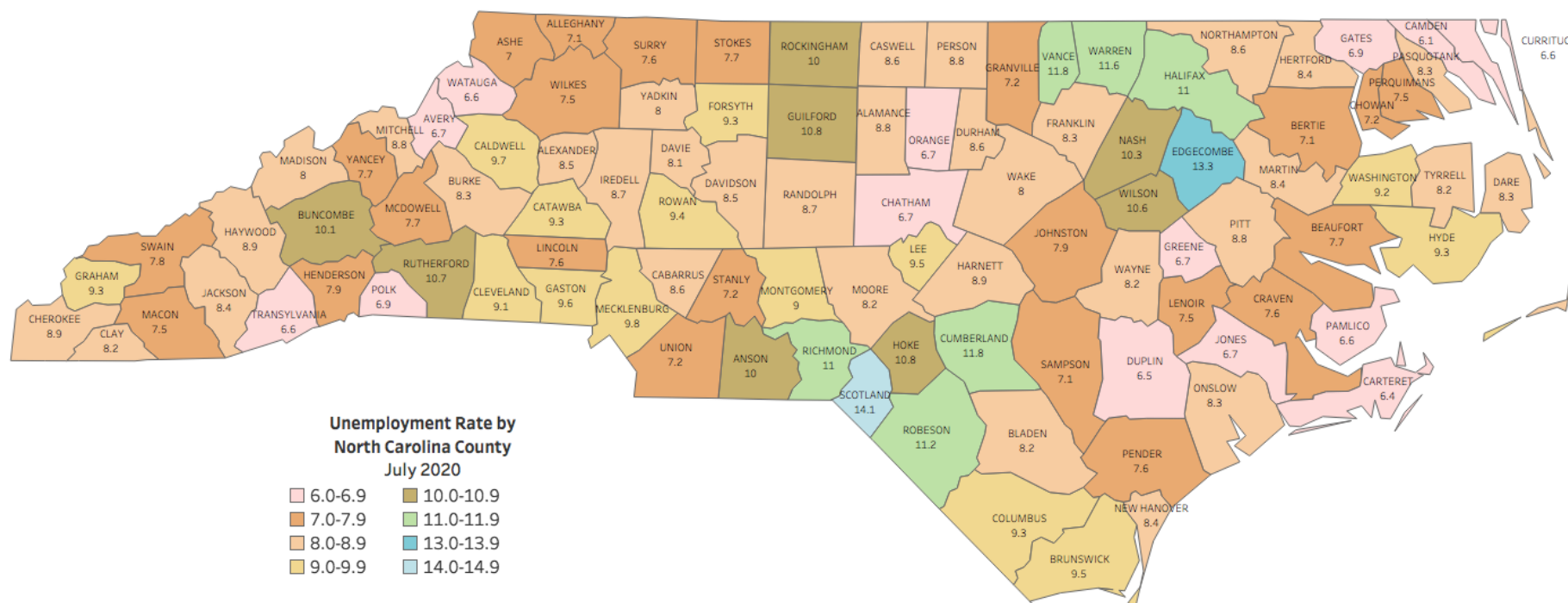
equipping them to sensibly evaluate trade-offs from their lockdowns. Their singular focus on trying to reduce new Covid cases has blinded them to the horrific negative consequences of their actions — consequences which may outweigh any benefit.

Adding insult to injury is a recent analysis of CDC data by the data-aggregation website Rational Ground. The analysis found that not only were stay-at-home orders ineffective, but states with more stringent lockdown orders were associated with *higher rates* of infection per 100k population.

Moreover, as a Sept. 9 article in the Financial Review reported, “Lockdowns beyond two months impose massive economic costs without any real health benefits because they only delay an inevitable second wave of the virus, according to a new international COVID-19 study by former Reserve Bank of Australia economist Greg Kaplan.”

Specifically, Kaplan noted, “In the US, we found that around two months was the inflection point where the economic costs start to get very steep and all you’re doing is really killing the economy with little additional impact on deaths.”

So not only did the shutdown destroy countless lives, it’s entirely possible that it provided no benefit.



The above map shows the July 2020, (not seasonally adjusted) unemployment rates for all 100 North Carolina counties (data from N.C. Department of Commerce).

The July not seasonally adjusted statewide rate was 8.9 percent.

Scotland County had the highest unemployment rate at 14.1 percent, followed by Edgecombe at 13.3 percent. Sixteen counties have an unemployment rate over 10 percent. Camden had the lowest at 6.1 percent. Over the month, the unemployment rate increased in 99 of North Carolina’s 100 counties and remained the same in one.

All 15 of the state’s metro areas experienced increases from June. Among the metro areas, Fayetteville had the highest rate at 11.6 percent followed by Rocky Mount at 11.3 percent. New Bern had the lowest at 7.5 percent.

When compared to the same month last year, not seasonally adjusted unemployment rates increased in all 100 counties. Since July 2019, the number of workers employed statewide decreased 382,189, while those unemployed increased 221,740.

The national unemployment rate for July was 10.2 percent for July and 8.4 percent in August.

NC Opportunity Scholarship expands in era of education uncertainty

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eligible for the program as a family of four making a little over \$72,000 can now qualify. The legislation also lifts the cap on the number of kindergarten and first grade opportunity scholarships that can be given out each year. Civitas Policy Director Bob Luebke, applauded the legislature’s actions. “Covid has severely limited educational options for many, especially families struggling economically or those who must help to educate special needs children. This legislation addresses those

needs by expanding eligibility for the Opportunity Scholarship and providing additional funding for special needs programs.”

The Editorial Board of the Wall Street Journal called the victory significant given that “the state’s Democratic Governor, Roy Cooper, came into office vowing to eliminate the program.” After signing the bill, Cooper released a statement in part that read, “Obviously, I don’t agree with every provision, but the funding for pandemic support in this budget is

critical and must move forward.”

In their latest effort to nix the popular program, the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE) filed a lawsuit that is still pending to challenge the constitutionality of Opportunity Scholarships. NCAE was a plaintiff in 2013 in an unsuccessful lawsuit to declare the program unconstitutional. They now hope that a much more left-leaning and activist state supreme court will do their bidding. “North Carolina’s decision comes as Covid-

19 has exposed the union-first, students-last priorities of traditional public schools,” said the WSJ editorial board. “Many union schools refuse to return to in-person learning, while charters and private schools are doing so. Parents worried about their children falling behind are learning that the union schools’ take-it-or-leave-it approach leaves them without options.” Lawmakers bolstered up protections for special needs families as well by including \$6.5 million in funding for 2,500

families that are on the waitlists for the Children with Disabilities Grant Program and the Education Savings Account Program. The relief package also provides more money for election workers, a \$50 a week increase in unemployment benefits, additional funding for coronavirus testing and licensed child-care centers, and a greater investment in rural broadband services. Money too was appropriated to help businesses that kept employees on the payroll and to bolster hurricane relief.

Plenty of focus on teacher pay but what about police?

BY RAY NOTHSTINE

Violent scenes of anarchy in cities like Kenosha, Wisconsin and Portland, Oregon and the nation's capital are a reminder that police have dangerous and difficult jobs. Those jobs only become more stressful as the rule of law and ordered society breaks down. Furthermore, police are increasingly caught up in politics as mayors and governors are often quick to throw law enforcement under the bus or even prevent a response to looting, property destruction, or other urban unrest.

In Raleigh this year, business owners blasted the lack of response to mob destruction by the city government. At the highest level in North Carolina, political games with teachers continues unabated and too often takes precedence over a pandemic or even violent crime.

In a recently released budget proposal, Gov. Roy Cooper, who loves to use teachers as a political wedge issue, offered \$360 million in bonuses for education employees -- \$230 million of which went to teachers and principals -- but nothing for state employees like troopers or other first responders that could not work from home or receive summers off during Covid-19 shutdowns.

This is an important point, because like a lot of states, North Carolina has been touched by mob violence and an increase in the homicide rate in many urban areas. In fact, so much of the political focus over the last half-decade or more has been on education spending and teacher pay, overshadowing other pressing problems like urban crime and cultural decay.

According to Forbes.com, the average North Carolina police officer salary in 2019 was \$47,340. Average public school teacher pay in North Carolina for 2018-2019 was \$53,975 and \$55,600 for 2019-2020. This is not to say teachers should be paid less or make the equivalent as police officers, but law enforcement compensation may have to be examined closer to improve policing in communities. Furthermore, police officers traditionally have a more dangerous though not more important job than teachers.

The vast majority of law enforcement officers are not government employees who have the option of working from home to wait out a pandemic.

As reminder of just how dangerous the work can be, several high-profile attacks and murders

of police officers in North Carolina made headlines in the last few years. Trooper Kevin K. Connor, 38, and a father of two young children, was shot and killed during a traffic stop in late 2018. Mooresville officer Jordan H. Sheldon, 32, was shot dead during a traffic stop in 2019. Other officers across NC have been killed in recent years in the line of duty or paralyzed by violent injuries. Nationally, of course, there have been officers killed by looters for merely trying to restore order. A retired sheriff, David Dorn, 77, was shot to death in St. Louis for trying to stop theft. At the Republican National Convention his widow Ann said, "They shot and killed David in cold blood, and livestreamed his execution. His last moments on earth."

One of the core functions of government is public safety and upholding the rule of law. When government fails to accomplish that it's an indictment on our elected leaders, who in an increasingly politicized society are more and more inclined to play political games to secure their power.

If governors and mayors are going to tackle comprehensive crimi-

nal justice reform, they might consider higher pay to attract an even stronger candidate pool. Many Americans watch the recent violence night after night with dismay. Yes, most agree that reforms are needed for police departments to help them better engage the populace and secure cities and neighbor-

hoods. Yet, merely blaming officers or advancing divisive media narratives will only advance the kind of anarchy and mob rule that perpetuates more crime and dangerous vigilantism.

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Murder most foul; justice denied

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defendants who prove that discrimination occurred in other parts of the state in other decades to other defendants who were discriminated against. Can you believe it? As a result, 152 of the 156 murderers then on death row filed motions for relief under the Racial Justice Act. Before the Act was passed in 2009, we predicted (accurately) that almost every person on death row whether white, black, or Indian would take advantage of it. We predicted

(inaccurately) a minimum additional time in court of two or three years (which has now been 11 years.) The delay will likely go on for another five or ten years under the Supreme Court's latest opinion. If the trial is indeed tainted by racial discrimination the law should have granted the defendant a new trial. But it does not. It grants them a sentence of life in prison. Why in the world would a person whose own trial was tainted by racial discrimination receive a

life sentence instead of a new trial. The answer is that the discrimination to be proved is not suffered by that convicted first degree murderer but rather by someone else. Can you believe it?

Since the modern era (1976) when our death penalty statutes were reformed to comply with U.S. Supreme Court decision, there has not been a single execution of a person who had any claim to factual innocence. Yet that canard is why we

have effectively had a 14-year moratorium on death sentences for first-degree murderers.

The victims of the Racial Justice Act have been mostly innocent African Americans. Why do I say this? Numerically the majority of the victims of homicide in North Carolina are African Americans. Several hundred of them and their families have been denied justice and an appropriate deterrent now for 11 years.

Not everything proposed

or enacted in the name of "racial justice" is worthy of the name.

Paul 'Skip' Stam was a member of the North Carolina House of Representatives for 16 years and either managed or authored the reform and then repeal of the Racial Justice Act as Majority Leader of the House and then as Speaker Pro Tempore. He is chairman of the board of directors of the Civitas Institute.

