

# Raleigh desperately needs nonpartisan think tank

**R**ALEIGH — Attention millionaires and billionaires and anyone else with extra money who wants to spend it in a meaningful way in North Carolina.

Raleigh desperately needs a nonpartisan, independent think tank to examine important issues from a neutral perspective and bring some level of clarity to debates dividing this state.

This topic comes to mind often, and did so again as the Fourth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals recently ruled the General Assembly's voter ID legislation unconstitutional. Over the course of two days, I received countless press releases about the ruling — all from either politicians or conservative or liberal interest groups. Having seen so many news releases over the years from these same senders, I could have almost written them myself.

I didn't receive a single email from any group that could claim any sort of political neutrality on this issue, and that's almost al-

ways the case.

In other words, the voter ID debate — along with many other important discussions going on in the state capital these days — goes on without substantive input from any organization that could honestly claim political neutrality.

Isn't that the job of the media? Maybe to some extent. But it's the media's job to report on issues fairly, giving both sides an opportunity to make their points. Most media organizations don't employ trained scientists, economists, tax or education experts either.

That's where a nonpartisan, independent think tank could serve an important role in informing our politicians and challenging both sides to make decisions in the best interest of all North Carolina's residents.

North Carolina already has partisan think

tanks, like the conservative John Locke Foundation and the liberal NC Policy Watch, among others. They do a good job examining issues, but their opinions are widely known and predictable.

Our elected representatives and senators in the General Assembly know this, and my guess is they rarely even read the opinions and research that come from the other side. And they take the research and opinions that come from their side as gospel.

This only serves to divide our legislature even more.

This is where a trusted, independent organization could play a vital role in ensuring that legislators have as much information as possible before them when making important decisions about the future of the state.

Such an organization would offer its re-

search and opinion based on what is best for North Carolina, not what's best for a certain fraction of society based on political ideology.

If nothing more, it would give lawmakers another source to consider in making decisions, one that isn't tainted by political pressures or donors' money.

This wouldn't be easy. To be successful, such a think tank would have to prove over time that it is truly above the political fray. It would have to be transparent about its donors. It would have to hire the right people.

In the end, we could only hope that this think tank would become a trusted source of reliable information for all legislators, regardless of political affiliation.

We could only hope that Republicans and Democrats would see that their respective sides aren't always right on the complex issues facing our state.

And act accordingly.

*Patrick Gannon is the columnist for the Capitol Press Association.*

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Mr. Trump Brings a Guest to the Intelligence Briefing



Letters to the Editor

## Court a blow to discrimination in NC

Dear Editor:  
 The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit recently invalidated North Carolina's discriminatory voter restrictions. The court found that our State intentionally restricted the voting rights of blacks.  
 Beginning in 2000, our State passed a series of reforms that benefited all voters, particularly black voters. Black voter registration and election turnout increased significantly, and by 2013, had reached near-parity with white registration and turnout rates.  
 In 2013, our State turned back the clock and we lost the first week of early voting, same-day registration, pre-registration for 16 and 17 year olds, and out-of-precinct voting (i.e., voting at the wrong precinct, but in the correct county). The new law also required photo IDs starting this year.  
 Before enacting the law, the legislature requested racial data on several voting practices. The court determined that the legislature used the

racial data to "target African Americans with almost surgical precision." What did the court mean by that?  
 Well, the racial data requested by the legislature showed that blacks disproportionately used the first seven days of early voting.  
 The racial data requested by the legislature also showed that blacks disproportionately used same-day registration.  
 The racial data requested by the legislature also showed that blacks disproportionately used pre-registration for 16 and 17 year olds.  
 The racial data requested by the legislature also showed that blacks disproportionately voted out-of-precinct.  
 Finally, the racial data requested by the legislature showed that blacks disproportionately lack the most common kind of photo ID, those issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles. The racial data also showed that blacks tend to use in-person voting, while

whites disproportionately use mail-in absentee voting. The State claimed that the photo ID requirement was established as a measure to control existing fraud. However, the State failed to provide the court with any evidence of in-person voter fraud. And although there was evidence of mail-in absentee voter fraud, our legislature chose to exempt absentee voting from the photo ID requirement.  
 The court decision prohibits the State from requiring photo IDs in future elections, including the November 2016 election. It restores a week of early voting and pre-registration for 16 and 17 year olds, and ensures that same-day registration and out-of-precinct voting will remain in effect.  
 Thanks to the Fourth Circuit Court for restoring our voting rights and blocking the State from discriminating against the citizens of North Carolina.

**Nancy Theodore Hertford**

## July 3 fireworks supporters, thanks

Dear Editor,  
 The 2016 Perquimans County Fireworks Show was again a big hit and the best show in the Albemarle region on the Fourth of July holiday weekend. Since the show, I have received calls almost daily thanking the volunteers, financial supporters, pyrotechnics contractor and first responders for all they did to make the show happen and another great success.  
 I would like to take a moment to personally echo that thanks and support and also let you know who made financial contributions to make the show great in your community: the Perquimans County Farm Bureau Board of Directors, Frank and Connie Jaklic, IBX Insurance Agency, Bill Sawyer, Miriam (Ray) Haskett, Gregory and Associates, Steve and Sharon S. Lane, Meghan and Salter Shoaf, the Parksville Ruritan Club, Layden's Supermarket, Reed Oil Company, the Town of Hertford, American Legion #362, Michael and Michelle Winslow, Alan and Kathleen Barnes, the Durants Neck Ruritan Club, Pepsi, Russell Waddell and Nancy Theodore, Charles and Rosanne Blankenship, Martha Borders, Greg and Anne Benton, Apex Clean Energy, Virginia Miller and Don Keith, the American Legion Auxiliary, the Winfall Fire Department, Mary Alice Brinn, Perquimans County, the Town of Winfall, and the Perquimans County Tourism Development Authority.  
 Again, thank you, for making the fireworks possible to all those that donated, and those that collected those funds. Thank you to those that volunteered to actually put on the show. Thank you Mayor Reid and thank you to the Hertford Fire Department, the Hertford Police Department, and the Perquimans County Emergency Services for making sure the show and evening were safe.

**Brandon Shoaf**  
 Perquimans County  
 Fireworks Committee

## Execution of priest is an abomination

Dear Editor:  
 On Tuesday, July 26, two Islamic terrorists stormed into a church in the French town of Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray during the celebration of Mass. They made the 85-year-old priest kneel and, after making a speech in Arabic, cut his throat.  
 I take this personally. And perhaps all Americans should.  
 Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray is in Normandy, that part of France where thousands of Americans gave their lives to liberate France from Nazi occupation in 1944. Any American who has ever visited the Allied cemeteries in Normandy has felt the special bond between us and this land made sacred

by the blood of our soldiers.  
 The French of that region have not forgotten. In 1964, two decades after D-Day, I happened to be having a mid-afternoon beer with an American friend in Amiens, not far from Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray. The bar was empty, except for three old men sitting at the far end of the room. After eying us for a while, one of the men came over to our table and asked, "Are you American?" When I said yes, the Frenchman held out his hand and said, "I want to thank you for what you did for us." I was deeply moved by this unsolicited and heart-felt gratitude.  
 Normandy also happens to be the land of my mother's ancestors who

emigrated to Canada in the 17th century. I share my blood with the people of Normandy.  
 Finally, I am a Catholic. The execution of a priest in his sanctuary during the most solemn of Catholic ceremonies is an unspeakable abomination. Worse, this atrocity was committed in the name of another religion, Islam.  
 If this does not rouse the people of France—and those Muslims who abhor radical extremism—to excise this growing cancer in their midst, I don't know what will. Whatever they do, I will take it personally.

**Claude Milot Hertford**

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