



FROM THE CENTER OUT

September-October-November 1989

NEW EDITION OF NORTH CAROLINA FOCUS AVAILABLE

In 1981, the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research published the first edition of North Carolina Focus, an anthology on state government. Now eight years later, the second edition is available from the Center. There are 61 different articles on state government, politics, and public policy contained in North Carolina Focus, the Center's 447-page textbook for high school social studies classes and college-level courses on state and local government.

"Up to now, when students studied state government, state politics, or state policy problems like school finance, there were no up-to-date texts specifically on North Carolina," says Ran Coble, the Center's executive director and author of several articles in the book. "Now there is. We published Focus as a public service for teachers and students across North Carolina." The book was funded by grants from The Janirve Foundation in Asheville and the A. J. Fletcher Foundation in Raleigh.

Coble says the book is organized like the North Carolina Constitution. It contains chapters on the rights of citizens, the legislative branch, the executive branch, the judicial branch, and budgeting and financing in state government -- which comprise the first five articles in the Constitution. Next there are chapters on four policy areas -- economic development, education, corrections, and the environment. The final two chapters examine state politics and the media's coverage of government and politics, with a copy of the state Constitution at the back of the book. "We thought it particularly appropriate to release this book in the year of the Bicentennial of the Constitution," says Coble.

The public release of Focus highlighted the problem of disparities in spending between rich and poor school districts. The Center found that despite the promise of the state's new Basic Education Program, the state's share of total per-pupil spending remains about the same, while the local contribution is moving up and the federal contribution continues to decline sharply. Because the state's share of school funding has not changed appreciably since 1973-74, the state has done little to counteract the enormous differences in local district supplements that can occur from one school district to the next.

"The disparity in local supplements presents a difficult political problem," says Coble. "You don't want to discourage county commissioners from appropriating local funds in efforts to improve their schools, but you don't like to see kids get differing educational opportunities either, simply because of where they live."

The Center says per-pupil spending in North Carolina varied by as much as 56 percent among the state's 140 public school systems in the 1987-88 school year, the latest school year for which figures are available. This situation remains virtually unchanged since the Center last checked the results in the 1983-84 school year, when there was a 58 percent difference in spending. The Center says the disparities between school districts are caused mainly by differences in local supplements and lead to greatly differing educational programs among the city and county systems. The Center says this kind of disparity has led courts in eight states to find school finance systems unconstitutional.

The share of school budgets from federal sources has been cut in half. It has decreased from 14.2 percent in 1972 to 7.7 percent in 1987-88, the latest school year for which figures are available. But since 1973-74, the state's share has stayed about the same, at 69 percent. "Thus, since 1973-74," says Coble, "the most flexible and controversial part of school budgets -- the local contribution -- has increased from 19 to 23 percent."

The state base of funding does little to counteract the differences in local supplements. In 1987-88, local per-pupil spending ranged from a high of \$1,535 in the Chapel Hill/Carrboro City Schools to a low of \$287 in the Fairmont City School District within Robeson County, a more than five-fold difference. The variation in these local supplements is the chief reason for the disparities in total per-pupil spending. In 1987-88, total spending (excluding food service) in the Onslow County system was \$2,645 per pupil, the lowest of any of the 140 districts. The Tryon City system in Polk County ranked first with \$4,124 spent on each pupil -- 56 percent more than the Onslow County system. Both the Fairmont City and Tryon City districts have been consolidated into county school systems for the 1988-89 school year.

Differences in Course Offerings

In explaining the possible consequences of disparities in school financing, Coble points to differences in course offerings. A student at Blue Ridge High School in Jackson County has 116 fewer courses to choose from than a student in Northern Durham High School. A student at Northern Durham has such choices as German, musical theater, and principles of technology, while a student at Blue Ridge gets only a few choices beyond the required curricula. One additional consequence of the disparities is that better teachers might be attracted to school systems that offer higher wages and better benefits. Finally, better buildings might be available in wealthier districts, since the responsibility for facilities lies mostly with the counties.

Court Cases on School Finance

In a companion article in North Carolina Focus, the N.C. Center reviewed court cases across the country involving the constitutionality of disparities in school financing. Though the court decisions are split, the Center noted that many of the successful challenges to school financing schemes were based on state constitutions with provisions similar to North Carolina's. North Carolina's Constitution has an equal protection clause as well as a clause guaranteeing a uniform system of education. Article IX, Section 2 of the constitution says "The General Assembly shall provide by taxation and otherwise for a general and uniform system of free public schools...wherein equal opportunities shall be provided for all students."

Both of these guarantees have been important in cases in eight states which found disparities in school finance unconstitutional. The eight states are California, Connecticut, Kentucky, New Jersey, Texas, Washington, West Virginia, and Wyoming. The Texas Supreme Court decision is the most recent, with a decision rendered on October 2nd that glaring disparities between rich and poor districts violated the state constitution. However, in six other states -- Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, New York, Ohio, and Oregon -- courts did not strike down unequal financing among local school districts under their state constitutions.

In North Carolina, about two-thirds of school finances come from the state, and all counties get some amount of money. But the Reidsville City School System is considering suing the state over its financing formula. School board attorney Robert L. Watt III says, "The board is considering doing it, and we are doing some research on it right now. The board has asked me to continue looking into it, but there is no timetable or deadline."

"These articles on school financing are just a sample of the kind of issues Focus can raise in classrooms across North Carolina," says the Center's Board Chairman, Thad Beyle, himself a teacher of courses on state government and on N.C. politics and public policy at UNC-Chapel Hill. "There is no other text available that provides in-depth information on North Carolina state government and policy issues," says Clyde Frazier, a professor of political science at Meredith College. "Focus should prove to be an invaluable resource for high school teachers of North Carolina state government," adds John Ellington, head of the social studies section for the N.C. Department of Public Instruction.

Copies of North Carolina Focus containing the research on school finance are available for \$19.00 (plus \$.95 tax and \$2.50 postage and handling) from the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research, P.O. Box 430, Raleigh, NC 27602, or call Sharon Moore at (919) 832-2839. There is a clip-out order form on page 5 of this newsletter.

REACTION TO THE LAST ISSUE OF INSIGHT

County-by-county analysis was also key to the statewide coverage given the August issue of North Carolina Insight magazine. That issue featured associate editor Mike McLaughlin's research on overcrowded state prisons and county jails, as well as editor Jack Bett's analysis of the changes in the office of the Secretary of State.

The Center released new research showing that not only are the state's prisons overcrowded, but that more than one-fourth of the 97 county jails are too. McLaughlin said the legislature should create a permanent Correction and Sentencing Policy Commission to seek a proper balance between prison construction and alternatives to incarceration. Such commissions have worked effectively in a number of states, including Minnesota, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oregon, and Tennessee, as well as the District of Columbia. Tennessee also has mandated Prison Impact Statements for legislation that affects sentence lengths or create new mandatory jail terms.

A Fayetteville Times editorial said, "A respected research organization has now found strong evidence that the state's harsh incarceration policies have little rhyme or reason.... A permanent commission or corrections and sentencing policy could move the state more swiftly and soundly along the road to a more logical, effective, and fair system for handling those thousands of North Carolinians caught in the toils of the law." A Charlotte Observer editorial said, "Now the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research has made perhaps the strongest case yet for more alternative sentencing," adding that the proposed commission "deserves serious study." An editorial in The News & Observer of Raleigh said "With those realities in mind [re: costs], an organization that casts a clear eye on state issues, the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research, urges a stepped-up legislative effort to balance new prison construction and alternative punishment programs...Tar Heels would do well to heed the N.C. Center's call for a more cohesive system of punishment that fits both the crime and the state's budget." In all, the research on overcrowded prisons and jails prompted attention in 45 articles in 39 newspapers, with 10 editorials and lots of radio and television coverage.

In the analysis of the office of the Secretary of State, Betts found that most states (47) have a Secretary of State, but North Carolina's is not one of the most powerful, at least in terms of formal powers and responsibilities. The Center's research shows that North Carolina's Secretary of State has the fewest electoral duties and is below average in the number of other duties. Of the 26 major powers and duties listed by the Council of State Governments for Secretaries of State nationally, North Carolina's Secretary has but 12.

"With the election of Rufus Edmisten to the office in 1988, the N.C. General Assembly has begun revamping the department of the Secretary of State, giving it more duties and more staff members," says Betts. "But before further changes are made, more consideration ought to be given to the proper role of the Secretary of State and the scope of the department's duties."

Betts said some new roles were appropriate -- such as its stepped-up activities in regulating securities -- while others were ill advised -- such as its efforts to take some economic development functions from the Department of Economic and Community Resources (formally Commerce).

A Winston-Salem Journal editorial agreed: "An analysis and sensible advice for legislators was offered by the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research, a Raleigh think-tank." Noting that the Center had said the General Assembly should go slow in overhauling the office, the paper concluded, "No good case has been made that it should be changed." Twenty-three other newspapers also gave this issue coverage.

A WARM WELCOME TO THESE NEW CENTER MEMBERS

Natalie Ammarell	Human Service Systems
Jack Bishop	Kinston City School Board
Thomas Blackburn	Krauskopf Memorial Library
Amy Carr	Mrs. John McNairy
Dr. Kent E. Carr	Nichols, Miller & Sigmon, P.A.
Delaware Valley College of Science and Agriculture	N.C. Institute of Minority Economic Development
Harriett Haith	Winnie Robinson
Andrea L. Harris	
Donald Hughes	

WE URGE YOU TO PARTICIPATE IN THE BOARD NOMINATION PROCESS

One of the benefits of membership in the Center is the opportunity to nominate persons who would make good additions to our governing Board of Directors. There will be at least 8 vacancies on the 37-member Board this year. So once again, we are asking you to submit names of persons who would be willing to work hard, attend quarterly meetings, and assist us with fundraising. The Center's Board is responsible for the overall policy and direction of the Center's work and also suggests ideas for topics to be examined in Insight and in research reports. Depending upon their backgrounds and areas of expertise, Board members are also asked to review drafts of articles and major reports for accuracy and clarity. The Board is balanced by race, sex, and geographic location in North Carolina, as well as by political party affiliation. If you would like to be considered, or if you want to nominate individuals who fit these qualifications and would be willing to serve a three-year term, please submit the name(s) and background information to Board Chair Thad L. Beyle, Nominating Committee Chair Wade Hargrove or Center Director Ran Coble, c/o N.C. Center for Public Policy Research, P.O. Box 430, Raleigh, NC 27602. Submit nominations as soon as possible, but no later than November 20, 1989.

OUR THANKS TO OUR CORPORATE CONTRIBUTORS

The Center wishes to thank and welcome these new corporate members:

Lee Iron and Metal Co., Inc.	\$200
The Transylvania Times	200
Trion Charitable Foundation	200
United Carolina Bank	200

And the Center's continuing thanks goes to these foundations, corporations, and individuals who recently renewed their support for the Center:

Glaxo, Inc.	\$2000	Sara Lee Corporation	\$500
R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company	1500	Universal Leaf Tobacco Co.	500
AETna Life & Casualty Foundation	1000	The Liggett Group Inc.	350
American Television & Communications Corp. - Charlotte, Fayetteville, Greensboro, & Raleigh-Durham	1000	Arthur Andersen & Company	250
Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation	1000	Epley Associates	250
Royal Insurance	1000	N.C. Textile Manufacturers Association	250
Bank of Granite	500	Adams Outdoor Advertising	200
Parkdale Mills	500	N.C. Association of Educators	200
Raleigh Federal Savings Bank	500	Ralph Simpson & Associates	200
Rhone Poulenc Ag Company	500	N.C. Cable TV Association	125
		N.C. Association of Broadcasters	125
		First National Bank of Randolph County	100

We would also like to thank Center Board members Karen Gottovi, Bob Spearman, and Geraldine Sumter for their individual contributions and John D. Lewis and Ralph and Peggy McLaughlin for renewing their individual supporting memberships.

INS AND OUTS IN STATE GOVERNMENT

Ins: William T. Boyd as chairman of the board of the N.C. Housing Finance Agency, replacing John Crosland Jr....Russell T. Clay as speechwriter for the Superintendent of Public Instruction....William W. Cobey Jr. as the first secretary of the new Dept. of Environment, Health, and Natural Resources (DEHNR)....Ann Q. Duncan as assistant secretary of administration at DEHNR....Lyons Gray as state representative for the 39th House district in Winston-Salem, replacing Ann Duncan....Dr. James P. Green as state representative for the 22nd House district in Granville County, replacing the late William T. Watkins....Harold Hopfenberg as interim athletic director at N.C. State University....Helen Laughery appointed to the State Board of Community Colleges, along with James Bennett and James Patterson....Julian Mann III as director of the Office of Administrative Hearings, replacing Robert A. Melott....Gov. James G. Martin as chairman-elect of the Southern Growth Policies Board for 1990....Larry K. Monteith as interim chancellor of N.C. State University, replacing Bruce R. Poulton, who resigned....James A. (Dolph) Norton as interim chancellor of the University of Maryland system. Norton previously led the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation's studies of higher education in North Carolina....Katherine R. White as assistant general counsel for the N.C. Press Association/NCPS....Constance Wilson as state senator for the 35th Senate district, replacing Laurence Cobb in Charlotte, who resigned to accept an appointment to the N.C. Utilities Commission.

Outs: Dr. William W. (Wes) Davis resigned as director of the division of State Parks and Recreation.

FOCUS ORDER FORM

Please send me _____ copies of the second edition of North Carolina Focus at \$19.00 each plus \$.95 tax and \$2.50 for postage and handling. (Bulk order discounts available for 20 copies or more -- please call for price.)

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5 West Hargett Street, P.O. Box 430, Raleigh, NC 27602
(or call (919) 832-2839)

INTERIM LEGISLATIVE STUDY COMMISSIONS

There will be at least 24 studies conducted by the Legislative Research Commission between the end of the 1989 legislative session and the beginning of the 1991 General Assembly. They are listed below:

Administrative Procedure Act
Agriculture and agribusiness plant variances
Certificate of need and nursing and rest home care
Consumer protection
Credit card banks and deregulation of revolving credit
Firemen's benefits
Groundwater protection
Health care issues
Homeless persons
Insanity verdict and guilty but insane verdict
Personalized license plates
Proprietary schools
Public employees' benefits and day care
Public transportation
Revenue laws
Solid waste management
State capital assets
State procurement contracts and small business programs
State ports
State railroad leases
Surface water quality
Tourism's growth and effect
Transportation: long-range needs
Worker Training Trust Fund

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