

# VIEWPOINTS

## State legislature is again for sale

BY CHRIS FITZSIMON  
Capitol Press Association

Not too many years ago, Republicans in North Carolina railed against what they described as the "pay to play" culture in Raleigh where special interests who gave political leaders big bundles of campaign contributions were rewarded with privileged access and preferential treatment.

That was when the Republicans were in the minority in the General Assembly and having trouble raising as much money as their Democratic opponents.

A new report from Democracy North Carolina finds that not only have the fundraising tables turned but also that Republicans seem to be embracing the pay to play culture even more than the Democrats they constantly criticized.

The report finds that Republican legislative leaders are not only raising more money from special interest political action committees than their predecessors, they are also raising a higher percentage of their campaign cash from the PACs than Democrats did.

In fact, they are raising more of their money from special interests than disgraced former Democratic House Speaker Jim Black did in his heyday on Jones Street—and that's not an easy bar to clear.

The General Assembly passed new ethics and fundraising rules as a result of the scandals that ultimately sent Black to federal prison.

One of the new laws was a ban on lobbyists making contributions to legislators'

campaigns. It's hard to believe that was ever legal in the first place, that the same people who were asking legislators for votes could also put checks in their hands—but it was until just a few years ago.

The Democracy NC report finds that the law hasn't stopped the indirect exchange of money for votes, it just required a rewording of the appeals. The report cites a recent solicitation from the political staff of House Speaker Thom Tillis sent to lobbyists telling them to get their PACs to send a check before an upcoming deadline or at least explain when the money will be sent.

Bob Hall with Democracy NC calls the appeal a "shake-down, plain and ugly," and notes that the fundraising figures show it appears to be working.

If that's not enough evidence that we have the best government special interests can buy, consider another report issued this week, this one from the Center for Public Integrity. It finds that out-of-state corporate money is playing a major role in the governor's race in North Carolina.

The report details how corporations from across the country give hundreds of thousands of dollars to groups like the Republican Governors Association and the Democratic Governors Association who then run attack ads against candidates in North Carolina.

That leads to the troubling scenario where groups like the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce is basically funding attack ads against Democratic gubernatorial candidate Walter Dalton. A

spokesperson for the insurance company AFLAC, a big donor to the Republican Governors Association, was unaware that the group's donation was also being used to attack Dalton on television.

Maybe even more disturbing still are the large anonymous contributions given to another category of political groups who are not required to disclose who is paying for the ads they run against candidates in North Carolina and elsewhere.

That makes a mockery of the Right's long opposition to meaningful campaign finance reforms like public financing that would provide funding for candidates without the special interest strings attached.

Their argument used to be that all we needed for a vibrant democracy was full and immediate disclosure of who was funding campaigns.

Now they seem perfectly comfortable not only that our elections and our government are for sale to the highest bidders but that we often can't even find out who the bidders are—at least until after the election when the legislative bodies meet and starting providing a return on the special interests' investments.

Record special interest money in pay to play Raleigh, unlimited contributions from Milwaukee helping determine who will be governor in North Carolina, and anonymous corporate money deciding who will represent us in Raleigh and Washington.

There's a lot of ways to describe that system but democracy is not one of them.

## THE TURKEY FESTIVAL BOARD REVERSES THIS YEAR'S PARADE ROUTE...



## Today's campaigns have roots in 1896

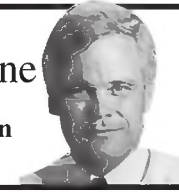
Are you already tired of the presidential campaigns and the barrage of television ads, glad the conventions are over, and dreading the upcoming debates? Blame it on William Jennings Bryan.

It used to be different. That was before radio, television, and airplanes. It was not so long ago that presidential candidates did very little personal campaigning. Sometimes the candidate stayed at home on his front porch and let his supporters across the country organize for the election.

All that changed in 1896 when William Jennings Bryan secured the nomination of the Democratic Party and mounted a hard-charging national campaign. Until that year, a presidential candidate had rarely, if ever, appeared in North Carolina. But, as Bob Anthony told me the other day, Bryan whistle stopped through North Carolina for three days in September 1896 making more than 20 stops in "Asheville, Black Mountain, Old Fort, Marion, Morganton, Hickory, Statesville, Mooresville, Charlotte, Salisbury, Greensboro, Burlington, Durham, Raleigh, Selma, Goldsboro, Wilson, Rocky Mount, Whitakers, Battleboro, Enfield, Halifax, and Weldon. Longer stops and off the train rallies were at Asheville, Hickory, Charlotte, Salisbury, Greensboro, Raleigh, Golds-

boro, Wilson, and Rocky Mount. Briefer stops, with Bryan often

### One on One D. G. Martin



speaking from the rear of the train, were at the other places. He arrived in Asheville from Knoxville on Sept. 16, and his last stop was at Weldon on his way to Virginia during late afternoon of Sept. 18. In three days in the state, he spoke to crowds that collectively were estimated to have numbered more than 100,000 people.

If you are tired of full-time campaigns, blame it on Bryan. Anthony, curator of the North Carolina Collection at UNC-Chapel Hill, has been preparing a talk for a program on important North Carolina political campaigns at the Wilson Library on the UNC campus this Friday and Saturday, Sept. 14 and 15.

The program will examine campaigns of North Carolinians like William Graham, Zeb Vance, Kerr Scott, Luther Hodges, Jim Holshouser, and Reginald Hawkins, and the Raleigh mayor's campaign of Isabella Cannon. How does William Jennings Bryan fit into this pattern?

Anthony says that the three day-multiple stop tour in our state

was reason enough. Presidential and gubernatorial campaigns have never been the same in North Carolina or the rest of the country.

But there is more. Anthony's talk is titled "Next to Nebraska: North Carolina and William Jennings Bryan's 1896 Presidential Campaign."

Anthony says that Bryan credited support from North Carolina as being, next to his home state of Nebraska, the most important for him in securing his party's nomination.

Even though Bryan, at age 36, barely met the minimum age requirement to be president, he had several things going for him in our state, according to Anthony.

- He was a compelling public speaker who had previously proved his talents with a rousing speech at the women's college in Greensboro, where he gained many admirers.

- He had made a good friend of Josephus Daniels, the young but influential editor of the Raleigh News & Observer.

- He was a pro-farmer advocate who had admirers not only among Democrats but also among supporters of the Populist Party, which had come to power in the North Carolina legislature in a cooperative or fusion effort with the Republican Party. Many North Carolinians, whatever their political party, agreed with Bryan's efforts to increase the supply of money by coining more silver and weakening the gold standard.

After his famous "Cross of Gold" convention speech opened the door, Bryan's North Carolina supporters were poised to help him win the nomination.

Bryan lost the election. But his vigorous effort won in North Carolina and led to earthshaking changes in the state's political power structure. Bryan's candidacy drew support from Populists, thereby weakening their fragile partnership with Republicans. That change led to the 1898 and 1900 White Supremacy campaigns that destroyed the Populists, marginalized the Republicans, and froze African-Americans from the North Carolina political process for most of the 20th Century.

Blame it on Bryan.

## We Get Letters

### 'Lunch room police' violated constitution

To the Editor:

I recently read an article about a preschool child in Raeford who had her "home-packed lunch" stolen by "lunch room police" and replaced with three pieces of meat from the school lunchroom menu. She must have been stuffed!

If this story is true, I am compelled to ask, where in the pages of the Constitution for the United States, the Supreme Law of the Land, does it 'specifically' grant the Federal government the authority to harass preschool children in this fashion? Does it not suggest to a child's not fully developed mind that the school knows more than mommy or daddy? Where in the pages of the Constitution does it grant the school the authority to demand what a home-packed lunch contains?

I know not what her parents did, but I know what I would have done. First, the person or persons of government-assumed authority would have been charged with theft of a child's meal! That would have

been followed with a charge of violating the 4th and the 10th Amendments to the Constitution.

If that were my child, she would not have set foot in that school again until the power hungry, dim-twitted "police of the lunchroom" had been discharged from the school system entirely.

As soon as your school system discovers that the laws of the Federal government do not override the laws of a Sovereign State government, this kind of 'horse defecates' will cease.

George E. Sexton  
USAF Retired  
Shepherd, Montana

*Editor's note: This story is six months old and even Rush Limbaugh has let it go, but apparently word has now reached Montana. There was much weeping and gnashing of teeth when a preschool student's lunch from home lacked an ingredient (milk) that nutritionists feel is necessary for a balanced meal. A teacher*

*who noticed it, and trying to conform to their policy, apparently inadvertently went too far and, instead of giving the child milk, sent her through the line for a complete meal (of chicken nuggets). After state representatives and at least two congressmen got involved, and Rush Limbaugh called the school people "food Nazis," the badgered teacher was pressured to resign. The policy, school officials say, is intended to supplement kids' lunches if teachers notice they lack prescribed ingredients. The nutritional guidelines for N.C. preschool classrooms are part of state policy, which applies only to children attending the state's taxpayer-funded subsidized pre-kindergarten program for identified at-risk four-year-olds. It does not apply to students attending K-12 public school. In response to the situation, N.C. legislators introduced a state law so parents can opt out of the supplemental food program. It hasn't passed yet, however.*

### Should state pay incentives to a retailer?

BY SCOTT MOONEYHAM  
Capitol Press Association

When it comes to taxpayer-provided incentives for business, those provided to retailers make the least sense.

The reason: Retailers need consumers/taxpayers more than consumers/taxpayers need them. Retailers have little leeway when building or renting stores. They go where the demographics and transportation infrastructure suggests they will see the most traffic.

People may do a bit of oohing and ahing when the hot, new restaurant franchise or big box retailer comes to town. That's still no reason to throw tax dollars at a company to bring relatively low-paying service jobs to a community when it is needed by the retailer to expand its customer base and revenue flow.

Distribution centers built by retailers are a different animal, posing trickier questions for the government officials given the task of handing out cash and other inducements to lure jobs to the state and its regions.

This entire business of business incentives is distasteful.

But let's set aside the broader question of whether state and local governments should even be handing out tax dollars to convince businesses to build here or there.

They have. They do. For the foreseeable future, they will.

So, if they do and will, are retail distribution centers the kind of thing that state commerce officials should try to lure with incentive dollars?

They recently did. Gas station and convenience store operator Sheetz Inc. will receive up to \$2.7 million from the state over the next 12 years if it meets employment and other targets.

The company plans to build a distribution center in Burlington. It is expected to employ 254 people by the end of 2018, and the company will invest \$32.8 million in building the facility. Based in Altoona, Pa., the company has been expanding into North Carolina for a few years now, with high-ceiling, nicely-laid out stores that offer fresh-made sandwiches.

The distribution center will serve North Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia.

So, perhaps the company

could have hopped further up Interstate 85 and built in South Hill, Va., or directly above Burlington in Danville, Va., along U.S. 29. State officials had to be concerned that was a possibility.

Still, the decision probably isn't sitting too well in some corners today.

Three large convenience store chains are headquartered in North Carolina -- Pantry/Kangaroo, WilcoHess and VPS Convenience Stores. All three compete with Sheetz for business, and the news that the state has furthered that competition probably isn't very welcome.

The jobs that will be coming to Burlington also aren't going to be at the higher end of the pay scale, like those where the state doles out money for manufacturing or pharmaceutical jobs. Based on the projected payroll, those 254 jobs would average \$29,133 in annual salary.

Nonetheless, it's hard to say no when 254 jobs can be plopped on this stretch of highway or one across the state line.

It becomes even more difficult in these tough economic times, when your unemployment rate exceeds 9 percent.



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