



The North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research

A voice for good government

Accomplishments in 2003

Evaluating Government Performance

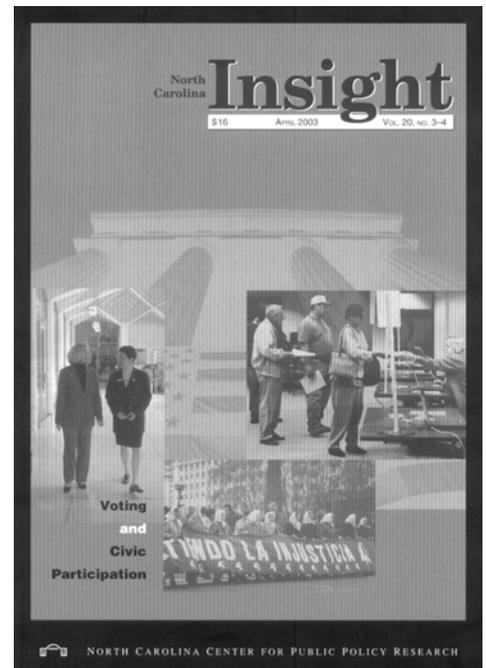
In April 2003, the Center released a major study of ways to improve voter turnout and the administration of elections in

North Carolina. The Center's study documented the state's voter turnout record since 1960 and found that the state now ranks 34th in turnout of the voting age population. The study also compared North Carolina's election laws with 49 other states and examined voting methods used in all 100 N.C. counties.

This new research follows up on the Center's previous study of voter participation published in 1991. At that time, the state ranked 47th in turnout. The Center then made nine recommendations to improve turnout, five of which were adopted in whole or in part, and the state now has moved up to rank 34th in voter turnout.

In 2003, the Center offered eight recommendations to boost voter turnout, including an education campaign with dual goals of *registering* 90 percent of North Carolina's voting age population and increasing *turnout* among the voting age population to at least 65 percent by 2008. This would place North Carolina among the top 10 states in voter turnout. In addition, the Center recommended that the state enact legislation allowing voters to register on election day. Our research found that six of the top 11 states in voter turnout in 2000 have election day registration or no registration requirement at all. Election day registration legislation was introduced in the 2003 N.C. General Assembly, and the Center testified in favor of the bill. The bill is alive for consideration in the 2004 session. The Center also endorsed legislation to guarantee public and private employees time off to vote. Of the top 10 states in voter turnout, seven offer some time off for state employees, private sector employees, or both without penalty of losing their pay or job.

North Carolina uses five different voting systems in its 100 counties. The Center recommended that the N.C. General Assembly take the most cost-effective route to move all North Carolina counties toward a uniform system of voting. The federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA) provides funds to states to replace outdated mechanical lever machines and punch card devices. The funds also can be used to bring the state's centralized voter registry into compliance with federal requirements. And, the federal act will improve voter education and increase training for poll workers, two other Center recommendations. For these reasons, the Center supported state legislation designed to bring North Carolina into compliance with the federal legislation. We are pleased that this bill was enacted into law by the 2003 legislature.



"The N.C. Center for Public Policy Research has made several notable contributions to improving voter turnout and enhancing democracy in North Carolina.... That's why the N.C. General Assembly should pay close attention to the center's new recommendations for improving voter participation."

The Charlotte Observer

Enhancing Government Accountability

A Citizen's Guide to the Legislature – In May 2003, the Center published the 14th edition of *Article II: A Guide to the N.C.*

Legislature. It is a resource for citizens to use in contacting their legislators and getting involved in public policy issues in North Carolina. The guide contains profiles on all 170 members of the General Assembly, including photos; legislative, business, home, and e-mail addresses; phone and fax numbers; committee assignments and meeting schedules; number of terms served; and educational and occupational backgrounds. For members who served in the previous session, the guide also lists five bills they introduced, their votes on 12 bills of statewide interest, and their rankings in attendance and roll call voting participation, as well as a history of rankings of each legislator's effectiveness since 1981.

This guide also is a resource to the news media in profiling legislators and analyzing trends in the legislature. This year, the Center highlighted North Carolina's experiment with Co-Speakers in the state House of Representatives and the large number of freshman lawmakers as key developments in the legislature. The Center described five ways that the Co-Speakers changed the legislature as an institution and how the 36 new faces in the House and 15 new Senators played surprisingly important roles in votes on the state budget and other issues. Over the last 20 years, the Center's guide showed that turnover in the legislature has averaged about a fourth of the House and a fifth of the Senate in each two-year election cycle. This year, however, 30 percent, or 51 of the 170 legislators, were new.



"Each year, I'm impressed with the wonderful service you provide to the citizens of the state. We are so fortunate to have you..."

Stella Trapp, Editor and Publisher, The Transylvania Times

Educating the Public and Involving Citizens in Public Policy

To educate citizens on how to become more effective when contacting their legislators, the Center released the results of our first-ever survey of the Most Influential Lobbyists in the N.C. General Assembly, asking their opinions on the most effective ways for citizens to lobby state lawmakers.

Effective Tactics for Citizens To Use in Contacting Legislators – Professional lobbyists say that the same methods that work for them in influencing legislators are also the right tools for citizens to use if they have concerns about an issue. Asked to rank five ways for *citizens* to lobby legislators, the state's most influential lobbyists say that personal contact with legislators is the most effective. Next in effectiveness is telephone contact, followed by a personal letter, a fax, and finally, email.

The Most Effective Tactics Used by Professional Lobbyists – The Center also asked the state's Most Influential Lobbyists to rate various lobbying tactics. Of the 12 tactics listed in the Center's survey, the three rated most effective were: (1) meeting personally with legislators, (2) using a coalition approach where different groups coordinate their lobbying, and (3) establishing a statewide grassroots network that can be activated to contact legislators. Next most effective is (4) using a team approach in lobbying, where one or more members of a team lobby Democrats and one or more members lobby Republicans.



New Research on Public Policy Issues Facing North Carolina

Issues Where Race, Ethnicity, and State Government Intersect – According to the U.S. Census, North Carolina’s population grew 21.4 percent from 6.6 million in 1990 to 8 million in 2000. The 2000 census indicates

that African Americans, American Indians, Asians, and Hispanics/Latinos now account for nearly one-third (28.7 percent) of the state’s population. Between 1990 and 2000, the Asian population in the state grew by 128 percent. Even more astounding, the Hispanic population grew by 394 percent.

At the end of 2003, the Center completed the research for a new study on the racial and ethnic differences in policy outcomes in economic well-being, education, health, housing, criminal justice, voter participation, and other areas. In this report to be released early in 2004, the Center examines what state government can or should do about differences such as these:

- **Income:** Per capita incomes for whites averaged \$23,237. African Americans, American Indians, and Hispanics earned as little as 47.8 percent of that amount at \$13,548, \$13,441, and \$11,097 respectively.
- **Poverty:** In addition, 25.2 percent of Hispanics/Latinos, 22.9 percent of African Americans, and 21 percent of American Indians lived in poverty in 2000, compared to only 8.1 percent of whites.
- **Education:** Among whites, 81.2 percent are high school graduates, while 79.3 percent of Asians, 70.7 percent of African Americans, 62.7 percent of Native Americans, and 44.5 percent of Hispanics in North Carolina have graduated from high school.
- **Health:** African Americans and American Indians have higher rates of illness and death from heart disease, stroke, and diabetes than do whites. Latinos in North Carolina have higher rates of child fatalities, AIDS deaths, and teen pregnancies than whites. All are less likely than whites to have health insurance.



“I routinely share articles, data, quotes, etc. from the NC Center for Public Policy Research documents with the members of the State Board of Education. The research... in your publications is reliable, objective, and timely, and I feel contributes positively to the State Board members’ information base, and ultimately to their making better informed education policy decisions.”

Jane W. Worsham, Executive Director, N.C. State Board of Education

Affecting Public Policy

Bringing Legislative Action and Public Attention to the Plight of Eastern North Carolina – In January 2002, we devoted an entire issue

of *North Carolina Insight* magazine to opportunities and challenges facing Eastern North Carolina. Our study found that the East trails the rest of the state on a broad range of indicators – from education levels to poverty to having the infrastructure needed for the region to prosper, such as water and sewer availability and natural gas connections. The Center attacked this problem on several fronts. Legislatively, the Center supported a bipartisan effort by three N.C. Congressmen to create a federal SouthEast Crescent Authority that would offer aid to poverty-stricken counties in seven Southern states – much as the Appalachian Regional Commission assisted poor mountain counties. The Center also offered its assistance to the new Foundation of Renewal for Eastern North Carolina, which has been established to act on the same issues raised in our report. The Foundation held a summit on Eastern North Carolina in May 2003. And, *Business North Carolina* magazine’s cover story for its February 2003 issue asked, “Whither the East?” The article echoed the Center’s conclusions, saying “The economic reality is that unless things get better for Eastern North Carolina, the whole state will suffer.”

Charter Schools – In July 2002, our *Insight* magazine 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 math. We also found a lack of racial

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balance, with 30 of 97 charter schools having more than 80 percent non-white students – despite a state law requiring them to 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 revoking 14 charters since 1997. Based on our findings, we recommended that the state retain its current cap of 100 charter schools until it has five full years of data that can prove the success or failure of the charter experiment. During the 2003 legislative session, bills were introduced to remove entirely the cap of 100 charter schools allowed in North Carolina. Based on the Center's research, our staff testified against lifting the cap. The House decided against lifting the cap entirely but passed a bill allowing just 10 new charter schools. That legislation is pending in the Senate in the 2004 session.

Looking Ahead To 2004

The Center will bring you new, independent, nonpartisan research in 2004 on important public policy issues facing our state. Here is a preview:

An Evening with Four Political Campaign Consultants – On March 25, 2004, at the Sheraton Imperial Hotel in RTP, the Center will host “An Evening with Four Political Campaign Consultants.” This event is co-sponsored with the N.C. Cable Telecommunications Association and Time Warner Cable. The event will feature equal numbers of Democratic and Republican party campaign consultants, with two who work nationally and two who work principally in North Carolina.

Higher Education Governance – The third in our series of four 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.

Teacher Shortage in North Carolina – Because of the state's population growth, we'll need 10,000 new teachers a year for the next 10 years, while all the state's public and private colleges and universities combined now produce only 3,300 new teachers a year. The Center will examine what can be done about this crisis.

Domestic Violence in North Carolina – Every day in North Carolina, there are 65 cases of domestic violence, and in about half of the cases, children also are abused. A third of the 911 calls to police are made by children. We'll look at the issue of domestic violence and its effect on the well-being of children.

Your Ideas

We welcome your suggestions for topics that would benefit from the Center's independent, nonpartisan research. Please write us at **P.O. Box 430, Raleigh, NC 27601**, call us at **(919) 832-2839**, fax us at **(919) 832-2847**, or visit our web site 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.