



The North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research

Accomplishments in 2002

Celebrating 25 years as a voice for good government

Educating the Public

This year, the Center celebrates its 25th year as a voice for good government. To raise policy issues for public discussion, the Center and the N.C. Cable Telecommunications Association co-sponsored “An Evening with Four Leaders for North Carolina’s Future” on February 21st. More than 300 people attended. The event featured four rising stars in the Democratic and Republican parties: Senate Minority Leader Patrick Ballantine, a Republican from Wilmington; Attorney General Roy Cooper, a Democrat from Rocky Mount; Lieutenant Governor Beverly Perdue, a Democrat from New Bern; and Representative Connie Wilson, a Republican from Charlotte. The program was videotaped and shown multiple times from April to July on cable TV stations across the state. The Center’s joint productions with Time Warner Cable have won three national cable TV *Communicator* “Awards of Distinction.”



The Center’s research has led to important changes in state policy over the last 25 years, including appropriations to low-wealth school systems, increased evaluation and rewards for teaching in public universities, statewide recycling legislation, a civil rights act for persons with disabilities, full public ownership of the N.C. Railroad, an Aging Policy plan, and elimination of 81 ineffective or duplicative boards and commissions. We are one of only eight independent, state-level policy centers in the country – and three other centers in Kentucky, Massachusetts, and New Mexico are modeled after the N.C. Center.

The Center also has garnered national recognition for our work. We were featured in a cover story in *Nonprofit World* as one of the magazine’s national Profiles in Excellence. Our joint productions with WUNC-FM Radio won national awards for public radio reporting. Our rankings of effectiveness of state legislators have been called the most straightforward and most widely respected of any in the country by *Governing* magazine and the best in the country by *State Policy Reports*. Our proposal for a corrections and sentencing policy commission resulted in the Ford Foundation’s national award as one of America’s 10 most innovative state government programs.

“The nonprofit N.C. Center for Public Policy Research has been in business for 25 years now, and ... the state would be less enlightened without it. The organization ... has demonstrated an uncanny knack for recognizing the issues that are important and are about to become important in the state. The center fears no topic, and surrenders to no single ideology. It presents pros and cons on every issue and backs up its views with clear, hard facts.”

—The News and Observer, Raleigh

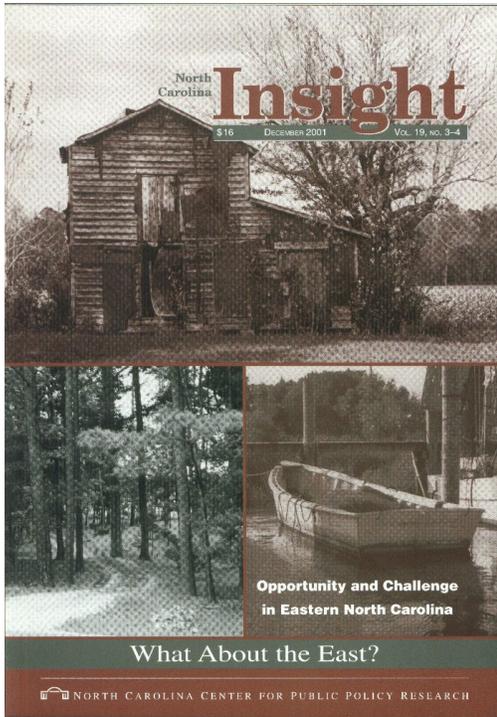
“When the center produces one of its book-length reports or examines issues in its estimable journal, North Carolina Insight, policymakers in local and state government know that it will be fair, complete and well-done... The center, in short, is a rarity in public affairs. It has served North Carolina and its people well for a quarter of a century...”

—The Charlotte Observer

New Research on Public Policy Issues Facing North Carolina

Economic Development in Eastern North Carolina – In January, our *North Carolina Insight* focused on Eastern North Carolina. The Center’s study found that the East trails the rest of the state on a broad range of

indicators – from education levels to income to poverty rates to having the infrastructure needed for the region to grow, such as water and sewer availability, natural gas connections, and Internet access.



Already, two Congressmen have introduced legislation to create a Southeast Crescent Authority to help the East the same way the Appalachian Regional Authority helped poor mountain regions. And, a new Foundation of Renewal for Eastern North Carolina has been created to do something about the issues raised in our report.

In this same issue of *Insight*, the Center published a study of “Lessons Learned and Not Learned” from Hurricane Floyd, which devastated the East in 1999. The Center made nine recommendations to prevent or mitigate damage before the next storm hits. These include a complete remapping of the floodplains for North Carolina; removal of hog farms, junkyards, and hazardous chemical facilities from the floodplains; and limits on the development of sewage treatment plants within 100-year floodplains.

“Policymakers throughout the state recently got a heads-up about North Carolina’s unreadiness for the next major flood, and sound advice on what to do about it. They should take heed and take action.”
 –The Fayetteville Observer

“It’s only January, but we may have already published the most important story of 2002. It was the story about economic opportunity, or lack of it, in Eastern North Carolina...based on information from the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research.”
 –The Roanoke Beacon, Plymouth, NC

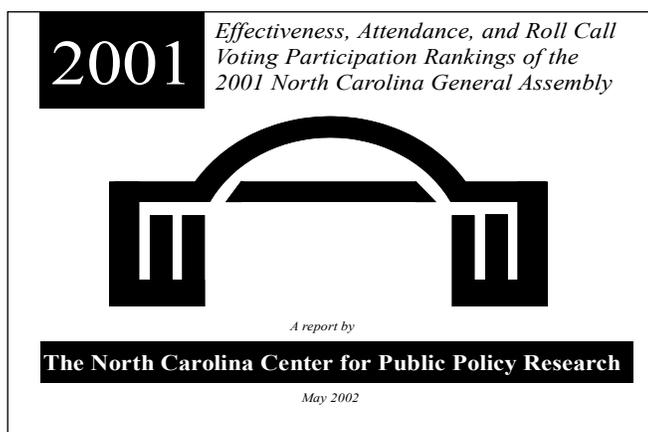
Enhancing Government Accountability

Rankings of Legislators’ Effectiveness, Attendance, and Roll Call Voting Participation – In May, the Center

continued its emphasis on enhancing government accountability and educating voters by publishing the 13th edition of rankings of the effectiveness of all 170 members of the N.C. General Assembly. This year, we added new rankings of legislators based on their attendance and their participation in roll call votes. The

rankings of attendance and voting participation tell citizens and voters how often their legislator was there to represent them. The other set of rankings tells citizens how effective their legislator was when he or she was there. We hope both are helpful to citizens in evaluating the performance of their legislators.

“The North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research provides a real service to the citizens of the state by conducting a legislative survey...to identify the most effective legislators in the General Assembly.” –The Transylvania Times, Brevard, NC





Rankings of Most Influential Lobbyists – In September, the Center released the 11th edition of *The Most Influential Lobbyists in the N.C. General Assembly*. The rankings tell citizens what key interests have clout with legislators, as well as who is *not* represented in the legislature. They shed light on what is often an invisible process and illustrate changes in the lobbying profession itself.

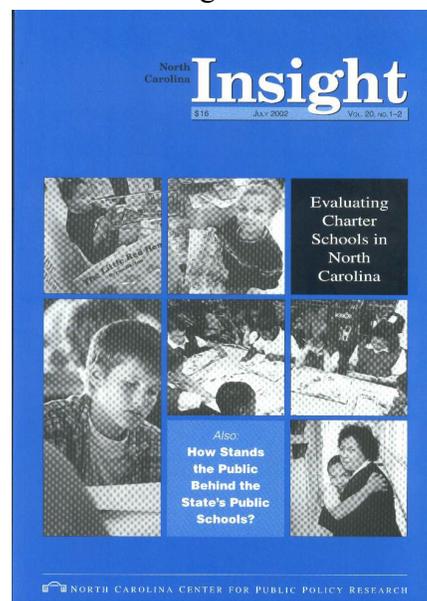
“These ratings...give us our best look at how important the role of lobbyist is to the functioning of our legislature. They call our attention to some things we forget when we read the daily reports of legislative activity.”

– D.G. Martin, Afternoon Newspaper Columnist

Evaluating Government Performance

Charter Schools –In July, *North Carolina Insight* featured an evaluation of North Carolina’s experience with charter schools since 1996. The Center’s research found that charter schools did not perform as well as regular public schools on end-of-grade tests on reading, writing, or arithmetic. The Center also found a lack of racial balance, with more than 30 of 97 charter schools having more than 80 percent nonwhite students – despite a state law requiring that charter schools must reasonably reflect the racial make-up of their local school districts. Third, we found too many charter schools had problems with financial management, with the State Board of Education having revoked 14 charters since 1997.

Based on our findings, we recommended that: (1) the state retain its current cap of 100 charter schools until it has five full years of data that can prove the worth of the charter experiment; (2) the State Board of Education not grant any more charters that target a narrow racial or ethnic population; (3) the N.C. General Assembly implement financial reforms to require that charter schools spend one year planning and getting their financial affairs in order before opening to students; and (4) the 2005 General Assembly – armed with adequate data about charter school performance – consider whether to raise the cap and, if so, by how much. The 2001-2002 legislature did not raise the cap, as the Center recommended.



Public Support for Public Schools – In the same issue of *Insight*, the Center also examined the rise in enrollment in non-public schools and whether that is affecting public support for public schools. Our research asked whether increasing enrollment in religious and secular private schools, home schools, and charter schools might be undermining public support for public education. The three indicators the Center used to address this question were: (1) enrollment trends in both public and non-public alternatives over the last decade; (2) statewide and national poll results gauging support for public schools; and (3) results of local bond referenda over the last decade. Our conclusion: despite rapidly rising enrollment in private schools, home schools, and charter schools, public support for the public schools is steady. Public school enrollment continues to increase about as fast as the state population, and the percentage of North Carolinians who give their local school an A or B grade in opinion polls is on the upswing over the last decade. Also, voters approved 67 of the 91 (74%) local bond referenda for construction of public schools over the last decade.

“The Center provides practical research about pressing public issues. And, they don’t just point out problems, they help solve them. We’re a long-time supporter and consider our contributions to be a great investment in the future of North Carolina.”

–Tammy Brown, Manager, Corporate Community Relations, Progress Energy

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Media Coverage – More citizens can benefit from our research because the Center’s work enjoys outstanding media coverage. In 2002, our work appeared in more than 319 newspaper articles and editorials and 1,100 radio and TV news broadcasts. Over the last two years, we increased our presence in the broadcast media with a monthly radio show on WPTF-AM, cable TV broadcasts of our events in collaboration with Time Warner Cable and the N.C. Cable Telecommunications Association, and continuing informal partnerships with the 90-station N.C. Radio News Network and WUNC statewide public television.

“The Center is an invaluable resource as a nonpartisan, objective guide to politics and political issues in the state.” –Paul Johnson, High Point Enterprise

Looking Ahead To 2003

The Center is hard at work to bring you new, independent, nonpartisan research in 2003 on important public policy issues facing our state. Here is a preview:

State Election Laws and Voter Participation – Our next edition of *North Carolina Insight* will look at whether North Carolina could have problems similar to what Florida experienced in the 2000 presidential election. We’ll examine our state’s election procedures and voting methods and our ability to guarantee an accurate vote count. The study also will examine ways to increase voter participation in North Carolina, which has never been high and has been declining steadily since 1960.

Issues Where Race, Ethnicity, and State Government Intersect – This project is designed to show where our state’s racial and ethnic groups stand on a broad range of indicators – in economic opportunity, employment, education, health, criminal justice, affordable housing, and Internet access. We will conduct research on areas where race, ethnicity, and state government intersect so that we can focus attention on issues where state government has principal responsibility to act.

Higher Education Governance – The third in our series of four Center reports on governance of higher education in North Carolina will begin with a brief history of the UNC Board of Governors and then look at how Board members are elected by the General Assembly. As with all our reports, we will discuss advantages and disadvantages of North Carolina’s approach and of alternative approaches to our system. The report also will look closely at the balance of powers between the UNC Board of Governors and the 16 campus Boards of Trustees.

Your Ideas

We welcome your suggestions for topics that would benefit from the Center’s independent, nonpartisan research. To make a suggestion or to order any Center publication, please write us at **P.O. Box 430, Raleigh, NC 27601**, call us at **(919) 832-2839**, send us a fax at **(919) 832-2847**, or visit our web site at www.nccppr.org.

Our Mission

The North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research is an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to the goals of a better-informed public and more effective, accountable, and responsive government. The Center identifies public policy issues facing North Carolina and enriches the dialogue among citizens, the media, and policymakers. Based on its research, the Center makes recommendations for improving the way government serves the people of this state.