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North Carolina Homeowners Could Face Insurance Increases Between 42% And 99%

North Carolina Insurance Commissioner Mike Causey announced the North Carolina Rate Bureau filed with the NC Department of Insurance asking for an average statewide increase in homeowners' insurance of 42.2% with amounts as high as 99% in coastal areas. The Rate Bureau has asked that the rate increase begin August 1, 2024.

Property owners throughout North Carolina are outraged. With cost-of-living increases felt with food, services, taxes and fuel, the section of the population living on a fixed income would no longer be able to make ends meet.

"I moved to North Carolina to retire. I had my budget worked out, I felt like I was in control. Everyday I get notified of another increase. When does this stop?"

Mary Hartman stated, frustrated with not knowing if staying in North Carolina was going to be realistic.

Coastal communities would be the hardest hit with a 99% requested increase. In December, insurance for both property and vehicles increased for many in North Carolina residents by an average of 9.8%



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Topsail Gun Gal 2024

By Dorothy Royal

20,000 used electric cars will be hitting the market as Hertz rental car company has decided to replace those vehicles with gas powered vehicles for their rental fleet. One of the reasons given was the enormous expense of repairs when electric vehicles are damaged in an accident.

Across the country, 12 Attorney Generals have asked the FDA to reduce Marijuana from a Schedule 1 narcotic (which includes heroin and LSD) to a Schedule III narcotic, basically reducing the penalty and restrictions that currently make the organic product a felony in some states. Currently Marijuana is legal as a recreational drug in 24 states and for medical use in 38 states. The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians voted in 2023 to legalize marijuana sale and possession for adults 21 and older on the tribal lands. The Eastern Band had already authorized its use for medical purposes. This action is the first time a southern state has legalized marijuana use for adults. In states where marijuana has been legalized for recreational use, the criminal market has been undercut and the sales tax has generated millions in tax dollars.

The Governor of Texas has made a bold statement. Governor Abbott signed a bill that would make illegal

immigration a state crime. Police would now be allowed to arrest people that entered the country illegally.

“Operation Lone Star” which is a multi-agency alliance between the Governor, the Texas Department of Public Safety and Texas National Guard was created to stop illegal immigration and the smuggling of drugs and weapons into the United States. Since the start of the project, there have been almost 500,000 illegal immigrant apprehensions and 40,000 criminal arrests. Over 450 million doses of fentanyl have been seized.

As if living in North Carolina was expensive enough, the N.C. Rate Bureau has submitted a request with the NC Department of Insurance to raise homeowner’s insurance rates up to 99%. That doesn’t sound legal to me. The Rate Bureau says the average increase would be around 42% across the state, but the coastal region would be much higher in the 79%-99% category. I don’t know about you, but there are very few expenses in my life that I can adjust for an increase of 99% without it financially hurting. Apparently, the N.C. Rate Bureau is not made up of homeowners with limited resources for income. What the state must take into consideration is how many people will be forced to drop their insurance all together.

Remember knowledge is power and living is expensive and securing our borders is essential to all of us.



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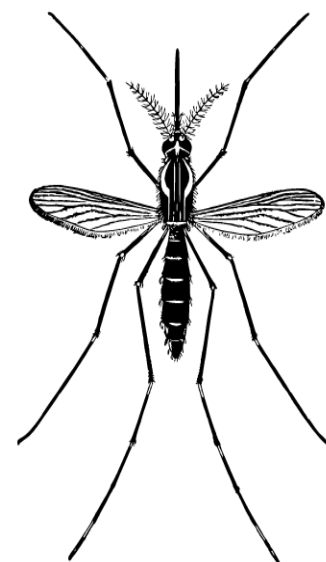
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Charlie



My name is Charlie, but I'm a tiny young lady! People tell me that I am so beautiful that I just can't be real...but I am! My long soft fur makes me look like a fuzzy stuffed animal. I had a very traumatized kitten hood & witnessed my brother getting eaten by a coyote. Thank goodness I made it out of there when FURR saved me. The ordeal has left me very scared, but I'm learning to trust the people who love me. I just want a calm, quiet home where I can be brushed, petted & held! Most of the time I just tuck my little head down by my chest. I do love treats & shaking that jar gets my attention every time! Would you like a little cuddle bug? Come meet me!

Blue Marlin



I am a Russian Blue look a like with a white spot on my chest! My fur is that silky, shiney silvery blue/gray color. My eyes tell you how truly sweet I am! My favorite thing is being scratched behind my ears & on top of my back. Next to that, I'd say kitty treats are my next favorite thing! I was homeless until FURR saved me! My brother, Perch, was also saved & we look like twin Russian Blue kitties! We can't wait to see if Christmas will mean a new home for us! Our paws are crossed for our dream to come true!

Bubbles



My name is Bubbles and I'm a BEAUTIFUL little boy that FURR saved! My best traits are my silky smooth fur & my adorable personality! I have the sweetest little meow & I love to tell everybody what I'm thinking. You just won't find a calmer, more laid back kinda kitty than me! I totally vetted & ready to move on with my life. FURR has prepared me well. I also have 2 sisters: Beaches, who looks just like me and Mermaid who is a tortoise shell. We all three had a rough start in life. Are u the one to change all that for me? For us???

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Exploring Some Of The Many Types Of Dance For Health Benefit

By LuAnn Hooper

I'll start out with the 3 types I am most familiar with, and involved in. Traditional Appalachian Clogging/ Folk Dancing. Clogging is a truly American dance form that began in the Appalachian Mountains and now enjoys widespread popularity throughout the United States and around the world. As the Appalachians were settled in the mid 1700's by the Irish, Scottish, English and Dutch-Germans, the folk dances of each area met and began to combine in an impromptu foot-tapping style, and the beginning of clog dancing as we know it today. Several types of Clogging are Buck, Free style/ Hoe Down, and Flatfoot, which are usually done solo to live Fiddle and Bluegrass Bands, Smooth and Running -Set and traditional Appalachian clogging are usually done in formations changing partners, also with live bands or with CD, vinyl records, with the "Caller" out on the floor with the group calling the different formations. There are Team Clogging, Couples and Solo dancing. Square Dancing is usually 4 to six couples doing formations, changing partners and the "Caller" can be on the floor with them or on the side line calling out the formations to the group on the floor. and the music can be with a live band or vinyl record, tape or CD music. Maggie Valley is the Clogging Capital of the eastern US.

If you have ever had the chance to visit "The Stomping Grounds Barn", in Maggie Valley, you have experienced the best of the best Clogging entertainment! And, Clogging is the State Dance of West Virginia, Kentucky, and North Carolina! Some of the health benefits are: Cardiovascular exercise, strength and endurance, stress relieve, social interaction, and balance and coordination.

I've mentioned 2 of the 3 that I am most familiar with, the 3rd being Belly Dancing. Oriental dance or "Raqs-Sharqi" is the correct name for Belly Dance, (also called Middle Eastern Dance), and is one of the oldest forms of dance. The Historical data on Belly Dance is fragmentary as there is relatively little documentation throughout the age of literacy. The name of "Belly Dance" was coined in 1893 by Sol Bloom, an American Event Promoter, who was trying to stir up public interest in the "Streets of Cairo" exhibit at the Chicago World's Fair, (Little Egypt & the Dance of the Seven Veils). This beautiful dance did NOT originate as a dance of seduction for the sultans, but as a folk Dance that people, male and female, would do at joyous occasions. In certain cultures, it was also a dance that "trained women's muscles" for childbirth and was usually performed by women for other women, their families or their husbands, but never for strangers. There are several styles of Belly Dance, to name a few,

American Cabaret, Turkish Cabaret, American Tribal, and Tribal Fusion. Belly Dance is a low impact, weight bearing exercise which is especially good for women and it can reduce the risk of

osteoporosis, and is suitable for all ages and body types, good cardio, stress relief, improved flexibility and self-confidence.

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Principles of Good Governance Adhering to the Will of the People

By Joshua Patti
Holly Ridge Town Council Member



Principles of Good Governance

In this op-ed series, we delve into the principles of good governance, drawing inspiration from a variety of real-world experiences to illuminate the key factors that contribute to effective and accountable governance. As Mayor Pro Tempore of Holly Ridge, I will be using my real experiences to write an honest op-ed series on good governance, where I'll share insights and lessons learned to contribute to the well-being and progress of Holly Ridge. Each piece explores different aspects of governance, emphasizing transparent communication, collaboration, and the responsible handling of confidential matters. The series aims to provide insights into the universal challenges and successes of governance, offering valuable lessons applicable to diverse contexts for the establishment of robust, responsive, and accountable public institutions.

In the pursuit of an effective and just government, one of the fundamental principles that must be upheld is the unwavering commitment to the will of the people. Democracy, at its core, thrives on the active participation and consent of the governed. In this second installment of our series on the Principles of Good Government, we delve into article two, focusing on the importance of decision-making by elected councils that align with the desires and aspirations of the population they serve.

1. Council Decisions Detached from Personal Interests

A cornerstone of good governance is the recognition that those entrusted with making decisions on behalf of the public must act selflessly and without personal bias. It is imperative for council members to rise above personal interests and consider the greater good. Decisions made by the council should be driven by a dedication to public service rather than personal gain. By divorcing decisions from personal interests, the council ensures that policies are shaped with the welfare of the community in mind. This commitment establishes a foundation of trust between the governing body and

the citizens, fostering an environment where the public can rely on the integrity of their representatives.

2. Openness to Change Reflecting Current Population Desires

A dynamic and responsive government is crucial for the well-being of society. Adhering to the will of the people underscores the necessity for the council to be open to change, adapting policies and strategies to align with the evolving needs and desires of the current population. The demographic, social, and economic landscape of a community is subject to change, and a government that remains stagnant risks losing touch with the pulse of its people.

An open-minded approach to governance allows for the incorporation of new ideas, perspectives, and innovations. This adaptability ensures that the government remains relevant and effective in addressing the challenges and aspirations of the population it serves. It is through this flexibility that a government can truly reflect the will of the people, embracing the dynamic nature of society.

3. Transparency in Decision-Making

Central to the principle of adhering to the will of the people is transparency in

decision-making. This emphasizes the importance of openness and clarity in the council's deliberations and actions.

Transparent governance builds trust and confidence among the citizens, as they are kept informed about the decision-making processes and the factors influencing policies.

By providing clear information on the rationale behind decisions, the council invites public participation and scrutiny. This transparency not only holds the government accountable but also empowers citizens to actively engage in the democratic process. Informed citizens are better equipped to contribute meaningfully to the shaping of their community's future.

In conclusion, adhering to the will of the people is a vital principle of government. A government that upholds this principle through unbiased decision-making, openness to change, and transparency establishes a foundation for a thriving and democratic society. As we explore further principles in this series, the overarching theme remains clear: effective governance is rooted in the empowerment and representation of the people it serves.

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Joe Cina

I am honored to be running to represent all of the citizens of Pender County again in the 2024 election cycle. In 2022 the voters in Pender County were misled and in 2023 their votes were overlooked. In 2024, I am back and ready to represent each of you and your families in Pender County as we take on the establishment and seek to restore the people's voice. We will be heard in 2024. It is time to give our local government back to the people.

Our concerns have gone unaddressed for too long and it is time to address them. Transparency is non-existent and traffic is horrific. Schools are still overcrowded, understaffed, and not protected. Our community has to pay to use our own beaches and our parks are far underfunded to meet our families needs. Our emergency services divisions are far understaffed and under equipped to meet our communities needs. Growth is out of control and our voices are being ignored.

As a father of 3 children growing up in our community, a substitute teacher, a business owner, and an active community volunteer I am asking for the citizens of Pender County to vote for change in 2024. The time is now for new leadership in our community and I look forward to serving each of you and your families.

Cinaforpendercommissioner@gmail.com



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Fashion Statements: B-B-B-Bingo

By **Becky Borneman**

I thought it would be a peaceful Friday night. I called some friends and we decided to head on over to the Sneads Ferry Community Center for a friendly ladies night of Bingo playing put on by volunteers of the Sneads Ferry Community Council.

We were one of the first ones there, paid for our bingo cards, got our seats and some concession snacks and settled in for some fun. It was set up for about 100 people. Within 5 minutes of us sitting down, there was a line out of the door of about 200 people. All of a sudden the volunteers who were putting on this event were running around trying to get up more tables and chairs for the influx of people they weren't expecting. And they did it! They sat 250 bingo players!

The games started and I quickly realized that these were some SERIOUS bingo players. I had flashbacks of attending bingo with my great grandma when she was in "the home". I was about 7 and she would let me spend the night at her retirement complex with her and she would take me to bingo in the Rec room where those ladies had some of the scariest looking troll dolls and gnomes "for good luck" I was told. They scared me half to death!

So we start playing bingo and it's intense y'all! Screaming, yelling, hooting and hollering. The prizes for each round were donated by vendors attending the event and setting up their products. I think the most popular prize was the Tupperware. Lawd let me tell you, when the Tupperware was announced the room erupted in applause and screams.

I swear it was like the 80's all over again when Tupperware parties were popular.

We sat at a table with a group of girls, one of which was celebrating a birthday, and they were fun. They had double the cards and were just as intense as everyone else playing. We all hit it off. By the end of the evening, my friend Erica decided we all need matching shirts for the next time. My friend Jenn, who had never played bingo before, said she was quitting her job and becoming a professional bingo player. I looked around the room at the chaos and craziness and realized one thing...I found my people!!

And the best part...the proceeds from this event go towards upgrading and maintaining the center, putting on community events such as Shrimp Festival, Christmas in the Ferry, and kids

events. Also at the end of every year 20% of the money goes back into the community. In the past couple of years the Sneads Ferry Community Council has paid off over \$2000 in overdue lunches at Dixon High School and donated over \$2000 to the Dixon school district CHEW program each year. Now that's a cause we can all support while having blast!

See y'all at the next Ladies Night Bingo, Friday, February 9th at the Sneads Ferry Community Center - 6:30pm



(L-R) Kristina Yates, Birthday Girl Sarah Morgan, Vikki Rehab & Danielle Vertolli

North Carolina Coast Host Presents The 2024 Tourism Impact Award Winners

By **Tammy Proctor**

The welcome centers of Currituck County, the co-director of the NC Pickle Festival, and a 77-year old vacation rental agency were presented the 2023 Tourism Impact Awards at the annual North Carolina Coast Host meeting. The annual meeting was hosted by Cape Fear Vineyard and Winery, Elizabethtown, and the White Lake Chamber of Commerce. "We were pleased to present awards to our highest tourism award to those who have made a tremendous impact on our industry," said Salem Clarke, president of NC Coast Host and the Tourism Director of Onslow County.

According to Tameron Kugler, director of the Currituck Department of Travel

and Tourism, said the welcome centers staff greet visitors, provide information, and dog treats to those who stop by the Currituck centers.

Julie Beck, the co-director of the NC Pickle Festival and the director of the Mt. Olive Chamber of Commerce, was presented the Central Tourism Impact Award. A world traveler, Beck has welcomed thousands of visitors to the NC Pickle Festival for the last 30 years. An instructor at Mt. Olive University, Beck has been a featured speaker on topics such as festival planning and festival safety.

Ward Realty of the Greater Topsail Area is one of the original developers of Topsail Island. In its third generation of leadership, Ward Realty specializes in

real estate and vacation rentals. The company is 77 years old and has provided generations with vacation memories on Topsail Island.

NC Coast Host is a membership organization that represents the counties, towns, attractions, and lodging east of I-95. The organization provides members with visibility through marketing on the website, <https://www.coasthost-nc.com>, coop advertising, networking, and sharing of best practices.

For more information about NC Coast Host, contact NC Coast Host President Salem Clarke at 910-347-3141.



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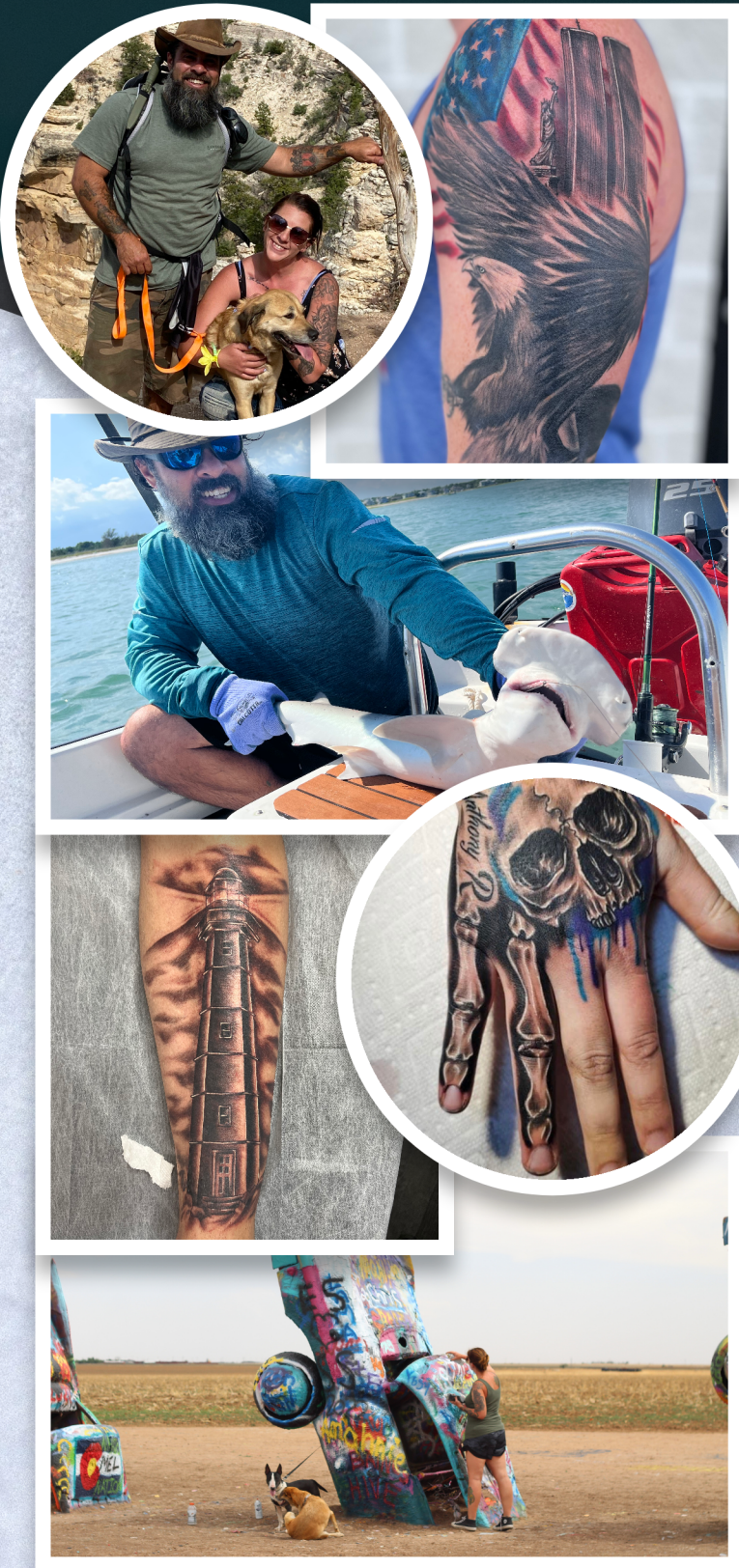
Ray Aloy and Lauren Michelle have a successful tattoo studio in Roanoke, Virginia, but after a visit to the North Carolina coast, they realized adding a second studio was in their future.

Evolution Tattoo, located on Highway 17 in Holly Ridge across from Smoky Tonys Restaurant, opened this January. With expectations of opening this past fall, Ray Aloy and Lauren Michelle are finally thrilled to be open and in business.

Ray, a tattoo artist with over 15 years of experience and who specializes in black and grey work, has recently acquired a taste for boating and fishing, making the Topsail area perfect for his new passion.

Lauren, whose wonderful and creative art and sculptures cover the walls in the waiting area, has been doing tattoos for about 3 years. In addition to tattoo work, Ray and Lauren are both artists that work with paint, charcoal, air brush and welding.

Evolution Tattoo is open every day, except Wednesday, from Noon until 8pm.



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Pender County Commissioner Candidate Questions

Joe Cina



What is the primary issue facing the county that led you to run for office?

As great a community as Pender County has always been, unfortunately it is overwhelmed with numerous issues that have not been addressed for far too long. The majority of these issues could have been prevented or at least lessened if only our previous elected leaders would have planned for the future of our families. Overcrowded schools, over congested roads, out of control growth and development, and an infrastructure that is strained beyond its abilities all plague our community. I am seeking the communities support in being their voice to address these concerns from day 1 in office for their families and mine and for their future here in Pender County.

Would you support the purchase of county beach land to allow Pender County residents the opportunity to enjoy the beach without having to pay for parking. If not, would you work with local beach communities in Pender County to obtain a reduced rate for parking for Pender County residents?

The failed previous representation of Pender County citizens has lead to this situation. NO Pender County resident should have to pay to park to visit their local beach. Current citizens of Pender County all pay taxes and contribute to our community and the last thing they should have to do is pay to enjoy one of our communities most desired amenities while they raise their families.

What are your skills and experiences that make you the right choice for Pender County voters?

I fully understand that as people we are all raised differently and have different views of how many different community concerns can be addressed. I also believe that as an elected leader you are chosen to represent your entire community not just a selected few. As a father raising 3 children in our community I have a vested interest in our future here in Pender County. As a former law enforcement officer, educator, business owner, and coach of our youth here in our community I am more than qualified to make educated decisions for the entire community and

protect all of our family's futures as we navigate through the crucial times created by our previous leaders who failed to plan for the growth we are experiencing currently.

If elected, would you attend local town meetings that are within Pender County to hear their concerns and to show the support of the Pender County Board of Commissioners?

I would absolutely attend as many community meetings as possible and take it a step further and host several of my own town hall style meetings to open up the line of communication with our citizens and the local government. Currently the citizens of Pender County do not have this line of communication. Even the public opinion piece of our County Commissioner meetings held twice a month has become less inviting by moving the open speaking segment from the beginning of the meetings to the end of the meeting. We the people are being silenced by our own local government and it must stop immediately.

If elected, what would you do to address the major concerns of the safety of travelers on Highway 17 in the Hampstead area? Would you consider a moratorium on construction until the bypass was completed?

Traffic concerns have always been a top issue for our community. For years previous candidates and elected officials

have used this topic to gain votes yet nothing has been done to address the concern. One previous elected official even went as far as to state in an open forum to the community that he knew people in Raleigh and could get the bypass completed more quickly. Well, years later and still no completed bypass.

However, I will argue that the bypass is not the solution and will only bring more traffic and development to our community especially in the over-populated, strained, over-developed east side of Pender County area. We must address the issue in front of us currently and plan for the future to prevent our children from having to deal with our errors. When elected I will work directly with the Pender County Sheriff, NC State Highway Patrol, and Governors Highway Safety Program immediately to address our needs in Pender County especially on Highway 17. As a community member I am tired of being mislead and want to see results immediately.

We the people must stand up and protect our futures here in Pender County for our children and their children to come. It starts by electing true representatives of our community and not establishment supported candidates who continue to make decisions for the selected few.

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- D. R. Royal

Brent Springer

What is the primary issue facing the county that led you to run for office?

Pender County is changing fast, so my top priority is protecting the things that make living here special. Protect our streets from crime. Protect our pocketbooks from high taxes. Protect our neighborhoods and schools from overcrowding. Our County is at a crossroads, and we need conservative leaders who appreciate our past while shaping our future. I am just an ordinary citizen who wants my children to grow up in a Pender County that they will cherish as much as I do.

Would you support the purchase of county beach land to allow Pender County residents the opportunity to enjoy the beach without having to pay for parking. If not, would you work with local beach communities in Pender County to obtain a reduced rate for parking for Pender County residents?

If we're being honest, filling the meter takes some of the fun out of arriving at the beach. Beautiful beaches are one of the best things about Pender County, and sometimes it is more important to protect something special rather than make a few extra bucks. I am open to considering any option that keeps parking free or affordable for our residents, whether that is allowing free parking on public lots or incentivizing private owners to limit parking rates.

What are your skills and experiences that make you the right choice for Pender County voters?

In the last two years, I have helped our Board of Education achieve major conservative victories, from protecting students from inappropriate and indoctrinating materials to rewarding good teachers with better pay. I have also had hard-working jobs my whole life and served in the military. I am proud of my accomplishments, but I believe that character is more important than a resume. Voters should know that everything I do is motivated by my faith,

family, and conservative values. You can always count on me to choose principles over politics.

If elected, would you attend local town meetings that are within Pender County to hear their concerns and to show the support of the Pender County Board of Commissioners?

Absolutely. Anyone who knows me will tell you that I value being accessible to constituents. That won't change when I am County Commissioner. The County Commission is not a one-stop shop for government in Pender County but a partner with municipalities. Countywide decisions have to work for Topsail and Surf City as much as they do for Burgaw and Rocky Point. I will strive to maintain strong relationships with all towns and their elected officials and offer a warm welcome when they attend our meetings.

If elected, what would you do to address the major concerns of the safety of travelers on Highway 17 in the Hampstead area?

Would you consider a moratorium on construction until the bypass was completed?

This is a great example of growth outpacing our infrastructure. Our traffic planning has been years behind, and we are dealing with the consequences now. We have to be very careful when considering a full-stop moratorium because that can have far-reaching effects on businesses, jobs, and the local economy. What I can promise is that I will pressure NCDOT and our leaders in Raleigh to send us adequate funding so that we aren't always playing catch-up with infrastructure. I refuse to let Pender County get the short end of the stick compared to other counties in Southeastern NC.

VOTE
March 5th

Brad George

What is the primary issue facing the county that led you to run for office?

As a lifelong resident of Pender County and having spent over 10 years on the Pender County Board of Education it allowed me the opportunity to witness the effects of rapid unplanned growth. The current UDO hasn't been updated since 2010, the comprehensive land use plan is outdated, and the future land use map doesn't reflect the current needs of the county. With the rapid development Pender is stressed in keeping up the services that the citizens desire and are entitled to. Funds are constantly having to be prioritized to maintain the current level of services leaving little to go towards enhance or expand, this causes areas of the county to become neglected and continue to fall farther behind. While residential development is a way to expand the tax base and has been the theory for a while, there comes a time when the balance shifts to becoming a tax burden Pender is at that tipping point. It is time for more focus directed toward economic growth

and development in the form of new commercial and industrial growth to help reduce the tax burden currently placed on the residential taxpayers.

Would you support the purchase of county beach land to allow Pender County residents the opportunity to enjoy the beach without having to pay for parking. If not, would you work with local beach communities in Pender County to obtain a reduced rate for parking for Pender County residents?

I would not support the purchase of "county beach land" With the enormous needs facing all of Pender County, needs such as competitive salaries for county employees, increase staffing for the Sheriff department, modernized county complexes that staff feel pride in working at, expanding the parks and recreation offers, the list goes on. As for working with local beach communities for a reduced rate, I feel the two beach towns within Pender County do an outstanding job managing one of the largest industries in Pender County. If they were willing to offer that would be great, but I don't feel as if that is a county commissioners place to make such a

request. The parking fees collected go toward beach nourishment, these funds reduce the amount of request from the County general fund.

What are your skills and experiences that make you the right choice for Pender County voters?

I served 10.5 years as an elected member of the BOE, and currently hold an appointment to the Pender board of commissioner. This experience has allowed me to work through numerous budget preparations, the ability to work with local and state officials, and the opportunity to see all areas of Pender's 900 plus square miles. These experiences allowed me to realize that one size doesn't fit all, and that there are vast differences in the needs and wants between eastern and western Pender.

If elected, would you attend local town meetings that are within Pender County to hear their concerns and to show the support of the Pender County Board of Commissioners?

If elected yes, I would attend any local or county meeting to which I was invited. I have done that in the past and will continue.

If elected, what would you do to address the major concerns of the safety of travelers on Highway 17 in the Hampstead area?

Living on the northern side of Hampstead and traveling to work in New Hanover County I realize like anyone the challenges I've had the same pleasure as others, the opportunity to be stuck for extended periods of time getting home. Unfortunately, the option for any local elected official is extremely limited. The county has no control over any roadways, speed limits are set by the NCDOT, law enforcement is performed by NC Highway Patrol, with limited traffic enforcement by the Pender County Sheriff's department. That restricts the local county government to lobbying for those changes, and lobbying for increased law enforcement presents.

Would you consider a moratorium on construction until the bypass was completed?

I have explored the requirements already, unfortunately it isn't as easy as it sounds. NC General statute 160D-107 outlines the requirements.

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Pender County Board of Education Candidate Questions

Phil Cordeiro



What is the primary issue facing the school systems that led you to run for office?

Building a new K-8 school in Hampstead will be the board's biggest challenge for the next 5-10 years. For example, the Surf City K-8 school opened in August 2018 and it's already over capacity. We cannot make that same mistake again.

As a member of the school board, I've already presented a detailed analysis to my colleagues and the superintendent regarding how the demographic data we're relying on are flawed. We cannot afford to ask the voters to approve more bonds in a few years – and ask the county commissioners to raise taxes – because we didn't do the important work of asking the right questions.

What are your skills and experiences that make you the right choice for Pender County voters?

My experience as a town manager and certified public accountant makes me uniquely qualified to participate in the budget formulation and approval processes. I am an expert in governmental accounting and can ensure financial resources are being used in the most efficient and effective way possible.

As an example of my finance experience at work, in my first six months on the board I identified approximately \$750,000 in wasteful annual spending. When I brought this to the attention of my colleagues on the board, they voted unanimously to cut that spending. We can now use those funds (totaling ~\$3 million over a four-year term) to hire teachers, counselors, bus drivers, and provide employees much-needed pay increases.

I'm also a retired Marine, and I understand the challenges our community's military families face.

More importantly, I understand the significant resources the military brings to the table.

As another example of my experience at work, soon after joining the school board I met with representatives from Camp Lejeune to see how the school system could partner with the military to help our students.

As a result of this meeting – along with staff, and fellow board member and retired soldier Brent Springer – Pender County Schools is about to implement an exciting new tutoring program. This program will provide free online tutoring in math and reading to all students in our Topsail area schools.

Further, because the military is providing this program at little-to-no cost to the county, the school system will have enough funding to offer similar in-person tutoring services to all students in our Pender and Heidi Trask area schools.

These are just a couple examples of how my outside-the-box thinking – and desire to be smart about spending – has benefitted the entire county.

Recently a young child was found unattended on Hwy 17 during school hours and was returned to the school by a passerby. If elected, what will you do to ensure something like this never happens again?

Foremost, I'm glad no harm came of this incident and I thank God for the good Samaritan that brought this child back to safety.

After hearing about this incident, I contacted the superintendent the same day to ask that he quickly investigate this issue and come to the board with recommendations for how we can ensure it doesn't happen again. I also asked the superintendent to be fully transparent about his investigation and findings. "Hiding the ball" or issuing politically-correct public statements only erodes community trust in the school system.

One of the many lessons I learned in my military career is that accountability is paramount when dealing with situations like this. And, my favorite Marine Corps leadership principle is, "Take accountability for your actions, and seek accountability from others."

The school system clearly failed in this case. We must admit our failure and learn from it. In my opinion (and experience), we learn much more from our failures than we do our successes. But, the first part of this learning process is admitting failure.

I look forward to receiving a detailed investigative report on this incident, sharing that report with the community, and collaborating with teachers and law

enforcement professionals to revise our security policies accordingly.

Do you have children or grandchildren that attend the Pender County Schools, and if so, what do you feel are the major issues that affect them?

My son will attend the new K-8 school the community is building in Hampstead, and will be a Pender County Schools student for the next decade. I have a strong interest in the school system's success.

The biggest challenge my son will face – along with all other students in our community – is overcrowded schools. Specifically, every school in the Topsail area is over-capacity and half the schools in the Pender and Heidi Trask areas will be over capacity by 2026.

The school board needs to sharply focus on solving this problem. Smartly allocating the \$178 million in school bonds passed by the voters in 2022 is key – and we must prioritize projects that create new classroom space for students.



If elected, how do you plan on filling the need for more teachers and school bus drivers? Would you support incentives, like benefits and bonuses?

The school system is understaffed, but it's important to realize this is a product of funding. The state only allocates minimal funding, and the county commissioners have been very meager in their local allocations. As a result, it's incumbent upon the school board to find savings where we can to hire more staff and increase pay.

As mentioned, last year I discovered and convinced my colleagues on the board to unanimously support eliminating approximately \$750,000 in wasteful annual spending (totaling ~\$3 million over a four-year term). I support using this funding to fill the need for more teachers and school bus drivers.

Lastly, yes, I firmly support incentives like bonuses for employees who earn them through exemplary service. As another example, in August of 2023 I made a motion to approve \$1,000 retention bonuses for all full-time school system employees. I also made a motion to approve \$5,000 recruitment bonuses for teachers in hard-to-fill positions. My colleagues on the board unanimously approved both of these initiatives.

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Tommy Reeves

What is the primary issue facing the school systems that led you to run for office?

The primary issues that led me to run for office are the overcrowding of the schools and improvements needed to make sure our teachers and staff have the tools and support they need to adequately support the learning of our children. Having lived in the Pender/New Hanover County area for most of my life, I have witnessed first-hand the growth of our community. This growth has increased our student population to the point that many of our schools are left with inadequate learning areas and not enough teaching staff. There is a current plan for a new K-8 school which will help to alleviate some of the overcrowding. However, along with the construction of the new school, we will need to make sure that our salaries for teachers and staff are structured in a way that we will not only be able to keep the staff we currently have but attract the additional staff needed. Having multiple family members who have and are working in school systems across the country, I have first-hand knowledge of the monies our teachers are outlaying to ensure their classrooms have adequate supplies. I do not believe that any teacher, staff

member or parent should be requested to supply items necessary for the classroom. If elected, I will work with my fellow Board Members to look for areas within our budget that will allow us to ensure these supplies are provided without asking teachers, staff members or parents to provide them.

What are your skills and experiences that make you the right choice for Pender County voters?

As an owner of two different successful businesses since I was 28 years old, I acquired many skills such as data analysis, budgeting, employee relations, forecasting, and customer service. I relate well to people and am open to listening to all points of view. I know that the decisions I will make will not please all, but I am running for this seat to look out for the best interest of the education system and have no other hidden agendas in place. I pride myself on my people skills and will work to try to bring unity between the Board and County Commissioners so that we can work to the common goal of improving our school system so that we can empower our children to achieve their dreams.

Recently a young child was found unattended on Hwy 17 during school hours and was returned to the school by a passerby. If elected, what will you do to ensure

something like this never happens again?

I am confident that the principal, vice principal and staff at the school have reviewed the circumstances around the incident and have put additional safety measures in place to ensure that this does not happen in the future. Additionally, while we hope these types of incidents will never happen, I am sure that other schools will take this experience and re-evaluate their campuses to aid in the prevention of this type of incident in the future.

Do you have children or grandchildren that attend the Pender County Schools, and if so, what do you feel are the major issues that affect them?

I do not have any children or grandchildren in the Pender County Schools. However, as a community business owner and resident, I encounter parents, school staff and students weekly. Based on the information I have heard, I feel like the number one issue affecting our students and teachers is the overcrowding in the classrooms. The large classroom size does not allow for an environment in which teachers can adequately work with our students and is not conducive to learning. The second issue is the focus on standardized testing. While I recognize that standardized testing is mandated at the state level, it

is not necessarily the best way to evaluate the full range of skills and knowledge that students have or the effectiveness of our teachers. They create a culture of teaching to the test, which limits the creativity and flexibility of both teachers and students. Not all students learn the same and we need to provide flexibility in education methods to help those students who need a different way of learning succeed.

If elected, how do you plan on filling the need for more teachers and school bus drivers? Would you support incentives, like benefits and bonuses?

I feel that our salary and benefits packages must be competitive with at a minimum our neighboring counties. I would support review of increasing the supplements the county funds over one-time bonus or incentive payments as that shows long term commitment and value. I would support the review of our benefits package to see how it can be improved and extended to those who may not currently be allowed to participate. While salary and benefits carry a lot of weight in hiring and keeping employees, we must also look for ways to make sure that staff feel valued and appreciated.



TOMMY REEVES

for Pender County Board of Education

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Education

Onslow County Commissioner Candidate Questions

Hans Miller

What is the primary issue facing the county that led you to run for office?

I see a real need for the Onslow County Board of Commissioners to be more "in touch" with & to listen to the PEOPLE of Onslow County, particularly on the south end (Stump Sound: Sneads Ferry, Folkstone, Holly Ridge, North Topsail Beach & Surf City) part of our county. I propose periodic town hall meetings in all areas of the county, where citizens can bring their needs & their recommendations to me, so I can properly represent them to the entire Board of Commissioners. No one in a public office should ever make any decisions solely based on campaign contributions. Decisions should always be made for the legitimate needs of the people, in general.

If elected, would you support an increase in local option sales tax, and if so, would you support a decrease in the property tax rate?

Yes to both. It is well known that I have been speaking with members of our county's State delegation (Senate & House of Representatives) about this issue for a long time.

I recommended a local quarter cent sales tax increase, which would bring a significant increase to our county budget for county needs. Then, after evaluation, the county property tax rate can be reduced for property owners. We have many people shopping & visiting our county, who make purchases of items & services. The quarter cent tax increase would be barely noticed by purchasers. I think it is unfair to place most of the county tax burden on property owners. If any State senator or representative is not in favor of raising sales tax for this minimal amount, they should put it to the PEOPLE as a referendum & let the PEOPLE decide the next election.

What are your skills and experience that make you the right choice for Onslow County voters?

As my public service record shows, I have years of experience in policy making, budgeting, managing, administering & LEADING in the military service & in Onslow County. I had to defend a security system maintenance budget to the U.S. Navy Comptroller in Washington, DC when I was on active duty. As the Police Chief of Albert J. Ellis airport, I proposed a budget to the airport director for my police force. As Sheriff of Onslow County for two terms (8 years), I was responsible for all

budgeting for the Onslow County Sheriff's Office & the Onslow County Detention Center (Jail). A very detailed & complex process. My goal was to only ask for needed funds & not to "over spend" taxpayer money. During my second term, I voluntarily attended almost all Board of County Commissioners (BOC) meetings, for security & to reduce Deputy Sheriff overtime. I am very well aware of the procedures that the BOC follows. I have always been honest, transparent & accessible to the PEOPLE that I serve.

If elected, would you support the construction of a multi-purpose sports and entertainment complex in Onslow County?

Yes. I would support a public/private partnership to find a location, determine the appropriate size, layout & construction & ensure that, in the long run (years ahead) the county citizens will benefit by bringing more visitors & events (sports, military events, conventions, etc.) into our county. The associated benefits would be more tourism funds, sales taxes, employment opportunities for our county citizens, especially our young people. Of course, the cost will be evaluated (cost/benefit analysis).

If elected, would you attend local town meetings that are within Onslow County to hear their concerns and to show the support of the Onslow County Board of Commissioners?

Of course. As the public record shows, as Sheriff of Onslow county, I organized multiple town hall meetings in all parts of Onslow County, to inform & to listen to the PEOPLE. These town hall meetings were conducted in a frequent basis, until a hurricane & a viral pandemic put a stop to it. I do understand that, as just one member of the Board of Commissioners, I would not be able to organize a town hall meeting just by myself. However, if the citizens of a city, a town or an unincorporated community of Onslow County want to organize a town hall meeting, I will make efforts to attend. (I might wear blue jeans & take notes for action).

P.S.: One of my goals is to reduce EMS response times to the southern area of our county. I also strongly believe in school & church security & plan to work closely with the OCSO to keep our citizens, old & young, safe.

Cheryl Coulson



What is the primary issue facing the county that led you to run for office?

There is not one issue that I would consider the "most important". Many of my platform points are deeply intertwined with one another. My community involvement and Criminal Defense experience requires that I spend a great amount of time within our jail to work with clients, many that face addiction and live with mental health challenges. I see our needs from within and I believe what we need currently is a Comprehensive Approach to Community Safety and Welfare.

Enhanced Support for the Sheriff's

Office

CURRENT ISSUE: Address the current challenges within the Sheriff's office, including the need for additional funding to accommodate staff and inmate needs. PROPOSED SOLUTION: Advocate for increased budget allocation to improve facilities and offer better retention incentives for staff. Emphasize the importance of well-supported law enforcement in maintaining community safety.

Addressing Mental Health and Substance Abuse

CURRENT ISSUE: Highlight the strain on the jail system due to individuals with addiction and mental health issues, compounded by the rising concerns of gang violence.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: Propose the development of a larger, specialized facility for mental health and substance abuse. This would allow the jail to focus more on violent crimes and alleviate the burden of failing mental health and rehabilitation systems.

Supporting Emergency Services

CURRENT ISSUE: Discuss the challenges in attracting and retaining emergency service personnel, crucial in handling drug overdoses and mental health crises. PROPOSED SOLUTION: Develop strategies to improve working conditions, provide competitive incentives, and offer better support systems for these critical

frontline workers.

If elected, would you support an increase in local option sales tax, and if so, would you support a decrease in the property tax rate?

I absolutely support an increased sales tax rate in order to decrease property taxes. We live in a unique community in which the Military plays a large role. It is essential for County officials to work collaboratively with military authorities, local residents, and businesses to strike a balance that ensures fair taxation while recognizing the contributions and unique challenges posed by the presence of a large military base. It has become an even more pressing need to be able to decrease property tax with homeowners of Onslow being faced with skyrocketing insurance rates. The combination of both could be detrimental to current homeowners and prevent others from choosing to make their home in Onslow.

What are your skills and experience that make you the right choice for Onslow County voters?

Running for County Commissioner represents my commitment to leveraging my legal background, community experience, and political engagement to drive positive change and advocate for the citizens of Onslow. This step has been a natural progression of my Republican values and dedication to

creating impactful changes at a local level. My community involvement and experience working with clients who face addiction and live with mental health challenges has not only honed my empathetic skills but also deepened my understanding of the complex needs facing our society. As I continue to evolve in my multifaceted roles, I have remained dedicated to being a voice for those in need and a force for positive transformation in our community.

If elected, would you support the construction of a multi-purpose sports and entertainment complex in Onslow County?

A multi-purpose sports complex is something that I have been encouraging our local elected officials to consider for several years now. I believe that we need to be able to better provide safe environments for our children to go to as well as having a location large enough to also act as a venue to bring entertainment revenue.

If elected, would you attend local town meetings that are within Onslow County to hear their concerns and to show the support of the Onslow County Board of Commissioners?

Yes, I think the best way to address the needs of the County is to communicate and listen to the citizens in every part of it.

John Davis

What is the primary issue facing the county that led you to run for office?

I believe we need to tackle taxes. We need to reduce our net taxes. After the assessment our taxes jumped significantly and are affecting everyone in this inflated economy but in particular, we have a lot of people on fixed income. This in conjunction with the proposed rate increase for our insurance is just too much. We don't have a revenue problem, we have a spending problem.

If elected, would you support an increase in local option sales tax, and if so, would you support a decrease in the property tax rate?

I believe a sales tax for the county and local municipalities should be considered.



This will allow us to reduce the property tax rate and put more of the tax burden on tourists instead of our citizens who live here in Onslow County. I do concur that if a sales tax is introduced that the board needs to make a commitment in the ordinance – in writing to the citizen - to reduce property taxes accordingly. Furthermore, we need to promote economic growth and development. By doing so we increase net revenues to the county and keep our taxes to the individual lower.

What are your skills and experience that make you the right choice for Onslow County voters?

I have been a business owner in Onslow County for 20 years and I believe the government should be run more like

a business. Which means financial accountability to the voter.

I have been Mayor of Swansboro for 6 years where we have kept the tax rate flat for 6 years and I have been able to work with our state and county leaders to bring in around \$10,000,000 to our town.

If elected, would you support the construction of a multi-purpose sports and entertainment complex in Onslow County?

I believe a multi-purpose sports and entertainment complex would be valuable to our community. I believe it should be done in a way that serves our outlying communities and municipalities. Partnerships will be critical to this being a success in Onslow County.

If elected, would you attend local town meetings that are within Onslow County to hear their concerns and to show the support of the Onslow County Board of Commissioners?

Yes! I have also been an advocate for doing joint meetings between our municipal boards and our county board. We need a comprehensive infrastructure plan. This plan must include roads, schools, broadband access, and housing at a minimum. Creating a county comprehensive infrastructure plan needs to be done in partnership with our municipalities and our community citizens.

John Davis

for Onslow County Commissioner

YOU matter.

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Coastal Common Sense

By Kim McGahey

What seems to be perpetual chaos and terminal inactivity in the United States Congress could easily be remedied. By turning the attention of both houses of Congress back to we the people instead of the the government, many of our political, economic and social problems could be resolved. The cure for congressional paralysis is term limits for all members of Congress.

The Founders of our great country wisely created a government to represent the people with a system of checks and balances. Each of the three branches of government, the Executive, the Legislative and the Judicial, were designed to limit the power of the other branches so that no single branch could replicate the tyranny of the King of England.

The ingenious system of separation of powers that the Founders devised most importantly secured the liberties and freedoms to the people that were guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. Having studied all the great civilizations in human history, the Founders knew that only a government based on decentralized power could protect those God-given rights.

Thus, in 1789 the U.S. Constitution was written to outline how the checks and balances under separation of powers would shield the people from a tyrannical government.

That system has worked well for 247 years, but the Founders knew that we are not governed by angels and human nature would eventually gravitate towards a power structure that would limit the freedoms of the people and expand the control of the state. That's where we are today.

So, the Founders in their infinite wisdom included an escape clause in the Constitution that allowed that historic document to be amended. Article Five of the Constitution outlines two ways that amendments to the Constitution can be made. The first is through a vote of Congress, and the second is through a vote of the state legislatures referred to as a Convention of States. Since Congress would never vote to limit their own power, door number 2 is our only choice.

Members of the House of Representatives are now elected for 2 year terms and members of the Senate for 6 year terms. These short windows demand that our elected representatives spend most of their time on their re-election campaigns rather than on

passing laws in the best interests of the country. They become pre-occupied with making decisions based on retaining their own personal power positions at the expense of the greater good.

An amendment to the Constitution for term limits for all members of Congress under Article Five would eliminate their focus on themselves and their re-election, and return their energies to what's best for the country. Knowing that the burden of re-election was off their shoulders and they are only there for a limited time, members of Congress could then vote for solutions to the country's problems without regard to their own political futures.

Here's how it works under Article Five: 34 state legislatures submit applications and delegates for a Convention of States to vote on the single issue of term limits for all members of Congress. The delegates draft language for a proposed term limits amendment. Each state gets one vote. When 38 state legislatures ratify the term limits amendment it then becomes part of the Constitution - as has been done 27 times before with other amendments. Right now 19 states have approved such an amendment.

The Term Limits Amendment would designate the length of terms for each

house of Congress. E.g., the House of Representatives could be limited to two terms of four years each and the Senate could be limited to two terms of six years each. That way, our representatives are only in power for a short amount of time instead of 47 stagnant years like Joe Biden.

There is more information on this Convention of States at COSAction.com. It's the cure for a selfish, dysfunctional federal government like ours.



Onslow County Board of Education Candidate Questions

Melissa Oakley



What is the primary issue facing the school system that led you to run for office?

My thoughts on the primary issue have changed somewhat since the 2020 election cycle when I ran the first time. Today, I believe, as then, that we have more than one critical issue at hand. In 2020, I believed a primary issue was maintaining and updating facilities as many needed repairs to roofing from lingering damage from the blows of Hurricane Florence, increasing bus driver pay to hire more drivers, and increasing the supplemental income incentive for teachers to be more competitive in the workforce to bring in new teachers and staff to fulfill vacancies. Today, the most pressing issue is rapid growth and school capacity concerns. For example, Coastal Elementary School was just opened in 2022 and has already reached capacity. Dixon High School is now the home of the largest student population in the county. Because of this, the district has applied for a grant that would allow for the complete renovation and expansion of Dixon High School at no match to local taxpayers funding. The Stump Sound area growth is at such a rapid pace we are likely to need an additional elementary school in the next five years or less. We recently broke ground on another elementary school in the Swansboro/Belgrade area where the old elementary school used to be out in the Deppe Rd area due to growth in population in that area. Additionally, we are still facing staffing shortages, just as in 2020, and most of all, increasing school safety initiatives. We have filled some vacancies and have new support

positions filled while others are still available. We also have an increase in behavioral and mental health concerns that led to increasing mental health services through the school's providing referrals for families to utilize at low or no cost depending on insurance coverage through Trillium Healthcare. Growth creates overpopulated schools that pose additional safety risks, so I think by addressing the growth problem, we can better address the safety concerns. It is easier to manage less crowded environments than overcrowded environments and mitigate risks.

What skills and experiences make you the right choice for Onslow County voters?

I'm an NC Native, born and raised in the foothill's region of our beautiful state, where I attended public schools, so I hold the values of most native North Carolinians. I hold a dual associate degree in Business Administration and Criminal Justice. I am enrolled at the University of Mount Olive in a Bachelor's program for Judicial Studies. I have a diverse background of work experience from skills programs that led me to pursue certification as a nurse's assistant, medical office management, and a childhood education worker. Additionally, I have a background in pre-school, as a pharmacy technician, in hospitality, tourism, domestic services, recruiting, management, staffing, and restaurant service. My most important role has been as the mother of three children who have all been blessed by the opportunity of education through Onslow County Schools since our family moved here as a part of military service when my husband was on active duty. Beyond these things, I have served as a mentor through military programs for spouses, such as LINKS, and as an FRA: Family Readiness Assistant. Locally, I served as a Guardian ad Litem for five years, advocating for abused and neglected children in our judicial system. However, I have been inactive for some time due to the conflict it poses with my role as an elected official in our county. I have supported and advocated for the United Way CHEW program, serving supplemental nourishment for children across our county, with over 900 children served weekly. I am connected with the many demographics of our wonderful community and understand the impact many of our families face economically, socially, physically, or otherwise.

School safety has been a hot topic at Onslow County School board meetings. If elected, what will you do to help ensure the safety of students and staff on school grounds?

I will keep tilling the ground.

Since I was elected to the board of education in 2020, I have avidly supported advancing security measures and initiatives that would improve our facilities structures as many of our schools are over 30 years old. Some of the facilities were built when society had not remotely imagined the safety issues we face today in society or a school system. Vaping has become an enormous problem and concern with the rise in the fentanyl crisis, and one of my greatest fears has been that a student may obtain a vape that is laced with a substance that could cause adverse health consequences or even a fatality. Because of this and other concerns with our current opioid and fentanyl crisis, I advocated for the placement of Narcan in our school's district-wide. The Narcan boxes are nasal inhalants, and they were provided through a federal grant, SAMSHA where members of our community wrote the grant to provide full funding for the Narcan, training for staff to administer and this requires no match of local tax dollars. Additionally, I have advocated fervently for vape detectors and requested that funding from the state legislature. Though the funding request was not approved in the annual state budget, the district has applied for a NC Center for Safer School's grant that will provide the necessary funding for them if we are granted the funding. Not only will these HALO vape detectors provide the level of assurance that will detect the use of vapes, they also provide an additional layer of security that detects key words like "fight, knife, gun" and other sound effects that would exhibit a potential threat or danger. After the tragedy at Northside High School in September of 2022 where one student lost his life, I proposed the use of mobile metal detectors at the schools with a focus on sporting events and other special events. This was because the data trends reflected the impact of violent incidents and threats at athletic events in certain areas of the county. Because of that, we also increased law enforcement presence at the schools greatest affected by threats of violence. Since then, we've increased the number of SROs and at least 3 of our high schools have two SROs, and one in every school otherwise. Our budget has permitted two on staff law enforcement officers who are housed at the central office, one from JPD and one from OCSO. We also funded a K-9 Officer Gus who is trained to detect explosives. Over the last few years, I've advocated for stronger legislation to our state senator and house representatives regarding the Delta 8 & 9 gummies after adverse health effects occurred at one of our middle schools last year where

students were sharing what was believed to be "snacks". These should never make it into the hands of youth or into our schools transported by youth. We approved school monitors in our fiscal budget for this year for our more at risk high schools to add additional supervision. Many of these jobs are held by parents, retired teachers, and the veteran population. I have also advocated for silent alarm systems that would allow teachers and staff to immediately lockdown with a radar type system guiding law enforcement to the directly impacted area(s) in response to any possible event of mass violence. I have advocated for Centegix silent alert systems that are badges that teachers and staff can use in conjunction with the aforementioned school radar system that will work effectively without WiFi or cellular. Funding constraints are an issue for swift implementation of additional layers of this magnitude. In December 2023, I began drafting a policy revision proposal to the existing School Safety policy that would bolster the communication between administrators, staff, and the SROs in reporting incidents of misconduct or violence to ensure a partnership between the two in combination with alleviating any strain on administrators to solely determine whether or not an act warrants a juvenile referral, purely administrative disciplinary action or a combination. This adds another layer of responsibility and accountability as well as balance between the school and law enforcement agencies. We recently unanimously approved the launch of Evolv weapons detection systems which I was one of three board members to recommend.

Do you have children or grandchildren that attend the Onslow County Schools, and if so, what do you feel are the major issues that affect them?

My two youngest children are students at Dixon schools and I cannot think of any major issues that have greatly affected them. We have fortunately had great teachers who have helped mold our children as individuals and recognize that each student is different from the next.

If elected, how do you plan on filling the need for more teachers and school bus drivers? Would you support incentives, like benefits and bonuses?

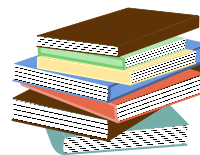
I have been consistently working for improvements in this area. When I was elected in 2020, I ran on increasing bus drivers' pay and we did raise the pay to \$15 an hour to which now is \$16 an hour starting pay with \$2500 sign on bonuses. Retention bonuses have been provided for the past few years with at least

Continuation of Melissa Oakley's response to question #5

\$1000 for those qualifying staff who have stayed onboard for the entire fiscal year. I voted proudly in support of these bonuses and pay increases. Additionally, I ran on increasing teachers' supplemental income in 2020 to which we voted unanimously on a 2% increase from 10% to 12% which is quite competitive for our region and statewide for counties our size. Teacher assistants oftentimes are assigned to a classroom

to substitute but were not given the substitute pay rate which would have been a higher rate and now they are paid for that rate and were offered backpay for the last fiscal year which this change came into effect. Through working cohesively with staff, and applying the relevant general statute, I was able to successfully advocate for this change on behalf of the teacher assistants. I believe one of the key issues with obtaining and retaining bus drivers is the lack of respect for adults in the public school system from some students and parents.

The hours are not enough for full time employment benefits unless they work as a custodian, nutrition assistant or teacher assistant to meet those hourly requirements. I believe this will take some support from state leaders to increase the funding available for public schools to bolster wages to meet these employment needs and demands.



Susanne Long



measures including student and staff well being, strengthening core instruction and student opportunities, and strengthening parent and community involvement.

What are your skills and experiences that make you the right choice for Onslow County voters?

It is often said to understand, one must "walk a mile in his/her shoes" to understand one's situation. While serving in the Onslow County System, I was afforded the opportunity to serve as an elementary and middle school teacher, elementary and middle school assistant principal and principal as well as director of curriculum and instruction and executive director of exceptional children's services. During my time as a central office director, I had the opportunity to engage with administrators and school staff at all but our two newest school locations. Being a military child, a military spouse, and parent of a son who graduated from Jacksonville High School has also provided perspective.

School safety has been a hot topic at Onslow County School board meetings. If elected, what will you do to help ensure the safety of

students and staff on school grounds?

Next steps with the Evolv visitor scanning system will be important. It will be vital to continually review the safety related series of policies, including student behavior policies, and implementation practice. A board member's responsibility would include ensuring financial allocation for resources, training staff and students in emergency preparedness, conflict resolution, and mental health awareness. A robust working relationship with law enforcement is vital as well as keeping abreast of vetted safety trends and hearing concerns from the community.

Do you have children or grandchildren that attend the Onslow County Schools, and if so, what do you feel are the major issues that affect them?

Our son attended his entire K-12 school career in Onslow County Schools, graduating from Jacksonville High School in 2017. Students want and deserve challenging courses, including workforce skills/credentialing, career choice internships and other student enriching opportunities. We are seeing more students struggling with mental

well-being, feeling disconnected and lack of engagement.

If elected, how do you plan on filling the need for more teachers and school bus drivers? Would you support incentives, like benefits and bonuses?

Students deserve excellent educators and support personnel, and the staff shortage is a complex issue. To recruit/retain certified employees keeping the supplement competitive is important. I would certainly support discussion to develop a well-thought-out sustainable plan for bonuses/benefits.



What is the primary issue facing the school system that led you to run for office?

Education is an ever-changing landscape. It is important for school board members to work together and communicate effectively to ensure that the needs of students, staff and the community are being met. Discourse can be productive, strife is not. Through productive discourse, larger concerns can be addressed which include strengthening safety and security

Michele Halley



collaboratively with others to resolve the issues. I want to support the employees of the system and the community we serve to provide the opportunity for an excellent education to all students who live here.

What are your skills and experiences that make you the right choice for Onslow County voters?

I retired in September 2020 after serving over 40 years in Onslow County Schools. During my career, I was able to experience the educational system in a variety of ways, ranging from volunteer, substitute teacher, teacher, teacher on-loan to NC Department of Public Instruction, an alternative pathway to licensure CT3 instructor with UNCW, and county-level director. I continue to maintain a vested interest in the Onslow County Schools as well as the Onslow community. A quality school system is vital to the growth and success of Onslow County.

School safety has been a hot topic at Onslow County School board meetings. If elected, what will you do to help ensure the safety of students and staff on school grounds?

I would follow current policies, address new policies as needed, stay up to date on county needs, conduct assessment of what is working and addressing what is not. It will take all stakeholders working cooperatively to address the issue of safety.

Do you have children or grandchildren that attend the Onslow County Schools, and if so, what do you feel are the major issues that affect them?

I don't currently have children or grandchildren attending Onslow County Schools. However, my two children were graduates of the system. The main reason our family relocated to Onslow County was for the availability of a quality school system.

If elected, how do you plan on filling the need for more teachers and school bus drivers? Would you support incentives, like benefits and bonuses?

Promote recruitment in various ways including but not limited to social media, job fairs, visiting teacher programs at local universities, and alternative pathways to licensure. Retainment of district employees would include looking at current surveys associated with job satisfaction, reason for employees leaving, turnover rates and causation, and other processes currently in place.

In addition to the above avenues, I would also want to meet and talk with stakeholders, form relationships, and work collaboratively to ensure a successful work environment. While this is a state issue, there is a need to retain a solid employee benefit package. We need to do what we can to address employee salaries.

What is the primary issue facing the school system that led you to run for office?

There are issues facing the school system that need to be addressed. I want to serve because I am a firm supporter of public education and wish to work

Erin Urbanski



What is the primary issue facing the school system that led you to run for office?

I believe the most urgent issue at present is ensuring the safety of the children and staff on school campuses- an ongoing concern that demands swift resolution. While I may not have all the answers, if elected to the Board of Education, I am committed to a collaborative effort aimed at guaranteeing the priority placed on the safety and well-being of our students at all times.

This involves engaging with local law enforcement agencies, seeking input from areas that have successfully address similar issues, and welcoming ideas from parents, teachers, and stakeholders. I respectfully refrain from discussing current leadership details, as I may not have the complete information on how matters are currently being handled.

What are your skills and experiences that make you the right choice for Onslow County voters?

I bring a wealth of experience in education, a strong professional background, and a steadfast commitment to my faith. As a Christian, small business owner, and a mother to a child in the Onslow County school system, my perspective is rooted in a genuine concern for our children. With a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice, I am equipped to address various aspects of safety and security. I advocate for collaborative efforts, valuing the input of all parties involved, to arrive at the best possible solutions for the benefit of our children, teachers, staff, parents and community.

School safety has been a hot topic at Onslow County School board meetings. If elected, what will you do to help ensure the safety of students and staff on school grounds?

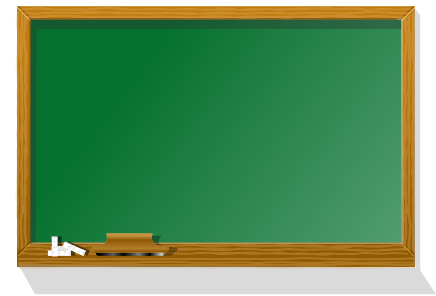
Ensuring safety remains the foremost concern within school campuses as it forms the foundation for education. In my pursuit of a seat on the Board of Education, I aim to leverage my background in criminal justice to facilitate a cooperative approach in implementing the most effective safety measures for our schools. Recognizing that a one-size-fits-all solution is inadequate, I am committed to dedicating ongoing time and effort to develop and adapt solutions as needed.

Do you have children or grandchildren that attend the Onslow County Schools, and if so, what do you feel are the major issues that affect them?

While my own child attending an Onslow County School is not currently facing any immediate issues, I am deeply aware of challenges affecting other students across the district. My advocacy is driven by the collective well-being of all children, not just my own. I am committed to addressing and preventing issues that may impact the broader student community, ensuring a positive and secure educational environment for every child in the district.

If elected, how do you plan on filling the need for more teachers and school bus drivers? Would you support incentives, like benefits and bonuses?

Recognizing the evident need for teachers and bus drivers in our county, I may not have direct experience as an educator, but I have close ties with several in the profession. I deeply appreciate the time, effort, and energy that educators invest daily in our students, and I believe they deserve proper compensation. Similarly, the crucial role of bus drivers in ensuring the safe transportation of our children should be appropriately rewarded. While I may not have an in-depth understanding of the current budget, if elected, I am committed to early exploration of budgetary aspects. My goal is to ensure that teachers and drivers receive fair compensation for their dedicated work. I understand the challenges they face, including overwork and underpayment, leading to a less than ideal retention rate. In addition to benefits and bonuses, I believe a comprehensive solution is essential to address these issues.



Phillip Williams



What is the primary issue facing the school system that led you to run for office?

The decision to run started to form while attending a safety town hall meeting. In my role as a Jacksonville Police Officer, I attended this meeting along with some parents and students from the school district, a number of citizens not connected to any specific schools, and a few elected officials. The stated purpose was a good one, to discuss ideas to improve school safety. The result was light on ideas for improvement, but even if the vast majority of our families and teachers feel safe, we can always make improvements.

The experience of even one child or teacher is worthy of consideration. This town hall meeting helped me realize that it was time to run.

What are your skills and experiences that make you the right choice for Onslow County voters?

I am a father of one OCS student and one OCS graduate. I have firsthand knowledge as an involved parent of the amazing opportunities our public schools provide students AND the challenges our schools face. My experience for the past 27 years as a Jacksonville Police officer has been centered on service and protection of the community. I've operated in a way that demonstrates respect for the citizens I interact with on either side of the law AND the laws I'm sworn to enforce. As a dad and as a police officer, I can leverage my understanding and experience in helping to set sensible policy and work collaboratively with administrators, staff, families, the community, and my fellow board members to make certain we have safe schools and meaningful opportunities for students both in and out of the classroom.

School safety has been a hot topic at Onslow County School board meetings. If elected, what will you do to help ensure the safety of students and staff on school grounds?

From the time I graduated at Swansboro High School, throughout my law enforcement career, and as an involved parent in multiple schools, I've been a direct witness to over 3 decades of safety improvements with the Onslow County Schools. A lot of recent attention has been given to physical safety measures and there will always be new options to consider given changing times. Knowing that there is no perfect physical safety measure, while the district continues to update and upgrade those physical features, some of the ideas I'd like the district to consider are: establishing a site for intensive behavioral needs particularly for the early grades, expanding partnerships with organizations like MENAC Inc. ("a Christian Veteran founded and operated mentoring organization"), with the successes but limited size of OCLC, investigating what other alternative school options and site locations are needed to assist principals in working with students with different needs, continuing to work with law enforcement and emergency service partners, expanding options like a twilight (night school) program, adding a JROTC program, exploring a middle college option and/or a full high school option at the Skills Center, adding EMT, Emergency Management, and Public Safety to the existing Fire Fighter program in order to create a Public Safety Academy, and working with our schools to identify and

support other programs and options that result in high engagement with our students.

Do you have children or grandchildren that attend the Onslow County Schools, and if so, what do you feel are the major issues that affect them?

Yes. I have one child in school and one graduate. What has impacted them the most is having great teachers and access to a well-rounded, quality education that includes core academic courses, advanced courses, CTE offerings, a strong music and art program, athletics, student organizations and clubs. I want to make sure we can continue those things for all students.

If elected, how do you plan on filling the need for more teachers and school bus drivers? Would you support incentives, like benefits and bonuses?

To attract and retain teachers, we need to have a collaborative, respectful, and future-focused board that is able to work with our educational professionals and families in meeting students' needs. If the board is focused and supportive, we will be in a better position to make the case for remaining in Onslow County. The teachers' supplement needs to be increased, and yes, I'd like OCS to continue to offer incentives for bus drivers like the signing bonus and perhaps a retention bonus.

Elbert Garvey



What is the primary issue facing the school system that led you to run for office?

The most important issue is ensuring the safety of all of our students and staff.

What are your skills and experiences that make you the right choice for Onslow County voters?

I currently serve on the Board of Education. I retired from the Onslow County School System having served as a teacher, coach, and principal.

School safety has been a hot topic at Onslow County School board meetings. If elected, what will you do to help ensure the safety of students and staff on school grounds?

As a Board Member I have supported and will continue to support the implementation of safety measures such as reviewing security assessments, and supporting the purchase, implementation, and approval of the feasibility study for metal detectors and weapon detectors in our schools.

Do you have children or grandchildren that attend the Onslow County Schools, and if so, what do you feel are the major issues that affect them?

Currently I do not have any children or grandchildren that attend Onslow County Schools, but my son and daughter-in-law are both high school teachers in Onslow County. My son is a product of Onslow County Schools. I have a granddaughter that will one day attend school in the Onslow County School District.

If elected, how do you plan on filling the need for more teachers and school bus drivers? Would you support incentives, like benefits and bonuses?

I would support signing and retention bonuses for our bus drivers. And for teachers we must continue to provide

competitive local supplements and retention bonuses. For recruiting purposes, we must promote the classroom support we provide our teachers in the form of Instructional Coaches, Reading Coaches, Digital Learning Coaches, Beginning Teacher Coordinators, and Mentors for beginning teachers.



Mat Hamm



What is the primary issue facing the school system that led you to run for office?

The primary issues that led me to run were the lack of safety and security in our schools and the lack of response or care from the administration to incidents of violence and assault.

What are your skills and experiences that make you the right choice for Onslow County voters?

A large part of my military experience centered around policy, regulations, and

mission planning.

I was required to audit programs regularly to ensure they were being run in accordance with the policies and rules and are being run in the most efficient and effective manner. I can use this experience on the BOE to look at current systems to identify possible flaws in compliance with either state or federal law or where things can be improved.

Additionally, I had a lot of experience working with a diverse group of people that all had a common goal in mind. I would also have to mediate and coordinate between entities with competing interests. Many of my skills will help me be an effective and communicative board member.

School safety has been a hot topic at Onslow County School board meetings. If elected, what will you do to help ensure the safety of students and staff on school grounds?

One of the biggest issues I am running to address is school safety and security.

There have been multiple complaints from parents of different types of abuse at school that have gone unresolved or ignored. Students have a right to attend school and feel safe. They also need to know that they will be heard. It's emotionally damaging to a child to deny their trauma when you are responsible for their safety. It isn't necessarily a matter of policy, but strict adherence to the current policy.

The schools have implemented safety measures such as clear backpacks and metal detectors which are good steps forward, but there are deeper, more cultural issues that need to be addressed. The first thing that can be done to fix this issue is to stop treating parents and teachers and the community as opposing entities. Our teachers are there because they care about kids and want to see the next generation succeed. And naturally, parents want to be sure their children are safe and getting a quality education for them to succeed. At the end of the day, we have the same goals in mind, so we should all be able to come together and find real solutions.

Do you have children or grandchildren that attend the Onslow County Schools, and if so, what do you feel are the major issues that affect them?

I have 2 boys aged 7 and 11. They were in the Onslow County School system, but I removed them a few years ago due to systemic and repeated issues. I homeschooled them for one year and now they attend Jacksonville Christian Academy. I would prefer they attend public school, that's why I'm running to make it better.

If elected, how do you plan on filling the need for more teachers and school bus drivers? Would you support incentives, like benefits and bonuses?

I would be in full support of increased pay and benefits for bus drivers and teachers. The current national average hourly wage for bus drivers is ~\$21.36 but Onslow County pays somewhere around \$15.00. This has caused real problems for students throughout Onslow County. We are growing, and we must keep up with that growth.



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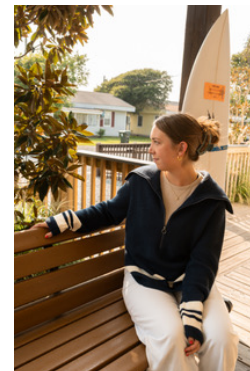


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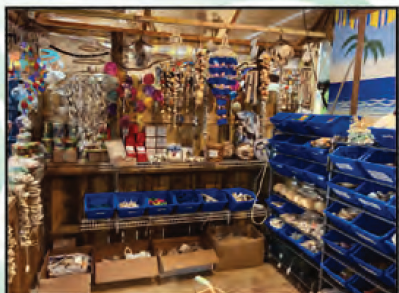


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