**Connect C Weekly Update**

**October 22, 2020**

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**Federal Election Update**

President Trump must do well in the debate with Biden tonight. If he does, he has a good chance of winning the election. Trump has his issues but Biden has more with the reports that he may have accepted money with regard to his son’s dealings with China. If this comes to light from media markets other than FOX, Trump wins. Without question, the virus has helped the Democrats and they have used it so well for political gain. The U.S. Senate will go down to the wire as to which party controls the chamber. U.S. Senator Thom Tillis must win for Republicans to have a chance to maintain control. Democrats will control the U.S. House but with fewer members.

**State Election Update**

Republicans in North Carolina are surging. It is expected that they will keep the State House and Senate by a slim margin with Governor Cooper winning even though Lt. Gov. Forest is closing the gap. The Council of State races will be mixed on which party wins the various seats. Democrats from California to New York have poured huge amounts of money into North Carolina. For example, Bloomberg gave over $2 million to the Democratic candidate for Lt. Governor. Nancy Pelosi sent $5 million last week to the Democratic Congressional candidate running against Richard Hudson. There has never been anything like this in North Carolina. The last day for early voting is October 31.

The ongoing dispute over North Carolina’s election laws moved through the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals this week. All policies related to absentee ballots were determined by bipartisan legislation earlier this year, but this legislation has been challenged in several different ways in several different courts over the past few weeks. The Attorney General is heavily involved in this litigation and has publicly stated he wishes to remove the witness requirement and extend the deadline for votes to be counted after election day. So far, legislative leaders have successfully defended the witness requirement which was included in a bipartisan bill earlier this year. We understand at this time the Attorney General has abandoned the attempt to undo the witness requirement. However, he achieved a victory this week in the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals related to the ballot-counting deadline. After initially issuing a temporary stay which blocked the deadline from being extended, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals has now issued a full ruling which allows all votes to be counted if they are postmarked by Election Day (November 3) and received by November 12. The state law allows votes to be counted if they are received by November 6. Legislative leaders have indicated their intent to appeal to the North Carolina Supreme Court and the United States Supreme Court for a final determination on this important issue. The entire situation is extremely unusual, since the litigation is taking place during an election in which nearly 20% of North Carolinians have already voted. The United States Constitution specifically tasks state legislatures with developing policy and procedures related to elections. We are seeing more partisan legal battles than ever before in our state and our country, as political leaders turn to the courts when the legislature’s determination on election law is not what they prefer.

**Supreme Court Nomination Update**

This morning, the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee approved the nomination of Judge Amy Coney Barrett to the U.S. Supreme Court. The vote was 12-0 with all Republicans voting to advance the nomination and all Democrats boycotting the vote. The nomination now moves to the Senate floor. If the Senate remains in session over the weekend as planned, a favorable vote is expected on Monday, October 26. The last addition on the Supreme Court was sworn in by Roberts just hours after the Senate confirmed his nomination. Since the court was in the middle of its term, the quick process allowed the Justice to begin work immediately. The same could happen with Barrett as the court will be in session starting November 2 with a busy schedule.

**COVID-19 Update**

Yesterday the Governor announced that North Carolina will remain in Phase 3 for another three weeks as the coronavirus metrics continue to trend in the wrong direction. The state has asked elected officials in the 36 counties with the highest infection rates to become more involved in implementing strategies specific to their communities to “improve compliance.” These actions would include local law enforcement agencies enforcing the state mask mandate, alcohol curfews and mass gathering limits. DHHS data indicates that among the reasons that our cases are on the rise are religious gatherings, private gatherings and family gatherings in homes. The positive test percentage has now climbed to 7.4%. Tuesday there were 53 virus-related deaths which is the highest one-day total in North Carolina since the beginning of the pandemic. DHHS noted that even though it becomes more difficult to keep our guard up as the virus continues on, it is critical that we remain diligent in doing what works – masks, social distancing and washing our hands – to slow the transmission.

*“We do not have government by the majority.*

*We have government by the majority who participate.”*

***Thomas Jefferson, Former U.S. President and Founding Father of the U.S.***

**In the News - North Carolina General Assembly**

**Legislative Calendar**

**Monday, October 26, 2020**

9:30 AM - 11:30 AM

[Unintentional Death Prevention Committee - North Carolina Child Fatality Task Force](https://www.ncleg.gov/Committees/CommitteeInfo/NonStanding/680)

Virtual (see committee website for details)

1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

[Perinatal Health Committee - North Carolina Child Fatality Task Force](https://www.ncleg.gov/Committees/CommitteeInfo/NonStanding/680)

Virtual (see committee website for details)

**Wednesday, November 4, 2020**

2:00 PM- 4:00 PM

[Intentional Death Prevention Committee - North Carolina Child Fatality Task Force](https://www.ncleg.gov/Committees/CommitteeInfo/NonStanding/680)

Virtual (see committee website for details)

**In the News**

### Early Voters

Jim Morrill, THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER and Richard Stradling, THE NEWS & OBSERVER, 10/20/20

More than 2 million North Carolinians have already voted in the fall election, and at this pace state elections officials estimate that as many as 80% of votes will be cast before polls open on Election Day. Elections officials say expanded early voting hours, in the evenings and on weekends, have helped boost early turnout. The state estimates that half of all voters will choose to vote in person at early polling places, which opened last Thursday. Democrats, women and Black voters are outpacing other groups in North Carolina’s early voting. Each group is voting at a higher rate than its registration would suggest, according to the State Board of Elections. More than 1.98 million North Carolinians voted through 1:30 p.m. Tuesday. That’s already 27% of the state’s registered voters. More than 1.3 million voted at early sites across the state since early voting started last Thursday. An additional 653,000 have voted by absentee ballot. Who are those voters? Here’s the breakdown by election officials through Monday:

* Forty-five percent are Democrats; 26% are Republicans and 28% are Unaffiliated. Democrats make up 35.7% of the state’s registered voters. Republicans account for 30.2% and Unaffiliated voters, 33.4%.
* Women make up nearly 53% of early voters; men are 41.2%. Women account for 49.7% of registrations, while men are 42.2%. (Eight percent of voters are “undesignated.”)
* Black voters account for 22.7% of the early vote. They make up 20.7% of registered voters.
* White voters are voting in numbers that roughly match their registration: 65.6% to 64%.

### Vote Counting

Laura Leslie, WRAL NEWS, 10/20/20

With two weeks to go until Election Day, more than a quarter of all voters in North Carolina have already cast their ballots. More than 1.4 million people have cast early, in-person votes since last Thursday, and elections officials statewide have accepted another 658,000 absentee ballots that have been mailed in, according to the State Board of Elections. The combined total of nearly 2.1 million is 28.4 percent of the state’s 7.3 million registered voters. With some many votes coming in before Election Day, North Carolina will be far ahead of other states on what could be a long election night. State law allows absentee ballots cast both by mail and in person to be approved over the course of five weeks at each county’s elections board meetings. Those ballots are scanned into a tabulator and recorded, but the vote totals aren’t counted up. “At no point do we instruct that machine – do we turn it or press the button telling it to tabulate the results,” state elections director Karen Brinson Bell said Tuesday. “We do not do that until Election Day.” The recording of each ballot is stored on a hard drive that matches up with that ballot. Both the hard drives and paper ballots are then locked up until Election Day, when local elections officials read the hard drives and officially tally the votes. Some people have expressed concerns that those results could be hacked, but Brinson Bell said hackers cannot access the data. “No component of our voting system is allowed to be connected to the internet. That is law, and that was practice even before it became law,” she said.

### Swine Virus

Martha Quillin, THE NEWS & OBSERVER, 10/16/20

An emerging coronavirus strain that causes gastrointestinal illness in swine — and is especially dangerous to baby pigs — could wreck the pork industry and has the potential to jump species and infect humans, a UNC study has found. The study, published this week in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, looked at a virus called swine acute diarrhea syndrome, or SADS-CoV, that began to infect swine herds in China in 2016, causing diarrhea and vomiting. It killed 90% of the piglets under five days old that contracted it. The virus, which has not been detected in the United States, is in the same family as SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19. Both viruses are thought to have emerged from bats. Last year, a group of 14 UNC-Chapel Hill epidemiologists, immunologists and microbiologists studied SADS-CoV to see if it could cross species and infect humans. Caitlin Edwards and Rachel Graham of UNC’s Department of Epidemiology said Thursday in a phone interview with The News & Observer that the team submitted its findings for publication in early 2020 before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. But the swift spread of COVID-19 around the globe this year has emphasized the need for developing interventions for coronaviruses. “If this virus did occur in the U.S., the primary concern would be the swine industry,” Graham said. But in experiments, the virus was able to adapt and use human liver, gut and airway cells as hosts. “We know it infects human cells,” Graham said.

### Rent Assistance

NEWS RELEASE, 10/15/20

Applications are now being accepted for the N.C. Housing Opportunities and Prevention of Evictions (HOPE) Program, which will assist eligible low- and- moderate-income renters experiencing financial hardship due to COVID-19. The new program seeks to promote housing stability during the ongoing pandemic by providing rent and utility assistance to prevent evictions and utility disconnections. The HOPE Program will provide $117 million for rent and utility assistance for renters who have been affected by the coronavirus pandemic, have a current household income that is 80 percent of the area median income or lower, and are behind on their rent or utilities when they apply. The HOPE Program is funded by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grant−Coronavirus funds and U.S. Department of Treasury Coronavirus Relief funds, which have been provided to North Carolina. The funds are administered by the North Carolina Office of Recovery and Resiliency, a division of the Department of Public Safety, and will be distributed through community partner agencies across the state.

### Senate Fundraising

Bryan Anderson, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, 10/16/20

North Carolina Republican Sen. Thom Tillis has entered the home stretch of his competitive and costly re-election bid with nearly $2.4 million more cash on hand than Democratic challenger Cal Cunningham, according to campaign finance reports filed with the Federal Elections Commission. But in the period from July 1 to Sept. 30, Cunningham raised far more money than Tillis, raking in more than $28.3 million. Tillis raised less than one-fourth of that, bringing in less than $6.6 million over the same period of time. According to Advertising Analytics, a company that tracks political television ad spending, North Carolina’s Senate contest this year is the most expensive Senate race ever, with more than $242 million spent on ads. According to Kantar Media, the campaigns and outside groups have flooded the broadcast airwaves with tens of millions of dollars dedicated to reaching voters in the Raleigh and Charlotte areas.

### Flu Update

Colin Campbell, THE INSIDER, 10/19/20

A state emergency management committee got an update on plans to combat a flu season that will likely be complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Erica Wilson, an epidemiologist with the Department of Health and Human Services, told the State Emergency Response Commission that state labs will be testing all cases of potential flu and COVID symptoms for both viruses. “There is no way without testing to distinguish between COVID and the flu,” she said. So far there’s no shortage of available flu vaccines, including a version tailored to older adults, and “everything we do to prevent COVID also prevents the flu.” Wilson’s presentation came a day after the state reported its first flu death of the 2020-2021 flu season.

### Lost Colony

Catherine Kozak, COASTAL REVIEW ONLINE, 10/16/20

Additional clues pointing to the fate of Sir Walter Raleigh’s “Lost Colony” have been unearthed near the Chowan River, with excavated remnants of everyday life showing “compelling evidence” that several settlers from the 1587 Roanoke Island colony had lived at the site for a few years. The discovery from the 2019-2020 archaeological survey in agricultural lands north of Salmon Creek, known as Site Y, bolsters a similar conclusion based on artifacts dug up during the foundation’s earlier excavation of nearby Site X. Findings discovered with ground-penetrating radar and screened soil excavated from 72 test squares consisted of ceramic sherds that archaeologists determined were Elizabethan artifacts used during the Roanoke Colonist Period. Site Y is located on the northeast corner of the property that Bertie County acquired for a proposed recreational project. English explorers were sent in 1584 by Raleigh to the coasts of North Carolina and Virginia to find a suitable place to establish a settlement. At the time, it is known that they had explored the Chowan River area, adding to the likelihood that the later 1587 colonists were aware of the area. The fate of the Roanoke colony’s more than 100 men, women and children, last seen in August 1587 when Gov. John White left for England to get supplies, remains one of the most abiding mysteries of Early Colonial American history.

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