

FORUM

Why everyone should vote AGAINST the bond

Nicole Revels

Guest Columnist

On the March 15 primary election ballot, NC residents will be asked to vote for or against a proposal to borrow 2 billion dollars in the form of a bond. I intend to vote AGAINST the bond.

A bond is not free money. It's a method of spending money now and leaving future generations of taxpayers to pick up the tab later. Many legislators are supporting the bond because it's a way for them to spend money on grandiose projects and earn

political points back home while not having to claim the expenditures as an operating budget spending increase.

The problem is that they're piling debt onto today's children. Another term for this is deferred taxation. It is a much more fiscally responsible practice to prioritize items by their importance and pay as we go.

There is no transportation nor k-12 education funding within the bond. I emphasize that fact because many voters have been misled by pro-bond marketing, which describes the measure as an "infrastructure and education" funding bill.

The bond was originally proposed as a transportation funding bill titled

"Connect NC," but by final adoption, all road funding was stripped from the bill, a move that some legislators have dubbed a "bait and switch."

Bond proponents tout the necessity of the water/sewer line item within the \$2 billion bond package, but there is actually no specific allocation within the bond legislation for any single water/sewer project. The plan is to place \$309 million into a fund to hold onto for future allocation once a municipality applies to receive them. It makes no sense for our state to borrow money simply to store it away for potential future redistribution to municipalities, paying millions in interest in the meantime!

There's also a section

of the bill titled "reallocation," which enables legislators to change the bond money allocations after the bond is passed. Such a provision means that voters have no guarantee that what they think they're voting on is what the funding will actually be used for. North Carolina's history with the gas tax being diverted to purposes other than roads should remind us that we need better guarantees over allocation before signing off on a blank check.

Sixty-six percent of the \$2 billion will be given to the N.C. university and community college systems for new buildings and renovations. Very few details of the specific projects have been revealed. Whether community col-

leges are renovating classrooms or building tennis courts and swimming pools with the bond money, we do not know. Community colleges are not required to submit their specific multi-million dollar projects for which the funding will be used until after the bond is approved by voters!

The bond is an omnibus spending bill for items that should be considered individually and funded during the budget adoption process based on their own merits. The taxpayers of North Carolina will be forced to pay the \$2 billion debt and interest, whether by direct tax increase or by taking money away from other future priorities in order to pay for the projects of

today.

Bond proponents claim that adopting this bond is equivalent to a household adopting a mortgage to purchase a home. That claim has no merit. The entirety of this bond is less than 10 percent of our state's annual operating budget. There's no logical comparison of this bond and our state budget to the cost of a home to a household budget. North Carolina households have to be resourceful with our budgets, and legislators need to do the same. Vote AGAINST the \$2 billion bond debt proposal.

Nicole Revels is director of NC Against the Bond, based in Louisburg, NC. The organization's email is Againstthebond@gmail.com

Cooper's spokesperson misleads public with statement

BY CONCERNED STUDENTS FOR KALVIN MICHAEL SMITH

On Thursday, Feb. 18, we brought students together from Wake Forest University, Winston Salem State University, and Salem College to do what Attorney General Roy Cooper has actively refused to do for the past eight years: to publicly declare our outrage at the failure of our criminal justice system in keeping Calvin Michael Smith incarcerated.

We urged Mr. Cooper to act in the Silk Plant Forest Case, to uphold the oath of his office and to usher in the long-awaited justice that Calvin Michael Smith, Jill Marker, and our community deserve, but

instead, Mr. Cooper's office released a statement that misleads the public and evades his prosecutorial responsibilities. In response to over 150 students converging to call on A.G. Cooper to join Calvin's defense counsel in petitioning the Superior Court to vacate the 1997 wrongful conviction, Cooper's spokeswoman, Noelle Talley, was quoted in the Winston-Salem Journal, saying: "We understand the community's concerns, and we want to work with them on systemic issues in the criminal justice system," Talley said. "But at this point in the legal process, only a court of law can overturn Calvin Smith's conviction and release him from

prison."

To admit there are "systemic issues" in our criminal justice system necessitates addressing the havoc that those "systemic issues" have wrought on specific people's lives—on Calvin Michael Smith's life.

A.G. Roy Cooper has the power to review the case, to review former FBI Assistant Director Christopher Swecker's report, and to join the defense counsel, Duke University Professor James Coleman Jr., in a motion to vacate the conviction.

A.G. Cooper is no stranger to Mr. Swecker, a former Assistant Director of the FBI; Mr. Cooper entrusted him in 2010 to audit thousands of cases

from the SBI Forensic Lab. Mr. Swecker's investigation reported over 200 cases of malfeasance that violated the constitutional rights of defendants, and Mr. Cooper followed his recommendations.

However, in Calvin Michael Smith's case, Mr. Cooper has actively ignored Mr. Swecker's review, refusing to even meet with him.

There is also precedent for what we are asking Mr. Cooper as a state prosecutor to do. In 2004, Forsyth District Attorney Tom Keith filed jointly with Darryl Hunt's defense counsel to overturn his wrongful conviction. Similarly, Mr. Cooper did not hesitate to intervene, investigate and exercise his

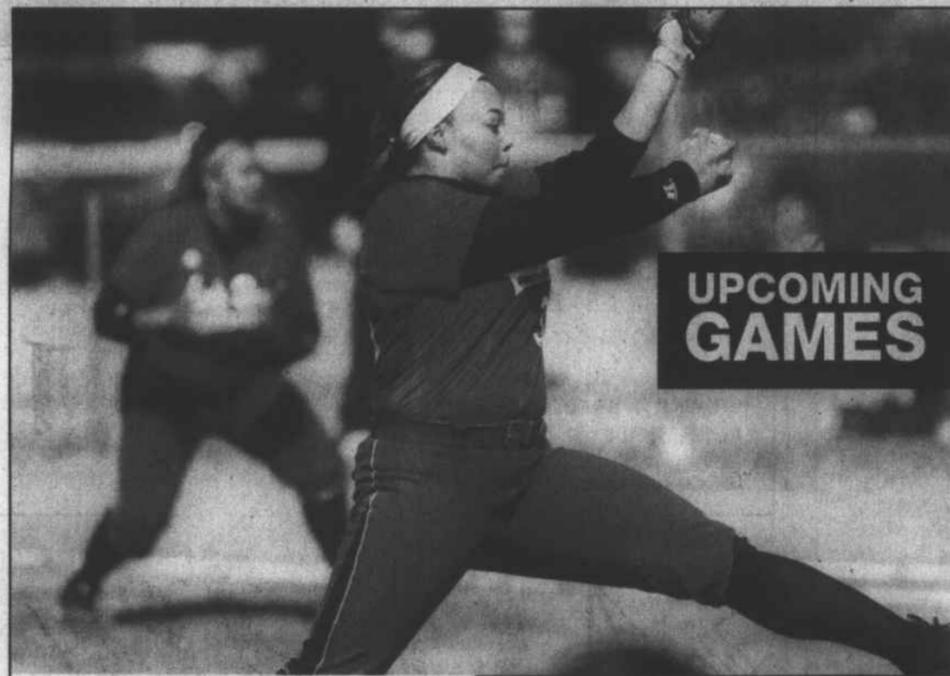
prosecutorial discretion in the 2006 Duke lacrosse case to dismiss the charges against three-wrongfully charged affluent white men. Yet Mr. Cooper remains silent about this injustice facing Calvin Michael Smith, a working-class black man.

We believe that prosecutorial ethics require Mr. Cooper to meet with former Assistant FBI Director Christopher Swecker and to acknowledge the truth that his review uncovered. The truth, as the Swecker Report states, that "only a new trial that considers the full record and evidence not available, misrepresented or omitted in the original trial" will provide the full measure of justice deserved.

Mr. Cooper should also meet with Winston-Salem Police Department's Lt. Joseph Ferrelli and Sgt. Chuck Byrom, who led an 18-month review of the case which found there to be "no credible evidence" that Calvin was at the crime scene and concluded "no confidence" in the original police investigation.

Mr. Cooper should meet with these men immediately and meet in public.

Hayden Abene from Wake Forest University, Jaylon Herbin from Winston-Salem State University and Virginia Parnell from Salem College.



UPCOMING GAMES

BASEBALL

SATURDAY, MARCH 5 1PM/4PM
VS. CONCORD
BB&T BALLPARK, WINSTON-SALEM

SUNDAY, MARCH 6 1PM
VS. CONCORD
BB&T BALLPARK, WINSTON-SALEM

SOFTBALL

MONDAY, MARCH 7 1PM/3PM
VS. MILLERSVILLE
AT TWIN CITY PARK, 2801 NEW WALKERTOWN RD

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 9 1PM/3PM
VS. MILLERSVILLE
AT TWIN CITY PARK, 2801 NEW WALKERTOWN RD

FOOTBALL SPRING TOURS & GAME

The WSSU Rams are coming to you this spring!

Saturday, March 19
Charlotte, N.C.

Saturday, April 2
Wilson, N.C.

Saturday, April 9
for the official
Spring Football Game!

Atkins High School, Old Greensboro Rd., Winston-Salem

There will be prizes, giveaways and games. Bring a canned good for entry and in support of the Harvest Food Bank.