

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF NORTH CAROLINA**
Civil Action No.:

POST VOICE LLC, d/b/a
The Pender-Topsail Post & Voice;
JAMES A. PETTIGREW; and
KATIE H. PETTIGREW,

Plaintiffs,

v.

PENDER COUNTY, NORTH
CAROLINA; WILLIAM RANDY
BURTON, in his individual capacity
and official capacity as CHAIRMAN
OF THE PENDER COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS;
BRENT AARON SPRINGER, in his
individual capacity and official
capacity as VICE-CHAIRMAN OF
THE PENDER COUNTY BOARD
OF COMMISSIONERS; and JERRY
DAVID GROVES, in his individual
capacity and official capacity as
MEMBER OF THE PENDER
COUNTY BOARD OF
COMMISSIONERS,

Defendants.

**COMPLAINT FOR DAMAGES AND
INJUNCTIVE RELIEF**

JURY TRIAL DEMANDED

INTRODUCTION

1. Since 2013, Plaintiff Post Voice, LLC has owned and operated *The Pender Topsail Post & Voice* (“*The Post & Voice*”), a weekly newspaper reporting on matters of public concern in Pender County, North Carolina.

2. *The Post & Voice* and its predecessors have been in continuous operation since the mid-1970s.

3. *The Post & Voice* also qualifies as a “newspaper of record” for the County, publishing legal-notice advertising required to be published by various provisions of the North Carolina General Statutes. *The Post & Voice* further publishes other advertising for Pender County at no cost to the County.

4. *The Post & Voice* is the only newspaper that enters the mail in Pender County in the Periodicals class and, thus, is the only newspaper qualified to publish legal-notice advertising for the County pursuant to N.C. GEN. STAT. § 1-597.

5. *The Post & Voice* also publishes a “Watchman on the Wall” column, written by Plaintiff James A. Pettigrew, alongside political cartoons. Some of those columns address the Pender County Board of Commissioners, including Defendants Chairman William Randy “Randy” Burton, Vice-Chairman Brent Aaron Springer, and Commissioner Jerry David Groves.

6. In March 2025, at a Board of Commissioners Retreat, multiple commissioners expressed distaste for unfavorable “Watchman on the Wall” columns and cartoons published about them, and Commissioner Groves requested that the matter of de-designating *The Post & Voice* as the newspaper of record for Pender County be placed on the agenda for an April 2025 Board meeting.

7. On 22 April 2025, Chairman Groves, while holding up a copy of the 17 April 2025 “Watchman on the Wall” column and cartoon, stated, “This is what we as three county commissioners have to put up with. The citizens’ money are [sic] paying for this, and it’s time for it to stop.” Chairman Burton, Vice-Chairman Springer, and Commissioner Groves then voted to remove all legal-notice and other advertising

from *The Post & Voice* in retaliation for Plaintiffs' publication of unflattering columns and cartoons about them. No alternative explanation was offered for the Board's decision.



Photograph of Commissioner Groves holding a copy of The Post & Voice during the 22 April 2025 Pender County Board of Commissioners meeting saying “This is what we as three county commissioners have to put up with. The citizens’ money are [sic] paying for this, and it’s time for it to stop.”

8. Chairman Burton, Vice-Chairman Springer, and Commissioner Groves voted to instead make *The Wilmington StarNews* (“*The StarNews*”) the newspaper of record for Pender County. *The StarNews* does not have a Periodicals permit in Pender County and, therefore, it is not qualified to publish legal-notice advertising for the County under N.C. GEN. STAT. § 1-597.

9. Defendants’ removal of legal-notice and all other advertising from *The Post & Voice* as punishment for Plaintiffs’ constitutionally protected speech violates the First Amendment to the United States Constitution; Article I, Section 14 of the North Carolina Constitution; and Article I, Sections 1 and 19 of the North Carolina Constitution.

10. Through this action, Plaintiffs seek to vindicate their constitutional rights, redress harms caused by Defendants' retaliatory acts, and prevent Defendants from continuing such unlawful retaliation in the future.

11. Plaintiffs further seek declaratory relief clarifying that *The Post & Voice* is the only newspaper qualified to publish legal-notice advertising in Pender County.

JURISDICTION

12. This Court has original subject-matter jurisdiction pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1331 and 1343(a) and 42 U.S.C. § 1988 because the claims asserted by Plaintiffs arise under the laws of the United States and seek redress for rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution and deprived under color of state law.

13. Plaintiffs further invoke this Court's supplemental jurisdiction pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1367 over any and all North Carolina state law claims and causes of action which derive from the same nucleus of operative facts and are part of the same case or controversy that gives rise to the federally based claims and causes of action.

VENUE

14. Venue is proper in this District pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391 because (i) the events giving rise to the claim occurred in this District, and (ii) on information and belief, multiple Defendants reside within this District.

PARTIES

15. Plaintiff Post Voice, LLC d/b/a *The Pender-Topsail Post & Voice* is a North Carolina limited liability corporation doing business at 45 Pintail Lane, Rocky Point, North Carolina 28457.

16. Plaintiff James A. Pettigrew owns *The Post & Voice* along with his wife, Katie H. Pettigrew. He is also managing editor of *The Post & Voice*. He is a citizen and resident of Rocky Point, North Carolina.

17. Plaintiff Katie H. Pettigrew owns *The Post & Voice* along with her husband, James A. Pettigrew.

18. Defendant Pender County is a county located in the State of North Carolina. Pender County is governed by a five-member Board of Commissioners.

19. Defendant William Randy Burton is, and was at all times relevant to this matter, the Chairman of the Pender County Board of Commissioners. Chairman Burton serves as the commissioner for District 2, which encompasses the community of Scotts Hill. He is sued in his individual and official capacity. Upon information and belief, Chairman Burton is a citizen and resident of Scotts Hill, Pender County, North Carolina.

20. Defendant Brent Aaron Springer is, and was at all times relevant to this matter, the Vice-Chairman of the Pender County Board of Commissioners. Vice-Chairman Springer serves as the commissioner for District 5, which encompasses the communities of Burgaw, St. Helena, and Maple Hill. He is sued in his individual and

official capacity. Upon information and belief, Vice-Chairman Springer is a citizen and resident of Burgaw, Pender County, North Carolina.

21. Defendant Jerry David Groves is, and was at all times relevant to this matter, a commissioner on the Pender County Board of Commissioners. Commissioner Groves serves as the commissioner for District 3, which encompasses the communities of Rocky Point and Long Creek. He is sued in his individual and official capacity. Upon information and belief, Commissioner Groves is a citizen and resident of Burgaw, Pender County, North Carolina.

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

The Post & Voice has served the people of Pender County for over fifty years:

1. *The Pender Topsail Post & Voice* is a locally owned and operated newspaper based in Rocky Point, North Carolina.

2. Prior to 2012, three newspapers operated independently in Pender County: *The Pender Chronicle* (founded in 1884), *The Pender Post* (founded in 1971), and *The Topsail Voice* (founded in 1991).

3. In 2012, the corporate owner of *The Pender Post* purchased *The Topsail Voice*, consolidated the two papers, and began publishing under a new name: *The Pender Topsail Post & Voice*. In September 2012, it also purchased *The Pender Chronicle* which became part of the *Pender Topsail Post & Voice*.

4. Thus, *The Post & Voice* has been the only newspaper published in Pender County since 2012. Many members of the community, including Plaintiffs

James A. Pettigrew and Katie H. Pettigrew, often still refer to *The Post & Voice* as *The Pender Post* out of affection for *The Post & Voice*'s predecessor.

5. In 2013, Mr. Pettigrew and Mrs. Pettigrew purchased *The Post & Voice* and formed Plaintiff Post Voice, LLC.

6. *The Post & Voice* publishes a weekly newspaper online and in print, including to paid subscribers in Pender County.

7. *The Post & Voice* reports on current events and matters of public concern in and around Pender County, including the Pender County Board of Commissioners.

8. Prior to 2012, all three papers were qualified to publish legal-notice advertising, and most legal-notice advertising was published in *The Pender Post*.

9. Since 2012, *The Post & Voice*, like its predecessors, has qualified as a newspaper of record for Pender County.

10. *The Post & Voice* regularly charges Pender County for the publication of tax notices and foreclosure notices from the Pender County Tax Administration and, on occasion, notices from other departments to the extent such notices are legally required to be published.

11. *The Post & Voice* also charges Pender County for the publication of a "government news block."

12. *The Post & Voice* publishes additional advertisements for Pender County at no cost to the County, despite incurring printing costs for such advertisements. Advertisements *The Post & Voice* publishes for free include half-page agendas for twice monthly Board of Commissioners meetings as well as all

advertisements for the Parks and Recreation Department, Pender County Library, and the Health Department.

13. Over the past several years, *The Post & Voice* published approximately \$2,000.00 per month in free advertising for Pender County.

The North Carolina General Statutes regulate the publication of legal advertising:

14. North Carolina General Statute § 1-597(a) provides, in part, that:

Whenever a notice or any other paper, document or legal advertisement of any kind or description shall be authorized or required by any of the laws of the State of North Carolina, heretofore or hereafter enacted, or by any order or judgment of any court of this State to be published or advertised in a newspaper, such publication, advertisement or notice shall be of no force and effect unless it *shall be published in a newspaper with a general circulation to actual paid subscribers which newspaper at the time of such publication, advertisement or notice, shall have been admitted to the United States mails in the Periodicals class in the county or political subdivision where such publication, advertisement or notice is required to be published, and which shall have been regularly and continuously issued in the county in which the publication, advertisement or notice is authorized or required to be published, at least one day in each calendar week for at least 25 of the 26 consecutive weeks immediately preceding the date of the first publication of such advertisement, publication or notice*; provided that in the event that a newspaper otherwise meeting the qualifications and having the characteristics prescribed by G.S. 1-597 to 1-599, should fail for a period not exceeding four weeks in any calendar year to publish one or more of its issues such newspaper shall nevertheless be deemed to have complied with the requirements of regularity and continuity of publication prescribed herein.

(emphasis added).

15. As the only newspaper that is “admitted to the United States mails in the Periodicals class” in Pender County, *The Post & Voice* is the only newspaper that meets the qualifications of N.C. GEN. STAT. § 1-597(a).

16. Pender County Clerk of Court Elizabeth Craver is on record confirming that *The Post & Voice* is the only publication in the County that is “statutorily qualified” to run legal notices pursuant to N.C. GEN. STAT. § 1-597(a).

The Post & Voice publishes opinion columns and political cartoons critical of Board of Commissioners:

17. *The Post & Voice* publishes an opinion column entitled “Watchman on the Wall,” written by *Post & Voice* managing editor James A. Pettigrew. Mr. Pettigrew’s columns are published alongside political cartoons, which he creates.

18. Mr. Pettigrew’s “Watchman on the Wall” columns discuss matters of public concern in Pender County, including actions taken by the Pender County Board of Commissioners and statements made by its members.

19. Mr. Pettigrew writes the “Watchman on the Wall” column, and *The Post & Voice* publishes it, as a private citizen.

20. *The Post & Voice*’s publication of the “Watchman on the Wall” columns and cartoons is entirely separate from its publication of both legal-notice and other advertising in that, when it publishes the columns and cartoons, *The Post & Voice* is not acting in its role as a publisher of legal-notice or other advertising.

21. In fact, *The Post & Voice* maintains separate contact email addresses for its news-reporting operation and its advertising-placement operation, including maintaining a distinct email address specifically for the publication of legal notices separate and apart from other advertising.

22. On 20 March 2025, *The Post & Voice* published a “Watchman on the Wall” column entitled “Clear as Mud.” Appearing alongside the column was a political

cartoon with the heading “Master of Puppets.” The cartoon featured Pender County GOP Executive Board Member Phil Cordiero puppeteering Chairman Burton, Vice-Chairman Springer, and Commissioner Groves. A copy of the 20 March 2025 column and cartoon is attached hereto as **Exhibit A**.

23. The 20 March 2025 column criticized Chairman Burton, Vice-Chairman Springer, and Commissioner Groves for failing to publicly advertise a resolution to declare the Board of Directors of Pender EMS & Fire vacant and appoint commissioners to the Board:

Board members Springer, Burton, and Groves were planning to sneak Phil Cordeiro’s Pender EMS and Fire takeover resolution onto the agenda without advertising it publicly. They couldn’t risk another room full of angry citizens objecting to the idea.

Remember what happened two meetings ago when Burton’s resolution requiring the Pender Sheriff’s Office to become ICE agents was met with a hostile, standing room only crowd of opposition, forcing Burton to back down – a resolution that wasn’t even supported by the Sheriff.

They didn’t want that happening again. And the BOC trio knew they would never get a unanimous vote to add the Pender EMS resolution the agenda with Brad George sitting there. So throw transparency out the window and employ a nearly-never if ever used tactic to get the resolution on the agenda.

Let’s vote to suspend the rules and add the resolution. That will only take a simple majority. Forget transparency, forget public input, we want our way so damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead. And this way, there won’t be a boardroom full of opposition to the resolution and we can sneak it in.

I have been covering the Pender County Board of Commissioners for more than 15 years. And to my recollection, that has never been done. I could be mistaken, and I welcome a correction if so, but I do not remember a Board ever suspending the rules to break a rule. I would be willing to bet that it was Cordeiro’s idea – I can’t see Groves, Burton or Springer coming up with that. But that is just my opinion.

Exhibit A.

24. On 3 April 2025, *The Post & Voice* published a “Watchman on the Wall” column entitled “An Epistle.” Appearing alongside the column was a political cartoon with the heading “Baby Sitting,” featuring a cartoon depiction of Commissioner Groves in a stroller flanked by Chairman Burton and Vice-Chairman Springer. A copy of the 3 April 2025 column and cartoon is attached hereto as **Exhibit B.**

25. The 3 April 2025 column again criticized Chairman Burton, Vice-Chairman Springer, and Commissioner Groves:

During the second day of the annual County Commissioner’s budget retreat, the board spent time listening to and agreeing with Jerry Groves’ baseless accusations and lies. Groves said it, but Randy Burton and Brent Springer agreed, so all three are guilty. During that fateful livestream, the endgame of these attacks on the newspaper was revealed.

These three men are attempting to carry out Phil Cordeiro’s desire to destroy the local newspaper.

The problem with the paper is this – we are dangerous – dangerous to Groves, Burton, and Springer because we will seek out and print the truth. And this is not healthy for the political careers of those three – and for Cordeiro’s agenda. If we don’t say what they want us to say, they will destroy *[T]he Post & Voice*.

So much for transparency. It appears our three commissioners and their handlers prefer working in the dark.

Exhibit B.

26. On 17 April 2025, *The Post & Voice* published a “Watchman on the Wall” column entitled “By the way.” Appearing alongside the column was a political cartoon with the heading “All About Transparency?” The cartoon again features Chairman

Burton, Vice-Chairman Springer, and Commissioner Groves surrounding a door with a sign stating “CLOSED SESSION.” A copy of the 17 April 2025 column and cartoon is attached hereto as **Exhibit C**.

27. The 17 April 2025 column stated the following about Commissioner Groves:

Commissioner Groves is in spin mode, trying desperately to change the meaning of things he has done to his advantage – unsuccessfully.

At the Board of Commissioner’s budget retreat last month, Groves made the accusation that *[T]he Post [&] Voice* and myself were making fun of him because he grew up poor. This is in reference to his infamous “I was washed in a tub by a black woman” statement made back in 2023.

Now, Groves is spinning this as making fun of him growing up poor – and that is a terrible thing to do. I agree, if it were true. But of course, with Jerry, it’s just another lie.

This is all on video, by the way, and is available for anyone to view and draw their own conclusions.

At the BOC meeting in question (Sept. 5, 2023 1:33 in the meeting), Groves was questioned during the meeting by a citizen who asked him “Commissioner Groves, did you make racial remarks about blacks?” Groves sat forward in his seat, and then leaned back laughing, not answering the question.

At the end of the meeting when each commissioner makes remarks, Groves answered her, saying ma’am, I’ve never done that. Then he launched into the story of being washed in a tub by a black woman when he was a baby. That was the proof he was not a racist.

Exhibit C.

Commissioner Groves raises the matter of removing all advertising from *The Post & Voice* at the Pender County Board of Commissioners Retreat:

28. On 21 March 2025, the commissioners met for day two of the Pender County Board of Commissioners Retreat, which was livestreamed on the County's website. A recording of the livestream is incorporated herein by reference.¹

29. At the retreat, Commissioner Groves referred to "three commissioners being made puppets in the local paper." Commissioner Groves' statement was a direct reference to the 20 March 2025 "Watchman on the Wall" column and "Master of Puppets" cartoon authored by Mr. Pettigrew and published by *The Post & Voice*.

30. Commissioner Groves further asserted that "it's not fulfilling community expectations to have a paper that makes \$100,000.00 a year off of citizens to make fun of county employees." Commissioner Groves' statement that *The Post & Voice* "makes \$100,000.00 a year off of citizens" refers to the paper's publication of advertising for Pender County.

31. Notably, *The Post & Voice* charges Pender County *only* for the government news block, tax notices and foreclosure notices from the Pender County Tax Administration, and, on occasion, advertisements from other departments that are legally required to be published. *The Post & Voice* publishes all other advertisements at no cost to the County.

¹ A recording of day two of the retreat can be found at the following link: <https://penderconc.portal.civicclerk.com/event/569/media>. Discussion of removing legal-notice and other advertising from *The Post & Voice* can be found from 2:01:38 through 2:07:45.

32. Moreover, *The Post & Voice* charges Pender County half of what private businesses are charged to run advertisements.

33. Commissioner Groves went on to state that “we need to address that,” presumably meaning that the Board of Commissioners needed to “address” the unfavorable coverage of Chairman Burton, Vice-Chairman Springer, and Commissioner Groves in *The Post & Voice*. Commissioner Groves further asserted that “we need another paper to represent Pender County” and “the citizens deserve facts and not fake news.”

34. Chairman Burton and Vice-Chairman Springer expressed agreement with Commissioner Groves’ statements about *The Post & Voice*.

35. At one point, Chairman Burton stated that “all newspapers have opinion sections, which are editorial opinion sections, and I don’t have any problem with that. That’s the First Amendment, and everybody has a right to free speech. I just think where it gets off the rails is if it’s on the front page as news[.]” He further expressed that it’s “unfortunate for the citizens to have to read things like that.”

36. Commissioner Groves concluded the discussion by stating his discontent with *The Post & Voice*’s and Mr. Pettigrew’s coverage of him personally and stating that “it’s time to move on away from him [Mr. Pettigrew] and get *The StarNews* or whoever to represent Pender County.”

37. The matter of removing legal-notice and other advertising from *The Post & Voice* and placing it with *The StarNews* was added to the agenda for the 22 April 2025 Board of Commissioners meeting.

38. Following the retreat, then County Manager Michael Silverman sent an email to the Board of Commissioners stating, in part, that “utilizing *[T]he Star News* will cost more than utilizing *[T]he Pender Post & Voice*.” Commissioner Groves responded: “At any cost we will use *[T]he Star News*.” A copy of this email exchange is attached hereto as **Exhibit D**.

Chairman Burton, Vice-Chairman Springer, and Commissioner Groves vote to remove all legal-notice and other advertising from *The Post & Voice*:

39. On 22 April 2025, at a Pender County Board of Commissioners meeting, the commissioners again discussed removing legal-notice and other advertising from *The Post & Voice* and placing it with *The StarNews*. The 22 April 2025 Board of Commissioners meeting was livestreamed on the County’s website, and a recording of that livestream is incorporated herein by reference.²

40. Now-Former Pender County Staff Attorney Andrew Hogan and others presented an “analysis” of options for legal-notice advertising based on incorrect information provided to the UNC School of Government that *The StarNews* enters the mail in the Periodicals class to paid subscribers in Pender County. It does not. *The StarNews* does not have a Periodicals permit in Pender County.

² A recording of the 22 April 2025 Board of Commissioners meeting can be found at the following link: <https://penderconc.portal.civicclerk.com/event/504/media>. Discussion of removing legal-notice and other advertising from *The Post & Voice* can be found from 2:11:10 through 2:34:20.

41. Interim County Manager Margaret Blue³ explained that Pender County has used both *The Post & Voice* and *The StarNews* to publish advertising but that the County “typically” uses *The Post & Voice*.

42. Interim County Manager Blue presented a slide with several years of cost data related to legal advertising. For example, in 2024, Pender County spent \$84,974.00 to publish 209 advertisements in *The Post & Voice* and \$1,052.00 to publish only *one* advertisement in *The StarNews*. The slide further indicated that “Pender Post [is] significantly more affordable.”

43. She explained that she could not accurately provide an estimate of future advertising costs, stating that *The Post & Voice* was “pretty consistent” in what it charges Pender County for advertising while, in comparison, *The StarNews* was “more expensive” and varied pricing based on multiple factors.

44. Interim County Manager Blue also indicated that *The StarNews* provided some pricing information. No commissioner or employee had requested similar pricing information from *The Post & Voice* such that the two papers could be fairly compared.

45. Following several minutes of discussion, Commissioner Groves interjected that “it’s time to cut to the chase” and – while holding a copy of the 17 April 2025 “Watchman on the Wall” column and referencing Mr. Pettigrew’s publishing of editorials about county commissioners for “twenty-seven months” – said

³ Interim County Manager Blue formerly served as the County’s Finance Director. She became Interim County Manager on 23 April 2025.

“this is what we as three county commissioners have to put up with. The citizens’ money are [sic] paying for this, and it’s time for it to stop.”



Photograph of Commissioner Groves holding a copy of The Post & Voice during the 22 April 2025 Pender County Board of Commissioners meeting saying “This is what we as three county commissioners have to put up with. The citizens’ money are [sic] paying for this, and it’s time for it to stop.”

46. After Commissioner Groves’ comments, Commissioner Jimmy T. Tate asked another county employee whether anyone had contacted the Pender County Clerk of Court about placing legal-notice advertising with *The StarNews*. An employee indicated that he had spoken with “one of her assistants” and the clerk’s office would accept legal-notice advertisements placed in *The StarNews*. In response, Commissioner Tate stated that the Clerk of Court told him advertisements placed in *The StarNews* “would not be accepted.”

47. Immediately thereafter, Commissioner Groves moved to use *The StarNews* for all future advertising – including both legal-notice and other advertising – for Pender County. The motion carried three to two. Chairman Burton, Vice-Chairman Springer, and Commissioner Groves voted in favor of the motion. A

copy of the minutes from the 22 April 2025 Board of Commissioners Meeting is attached hereto as **Exhibit E**.

48. Apart from Commissioner Groves' statements, no further explanation was given as to why the Board voted to remove legal-notice and all other advertising from *The Post & Voice* and place such advertising with *The StarNews*, a decision that is both more expensive for the County and fails to meet the statutory requirements of legal notices as outlined in N.C. GEN. STAT. § 1-597(a).

49. As a result of the Board's retaliation, *The Post & Voice* has lost and will continue to lose revenue from legal advertising, forcing it to cut certain aspects of the paper's coverage. For example, advertising revenue from the County paid for local sports coverage. Without that revenue, *The Post & Voice* has reduced its sports coverage to one page.

50. *The Post & Voice* will also reduce the number of pages it prints, including ceasing the free publication of other types of advertisements for the County because it can no longer afford the printing costs.

***The Post & Voice* sends demand letter addressing the County's unconstitutional actions and receives no response:**

51. On 20 May 2025, counsel for Plaintiffs sent a demand letter (the "Letter") to the Board of Commissioners, including to all five commissioners individually, addressing the Board's unconstitutional actions of removing all legal-notice and other advertising from *The Post & Voice* in retaliation for Plaintiffs' publication of "Watchman on the Wall" columns and cartoons critical of Chairman

Burton, Vice-Chairman Springer, and Commissioner Groves. A copy of the Letter is attached hereto as **Exhibit F**.

52. The Letter further explained that *The Post & Voice* is the only publication in the county that is statutorily qualified to run legal notices by N.C. GEN. STAT. § 1-597(a).

53. The Letter demanded that the Board of Commissioners reverse its decision to remove all future legal-notice and other advertising from *The Post & Voice*.

54. As of the date of this filing, neither Plaintiffs nor their counsel have received a substantive response to the Letter however, on 11 June 2025, Plaintiffs' counsel received a letter indicating that the county was still evaluating the letter and would respond "soon"

CLAIMS FOR RELIEF

FIRST CLAIM FOR RELIEF

Violation of The First Amendment – 42 U.S.C. § 1983

55. Plaintiffs repeat, reiterate, and re-allege each and every allegation contained in the above paragraphs with the same force and effect as if fully set forth herein.

56. This claim is brought by Plaintiffs against Defendants Chairman Randy Burton, Vice-Chairman Brent Springer, and Commissioner Jerry Groves.

57. This claim is also brought against Pender County, which is sued under this claim for the acts of its Board of Commissioners.

58. The acts of Pender County and Chairman Burton, Vice-Chairman Springer, and Commissioner Groves complained of herein were taken under color of state law.

59. The First Amendment of the United States Constitution provides, in relevant part, that “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech” U.S. Const. amend. I.

60. “The First Amendment right to free speech includes not only the affirmative right to speak, but also the right to be free from retaliation by a public official for the exercise of that right.” *Suarez Corp. Indus. v. McGraw*, 202 F.3d 676, 685 (4th Cir. 2000).

61. Plaintiffs have a constitutional right, guaranteed by the First Amendment, to publish editorials and political cartoons that are critical of public officials. *See New York Times Co. v. Sullivan*, 376 U.S. 254, 270, 11 L. Ed. 2d 686, 84 S. Ct. 710, 721 (1964) (explaining that the First Amendment ensures citizens enjoy “a profound national commitment to the principle that debate on public issues should be uninhibited, robust, and wide-open, and that it may well include vehement, caustic, and sometimes unpleasantly sharp attacks on government and public officials”); *see also Connick v. Myers*, 461 U.S. 138, 162, 75 L. Ed. 2d 708, 103 S. Ct. 1684, 1698 (1983) (explaining that “[t]he constitutionally protected right to speak out on governmental affairs would be meaningless if it did not extend to statements expressing criticism of governmental officials”).

62. Defendants have deprived Plaintiffs of their right to free speech under the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States by revoking all legal-notice and other advertising in retaliation for Plaintiffs' protected speech.

63. The decision to remove all legal-notice and other advertising from *The Post & Voice* was motivated by Chairman Burton, Vice-Chairman Springer, and Commissioner Groves' distaste for editorials and cartoons Plaintiffs published about them.

64. Thus, Chairman Burton, Vice-Chairman Springer, and Commissioner Groves voted to remove all legal-notice and other advertising from *The Post & Voice* to punish Plaintiffs for their publication of the critical "Watchman on the Wall" columns and cartoons, including but not limited to those published on 20 March 2025, 3 April 2025, and 17 April 2025.

65. No alternative explanation was provided for the removal of legal-notice or other advertising from *The Post & Voice*.

66. If not for the publication of the "Watchman on the Wall" columns, Chairman Burton, Vice-Chairman Springer, and Commissioner Groves would not have removed legal-notice or other advertising from *The Post & Voice*.

67. Defendants' acts were intentional, malicious, willful and wanton in that they set out to and did retaliate against Plaintiffs for their constitutionally protected speech.

68. Defendants' acts directly caused the monetary and reputational injuries and damages to Plaintiffs described herein.

SECOND CLAIM FOR RELIEF
Violation of Article I, Section 14 of the North Carolina Constitution

69. Plaintiffs repeat, reiterate, and re-allege each and every allegation contained in the above paragraphs with the same force and effect as if fully set forth herein.

70. This claim is brought by Plaintiffs against Defendants Chairman Randy Burton, Vice-Chairman Brent Springer, and Commissioner Jerry Groves.

71. This claim is also brought against Pender County, which is sued under this claim for the acts of its Board of Commissioners.

72. Article I, Section 14 of the North Carolina Constitution declares, in relevant part, that “[f]reedom of speech and of the press are two are the great bulwarks of liberty and therefore shall never be restrained” N.C. Const. art. 1 § 14.

73. Article I, Section 14 is “self-executing” and creates “a cause of action against state officials for its violation.” *State v. Petersilie*, 334 N.C. 169, 184, 432 S.E.2d 832, 840-41 (1993) (citing *Corum v. University of North Carolina*, 330 N.C. 761, 782, 413 S.E.2d 276, 289 (1992)).

74. Although the North Carolina Supreme Court has “recognized that ‘in construing provisions of the Constitution of North Carolina, this Court is not bound by the opinions of the Supreme Court of the United States construing even identical provisions in the Constitution of the United States,’ North Carolina courts “give great weight to decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States interpreting” such parallel provisions. *Petersilie*, 334 N.C. at 184, 432 S.E.2d at 840-41.

75. The right to free speech under Article I, Section 14 is “violated when ‘restrictions are placed on the espousal of a particular viewpoint,’ . . . or where retaliation motivated by the content of an individual’s speech would deter a person of reasonable firmness from engaging in speech or association.” *Harper v. Hall*, 384 N.C. 292, 369, 886 S.E.2d 393, 442 (2023) (citations omitted).

76. Defendants have deprived Plaintiffs of their right to free speech under Article I, Section 14 of the North Carolina Constitution by revoking all legal-notice and other advertising in retaliation for Plaintiffs’ protected speech.

77. The decision to remove all legal-notice and other advertising from *The Post & Voice* was motivated by Chairman Burton, Vice-Chairman Springer, and Commissioner Groves’ distaste for editorials and cartoons Plaintiffs published about them.

78. Thus, Chairman Burton, Vice-Chairman Springer, and Commissioner Groves voted to remove all legal-notice and other advertising from *The Post & Voice* to punish Plaintiffs for their publication of the critical “Watchman on the Wall” columns and cartoons, including but not limited to those published on 20 March 2025, 3 April 2025, and 17 April 2025.

79. No alternative explanation was provided for the removal of legal-notice or other advertising from *The Post & Voice*.

80. If not for the publication of the “Watchman on the Wall” columns, Chairman Burton, Vice-Chairman Springer, and Commissioner Groves would not have removed legal-notice or other advertising from *The Post & Voice*.

81. Plaintiffs do not have an adequate alternative state-law remedy, and, therefore, they enjoy a direct cause of action against Defendants for the violation of their rights as guaranteed by the North Carolina Constitution.

82. Defendants' acts were intentional, malicious, willful and wanton in that they set out to and did retaliate against Plaintiffs for their constitutionally protected speech.

83. Defendants' acts directly caused the monetary and reputational injuries and damages to Plaintiffs described herein.

THIRD CLAIM FOR RELIEF
Violation of Article I, Sections 1 and 19 of the North Carolina Constitution

84. Plaintiffs repeat, reiterate, and re-allege each and every allegation contained in the above paragraphs with the same force and effect as if fully set forth herein.

85. This claim is brought by Plaintiffs against Defendants Chairman Randy Burton, Vice-Chairman Brent Springer, and Commissioner Jerry Groves.

86. This claim is also brought against Pender County, which is sued under this claim for the acts of its Board of Commissioners.

87. Article I, Section 1 of the North Carolina Constitution declares that North Carolinians are entitled to "the enjoyment of the fruits of their own labor." And Section 19 provides that no North Carolinian will be "deprived of his life, liberty, or property, but by the law of the land."

88. Together, these provisions protect "engaging in any legitimate business, occupation, or trade" unless "the promotion or protection of the public health, morals,

order, or safety, or the general welfare makes [burdensome state action] reasonably necessary.” *Kinsley v. Ace Speedway Racing, Ltd.*, 386 N.C. 418, 424, 904 S.E.2d 720, 726 (2024).

89. Action that interferes with a “legitimate business” is therefore unconstitutional unless it (1) serves a “proper governmental purpose” (2) by way of “reasonable means.” *Id.*

90. Plaintiffs are engaged in the legitimate business of operating a newspaper reporting on local news in and around Pender County. That business also includes selling advertising space to the County.

91. Chairman Burton, Vice-Chairman Springer, and Commissioner Groves arbitrarily and without legal justification acted to remove all legal-notice and other advertising from *The Post & Voice* to punish Plaintiffs for their publication of unfavorable editorials and cartoons about them.

92. This action was arbitrary and unreasonable because it was initiated and targeted at Plaintiffs in direct response to Mr. Pettigrew’s criticism of Chairman Burton, Vice-Chairman Springer, and Commissioner Groves.

93. As a direct and proximate result of Chairman Burton, Vice-Chairman Springer, and Commissioner Groves’ action, *The Post & Voice* has lost and will continue to lose critical advertising revenue upon which it relies to continue its operations.

94. Plaintiffs do not have an adequate alternative state-law remedy, and, therefore, enjoy a direct cause of action against Defendants for the violation of their rights as guaranteed by the North Carolina Constitution.

95. Defendants' acts directly caused the monetary and reputational injuries and damages to Plaintiffs described herein.

FOURTH CLAIM FOR RELIEF
Declaratory Judgment

96. Plaintiffs repeat, reiterate, and re-allege each and every allegation contained in the above paragraphs with the same force and effect as if fully set forth herein.

97. This claim is brought by Plaintiffs against Defendants Chairman Randy Burton, Vice-Chairman Brent Springer, and Commissioner Jerry Groves.

98. This claim is also brought against Pender County, which is sued under this claim for the acts of its Board of Commissioners.

99. 28 U.S.C. § 2201(a) provides that:

In a case of actual controversy within its jurisdiction . . . any court of the United States, upon the filing of an appropriate pleading, may declare the rights and other legal relations of any interested party seeking such declaration, whether or not further relief is or could be sought. Any such declaration shall have the force and effect of a final judgment or decree and shall be reviewable as such.

100. There exists an actual controversy as to whether Defendants' action of removing legal-notice advertising from *The Post & Voice* and instead placing it with *The StarNews* satisfies the requirements for the publication of legal advertising under N.C. GEN. STAT. § 1-597(a).

101. Significantly, as the only newspaper that enters the mail in the Periodicals class to paid subscribers in Pender County, *The Post & Voice* is the only newspaper in Pender County that meets the qualifications of N.C. GEN. STAT. § 1-597(a).

102. As alleged above, the “legal analysis” of options for legal-notice advertising presented to the Board of Commissioners at the 22 April 2025 meeting was based on incorrect information that *The StarNews* enters the mail in the Periodicals class to paid subscribers in Pender County.

103. Thus, declaratory relief would “serve a useful purpose in clarifying and settling the legal relations in issue” and would “terminate and afford relief from the uncertainty, insecurity, and controversy giving rise to the proceeding.” *Volvo Constr. Equip. N. Am., Inc. v. CLM Equip. Co.*, 386 F.3d 581, 594 (4th Cir. 2004) (quoting *Aetna Cas. & Sur. Co. v. Quarles*, 92 F.2d 321, 325 (4th Cir. 1937)).

104. Without declaratory relief, *The Post & Voice* will continue to suffer lost legal-notice advertising revenue.

105. This Court has jurisdiction pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1367 to declare the rights of the parties under N.C. GEN. STAT. § 1-597 and any other relevant statutes.

106. For the reasons stated above, Plaintiffs are entitled to a declaration that it is the only newspaper qualified under N.C. GEN. STAT. § 1-597(a) to publish legal-notice advertising for Pender County.

FIFTH CLAIM FOR RELIEF
Injunctive Relief Against Pender County

107. Plaintiffs repeat, reiterate, and re-allege each and every allegation contained in the above paragraphs with the same force and effect as if fully set forth herein.

108. Plaintiffs bring this claim for permanent and preliminary injunctive relief against Pender County.

109. As alleged herein, Plaintiffs have suffered and will continue to violations of their rights under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution; Article I, Section 14 of the North Carolina Constitution; and Article I, Sections 1 and 19 of the North Carolina Constitution related to Defendants' de-designation of *The Post & Voice* as the newspaper of record for Pender County in retaliation for Plaintiffs' constitutionally protected speech.

110. The deprivation of Plaintiffs' constitutional rights constituted irreparable injury such that remedies available at law, including monetary damages, are inadequate to fully compensate for such injury.

111. Considering the balance of hardships between the parties, the public's interest in protecting freedom of speech, and Pender County's indifference toward the egregious violations of Plaintiffs' constitutional rights, a permanent injunction against the County is warranted.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiffs pray that the Court enter judgment in its favor and order relief as follows:

- A. Compensatory damages against all Defendants, jointly and severally.
- B. Punitive damages against the individual Defendants, jointly and severally.
- C. A declaration, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2201, that *The Post & Voice* is the only newspaper qualified to publish legal-notice advertising for Pender County pursuant to N.C. GEN. STAT. § 1-597(a).
- D. An injunction ordering Pender County to reinstate *The Post & Voice* as the official newspaper of record immediately for a period continuing through the calendar year following this Court's order and ordering the County and Board of Commissioners to award future designations to newspapers only upon articulable and coverage content-neutral criteria, including the qualifications in N.C. GEN. STAT. § 1-597(a).
- E. A declaration, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2201, that Defendants violated Plaintiffs' right to free speech under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution and Article I, Section 14 of the North Carolina Constitution by de-designating Plaintiff as the official newspaper of record in retaliation for Plaintiff's protected speech.
- F. A declaration, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2201, that Defendants violated Plaintiffs' right to enjoy the "fruits of [their] labor" under Article I, Sections 1 and 19

of the North Carolina Constitution by de-designating *The Post & Voice* as the official newspaper of record in retaliation for Plaintiffs' protected speech.

G. Pre-judgment and post-judgment interest and recovery of costs, as well as reasonable attorneys' fees, pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1988 and any other applicable laws.

H. Any other relief that this Court deems just and proper.

JURY DEMAND

Plaintiffs respectfully demand a trial by jury of all issues in this matter so triable pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 38(b).

Respectfully submitted this the 1st day of July 2025.

STEVENS MARTIN VAUGHN & TADYCH PLLC

/s/ MICHAEL J. TADYCH
Michael J. Tadych
N.C. State Bar No. 24556
mike@smvt.com
Ashley N. Fox
N.C. State Bar No. 57896
ashley@smvt.com
2225 W. Millbrook Road
Raleigh, NC 27612
Telephone: (919) 582-2300
Facsimile: (866) 593-7695

TIN FULTON WALKER & OWEN PLLC

/s/ ABRAHAM RUBERT-SCHEWEL
Abraham Rubert-Schewel
N.C. State Bar No. 56863
schewel@tinfulton.com
Zachary Ezor
N.C. State Bar No. 55070
zezor@tinfulton.com
119 Orange Street, Floor 2
Durham, NC 27701
Telephone: (919) 307-8400

Attorneys for Plaintiffs

Opinion



Watchman on the wall



Andy Pettigrew
Post and Voice Publisher

Clear as Mud

Transparency. Now there is a word that we have heard quite a bit in the past few weeks. It's mentioned frequently in the past several press releases from Pender County Government – how the goal of the Board of Commissioners is transparency. These press releases push the takeover of Pender EMS and Fire by the county as a great thing that will benefit the people of Pender County. It is featured prominently on the political website of apparent Republican BOC advisor Phil Cordeiro. Transparency in government is very important, they all proclaim. Trouble is, transparency is just a political buzz word. It has no meaning because Cordeiro and his Commissioner followers Jerry Groves, Randy Burton, and Brent Springer fail to put it into practice. Shortly, I will offer the undeniable truth. But first, a bit of background.

A few years ago – maybe as many as 15 years - the Pender County Board of Commissioners had a problem with transparency. The Board had a habit of adding items to the agenda at the beginning of a meeting, which did not allow the public to see what was happening and allowed the Board to move agenda items through without any public input.

Commissioner George Brown thought this was a bad practice and in the interest of transparency, pushed the Board to pass a rule that required any item added after the agenda had been finalized required a unanimous vote. This prevented last minute sneaky items added and acted on without public input.

Real, bonified transparency in action.

This great idea by Commissioner Brown has worked like a charm. If an emergency item came up that needed immediate attention, or something that was extremely time sensitive, it could be added with a unanimous vote. Legitimate needs were recognized by all Board members and had no problem being added to the agenda.

Fast-forward to the last BOC meeting. Board members Springer, Burton, and Groves were planning to sneak Phil Cordeiro's Pender EMS and Fire takeover resolution onto the agenda without advertising it publicly. They couldn't risk another room full of angry citizens objecting to the idea.

Remember what happened two meetings ago when Burton's resolution requiring the Pender Sheriff's Office to become ICE agents was met with a hostile, standing room only crowd of opposition, forcing Burton to back down – a resolution that wasn't even supported by the Sheriff.

They didn't want that happening again. And the BOC trio knew they would never get a unanimous vote to add the Pender EMS resolution to the agenda with Brad George sitting there. So throw trans-

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Master of Puppets



John Hood
The Carolina Journal
Special to the Post & Voice
Institute fosters stronger public leadership

“What’s in a name?” wrote the Bard in his masterpiece *Romeo and Juliet*. “That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”

William Shakespeare possessed extraordinary gifts. On this matter, however, don't take his poetic flourish as a general rule. Names are *not* extraneous. They can matter a great deal — clarifying what is muddled, exposing what is hidden, emphasizing what is important. “If names be not correct,” wrote another oft-quoted sage, Confucius, “language is not in accordance with the truth of things. If language be not in accordance with the truth of things, affairs cannot be carried on to success.”

Veterans of politics and public policy would surely agree. More than a few well-meaning candidates have bombed by using the wrong

words and images to introduce themselves to voters. And more than a few promising ideas have remained just that, falling far short of enactment, because their advocates failed to define their ends memorably and their means persuasively.

Or so argued the late Walt de Vries. A professor and former campaign aide to Michigan Gov. George Romney (father of Mitt), Walt founded a short-lived training program for North Carolina candidates in 1974, then relaunched it in its current form in 1988 with co-founders Bill Friday, longtime president of the University of North Carolina system; former federal judge and congressman Richardson Preyer; and Preyer's cousin Smith Richardson Jr., a philanthropist and former chairman of Richardson-Vicks Inc.

They dubbed it the North Carolina Institute of Political Leadership. The name suited the times well. Having been an overwhelmingly Democratic state for most of the past century, North Carolina was by the 1980s becoming more politically competitive in the fall, not just in the spring (when Democratic primaries had, for all intents and purposes, decided who would control most state and local offices).

In 1988, Democrats still enjoyed comfortable, if not overwhelming, majorities in the General Assembly and held nearly all judicial, Council of State, and county offices. But

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Jefferson Weaver

Sound of the Harvest

As I awoke the other morning to the sound of a giant vacuum cleaner. I knew it was time for the harvest.

It's been said that trees are not planted for our own benefit, but for that of our children and grandchildren. I have always had a particular affinity for old piney woods, where the straw softens the step of every living creature that moves, and the tall straight trunks reach to Heaven. I have too many times referred to a forest of longleaf pines as a cathedral, but then again I've been blessed to stand in a couple of famous cathedrals whose flying buttresses and incredible frescoes; they had absolutely nothing on the towering spires and bas-relief bark of a longleaf pine forest.

Anyone who has ever had the privilege of living next to a cornfield knows the peace and privacy it brings for several months, when the golden stalks are tall and thick and keep both prying eyes and irritating noises at bay. The same can be said of a pine forest, although the peace lasts much longer than from the first June rain to the September's harvest.

I am a bit of a pine snob, since I tend to look down on the working class white and loblolly pines. I know they too serve an important role, plus they grow faster, making for a quicker harvest than the longleaf royalty. I have some affection for the lower class pines; they too shelter the deer, the turkey and the blue jay, and feed the squirrel and songbird. When properly maintained their floors can also succor the Venus flytrap, the pitcher plant and the wild grape. Turtles and snakes make their homes there as well. The workaday pines have none of the class and romance of the big trees to me, and I won't apologize for that, even while I respect them.

So when I heard the high-pitched whir, occasionally interrupted by the sound of a brief stall as a blade hit a knot, I felt a little mournful. Like the corn planted every other year in front of our house, the had come, and the harvester was hard at work.

I didn't know most of these pines personally – aside from the occasional emergency involving runaway animals I hadn't ventured far from our own property lines very often, since I was raised that way – but it still saddened me a little. I knew very few of the trails that natural residents laid out in shortcuts and detours through Man's neatly planted rows, trails worn down through expediency or need or whimsy by the deer that occasionally raid my horse's feed or visit with the goats. There was a single short path I cut through the scrub and trash at the edge, mainly to be able to move faster when one of my malcontents decided to enjoy some unsanctioned freedom. I found an almost-intact, ancient Coke bottle out there once, green glass that was significantly older than the trees themselves, thus proving that I wasn't the first to follow that trail.



Jefferson Weaver

Like every red-blooded male, I was and am enthralled by the big machines that seem to effortlessly yank, cut and bundle trees a man couldn't move on his own. It's fascinating to watch how areas that have been in shadows for ten or twenty years suddenly have a green veil torn away and light streaming down on ground the sun had forgotten. I doubt the fellows in the driver's seats of these monsters think along the same lines, but to many another man and not a few ladies, the drivers have a really cool job, operating machines that can cross ditches that have and do eat unwary cars along the roadside, and effortlessly moving through bogs that suck a tall man down to his knees, just so they can enter woods no one has seriously walked for years and gather trees by the truckload. As far as I'm concerned, they deserve the gold they dig from the equivalent of “them thar hills”, especially since more and more forestry companies have become better stewards of the land they leave behind.

The second morning of the harvest, I was getting a cup of coffee when I saw a bundle of trees as thick as I am tall waving above the others. You couldn't see the machine cutting and snatching them. I was amused for a moment, watching the trees “walk” through the woods. It was reminiscent of the Ents in the Lord of the Rings, except these trees weren't sentient and had no say in their own fate, nor was their inevitable death anywhere near as glorious as dying in battle against the forces of evil.

Instead they were being cut, stripped of branches, loaded onto trucks driven by men who might or might not be trying avoid the DMV scales, all so they could wait in line with dozens of other loggers trying to make a living, who hoped that the quota wasn't reached that day or a machine didn't break down or a fire blow or the stock market tumble and drive down the price of pulp wood. Once unloaded, they'd return to the deck, and do it all over again, providing the materials for paper and cardboard and diaper fluff and biofuels and everything else we get from trees. Day in, day out.

I stopped and spoke to one of the men as I was heading for work, just to warn him about our overly-exuberant dogs who would likely climb the fence and chase the machines in the woods, without a thought about what they'd do should they catch one. The fellow I spoke to was friendly, and said they planned to thin 70-75 acres. The dry weather had worked to their advantage and the hope was to reduce the wildfire risks, while giving the remaining trees more room to grow. I agreed that the whole place was begging for a match or a lightning strike, what with years of pine straw breaking down into resin-rich peat that would burn for weeks if the fire ever went into the ground.

“There's some good wood in there,” he agreed.

I saw something in his eye that reminded me of Robert Williams, an old friend now gone home to his reward. Mr. Robert was old school, never having seen or used a chainsaw until after World War II. He snaked logs one by one, lashed to a mule that also plowed the family farm. He knew how to sharpen a two-man crosscut, and how to whet an axe so it bit just right, cutting without chewing.

He was an old man in his 80s by the time we became friends, and he spent his entire adult life in the “logging woods” of the Carolinas and Georgia. He loved trees, even while he had a desire to see some of them fall.

We happened to be together one sunny afternoon when he directed me down a dirt road in the middle of nowhere, which in turn led to another dirt road on the far edge of nowhere. Far back in the woods, we found a managed cutover. One side had an idle loading deck; the other, tall pines as old as my guide.

We got out of the truck and he leaned on his walker, shuffling through the sugar sand to one of the pines standing watch for nearly a century. Mr. Robert stroked the tree like some men would a horse or a pretty woman.

“Don't matter how old you are,” he said, “you still see something like this and want to put an axe to it. Farmers love corn. Loggers love trees.”

And just like the farmer has to chop down the corn he has nurtured and loved, so must the logger take down the trees that have reached for the sky.

Sometimes those things we love, we must harvest.

Send Letters to the Editor to posteditor@post-voice.com

My Spin



Tom Campbell

Cracking eggs and tearing down the henhouse

“What do you think of all the turmoil coming out of Washington,” my friend asked while we were making coffee before church. “It’s a real mess,” I responded, not really wanting to engage in a political discussion in a house of worship. “I never thought Trump would do so much so fast,” she concluded.

I didn’t respond further. Why so many are surprised? Many of us tried to warn about Project 2025 and even though Trump claimed he didn’t know anything about it, the 900-page game plan is becoming reality.

Voters were obviously worried more about the price of eggs than the character of the person who would lead our country. Since Jan. 20, Maga types are pass off all the turmoil by rationalizing, “if you want to make an omelet you’ve got to break a few eggs.” You can’t make big change by just doing the same-old, same-old.

Speaking of eggs, Trump promised he was going to bring down the cost of those eggs as soon as he took office. In December a dozen eggs cost \$4.16, up from \$3.60 in November. In January those eggs cost \$4.95 a dozen and are projected to increase another 41 percent this year. How’s that working out for everyone?

DOGE, the so-called department of government efficiency is running amuck – slashing and burning almost everything, firing people without regard to what they do. Then, as often as not, they have to restore services and re-hire people they just laid

off. If DOGE really wants to provide a valued and lasting service, why don’t they take on our do-little congress? It could use some shaking up.

It came as no surprise that governments across the country caught “DOGE Fever.” Our North Carolina legislature has been summoning cabinet leaders and ranking officials to appear before them to answer questions about what their agencies do, how they go about doing it, how they benefit people and how can they economize. House Speaker Destin Hall has created a new House Select Committee on Government Efficiency.

Might I suggest a more critical use of our legislature’s time would be to strategize how state government, our universities, hospitals, and other public services are going to function without the \$1 billion or more in funding cuts from agencies like the Departments of Education, Pell Grants, Transportation, Health and Human Services, the VA, NIH and research projects we appear certain to lose.

Most of us agree the federal government needs to work better, spend less, reduce red tape and provide better customer services. But destroying the hen house (using the egg metaphor once again) is creating more problems than it is solving.

Our state has made many thrusts to improve efficiency, cut costs or improve services through the years. GovOps (the Joint Legislative Commission on Governmental Operations), the PEP (Program Evaluation Committee), Governor McCrory’s GEAR (Government Efficiency and Reform) initiative and the 2017 Results First initiative, among others, have produced some changes but have stopped short of making significant lasting results.

Virtually no one is around who can remember back to 1991, when a similar mood to effect savings and improve government efficiency resulted in the hiring of Peat Marwick to do a statewide examination of all state agencies and

programs. Called GPAC (Government Performance and Audit Committee), it spent millions of dollars and two years developing a comprehensive study. A big hoopla heralded the release of the report, followed by pledges from state leaders that major changes were forthcoming. There were some achievements, but not nearly so many or as meaningful as had been touted. Today, GOOGLE can’t even find stories lauding the results of GPAC.

Why aren’t big change initiatives more impactful? It’s complicated – not a satisfactory answer, but a truthful one. Self-preservation is one reason. The minute an agency or program is attacked or threatened supporters come out of the woodwork to preserve their jobs, their pet projects or traditions. There are always some who cite examples of the good that’s been done or the ill that will result when a program or jobs are cut. Lobbying is intense and lawmakers, who make a lot of noise about wanting change, tend to back away when threatened by losing lots of votes or campaign contributions.

Change is difficult. And to make real change you can’t just cut something and expect widespread support. Selling change requires a plan and promise for how things will be better. Changemakers are better tearing down than rebuilding.

But the biggest reason why big changes are seldom made in government is because reformers try to change too much too fast. They never learn. Frederick Hartmann, longtime political science professor at the Naval War College, repeatedly admonished his students: “Never take on more enemies than you can handle at the time.”

We strongly suspect the President and our legislature will be forced to learn Hartmann’s Law.

Tom Campbell is a Hall of Fame North Carolina broadcaster and columnist who has covered North Carolina public policy issues since 1965. Contact him at tomcamp@carolinabroadcasting.com.



Donna King
The Carolina Journal
Special to the Post & Voice

Where were you during the March ‘93 blizzard?

With this week’s 70-degree days across North Carolina, it is difficult to imagine what we faced Mar. 13, 1993. This week, 32 years ago, North Carolina was caught in the icy grip of what would become one of the most memorable and devastating weather events in the state’s history: the Storm of the Century. The blizzard that swept through the state brought with it snow, ice, and wind that would alter the state’s landscape for weeks to come.

What made the storm so remarkable was not just the amount of snow that fell, but the scale of the event itself. Stretching across the entire eastern United States, the 1993 blizzard was a monumental storm that affected millions of people from the Gulf Coast all the way to New England. Yet it was in North Carolina where the storm’s full force was most felt.

The storm began to make its mark to North Carolina Mar. 12, 1993. What started as a typical spring weather pattern quickly escalated into something far more severe. Within hours, snow began to fall in heavy, almost-contin-

ous sheets, coating the state in white. The snow accumulation was impressive by any standard, with some areas receiving up to 20 inches of snow in just a matter of hours. Mount Mitchell saw 50 inches of snow.

Gale-force winds created huge drifts, making roads impassable and leaving thousands of people stranded in their homes or in snowbound vehicles. Power outages were widespread, even casting Charlotte Coliseum in the dark while North Carolina was battling Virginia in the ACC Tournament. As snow accumulation weighed down power lines and trees, many were left without electricity for days. Schools were closed, businesses shut down, and for a time, the entire state came to a standstill. Electricity was out from Florida to Maine, impacting nearly 10 million people and businesses.

Former National Weather Service (NWS) director Louis Uccellini said the storm had a central pressure that is usually found in Category 3 hurricanes. The storm eventually spawned tornadoes and crippled much of North Carolina under snow and flood waters.

“What was remarkable to us, being inside the forecast, was that people started making decisions on it,” said Uccellini. “The New York Turnpike Authority announced that it was going to close the turnpike on Friday night given the amount of snow that we were forecasting, three to four feet of snow up in upstate New York along the mountains. And then you had states up the chain of the Appalachian Mountains declaring states of emergency even before the snow fell.”

In other words, leadership and preparedness matter.

Leadership does not just come into play when the crisis strikes, but in the years ahead, diligently preparing and designing a response plan for a multitude of scenarios. North Carolina’s Department of Emergency Management does just that, and it now has the lessons of the 1993 storm and 2024’s Hurricane Helene. It also has learned from the failures of the North Carolina Office of Resilience and Recovery in responding to Hurricanes Matthew and Florence.

For meteorologists, the 1993 blizzard became a case study in how to prepare for extreme weather. In the years that followed, North Carolina invested more heavily in weather forecasting technology, disaster response systems, and better preparedness measures to handle such events.

In Gov. Josh Stein’s State of the State speech on Wednesday evening, he made clear that Helene recovery remains a top priority for North Carolina. Any policy changes need to focus on local early warning and ensuring that stable communication systems are in place well before a disaster hits. In the aftermath of Helene, satellite internet systems saved lives when all other communications were down.

Storms of all type in North Carolina have demonstrated how quickly power grids, roads, and emergency services can be overwhelmed, underscoring the importance of investing in infrastructure that can withstand extreme conditions, with backup systems in place for quick recovery.

Clear roles and responsibilities between local, state, and federal agencies are crucial

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Watchman

Continued from Page 3A

parency out the window and employ a nearly-never if ever used tactic to get the resolution on the agenda.

Let’s vote to suspend the rules and add the resolution. That will only take a simple majority. Forget transparency, forget public input, we want our way so damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead. And this way, there won’t be a boardroom full of opposition to the resolution and we can sneak it in.

I have been covering the Pender County Board of Commissioners for more than 15 years. And to my recollection,

that has never been done. I could be mistaken, and I welcome a correction if so, but I do not remember a Board ever suspending the rules to break a rule. I would be willing to bet that it was Cordeiro’s idea – I can’t see Groves, Burton or Springer coming up with that. But that is just my opinion.

To add insult to injury, the Pender EMS resolution attempted to remove the Pender EMS and Fire Board of Directors and replace them with Groves, Springer and Burton. Imagine that. The BOC was trying to remove the Board of Directors of a private, non-profit and replace them with commissioners simply because the county does business with them and they want to take it

over.

Get ready for more of this tactic – throw it against the wall and see if it sticks. If so, we got away with it. Trouble was, Brad George scraped it off the wall and tossed it back by objecting to the takeover and it was confirmed by County Attorney Trey Thrumman.

Nope. You can’t do that. You can change out the county representatives, but you can’t dissolve the board in favor of installing Burton, Groves, and Springer.

Break the rules, lie, hurt people, keep things from the public, but you are ok as long as you mention Jesus and say God bless Pender County on Facebook. Friends, if it’s a good idea, you don’t have to

sneak around in the dark to get it done – it can stand the bright light of day.

And a final point. As he was introducing Cordeiro’s Pender EMS resolution last week, Springer made a point to emphasize this was not a personal vendetta. It was nearly the first words out of his mouth. It reminded me of the old saying, when someone says it ain’t about the money, it’s ALWAYS about the money.

Personal vendettas? Pender County friends and neighbors, this BOC trio has more axes to grind than a Northwoods lumberjack convention. Action like this will set Pender County back 15 years. Transparency huh...It’s as clear as mud.

Hood

Continued from Page 3A

the governor, Jim Martin, was about to be reelected for an unprecedented (and still unmatched) second term as a Republican. The GOP would also win its first races that year for lieutenant governor and statewide judicial office.

Over the ensuing 36 years, IOPL has trained more than 1,200 North Carolinians to serve in various roles in politics and policy. About a third have won election to office. Multipartisan from the start, IOPL educates two classes a year of fellows spanning the ideological spectrum. From a similar balanced faculty of practitioners and experts, they learn the basic blocking and tackling of politics as well as building coalitions and making ethical decisions in stressful conditions.

Jim Hunt, Virginia Foxx, Dan Blue, Tom Ellis, Harvey Gantt, Sue Myrick, Henry Frye — these and many other notable North Carolina politicians have served on IOPL’s board. I am honored to serve as its current chairman, alongside the likes of N.C. Rep. Brian Turner of Asheville, Charlotte City Councilman Tariq Bokhari, former New Hanover County Commission Chairman Jonathan Barfield, and former Supreme Court Justice Bob Edmunds.

Times change. Sometimes names must change with them. The term “political” has a more negative connotation

than it did four decades ago. When we introduce IOPL to potential fellows, partners, and donors, some hear the word “political” and think “toxic,” or at least “partisan.”

A while back, I was reviewing some old IOPL documents and found Bill Friday describing its mission as ensuring that “North Carolina enters the next century with the best public leaders possible.” I also found Walt de Vries describing it as training “ethical, accessible, and responsible public leadership.”

I felt tumbler click into place. At a subsequent board meeting, I suggested the idea to the other directors. We discussed it internally and with many IOPL alumni and supporters. Consensus emerged.

We are now the North Carolina Institute of Public Leadership. Still IOPL. Still committed to our mission. And it still smells sweet.

John Hood is a John Locke Foundation board member. His books Mountain Folk, Forest Folk, and Water Folk combine epic fantasy with American history (FolkloreCycle.com).



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Opinion



Watchman on the wall



Andy Pettigrew
Post and Voice Publisher

An Epistle

I know the majority of you don't watch the live streams of Commissioner meetings. I wouldn't either except for the fact it's our responsibility to report to you what the Board is doing.

During the second day of the annual County Commissioner's budget retreat, the board spent time listening to and agreeing with Jerry Groves' baseless accusations and lies. Groves said it, but Randy Burton and Brent Springer agreed, so all three are guilty. During that fateful livestream, the endgame of these attacks on the newspaper was revealed.

These three men are attempting to carry out Phil Cordeiro's desire to destroy the local newspaper.

The problem with the paper is this – we are dangerous – dangerous to Groves, Burton and Springer because we will seek out and print the truth. And this is not healthy for the political careers of those three – and for Cordeiro's agenda. If we don't say what they want us to say, they will destroy the Post & Voice.

So much for transparency. It appears our three commissioners and their handlers prefer working in the dark.

In an attempt to punish us for telling the truth, the three commissioners are working with county staff to remove the *Post & Voice* as the county newspaper of record. They are trying to stop advertising with us and hit us hard financially.

As the only newspaper published in Pender County, we are, by state law, the newspaper of record and all legal advertising must be published in the *Post & Voice*. Apparently, our commissioners and their advisors don't understand the difference between publication and distribution.

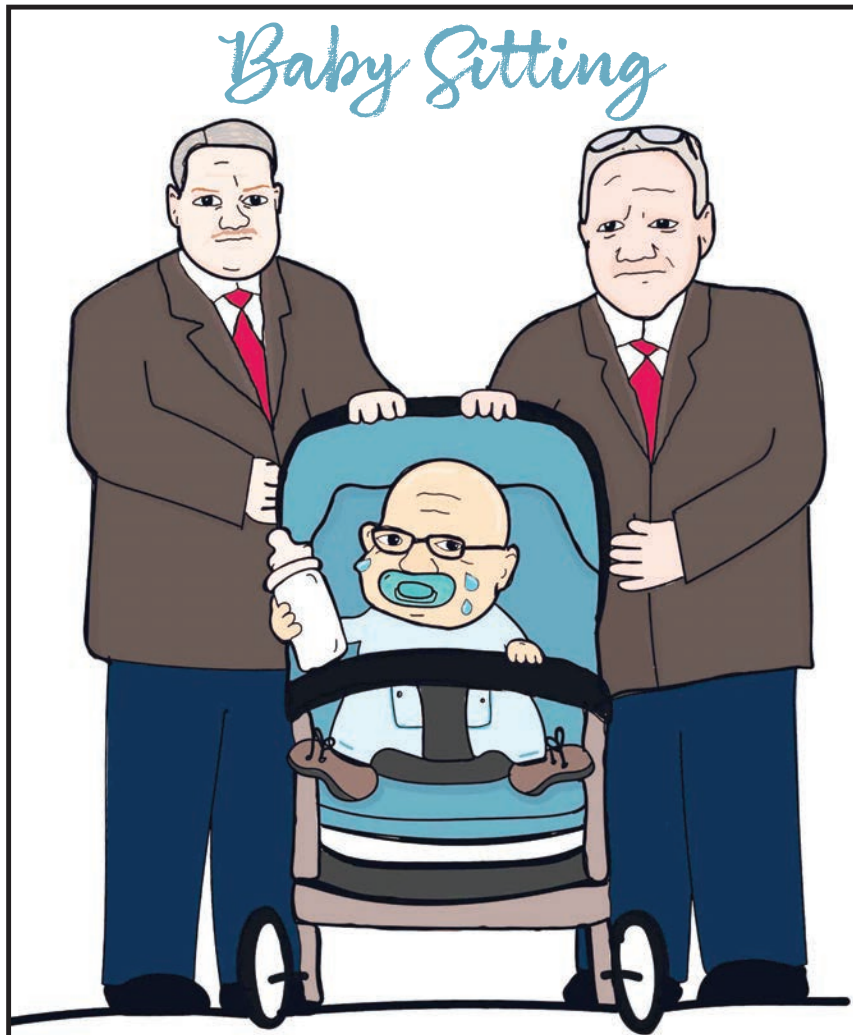
There is one published here (the *Post & Voice*), and many distributed. You can get a newspaper in the mail from anywhere in the country – *Wilmington StarNews*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Washington Post*, *Atlanta Journal/Constitution*, *Raleigh News and Observer*, *Charlotte Observer*, *Greensboro News and Record*, *Winston-Salem Journal*, *Arkansas Democrat* – any newspaper from anywhere right here in Pender County through the U.S. Postal Service. But it is publication that matters by state statute. And we publish here.

It's amusing when county officials think they know more about the newspaper business than we do. I didn't fall off the turnip truck yesterday. I've been doing this a long time and know my business. We don't just make this stuff up.

I have advised the commissioners and Manager Michael Silverman of the applicable state law, with no response. If they do this, they will end up wasting taxpayer money (to which we will dutifully report to the citizens of Pender County), and they will also run all those legal notices with the *Post & Voice* anyway – or all the county's attempts to collect delinquent property taxes will grind to a halt.

Then I guess we can all stop paying our property taxes because the county can't foreclose without a legal notice and it's not legal if we don't publish it. See what that does to the tax collection rate and the county budget.

No offense to the county staff. I'm quite sure they are afraid for their jobs if they don't go along



with the County Commissioner's vendetta against us. And they are wise to be fearful of that trio.

There is a simple fix for all this – don't misbehave (to use a gentle term) and we won't have anything to print. If you misbehave and we find out, it's going in the newspaper. The voters of Pender County have a right to know who their elected representatives really are – not who they pretend to be.

They also have a right to know when said officials are not acting in the best interest of the people but are working for themselves or special interests. It is our job to publish the information and the people can decide for themselves.

And now, some of the more interesting statements by Commissioner Jerry Groves during the budget retreat Mar. 21. It's all on video starting at the 2:01 time stamp, in case you want to verify what I'm reporting. He did most of the talking regarding the newspaper.

I think this is the time to bring this out. Three commissioners being made puppets in the local paper is not fulfilling community expectations.

Having a paper that makes \$100,000 a year off of citizens to make fun of county employees.

So we need to address that. And I'm glad we are live streamed. We need another paper to represent Pender County. (Jerry Groves Mar. 21 budget retreat.)

Gee, where to start. I think if the local newspaper didn't report that three commissioners were acting as puppets to an unelected third party, THEN we would not be meeting community expectations. I believe we should report what our elected officials are doing and saying and let the voters decide for themselves. That is meeting community expectations.

Since he referenced the puppet cartoon, I have to mention this. Groves commented publicly on Facebook that the Master of Puppets cartoon from two weeks ago looked like a lynching and is a hate crime. Really. What next?

Groves regurgitates the statement about making \$100,000 off the citizens. This isn't the first time I have explained this in these pages.

I don't know if that figure is accurate, but let's say for argument's sake it is. First, it's not a salary as Groves implies. We don't work for the county and have no obligation to promote the commissioner's agenda. Apparently, Groves, Burton and Springer believe since the county advertises with us, they have the right to tell us what to print and what citizens should read.

If we don't do what they say, then they will punish us. It appears they want to control what the citizens read and the information published about county government. Can anyone say *Pravda*?

Pravda, meaning "truth" in Russian, was the official newspaper of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, serving as a mouthpiece

for party ideology and policy from 1912 until the collapse of the USSR in 1991 – pure state controlled communist propaganda. A free press has always been a challenge to government control and power.

We are an independent contractor that serves our readers and sells advertising to the county. And the lion's share of that figure comes from running delinquent tax notices that end up recouping money for the county and are PAID FOR by fees charged during the process, not the citizens of Pender County. The rest is other advertising from different county departments.

And FYI. It isn't fun money and profit. It takes \$50,000 a year for us to just put ink on paper – straight up printing costs, 52 weeks a year – not including postage, distribution, staff salaries, taxes and all the other costs in running a business. That \$100K figure sounds impressive until you look at it honestly.

Here is a good one – we make fun of county employees.

We love county employees. There are great people working for Pender County – we work with them, promote what they are doing and help anyway we can. It's politicians we don't trust and keep an eye on. Oddly, I do believe Mr. Groves is referring to himself, Burton, and Springer as county employees.

Uh, no. You are not. You are elected officials – politicians, and therefore, fair game. Since the printing press was invented and newspapers along with it, elected officials and politicians have been the subject of satire, political cartoons and editorials. For us to not keep up that time-honored tradition is downright un-American.

Sorry Jerry. Commissioners are not county employees and you don't get a pass. Besides, your behavior is a virtual fountain of material for political satire and editorial comment.

Commission Chairman Randy Burton made a comment during the newspaper discussion at the Mar. 21 meeting. Burton lamented it was a shame the people of Pender County have to read what is in our paper. I disagree – they don't have to read it. They read it because they have the freedom to do so.

But I agree 100 percent it is a shame – a shame this trio of commissioners act the way they do and we are obligated to report it to the citizens of Pender County.

In a real way, Burton, Springer and Groves do control what the newspaper reports – by their actions. Don't misbehave and we have nothing negative to say. Misbehave, and rest assured we will share it with the voters of Pender County. After all. It is the truth and we don't make it up.

Jefferson Weaver

QWERTY, QR codes, and press one for English

The phone actually rang the other day, instead of beeping or clicking. The voice on the other end of the line was pleasant, female and strange.

"Don't you know who this is?" the caller said, and identified herself as someone with whom I frequently communicate regarding animals. The telephone call was, in a word, nice. It also took less time than texting back and forth to deal with a potential problem.

As I pressed the end button, I absentmindedly set my phone on the 1957 Royal typewriter on my desk. I realized I have officially reached that ill-defined, indeterminate age men reach when they automatically grimace at technology.

Don't get me wrong. I use tech, a lot, every single day. Texting, email and a variety of message platforms are de rigueur for me. I get literally dozens of various messages every single day, but likely not more than a half-dozen calls, and those are almost always from numbers I have saved.

That was why I was so confused when the phone first rang. I initially started to ignore the call, figuring it was someone trying to sell me an extended warranty on one of my vehicles (most of which qualify for the vehicular equivalent of Social Security) or a Medicare supplement (for which I am not quite old enough to qualify, and wouldn't buy from a random stranger calling from Isanpur, anyway).

As the joke goes, I am pre-GPS, old enough to remember when we navigated with maps and later, printouts from MapQuest, like we were pirates from a bygone era. I'm fairly sure a buddy and I found that place where the old cartographers wrote "Beyond Here There Be Dragons" when we got off on the wrong exit in Washington, D.C. once, but that's a column for another day.

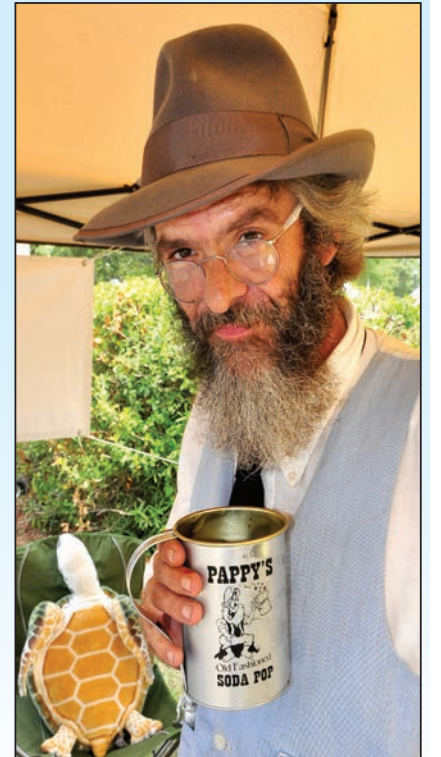
The typewriter on my desk is not the first one I ever used, but it is my most functional one. Whenever I have a little kid in my office, I encourage them to try it. Sure, I have a lot of tangled keys and I often have to rewind the ribbon, but it's cool to see their eyes light up when they think of a letter, find the key and smack, it appears on the paper. Some of them go so far as to write notes on the old Royal. I keep every one written by my neophyte proteges.

The keyboard is the same in terms of letters and symbols – QWERTYUIOP, etc. – as those on my computer, tablet and telephone, but it isn't the same. A typewriter requires commitment to put a word down. Erasing isn't as easy as backspacing, or highlighting and hitting delete. There's no Command Z on a typewriter to reverse a series of mistakes, only a balled-up piece of paper tossed in frustration at a trashcan or a lot of Whiteout.

There is permanence to paper, which is one reason I take a lot of notes on virtually everything. It's a habit I learned from my father; I still have dozens of his ubiquitous steno pads, filled with his handwriting, with his own code of abbreviations. It wasn't a secret code, per se, but between his handwriting and what worked for him, he never needed to encrypt anything.

Usually the notes were news oriented, but I've found sketches and measurements of various projects, detailed historical references to things he found interesting (SRTLWOL, Pg6 G8, for example, referred to a book, page and paragraph) and even one list of prescriptions.

My own notes are not usually so cryptic, but they can be equally illegible and confusing to one who has no reason to be reading them



Jefferson Weaver

anyway.

Whenever I have a reason to call a business, I automatically grab a pen and paper, if I'm not by my beloved Royal. I lie to write down the firm's answers to my questions, since the process helps me think.

My blood ran cold the other day when an earnest young man on the end of the line explained that I could scan the QR code or logon to the company's website via the link he'd just sent me by text. My question was ridiculously basic, on the lines of "Is water wet?", but I wanted to be 100 percent sure of the answer.

Yet he couldn't tell me.

I have no desire to download another application to any of my devices. I have yet to be able to successfully scan a QR code for anything, and I don't really care how convenient and quick it might be. If someone else is content to further widen the communications gulf that was created through the fear of the pandemic then I say that's their choice. We became frightened of speaking to others during the pandemic, never moreso than when, some flibbertigidiot actually posted a drunken social media rant about catching COVID by talking on the telephone – and people believed it.

I am not interested in trusting any company with my bank account information so they can automatically take out the amount they say on the date they choose, and I never have a physical bill for said service.

I have yet to see the efficiency in wasting time by scanning a QR code to download an app to take me to a website that doesn't answer my question so I get sent into a telephone tree that's tangled as a kudzu vine in a blackberry bramble just so I can be charged \$10 to speak with an actual person who may or may not be able to answer my question in English, leading me to give up in frustration after having supplied the company with more data to sell to other companies.

If one of those billionaires really want to make some money, he or she would come up with a product or service that everyone needs, and only offer customer service via telephone to a live human being, at no extra cost. And all of it – product, service, customer service – made and performed in America.

Perhaps one day one of the bright-eyed young'uns who cautiously push down on the dirty keys of my Royal will have a similar visceral reaction, and become that entrepreneur who saves us from QR codes and customer disservice apps. If so, I hope I can be one of the first in line to support them – without scanning something on my phone, logging into an app, or pressing One for English.

Send Letters to the Editor
to posteditor@post-voice.com

Opinion



Watchman on the wall



Andy Pettigrew
Post and Voice Publisher

By the way

I wanted to address this last week, but alas, I ran out of space. But since it is important, I will bring it up now.

Commissioner Jerry Groves is in spin mode, trying desperately to change the meaning of things he has done to his advantage – unsuccessfully.

At the Board of Commissioner's budget retreat last month, Groves made the accusation that the Post and Voice and myself were making fun of him because he grew up poor. This is in reference to his infamous "I was washed in a tub by a black woman" statement made back in 2023.

Now, Groves is spinning this as making fun of him growing up poor – and that is a terrible thing to do. I agree, if it were true. But of course, with Jerry, it's just another lie.

This is all on video, by the way, and is available for anyone to view and draw their own conclusions.

At the BOC meeting in question (Sept. 5, 2023 1:33 in the meeting), Groves was questioned during the meeting by a citizen who asked him "Commissioner Groves, did you make racial remarks about blacks?" Groves sat forward in his seat, and then leaned back laughing, not answering the question.

At the end of the meeting when each commissioner makes remarks, Groves answered her, saying ma'am, I've never done that. Then he launched into the story of being washed in a tub by a black woman when he was a baby. That was the proof he was not a racist.

No one was talking about being poor. It was all about whether he had made racial remarks. Groves' statement had nothing to do with poverty but was in response to being questioned about making racial remarks.

Now however, Groves is spinning the story that it was about being poor and we are terrible people for making fun of him for being underprivileged.

Sorry Jerry, that's not what happened. We, and most who heard you, were shocked that you would think being washed in a tub by a black woman proves you didn't make racial remarks.

Something infinitely more serious and sickening has surfaced recently.

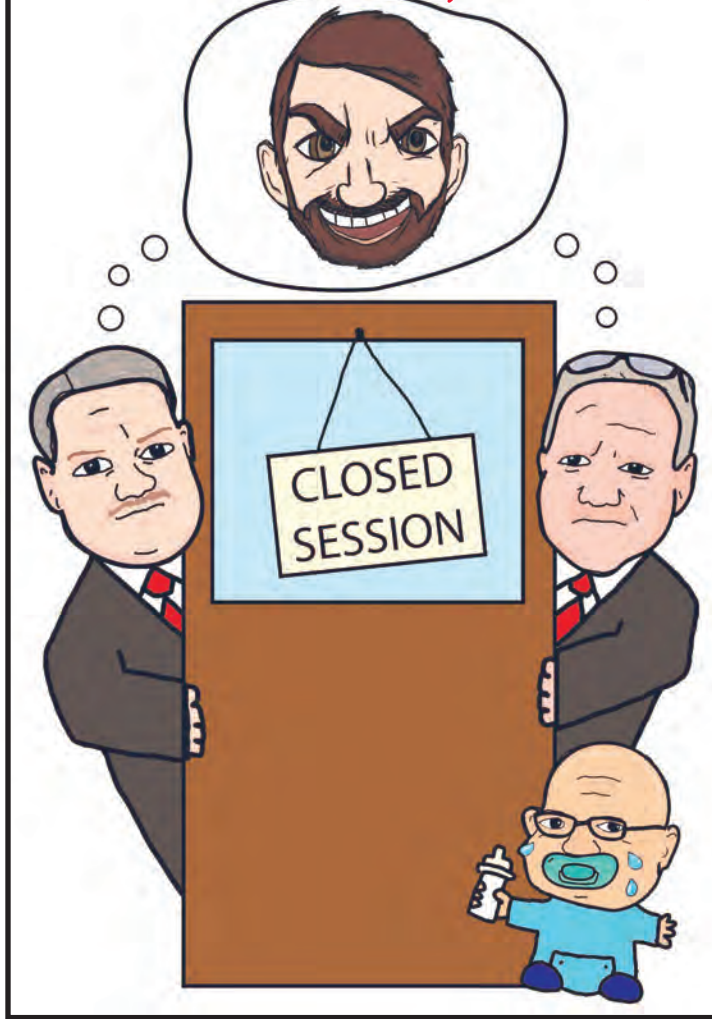
There is another spin that has popped up from the mind of Groves in the past weeks. It seems the Master of Puppets political cartoon which ran a few weeks ago (of which we have received rave reviews) now has a new meaning.

Mr. Groves is saying the cartoon is not about three commissioners who are puppets to political activist Phil Cordeiro, it is about something far more sinister.

Groves says it looks like a lynching (quote from Facebook.) And he is pushing this idea to try to gin up

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All About Transparency?



John Hood
The Carolina Journal
Special to the Post & Voice

Where New York beats North Carolina

For more than a decade, the North Carolina General Assembly has pursued a prudent and successful strategy of making our state one of the best places in the country to live, work, and invest.

I call the strategy prudent because it reflects conservative governance at its best, with a focus on reducing the cost of living and creating jobs (through tax and regulatory reform) while also improving the return on public investment in services such as transportation and education.

I call the strategy successful because it has helped ensure a net inflow of capital and people. Over the past five years, North Carolina's population grew 5.3%. The nation as a whole grew 3.6%. New York, by contrast, grew by only 2.1%. North Carolina ranks at or near the top of most measures of economic freedom. New York ranks at or near the bottom. There is no coincidence here.

In one regulatory arena, however, New York beats North Carolina. The Empire State is one of 27 states that extend full practice authority to advanced-practice nurses. In these jurisdictions, nurses with the requisite training are empowered to evaluate patients; diagnose, order and interpret diagnostic tests; and initiate and manage treatments, including prescribing medications and controlled substances, under the exclusive licensure authority of state boards of nursing.

In another 12 states, such nurses are afforded only limited scope of practice, with laws requiring either that some services be delivered in another setting or that the nurse practitioner operate under a "collaborative agreement" with a physician.

Finally, there are 11 states

where nurse practitioners must provide at least one service under the supervision, delegation or team management of a physician. North Carolina is one of them.

For years, nurses and health care reformers have tried to reform North Carolina's draconian approach.

For years, they've faced vociferous opposition from doctors. I hear from the latter every time I write about scope-of-practice reform. They argue that while they deeply appreciate and value the care provided by nurses, it is too dangerous to permit nurse practitioners to operate independently. Perhaps in most cases outcomes for patients will be fine either way, they concede, but in too many others a nurse practitioner will miss something that a doctor will see, or perform a procedure that a doctor ought to have performed. Why risk such adverse outcomes?

Some scope-of-practice reformers dismiss these arguments as self-serving, saying physicians simply don't want to give up the revenue they derive from "supervising" nurse practitioners. But I believe at least some of my correspondents are sincere. They may well have witnessed an incident in which the presence of a physician proved critical. Or they may just find it implausible to believe that allowing nurses in independent practice to assume more primary-care responsibilities wouldn't generate significant risks.

When it comes to patient care, I agree that policymakers ought not take leaps of faith. But the existence of a patchwork of different regulations across the country has given scholars a rich trove of data to mine. After all, we don't have to guess what would happen if advanced-practice nurses were permitted to deliver the full scope of services for which they are licensed. Some states already do it. Others, including North Carolina, don't.

My reading of the available research is that affording nurses more scope of practice does not typically result in a higher rate of adverse outcomes or a lower quality of care. The most recent study I've seen, published earlier this year in the journal Nursing Outlook, found that states that give nurses broader practice authority ranked higher than more-restrictive states on "overall state health, health outcomes, clinical

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Jefferson Weaver

Celebration in the Sunrise

I am ashamed to admit I rarely make it to a sunrise Easter service anymore. Animals and malfunctioning body parts make for a slow start to any day, and starting one even earlier is to say the least difficult.

I always remember, however, one particular sunrise service.

The Old Man got me up, of course; weekend mornings were our time together, and since he started the day early, I wanted to as well. We had coffee and cereal, bade my dog farewell (he didn't seem too upset, being content to stay home and look after Miss Lois) and headed for the cemetery.

I knew the place well, of course. I mean, I was all boy, and parents in the 70s allowed their children a tremendous amount of freedom. We rode bikes through there, played hide and seek among the tombstones (until we got caught) and explored the woods and creek along the edge of the graveyard more thoroughly than Amadas and Barlowe. Our Cub Scout pack placed flags on veteran graves there every year. And of course, there were funerals now and again. For some reason, I'd never been to a sunrise service there.

That particular morning was cold. Not chilly, but cold. It was foggy as well, which lent itself to all kinds of imaginative thoughts for a little kid who had likely watched an old horror movie the morning before on Sunrise Theater.

The fog, the pre-dawn darkness, and the hushed tones of the faithful few who gathered (most were men, as I recall) gave the entire scene an eerie feeling.

Our preacher, Rev. Tom Freeman, gave the message that morning, bundled like almost all the other men in a long black coat. The sun broke the horizon and began to slowly burn off the mist just as he read the passage about the women questioning the gardener about where Jesus' body had been taken, only to discover that he was no gardener, but the Messiah they sought among the dead.

We have no meteorological or historical records to show what it was like that day 2,000 years ago, when the stone



Jefferson Weaver

was discovered rolled back and the Roman guard were discovered missing. Was it bright, dry and clear? Was it chilly and foggy, as was the morning I remember so vividly? We really don't know, and I reckon in reality it doesn't matter.

What matters is that Jesus Christ, the son of God, born of woman, lived a perfect, sinless life, was unjustly convicted and executed in the worst way imaginable in that time. Plenty of people were crucified, of course, and plenty were flogged to death, but few were subjected to the agony of both, a sadistic torture that He voluntarily took, paying the ultimate price, the sacrificial price for all the sins of all people, forever.

I have a hard enough time, even as a somewhat cynical adult, paying for the faults of others. No one has ever asked me to shed blood to pay for their debt, of course, but sometimes I wonder if that might have been easier.

As a little kid, and now even as a late-middle aged man, I cannot conceive of bearing the sin, the hatred, the evil, the debt of all people, and doing it out of love.

I know the sins I have committed; I need repentance and forgiveness every day. And He knew. As those spikes were driven into His hands and feet, as the blood stank and stuck to the cross and the thorns jammed into His forehead—He knew, almost 2,000 years before I was born, exactly what I would do wrong, when, and

how often. Me and everyone else. He knew as He died, slowly and painfully, and was finally taken down and laid in a borrowed tomb, the door sealed and a guard set upon it. Yet he did it anyway.

He knew how bad I would be, and he paid my sin debt in full in the only way possible. He willingly bore that burden, out of love.

I am not a hateful person, but I cannot fathom that kind of love. I have a wife, friends and family for who I would give my life. The children I call my grandkids: an orphan boy in Uganda, a sassy nine-year-old girl here who may have a new little sister by the time you read this—I would not hesitate to take whatever steps were necessary to protect them. I can see dying for them, with a smile on my face.

But for the people I write about every day, those who inflict pain and suffering on others, the mean and the greedy and the uncaring and the unthinking and the heartless—would I die for them? Likely not.

Yet I am no better than them, in the eyes of Christ. He died for their sins just as He died for theirs, that all men could have eternal life, in Heaven, with Him, where there is no more pain, no more anger, no sorrow, no hunger. He paid that price for me, as sinful and evil as I was and am.

Just as he did for you. Enjoy the bunnies and the candy and the kids in their new Easter clothes this week. Spend the time with your family. Our older nieces are too far away and too grownup for egg hunts any more, but there are other kids to hear laughing as they run across the yard and moms stress over getting their new good clothes dirty.

Just don't forget that it's Resurrection Day, when an open tomb showed the Death and Sin had been defeated forever, and anyone can have a part in that victory, by asking Christ into your heart.

If you can make your morning move along, be there when the sun breaks the horizon, and the preacher says those glorious words, "He is risen."

Lori's Stories



Lori Kirkpatrick

Last Sunday, churches across our community waved palm branches and remembered the moment Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey - a quiet but powerful entry that marked the beginning of Holy Week. Now, just days later, we find ourselves moving toward the heart of the Christian story: the cross and the empty tomb.

Palm Sunday is often remembered for its celebration, but it's also the start of a week filled with deep meaning. As Jesus rode into the city, people shouted "Hosanna!" - a cry that means "save us."

They believed He was coming as a victorious king. But the victory He offered wasn't political or military. It was something greater: peace, forgiveness, and eternal life. He came not to claim a throne, but to offer His life.

The same crowd that cheered for Him would, just days later, fall silent - or worse, shout "Crucify Him!" That shift is hard to imagine, but it reminds us how quickly expectations can change when God doesn't move the way we think He should.

As the week unfolds, we come to Good Friday, when Jesus gave Himself up for us, dying a painful and humiliating death on a cross. It's a heavy moment in the Christian calendar, one that calls for quiet reflection. But it isn't the end of the story.

There's something sacred about the pause between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. It's easy to rush from the sorrow of the cross to the joy of the resurrection, but those in-between hours remind us to slow down. To sit in the stillness. To remember what Jesus endured - not just in death, but in separation, silence, and sacrifice. It's a time to reflect on what God has done for us, to feel the weight

of His love, and to prepare our hearts for the hope that is coming.

Because then comes Easter Sunday.

And here's where the beauty of the Gospel shines brightest: when the women went to the tomb on that first Easter morning, they found it empty. The angel's words were simple but life-changing: "He is not here; He has risen, just as he said" (Matthew 28:6, NIV)

For Christians, the resurrection of Jesus isn't just a historical event. It's a personal promise. It means that sin doesn't get the last word. Death doesn't get the final say. And hope, even when it feels buried, always has a way of rising again.

So as we move from the palms of last Sunday to the celebration of Easter this weekend, may we hold on to what this week truly represents. It's a story of love stronger than death, grace deeper than guilt, and a Savior who walked willingly from praise to pain - all so we could walk with Him from brokenness to new life.

Wishing you and your family a meaningful Holy Week and a joyful Easter.

My Spin



Tom Campbell

Time to fold 'em

We weren't surprised when the NC Court of Appeals ruled in favor of their Republican colleague Jefferson Griffin's challenge of some 60,000 who voted in November's elections. But their actual ruling was astonishing. They demanded that those 60,000 persons had 15 business days to prove they were, in fact, qualified to vote or else their votes would be thrown out. What were these appellate judges smoking? Do they really believe this is possible? It is one of the most incredible and unreasonable verdicts ever issued. One of the judges opined that even one unlawful vote essentially "disenfranchises lawful voters." Is he intimating that if one vote is cast unlawfully all votes should be disqualified? Fortunately, the NC Supreme Court displayed more wisdom and put a stay on the panel's decision. There was no indication what comes next, but let's hope the Court of Appeals ruling is discarded. Griffin maintains that the 700+ margin of victory for Allison Riggs tallied by the State Board of Elections and confirmed by recount was not fair because some 60,000 votes were ineligible. The voters' registrations didn't contain either the driver's license number or the last four digits of the voter's Social Security number. Never mind this challenge had been made before the election and resolved. These same voters cast ballots in the primary election and perhaps previous elections.

Hood

Continued from Page 3A

care, quality of care, access to care, number of primary care providers per 100,000 population, and childhood immunizations." On Mar. 25, a bipartisan group of state lawmakers filed new legislation to give North Carolina nurses full practice authority. I hope they succeed. On this one issue, we should, indeed, follow New York's lead. John Hood is a John Locke Foundation board member. His latest books, *Mountain Folk* and *Forest Folk*, combine epic fantasy with early American history (FolkloreCycle.com).



If some (or even all) of these "ineligible" votes are thrown out does that mean they are also thrown out for other races in November's elections, even though those contests may have been declared certified? I went to the NC Board of Elections dashboard and studied November's election outcomes to find just how serious a problem this might be. The only congressional race that fell within the 60,000 search parameter was the 1st District race, where incumbent Democrat Don Davis beat Laurie Buckhout by 6,307. Wonder if any of Davis' votes were "ineligible?" No Council of State races fell within the parameter, but many legislative races did. In the North Carolina State Senate elections two were decided by fewer than 5,000 votes and two more by fewer than 500 votes. In Senate District 18, Terrence Everitt (D) beat Ashlee Adams by a mere 128 votes. And in District 42, Mrs. Woodson Bradley (D) defeated Stacie McGinn by just 209 votes. Were any of those votes ineligible?

The 120 seat House of Representatives really opened a can of worms. 10 races were decided by fewer than 6,000 votes, 4 by fewer than 2,000 votes and 4 by fewer than one thousand votes. It is feasible that the outcome of these 18 elections could have changed the partisan makeup of the House if ineligible votes were thrown out. We could spend from now until Jesus comes again trying to ascertain how many of the 60,000 are truly ineligible. Perhaps we should just call for an entire November election do-over. Yes, this is a ludicrous proposal, but it is no more ludicrous than Jefferson Griffin's attempt to disenfranchise voters he believes would have voted for his opponent after the election was held. You might remember a similar tactic was attempted by the NC Republican Party prior to the election. They claimed that 225,000 voter registrations should be

disqualified, one of several attempts to challenge election rules and voting. They were nothing less than attempts by the GOP to discredit our elections. They went nowhere. Does Griffin's claim ring a familiar bell? Here's my spin: We live in a culture where trust is increasingly rare. We don't trust government. Don't trust politicians. We don't trust business, or religion or just about anything or anyone. One thing North Carolinians have trusted is our elections. Repeatedly we have seen reviews, recounts and studies revealing that the amount of fraud in our elections is negligible. Nobody ever claimed any election was perfect, but our election laws are solid, the administration of elections has been remarkably free from miscreants and misdeeds and the vote counting (and recounting) is accurate. Jefferson Griffin's "sore loser campaign" is yet another blatant attempt to drive a wedge in the public trust of our elections. He demands to get his way after the votes have been counted. We ask once more. If we are going to disqualify any number of voters from the Supreme Court elections shouldn't fairness dictate that we also throw them out for all elections, then recalculate who won and lost? Can you see where we are headed? Are we really going to have lawsuit after lawsuit, appeal after appeal ad nauseum? Continued pursuit of this case is both costly and unjust. Kenny Rogers, in his classic song, *The Gambler*, said it well: "You got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em." Judge Griffin, it is time to fold 'em. Don't make yourself or your political party more untrustworthy.

Tom Campbell is a Hall of Fame North Carolina broadcaster and columnist who has covered North Carolina public policy issues since 1965. Contact him at tomcamp@carolinabroadcasting.com.



Donna King
The Carolina Journal
Special to the Post & Voice
Free markets, not tariffs built America

In the past several weeks the mounting debate over tariffs has created an ideological split among conservatives. While the popularity of Donald Trump united some centrists and right-leaning

voters, he also drew in those who traditionally might have leaned Democrat, even those who sought to vote for the first time. He tapped into the frustrations of the American people, many of whom felt downtrodden by the government, progressive cultural trends, and global politics. Therein lies the challenge: the Trump administration unites Americans over fundamental fairness, but can divide over core principles of conservatives, like free-market economic policies. We cheered when his DOGE team uncovered waste and abuse by those who took billions from the taxpayers' well, but did little to help their community at large. We cheered when they uncovered false accounts stealing entitlement benefits. The audits are ongoing and there

will likely be many more discoveries, but those are concrete examples, not just theoretical, of the abuse that millions of Americans felt for years. However, the cost of tariffs is not theoretical either. The increased cost of goods from tariffs impacts North Carolinians directly, and the rising cost of living is a primary reason 77,284,118 voters cast their ballots for Donald Trump less than six months ago. Yes, he has widespread support, and, yes, this is about fairness. But this is also about fairness for business owners and consumers to operate the economy free from the heavy hand of government and global bureaucrats, a policy strategy that made America what it is.

Continued on Page 12A

Watchman

Continued from Page 3A

opposition to the newspaper. Now Groves' comment made at the end of the BOC meeting April 7 wondering about being in the paper next week with a rope around his neck makes sense – another absurd and disgusting reference to lynching. This is total desperation. Using something as historically horrible and offensive to not only the African-American community, but to all people as lynching to smear the newspaper and publisher in a vain attempt to cover his actions is completely beneath the dignity of a county commissioner, and a human being. Don't be surprised if this sickening lynching nonsense shows up at the April 22 BOC meeting. No sane individual looking at that cartoon would come up with that mean-

ing – Groves, Burton and Springer dangling on the end of puppet strings attached to the fingers of the Master of Puppets Phil Cordeiro. There is no excuse for such absurd and racist remarks.

How long are Pender County citizens going to put up with Groves' disgusting, unacceptable behavior and the two other commissioners that support him?

PUBLIC NOTICE

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA-Part B, Public Law 108.446) Project is presently being amended. The Project describes the special education programs that PENDER COUNTY proposes for Federal funding for the 2025-2026 School Year. Interested persons are encouraged to review amendments to the Project and make comments concerning the implementation of special education under this Federal Program. All comments will be considered prior to the submission of the amended Project to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in Raleigh, North Carolina. The IDEA-Part B Project is open to the public for review and comments during the week of April 28, 2025 in the office of Special Education Programs located at Pender County Board of Education, 925 Penderlea Highway, Burgaw, North Carolina 28425. To make an appointment, call 910-259-2187 ext. 710204.

April 17, 24, 2025

NOTICE

MEETING OF THE PENDER COUNTY BOARD OF EQUALIZATION & REVIEW

Pursuant to North Carolina General Statute 105-322, the Pender County Board of Equalization & Review will meet as required by law.

PURPOSE OF MEETINGS: To hear, upon request, appeals from taxpayers who own or control taxable property assessed for taxation in Pender County regarding the valuation of such property or the property of others, and to fulfill other duties and responsibilities by law.

TIME OF MEETINGS: The Board will convene its first meeting on Thursday, May 1st, 2025, at 1 p.m. The Board will meet again on Thursday, May 15, 2025, 1 p.m. with plans to adjourn the 2025 tax year. If needed, other hearings will be scheduled at a later date(s) with the sole purpose of hearing any remaining open 2025 property tax appeals filed timely on or before the adjournment date. The meetings will be held in the Public Assembly Room located at 805 S. Walker Street, Burgaw, NC 28425.

In the event of earlier or later adjournment, notice to that effect will be published in this newspaper.

Notice is specifically given that all appeals or requests for a hearing must be received no later than Thursday, May 15th, at 1 p.m.

Notice is further given that dates for the hearing of appeals timely filed will be available through the office of the Tax Administrator, serving as the Clerk to the Board of Equalization & Review, and will also be provided to individuals and organizations that have requested notice pursuant to North Carolina General Statute 143-318.12.

All requests for hearing should be made to:

PENDER COUNTY BOARD OF EQUALIZATION & REVIEW
C/O Pender County Tax Administration
PO Box 67, Burgaw, NC 28425
(910) 259-1221

2025 Property Tax Appeals

2025 Property Tax Appeals are now being accepted by the Pender County Tax Department.

Informal deadline for appealing for the 2025 tax year is April 30, 2025.

To allow staff enough time to review your appeal, we kindly ask that any submissions be submitted on or before this date.

Final deadline for appealing is the day of adjournment of the Board of Equalization and Review, watch for notification of these deadlines in the Pender-Topsail Post and Voice.

To submit an appeal, please mail back or drop off the 2025 Property Tax Appeal form to our office at 300 E. Fremont St, PO Box 67, Burgaw, NC 28425. Please complete the appeal form as completely as possible and include any documentation you have to support your appeal.

You can find the appeal form online to be printed or pick one up from our office. You may also call our office and we will email you a form

If mailing your appeal, it MUST be postmarked by the United States Postal Service on or before the date of adjournment of the Board of Equalization and Review to be reviewed for the 2025 tax year. If dropping off your appeal, it must be received in our office on or before the date of adjournment of the Board of Equalization and Review.

Any untimely submissions will not be reviewed for the current tax year but will be kept on file and reviewed the following year.

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FOCUS
BROADBAND

From: Jerry Groves
To: Michael C. Silverman; W. Randy Burton; BOCC; Trey Thurman; Andre Hogan
Cc: Lexi Stanfield
Subject: Re: [External]Newspaper information
Date: Monday, March 24, 2025 10:15:47 AM

At any cost we will use the Star News ,

Get Outlook for iOS

From: Michael C. Silverman <msilverman@pendercountync.gov>
Sent: Monday, March 24, 2025 10:02:10 AM
To: W. Randy Burton <wburton@pendercountync.gov>; BOCC <bocc@pendercountync.gov>; Trey Thurman <tthurman@pendercountync.gov>; Andre Hogan <ahogan@pendercountync.gov>
Cc: Lexi Stanfield <lstanfield@pendercountync.gov>
Subject: RE: [External]Newspaper information

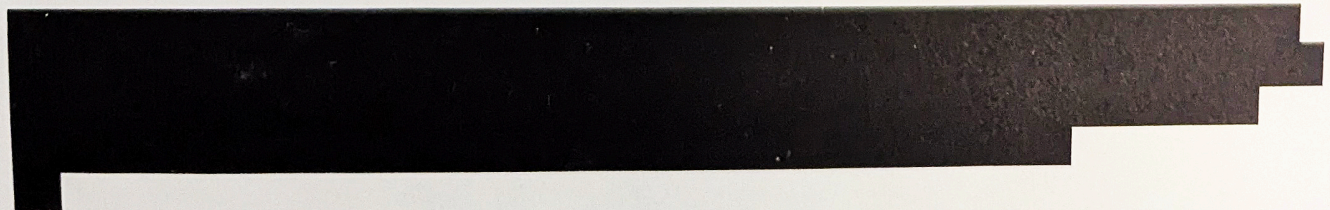
Chair and Commissioners:

I hope you're having a good morning. We spoke with Kristina Wilson, UNC School of Government Assistant Professor of Public Law and Government, this morning and she informed us that we are allowed to use the Star News for legal ads. Mr. Pettigrew is using a UNC School of Government publication that is over forty years old and predominantly cites case law that is not applicable to North Carolina. Please note, that utilizing the Star News will cost more than utilizing the Pender Post & Voice. At the February 20, 2024, BOCC Meeting there was a presentation on using a different newspaper to advertise county information. Attached is the Presentation. Slide 8 of the Presentation provides the annual cost differential between using Star News and Pender Post & Voice for publications. If you need any more information, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Michael Silverman

From: W. Randy Burton <wburton@pendercountync.gov>
Sent: Sunday, March 23, 2025 9:41 AM
To: BOCC <bocc@pendercountync.gov>; Michael C. Silverman <msilverman@pendercountync.gov>; Trey Thurman <tthurman@pendercountync.gov>; Andre Hogan <ahogan@pendercountync.gov>
Subject: Fw: [External]Newspaper information



Randy Burton, BFS, CHSS
Pender County Board of Commissioners



Minutes

**Board of County Commissioners Regular Meeting
Tuesday, April 22, 2025 at 4:00 PM
Pender County Public Assembly Room
805 S. Walker Street, Burgaw, NC**

PRESENT: Commissioner Brad George
Commissioner Jerry Groves
Chairman Randy Burton
Vice Chair Brent Springer
Commissioner Jimmy T. Tate

ABSENT:

OTHER PRESENT: Michael Silverman, County Manager
Trey Thurman, County Attorney
Lexi Stanfield, Clerk to the Board
Allen Vann, Assistant County Manager
Other Staff and Members of the Press and Public

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Burton called the meeting to order at 4:00PM.

2. INVOCATION

Commissioner Tate gave the invocation.

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Vice Chair Springer led the Pledge of Allegiance.

4. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Commissioner Tate requested items 8.1, 8.6, and 8.10 be pulled from the consent agenda and reviewed under Approvals and Resolutions.

Vice Chair Springer made a motion to adopt the agenda with items 8.1, 8.6, and 8.10 under Approvals and Resolutions.

Commissioner Tate seconded the motion.

The motion carried unanimously.

5. PUBLIC HEARING

6. PUBLIC INFORMATION

6.1 Update on the Imagine Pender 2050 Comprehensive Land Use Plan

Daniel Adams

5-14

Daniel Adams, Planning Director, presented the item. Daniel reviewed staff and steering committee tasks and public engagement opportunities held so far. There is an upcoming public

engagement event on April 28th with more to follow in Hampstead, Burgaw, Penderlea, Currie, and Rocky Point. An online survey is available. Adams reviewed the framework of the plan, including its vision, goals, policies, and actions. Adams answered questions from the Board.

6.2	2025 Employee Survey Results	Kimberly Wickline-Bennett	15-27
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Kimberly Wickline-Bennet, Deputy HR Director, presented the item. Bennet reviewed the questions asked and the responses from a survey conducted in January 2025. Bennet reviewed in more depth the areas where Pender County staff were most concerned and most appreciative of. The Board asked questions.

7. PUBLIC COMMENT

Kenneth Ramsey: Pender-Topsail Pender Post and Voice
Rochelle Whiteside: Pender-Topsail Post and Voice
Charlie Schumaker: Union Rescue
Diane Giddeons: Union Rescue

8. CONSENT AGENDA

8.1	Approval of Closed Session Minutes from the Years 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006	Lexi Stanfield	28
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Lexi Stanfield, Clerk to the Board, reported she has no records of the closed session minutes being approved from the year 1995 to present. She asked the Board to approve the minutes as a housecleaning item, to certify the Board's minutes had been officially adopted. Stanfield answered questions from the Board.

Commissioner Tate made a motion to approve the item.
Vice Chair Springer seconded the motion.
The motion carried unanimously.

8.2	Resolution Approving the Reactivation of the Parks Foundation Board of Directors	Lexi Stanfield	29-30
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8.3	Resolution Approving the Reactivation of the Pender Housing Initiative	Lexi Stanfield	31-32
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8.4	Approval of Resolution Reactivating the Priority One Workforce Committee	Lexi Stanfield	33-34
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8.5	Approval and release of \$500.00 donation from Civics Federal Credit Union for Employee Appreciation events.	Pam Brame	35-37
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| 8.6 | Approval of budget ordinance amendment in the amount of \$15020.20 to recognize insurance reimbursement funds received for repairs to an inspection department vehicle involved in a non-at-fault accident | Ivan Blume | 38-39 |
|-----|--|------------|-------|

Ivan Blume, Permitting Director, presented the item. Blume reported the budget ordinance amendment was to accept the amount of money received from insurance for a car wreck. The wreck was not the fault of the county employee. The funds will go towards repairs on the vehicle.

Vice Chair Springer made a motion to approve the item.
Commissioner Tate seconded the motion.
The motion carried unanimously.

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| 8.7 | Approval of a Budget Ordinance Amendment to Increase Holly Shelter Shooting Range Revenue and Expenditures by \$1,887.00 | Zach White | 40-41 |
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| 8.8 | Approval of budget ordinance amendment in the amount of \$11,100 for Holly Shelter Shooting Range Concession Revenue | Zach White | 42-43 |
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| 8.9 | Approval to increase Purchase Order #108 by an additional \$15,000 for the purchase of chlorine and phosphate chemicals from Amerochem Corporation. | Brian Terry | 44 |
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| 8.10 | Approval Request to increase Purchase Order #34 by an additional \$10,000 for uniforms from UniFirst Uniform Rental. | Brian Terry | 45 |
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Brian Terry, Utilities Supervisor, presented the item. Terry reported the increase in the purchase order was made with funds already allocated in the budget. The monies will purchase uniforms for twenty-four employees.

Vice Chair Springer made a motion to table the item to the May 5th meeting.
Commissioner Tate seconded the motion.
The motion carried unanimously.

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| 8.11 | Requesting approval of the Budget Amendment to budget the lottery funds received and expense to pay the Board of Education in the amount of \$155,000.00. | Margaret Blue | 46-47 |
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| 8.12 | Approval to declare the intent to list surplus properties obtained in a tax foreclosure sale. | Margaret Blue | 48-50 |
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| 8.13 | Approval of Budget Amendment to reallocate project funding for the Law Enforcement Center Project to appropriate lines to complete the remainder of the | Margaret Blue | 51-53 |
|------|---|---------------|-------|

project.

8.14 Refund/Release Requests for items meeting NC G.S. 105-381 Jessica Hudson 54-55

9. APPROVALS AND RESOLUTIONS

9.1 Approval to accept \$4,239.00 grant from the NRA and approval of Budget Ordinance Amendment Zach White 56-61

Zach White, Parks and Recreation Director, presented the item. White reported the grant was from the National Rifle Association and is for the Holly Shelter Shooting Range. The Board offered words of support and appreciation.

Vice Chair Springer made a motion to approve.
Commissioner Tate seconded the motion.
The motion carried unanimously.

9.2 Approval of Budget Ordinance Amendment and payment to Lower Cape Fear Water and Sewer Authority for the 54" line project James Proctor 62-64

James Proctor, Deputy Director for Utilities, presented the item. Proctor reported this budget ordinance amendment was for their second payment to the Lower Cape Fear Water and Sewer Authority for the building of 54" line project.

Commissioner Tate made a motion to approve.
Vice Chair Springer seconded the motion.
The motion carried unanimously.

9.3 3 year Contract approval for \$330,000 for Year 1 from May 1st, 2025 to June 31, 2026 and Purchase Order Approval for the remainder of the 24/25 FY in the amount of \$50,000 for appraisal services with Vincent Valuations, LLC. Michael Silverman 65-84

Michael Silverman, County Manager, presented the item. Silverman presented two contracts to the board with Vincent Valuations. The first contract was for one year and the second was for three years. Additionally, Silverman requested the Board approve a purchase order in the amount of \$50,000.00 to cover the remainder of the fiscal year 24-25 contract. The \$50,000.00 would come from unused salaries. The Board discussed contracting out the services versus hiring appraisers. Staff from Vincent Valuations and Silverman spoke about the difficulty in hiring appraisers in today's time.

Commissioner George made a motion to approve a one-year contract and the purchase order for \$50,000.00.
The motion did not receive a second and failed.

The Board returned to the item at the end of the meeting.
Commissioner George made a motion to approve a one-year contract and the purchase order for \$50,000.00.

Vice Chair Springer seconded the motion.
The motion carried unanimously.

9.4 Approval of purchase order for new detention center radio system in the amount of \$128,388.18 Sarah Fulton 85-90

Sarah Fulton, Assistant to the County Manager, presented the item. Fulton reported this item is budgeted for and is a state contract. The radios will be used in the new 911 center. The current radios do not allow communications among other radios, leading to longer lead times.

Commissioner Tate made a motion to approve.
Vice Chair Springer seconded the motion.
The motion carried unanimously.

9.5 Approval of Purchase Order for E911 radio consoles and installation for the new Law Enforcement Center in the amount of \$644,262.25 Sarah Fulton 91-98

Sarah Fulton, Assistant to the County Manager, presented the item. Fulton reported this item is budgeted for and is a state contract. The radio consoles will be used in the new 911 center. There are ten seats total for the radio consoles to allow for growth in staffing in the 911 center as the population grows.

Commissioner Tate made a motion to approve.
Vice Chair Springer seconded the motion.
The motion carried unanimously.

9.6 Update on the EMS and Fire Merger Plan Sarah Fulton, Michael Silverman 99

Sarah Fulton, Assistant to the County Manager, presented the item. Fulton reviewed the planning cycle, steps taken, and timeline of events. Fulton reported that staff were currently analyzing the data including HR aspects, finances, facilities and fleet, ITS, Emergency Management, training, and more. Fulton answered questions from the Board. No action was taken on this item.

9.7 Legal Advertisements Andre Hogan 100

Andre Hogan, Staff Attorney, and Meg Blue, Finance Director, presented the item together. Hogan gave a brief overview of the items advertised in the paper by the county, differentiating what is legally required and what is not. Hogan reviewed statutes and relevant case laws. Blue reviewed the costs and departments utilizing the paper. Trey Thurman, County Attorney, and Hogan provided legal answers to the Board questions. Commissioner Tate vocalized that the Clerk of Court did not approve the change in the newspaper.

Commissioner Groves made a motion to switch legal advertisements to the Wilmington Star News.

Vice Chair Springer seconded the motion.
Commissioner Groves voted in favor of the motion.
Vice Chair Springer voted in favor of the motion.
Chair Burton voted in favor of the motion.
Commissioner voted in opposition of the motion.
Commissioner Tate voted in opposition of the motion.

The motion carried 3-2.

- 9.8 Approval of Budget Ordinance Amendment to Reallocate \$91,220.87 from Closed-out Projects to the Hampstead Kiwanis Park Phase 4 Project. Dario Ramirez-Duenas 101-102

Dario Duenas-Ramirez, Project Manager, presented the item. Ramirez reported the budget ordinance amendment was to reallocate \$91,220.87 from two closed projects to the Hampstead Kiwanis Park project.

Commissioner Groves made a motion for approval.
Vice Chair Springer seconded the motion.
The motion carried unanimously.

- 9.9 Authority to Execute Contract Amendment with Bobbitt Construction for the Health and Human Services Facility for Tree Removal and Replacement in the amount of \$44,961. Dario Ramirez-Duenas 103-109

Dario Duenas-Ramirez, Project Manager, presented the item. This item was originally presented at the April 7th meeting and was tabled until Ramirez could speak with the Town of Burgaw about which trees could be planted in place. The Town of Burgaw reported back that any tree can be planted.

Vice Chair Springer made a motion for approval.
Commissioner Groves seconded the motion.
The motion carried unanimously.

- 9.10 Resolution Supporting a Moratorium to Freeze Employment of County Employees and Spending Jimmy T. Tate 110-112

Commissioner Tate presented the item. Tate vocalized his concern about County spending and asked that all non-essential employment positions, new positions not currently advertised, and other non-essential spending be frozen. The Board discussed spending in the County. Tate requested the Board be presented with an inept analysis of current spending.

Commissioner Tate made a motion to approve the item.
Vice Chair Springer seconded the motion.
Commissioner Tate voted in favor.
Commissioner George voted in favor.
Vice Chair Springer voted in favor.
Chair Burton voted in favor.
Commissioner Groves voted in opposition.

- 9.11 Approval of Union Rescue as a Subcontractor for Pender County Jimmy T. Tate 13

Commissioner Tate requested the Board approve Union Rescue as a subcontract for paramedic services for Pender County pending a contract can be agreed upon and presented to the Board. The contract would need to meet all state, county, and medical director requirements.

Commissioner Tate made a motion to approve the item.
Vice Chair Springer seconded the motion.
The motion carried unanimously.

10. DISCUSSION

- 10.1 County Policy for Allowing County Employees to Drive County-Owned Vehicles to and from assigned office or place of work and Department Head Residencies Jimmy T. Tate 114

The Board discussed County the policy that allows county employees to drive cars home. The discussion did not include the Sheriff's Office fleet. Concerns with staff working in Pender County but living outside the county and driving vehicles home were discussed. The Board vocalized they were not telling staff where to live, but stated driving outside the county every day puts wear on the vehicles, causing them to be replaced faster.

11. APPOINTMENTS

- 11.1 Appointment to the Trillium Health Resource Board Lexi Stanfield 115-125
Lexi Stanfield, Clerk to the Board presented the two applicants for the Trillium Health Resource Board. Stanfield stated in the past the DSS director has served on the board in place of a commissioner and, since the leaving of former director Wes Stewart, the position has been vacant on the Board. The Board voted to appoint both applicants to the Trillium Health Resource board. Roxanne Devane rescinded her application, however, to another board.

Commissioner Groves made a motion to appoint Mrs. Green.
Vice Chair Springer seconded the motion.
The motion carried unanimously.

- 11.2 Appointments to the Tourism Development Authority Lexi Stanfield 126-139
Lexi Stanfield, Clerk to the Board, presented the item to the Board. Stanfield clarified there was a technical error and one applicant had already been appointed, so the Board only needed to review Mr. Bielec's application. The position available is the collector position, which requires the applicants to collect occupancy tax in the county.

Commissioner Groves made a motion to appoint.
Commissioner Tate seconded the motion.
The motion carried unanimously.

- 11.3 Appointments to the Pender Housing Initiative Lexi Stanfield 140-149
Lexi Stanfield, Clerk to the Board, presented the two applicants. Sarah Fulton applied to the PHI Board as a County Employee and JaQuasia Murray applied as a private sector member. Stanfield reviewed both applicants' resumes and recommended both for appointment to the Board. The Commissioners deliberated among themselves.

Vice Chair Springer made a motion to appoint both applicants.
Commissioner George seconded the motion.
The motion carried unanimously.

- 11.4 Appointment to the Lower Cape Fear Water and Sewer Authority Lexi Stanfield 150-156

Lexi Stanfield, Clerk to the Board, presented the item. Stanfield reviewed the current citizen's status of the Lower Cape Fear Water and Sewer Authority, Mr. Norwood Blanchard. Stanfield

explained Mr. Blanchard continued to serve as the Board bypass of rule 32, section C, as he has served more than three terms or ten years per the Rules of Procedure. While Mr. Blanchard served; the County continued to advertise the position until a new candidate applied. Stanfield reviewed the applicant and answered questions from the Board. Commissioner Groves vocalized his support for Mr. Blanchard serves on the Board and noted what an asset he has been.

Vice Chair Springer made a motion to appoint Mr. Buchanan.
Commissioner Tate seconded the motion.
Commissioner Tate voted in favor of the motion.
Commissioner George voted in favor of the motion.
Vice Chair Springer voted in favor of the motion.
Chair Burton voted in favor of the motion.
Commissioner Groves voted in opposition of the motion.

11.5 Appointment to the Cape Fear Community College Board of Trustees Lexi Stanfield 157-164

Lexi Stanfield, Clerk to the Board, presented the item. Stanfield reported to the Board that Cape Fear Community College personally reached out and requested Mr. Guy Zander was reappointed to the Board of Trustees for the Community College. Zander is eligible for reappointment. The Board did not discuss the item.

Commissioner Tate made a motion to appoint.
Commissioner George seconded the motion.
The motion carried unanimously.

11.6 Commissioner Appointment to Boards, Commissions, and Committees Lexi Stanfield 165

Lexi Stanfield, Clerk to the Board, presented the item. Stanfield requested the Board consider appointing Commissioner Tate to the Priority One Workforce, Animal Shelter Advisory Committee, Wallace Airport Board, and Pender Housing Initiative.

Commissioner George made a motion to appoint.
Vice Chair Springer seconded the motion.
The motion carried unanimously.

12. MAPLE HILL WATER AND SEWER DISTRICT
13. ROCKY POINT WATER AND SEWER DISTRICT
14. SCOTTS HILL WATER AND SEWER DISTRICT
15. MOORE'S CREEK WATER AND SEWER DISTRICT

16. CENTRAL PENDER WATER AND SEWER DISTRICT

17. PENDER COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH

18. SOCIAL SERVICES BOARD

19. ITEMS FROM COUNTY ATTORNEY, COUNTY MANAGER,
ASSISTANT COUNTY MANAGER, & COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Michael Silverman, County Manager, requested the Board revisit item 9.3.

Trey Thurman, County Attorney, requested the Board go into closed session for item (3) Attorney Client Privilege, (4) Economic Development, (5) Acquisition of Real Property, and item (6) Personnel.

Andre Hogan, Staff Attorney, added two Attorney Client Privilege items to the closed session agenda.

Commissioner Groves discussed the Lower Cape Fear Water and Sewer Authority.

Vice Chair Springer spoke about the child who was involved in the hit-and-run.

20. CLOSED SESSION (IF APPLICABLE)

Commissioner Tate made a motion to go into closed session for item (3) Attorney Client Privilege, (4) Economic Development, (5) Acquisition of Real Property, and item (6) Personnel after the 7PM Public Hearing.

Vice Chair Springer seconded the motion.

The motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Tate made a motion to resume open session.

Vice Chair Springer seconded the motion.

The motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Tate made a motion to terminate Michael Silverman's contract as County Manager.

Vice Chair Springer seconded the motion.

Commissioner Tate voted in favor of the motion.

Vice Chair Springer voted in favor of the motion.

Commissioner George voted in favor of the motion.

Commissioner Groves voted in opposition to the motion.

Chair Burton voted in opposition to the motion.

The motion carried by a 3-2 vote.

21. 7PM PUBLIC HEARINGS: SPECIAL USE PERMITS/ZONING MAP
AMENDMENTS/RESOLUTIONS

21.1 Petition to Name Roads Michael Dickson 166-168

Mike Dickson, GIS, presented the item. Dickson requested the Board approve the renaming of two roads of a new subdivision. No members of the public spoke in opposition or approval. The Board had no questions.

Vice Chair Springer made a motion for approval.
Commissioner Tate seconded the motion.
The motion carried unanimously.

21.2 REZONE 2025-83: Request to rezone approximately 30.93 acres from the Rural Agricultural zoning district to a conditional zoning district to allow for new hangars to be installed at the existing Stag Air Park facility in the Burgaw Township Daniel Adams 169-219

Daniel Adams, Planning Director, presented the item. This was a request for a conditional rezoning of 30.93 acres for Stag Airport. Originally, the property was operating under a special use permit, but that is no longer permitted, so a conditional rezone must be requested. Staff and the Planning Board both recommended approval. Adams answered questions for the Board.

Vice Chair Springer made a motion for approval.
Commissioner Tate seconded the motion.
The motion carried unanimously.

21.3 REZONE 2024-82: Request to rezone the Hawthorne at Hampstead development to add 84 apartment units and unify adjacent developments under one zoning district in the Topsail Township Daniel Adams 220-277

Daniel Adams, Planning Director, asked on behalf of the applicant for this item to be tabled until the May 19th meeting.

Vice Chair Sprigner made a motion to table.
Commissioner George seconded the motion.
The motion carried unanimously.

22. ADJOURNMENT

Vice Chair Springer made a motion to adjourn the meeting.
Commissioner George seconded the motion.
The motion carried unanimously.

[MIN_SIGNATURES]



Hugh Stevens*
K. Matthew Vaughn
Michael J. Tadych
Karen M. Rabenau*
William P. Janvier**
Kathleen O'Malley
Ashley N. Fox

* Of Counsel to the Firm
+Board Certified Specialist
in Business and Consumer Bankruptcy

Direct: (919) 582-2319
E-mail: mike@smvt.com

20 May 2025

VIA EMAIL ONLY TO PenderBoard@pendercountync.gov

Pender County Board of Commissioners
Chairman Randy Burton (wburton@pendercountync.gov)
Vice-Chairman Brent Springer (bspringer@pendercountync.gov)
Commissioner Brad George (bgeorge@pendercountync.gov)
Commissioner Jerry Groves (jgroves@pendercountync.gov)
Commissioner Jimmy T. Tate, Ed.D (jtate@pendercountync.gov)
805 S. Walker
P.O. Box 5
Burgaw, N.C. 28425

Re: Removal of Legal-Notice and All Other Advertising from *The Pender-Topsail Post & Voice*

Dear Chairman Burton, Vice-Chairman Springer, Commissioner George, Commissioner Groves, and Commissioner Tate:

We hope this finds you otherwise well.

We, along with our co-counsel Abraham Rubert-Schewel and Zachary Ezor of Tin Fulton Walker & Owen, PLLC, represent *The Pender-Topsail Post & Voice* (“*The Post & Voice*” or the paper). We understand that on 22 April 2025, the Board of Commissioners voted to remove legal-notice and all other advertising from *The Post & Voice* after it published editorials and editorial cartoons featuring Chairman Burton, Vice-Chairman Springer, and Commissioner Groves. The removal of legal-notice and other advertising from *The Post & Voice* in retaliation for its constitutionally protected speech violates the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, Free Speech and Free Press and other rights enumerated by the North Carolina Constitution, and as to legal-advertising, violates N.C. GEN. STAT. §§ 1-597 through 1-599, which regulate the publication of legal notices.

The First Amendment provides that “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech.” U.S. Const. amend. I. The First Amendment right to free speech includes not only the affirmative right to speak, but also the right to be free from retaliation by a public official for the exercise of that right. See *ACLU v.*

Wicomico County, Md., 999 F.2d 780, 785 (4th Cir. 1993) (“Retaliation, though it is not expressly referred to in the Constitution, is nonetheless actionable because retaliatory actions may tend to chill individuals’ exercise of constitutional rights.”); see also *Pickering v. Board of Educ.*, 391 U.S. 563, 574, 20 L. Ed. 2d 811, 88 S. Ct. 1731 (1968) (noting that retaliatory acts are “a potent means of inhibiting speech”). Thus, by engaging in retaliatory acts, public officials place informal restraints on speech “allowing the government to ‘produce a result which [it] could not command directly.’ Such interference with constitutional rights is impermissible.” *Perry v. Snidermann*, 408 U.S. 593, 597, 33 L. Ed. 2d 570, 92 S. Ct. 2694 (1972) (alterations in original) (citation omitted).

Suarez Corp. Indus. V. McGraw, 202 F.3d 676, 685 (2000).

On 21 March 2025, at the livestreamed Pender County Board of Commissioners Retreat,¹ Commissioner Groves referred to “three commissioners being made puppets in the local paper” and stated that “it’s not fulfilling community expectations to have a paper that makes \$100,000.00 a year off of citizens to make fun of county employees.” Commissioner Groves went on to state that “we need to address that” and “we need another paper to represent Pender County.” At least one commissioner expressed agreement with Commissioner Groves. Following several minutes of discussion regarding multiple commissioners’ discontent with *The Post & Voice*’s editorial coverage of them, the issue of removing legal-notice and other advertising from *The Post & Voice* and placing it with the *Wilmington Star-News* was added to the agenda for the 22 April 2025 Board of Commissioners Meeting.

Approximately one month later, at the 22 April 2025 Board of Commissioners Meeting,² former Pender County Staff Attorney Andre Hogan presented a “legal analysis” of options for legal-notice advertising based on incorrect information provided to the UNC School of Government that *The Star News* enters the mail to paid subscribers in Pender County. It does not. After several minutes of discussion, Commissioner Groves stated “it’s time to cut to the chase” and, while holding up a copy of *The Post & Voice*



¹ <https://penderconc.portal.civicclerk.com/event/569/media>, from 2:01:38-2:07:45.

² <https://penderconc.portal.civicclerk.com/event/504/media>, from 2:11:10-2:34:20.



and referencing editorials published about three county commissioners, said “this is what we as three county commissioners have to put up with. The citizens’ money are paying for this — this is money they are paying for and it’s time for it to stop.” Thereafter, the Board of Commissioners voted to use *The Star-News* for all future advertising including legal-notice advertising.

The Post & Voice has constitutionally protected rights to publish speech that is critical of government and public officials. *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan*, 376 U.S. 254, 270, 11 L. Ed. 2d 686, 84 S. Ct. 710, 721 (1964) (explaining that the First Amendment ensures citizens enjoy “a profound national commitment to the principle that debate on public issues should be uninhibited, robust, and wide-open, and that it may well include vehement, caustic, and sometimes unpleasantly sharp attacks on government and public officials”); *see also Connick v. Myers*, 461 U.S. 138, 162, 75 L. Ed. 2d 708, 103 S. Ct. 1684, 1698 (1983) (explaining that “[t]he constitutionally protected right to speak out on governmental affairs would be meaningless if it did not extend to statements expressing criticism of governmental officials”).

The Commissioners’ recorded statements on 21 March 2025 and 22 April 2025 make clear that the removal of legal-notice and all other advertising from *The Post & Voice* was motivated by an intent to punish the paper for its publication of critical editorials and editorial cartoons featuring Chairman Burton, Vice-Chairman Springer, and Commissioner Groves. This retaliation in response to protected speech is plainly unconstitutional.

Federal courts have “easily” concluded that similar conduct amounts to unconstitutional retaliation. *See Decker Advert. Inc. v. Delaware Cnty.*, *New York*, No. 3:23-CV-1531 (AMN/ML), 2025 WL 591940, at *7 (N.D.N.Y. Feb. 24, 2025). For example, in 2022, the Delaware County, New York Board of Supervisors voted to “de-designate” a local newspaper as the official county paper for publication of “laws and notices” after the paper ran an unflattering story about a local judge. *Id.* at *5. In response, the paper filed suit and alleged that the Board took this action in retaliation for its “unfavorable coverage.” Just three months ago, a federal district court rejected the County’s motion to dismiss the lawsuit and held that the paper had properly alleged multiple first amendment retaliation claims. *Id.* at *1.

Additionally, Article 1, Section 14 of the North Carolina Constitution provides that: “Freedom of speech and of the press are two of the great bulwarks of liberty and therefore shall never be restrained[.]” N.C. Const. art. 1 § 14. The North Carolina Supreme Court has instructed that:

Our State Constitution offers similar free speech protection in Article I, Section 14. This provision is self-executing, and we have recognized a cause of action against state officials for its violation. *Corum v. University of North Carolina*, 330 N.C. 761, 782, 413 S.E.2d 276, 289, *cert. denied*, *Durham v. Corum*, U.S. , 121 L. Ed. 2d 431 (1992). In some of our cases, the Court has found the guarantees in the state and federal constitutions to be parallel and has addressed them as if their protections were equivalent. *Felmet*, 302 N.C. 173, 273 S.E.2d 708; *Andrews v. Chateau X*, 296 N.C. 251, 250 S.E.2d 603 (1979), *vacated on other grounds*, 445 U.S. 947, 63 L. Ed. 2d 782 (1980). We have also recognized that “in construing provisions of the Constitution of North Carolina, this Court is not bound by opinions of the Supreme Court of the United States construing even identical

provisions in the Constitution of the United States.” *State v. Hicks*, 333 N.C. 467, 483, 428 S.E.2d 167, 176 (1993); *State v. Arrington*, 311 N.C. 633, 642, 319 S.E.2d 254, 260 (1984). “We do, however, give great weight to decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States interpreting provisions of the Constitution of the United States which are parallel to provisions of the State Constitution to be construed.” *Id.* at 484, 428 S.E.2d at 176.

State v. Petersile, 334 N.C. 169, 184, 432 S.E.2d 832, 840-41 (1993). “The right to free speech is violated when ‘restrictions are placed on the espousal of a particular viewpoint,’ . . . or where retaliation motivated by the content of an individual’s speech would deter a person of reasonable firmness from engaging in speech or association.” *Harper v. Hall*, 384 N.C. 292, 369, 886 S.E.2d 393, 442 (2023) (citations omitted). Thus, the Board has also violated *The Post & Voice’s* right to free speech under the North Carolina Constitution.

Further, the removal of legal-notice and all other advertising deprives *The Post & Voice* and its owners their inalienable right to earn a living as guaranteed by the “Fruits of Their Labor Clause” found in Article 1, Section 1 of the North Carolina Constitution. Article 1, Section 1 provides that: “We hold it to be self-evident that all persons are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, the enjoyment of the fruits of their own labor, and the pursuit of happiness.” N.C. Const. art. 1 § 1. The “Fruits of Their Labor Clause” protects people “‘engaging in any legitimate business, occupation, or trade,’” and “bars state action burdening these activities unless ‘the promotion or protection of the public health, morals, order, or safety, or the general welfare makes it reasonably necessary.’” *Kinsely v. Ace Speedway Racing, Ltd.*, 386 N.C. 418, 424, 904 S.E.2d 720, 726 (2024). To survive constitutional scrutiny, the challenged state action must be done for “a proper governmental purpose,” and the means chosen to effect that purpose must be reasonably necessary. *Id.*

As the North Carolina Supreme Court recently explained, government does not act with a proper governmental purpose where “its purpose [is] not to protect public interest but to punish a private business for standing up to the government.” *Id.* at 426, 904 S.E.2d at 728 (holding that *Ace Speedway* properly alleged a violation of the “Fruits of Their Labor Clause” where it alleged it was shut down “because it spoke out against the Governor’s emergency order [related to COVID-19], and that other businesses violating the emergency order were not subjected to similar enforcement by the State”). *The Post & Voice* is engaged in a legitimate business, which includes selling advertising space to Pender County. By removing legal-notice and all other advertising from *The Post & Voice* in retaliation for the publication of editorials critical of public officials, the Board has impermissibly burdened the paper’s business for an improper governmental purpose in violation of the “Fruits of Their Labor Clause.”

The removal of legal-notice advertising from *The Post & Voice* also violates the North Carolina General Statutes regulating the publication of legal advertising. North Carolina General Statute § 1-597(a) provides that newspapers qualified to publish legal advertisements are those:

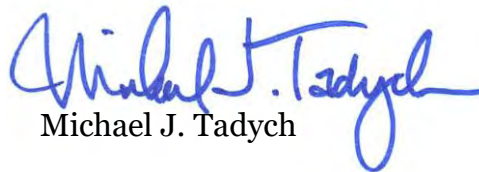
with a general circulation to actual paid subscribers which newspaper at the time of such publication, advertisement or notice, shall have been admitted to the United States mails in the Periodicals class in the county or political subdivision

where such publication, advertisement or notice is required to be published, and which shall have been regularly and continuously issued in the county in which the publication, advertisement or notice is authorized or required to be published, at least one day in each calendar week for at least 25 of the 26 consecutive weeks immediately preceding the date of the first publication of such advertisement, publication or notice[.]

As the only newspaper published in Pender County, *The Post & Voice* is the only newspaper that meets these qualifications. Pender County Clerk of Court Elizabeth Craver is on record confirming that *The Post and Voice* is the **only** publication in the county that is “statutorily qualified” to run legal notices and that the Board never contacted her office about their decision to remove legal-notice advertising.

The Post & Voice respectfully demands that the Board of Commissioners reverse its decision to remove all future legal-notice and other advertising from the paper. *The Post & Voice* further requests that all recordings (including but not limited to the above-referenced 21 March 2025 and 22 April 2025 recordings), communications, and other documents in the Board’s possession, custody, or control related to this matter be preserved. To the extent necessary, *The Post & Voice* is prepared to take any and all legal action, and to seek appropriate damages and attorneys fees, to vindicate its constitutional rights.

Very truly yours,



Michael J. Tadych



Ashley N. Fox

- cc: M. Blue, Interim County Manager (mblue@pendercountync.gov)
A. Pettigrew (posteditor@post-voice.com)
A. Rubert-Schewel (schewel@tinfulton.com)
Z. Ezor (zezor@tinfulton.com)