

**Brian Farkas**

**Media Report  
Update**

**Draft**

**May 14, 2022**

# Part I Introduction

This report reviews electronically available news stories on Brian Farkas, member of the NC House.

The Table of Contents in **Part II** of the report is a useful guide to the entire report and can be used as a stand-alone summary. In one section, it surveys the bulk of the news file, through the headlines we have assigned to each item.

**Part III**, the **Greatest Hits** section, identifies key points taken from available media articles.

**Parts IV**, **The News File**, contain edited copies of the most relevant electronically available stories.

We hope you find this useful.

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## Part III Farkas - Greatest Hits from Media Review

### Background

From Farkas's ZOOM profile

- Brian Farkas is the Director of Development and Client Relations at JKF ARCHITECTURE . Brian received a B.A. in Political Science from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and a Master of Public Administration from the UNC School of Government in Chapel Hill. Using his developed skills and experiences, he has engaged a number of governmental and economic development organizations on issues affecting North Carolinians and delivered tangible projects to improve the lives of citizens across the State.
- Prior to joining JKF ARCHITECTURE , Brian most recently worked for the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), one of 27 research institutes that comprise the National Institutes of Health (NIH). He specialized in emergency management programming to safeguard the lives and prized research of over 1,000 people.
- Brian has served on the Legislative Issues Committee for the local Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce , the Public Transportation and Parking Commission for the City of Greenville, as well as President of the Greenville Museum of Art's Board of Trustees (ZOOM, 3/20)

From the left wing “Watauga Watch” blog.

- He's a graduate of UNC-Charlotte and earned a Master's of Public Administration at Chapel Hill. He interned with Congressman Brad Miller in DC in 2007, worked almost three years in the US Attorney's office in Charlotte, spent ten months as a graduate assistant in the School of Government at UNC, worked 20 months as a program specialist with the National Institute of Environmental Health at Research Triangle Park before joining the JKF Architecture firm in Greenville as Director of Client Relations and Development, where he's been since 2013. (Watauga Watch, 1/8/20)

### Previous Runs For Office

- He initially announced he was running for the NC House seat in the 2014 election when it was held by Brian Brown, but one month after declaring, he withdrew, citing “unexpected responsibilities.” (Greenville Daily Reflector, 1/9/14)
- He ran for the seat in 2016 and lost to Dr. Greg Murphy (an appointed incumbent who replaced Brown), by 6,000 votes. (Daily Reflector, 11/9/16).

- He is running again in the District (now held by Perrin Jones, who replaced Murphy following his election to the US House) which is considered more competitive due to redrawing of the lines that have removed a number of Republican voters. (Watauga Watch, 1/8/20)

### **Greenville Committees**

While Farkas has never been elected to office he has been appointed to committees in Greenville.

- 2015-Appointed to the Comprehensive Plan Committee. (Daily Reflector, 4/9/15)
- 2016-Vice-Chair of Public Transportation and Parking Commission. He introduced the “Vision Zero” goal resolution for the city to aim toward reducing the rate of pedestrian fatalities by 2026. (Daily Reflector, 8/19/16)

### **Issues (2016)**

These positions were expressed during his 2016 campaign for the House seat.

### **Regulatory Changes for Small Businesses**

- When asked what regulatory changes the candidates would support to help small businesses.....Farkas said a new rule requiring regulation reviews every 10 years should weed out useless rules. (Daily Reflector, 2/16/16)

### **Teacher Salaries and Public Education**

- Farkas said that unless teacher’s salaries in the state move toward the national average and funds stop moving away from public schools to for-profit schools, education in the state will continue to suffer. “As a proud product of the Pitt County Schools, I know first hand that our schools directly reflect our communities,” he said. “The success of our public schools, and most importantly the children they educate, has major ramifications for economic prosperity, quality of life, and equal opportunity in the state.” (Daily Reflector)
- “I want to get teachers’ salary truly to the national average over the next four years,” Farkas said. (Grifton Times-Leader, 10/12/16)

## **Student Debt**

- Farkas, who is running for the District 9 seat to represent Pitt County in the state House, said legislators need to step in to help fix what he called a "student loan debt crisis." "It's absolutely wrong, some of the debt we're seeing students leave college with," he said. "The rates shouldn't be so high and cost them so much more to pay them back over time. Our elected leaders in Raleigh and in Washington can do something about this, but the truth be told, Republicans who are currently running the show, including in the U.S. Senate, have showed a tendency to put student needs last, and that's gotta stop." (Daily Reflector, 4/30/16)

## **Charter Schools and Vouchers**

- Farkas said he is troubled by the General Assembly continuing push to reduce public education funding by directing more resources to charter schools. Farkas said the original idea of charter schools, institutions that pursued innovation, was good, but current practices are allowing organizations from out of state to operate them without the same oversight of public schools. (Daily Reflector, 8/3/16)
- "As a proud product of Pitt County Schools and the brother of a high school teacher, I understand how strong public schools create strong communities. It was disappointing to see this legislature — including my 2016 opponent — continue to undermine our schools. The state's controversial voucher program will now increase \$10 million every year until 2027. Spending will be locked in at \$144.8 million per year after that, which means millions of taxpayer dollars ripped from public schools across our state, including here at home. Public money should go exclusively toward supporting strong public schools." (Daily Reflector, 8/3/16)
- Farkas opposes Opportunity Scholarships, grants of up to \$4,200 given to low-income families so their children can attend private schools. He said he does not believe there is enough accountability in the process and wonders if families turn to loans to pay the remaining tuition costs. (Daily Reflector, 10/25/16)

## **Taxes**

- Farkas said he believes the Republicans have created a tax system that picks winners and losers, keeping tax breaks in place for purchasing luxury items such as sports boats and aircraft while doing away with the 529 savings plan that allowed families to save for college without paying taxes on earnings. (Daily Reflector, 8/3/16)
- Farkas said tax reforms implemented by the General Assembly need to be changed. "I think the tax proposal and plan put in action by the General Assembly exhibited misplaced priorities time and time again," he said.
- Reducing the state's income tax rate did not help middle class families because new sales and service taxes were implemented to make up the lost revenue, he said.



- Farkas said he supports a progressive tax system that requires the wealthy to pay more of their income. “If we’re going to have tax reform, it's got to be tax reform for everybody. You can't pick and choose winners,” he said.
- The Republican-led leadership said its tax reform package was needed to attract industry and business to North Carolina. He agrees the corporate income tax needed to be reduced to match surrounding states, but relocating companies have other priorities, he said. “Companies do look at taxes, but they also look at quality of life,” he said. “They look at your schools, your infrastructure investments, to know if they can set up shop here. There are a whole bunch of things on a check list right up there with taxes.” (Daily Reflector, 10/25/16)

### **Voter ID**

- Farkas said he was pleased the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the state's Voter ID law. He urged young voters to exercise their right by turning out in record numbers. (Daily Reflector, 8/3/16)

### **HB2**

- If anything has hurt North Carolina's business since the 2008 recession, it's the unpredictability of the General Assembly, which was highlighted by the passage of HB2, he said. HB2 legislation required individuals to use the rest room assigned to the gender on their birth certificates and prevented local governments from adopting ordinances that counter that requirement. It was adopted after the Charlotte City Council adopted an ordinance allowing individuals to use the rest room of their choice.
- Farkas said he would have voted against HB2. “HB2 was a lot more about bathrooms. It was designed to fire up the bases of both parties and tried to play to the extremes,” Farkas said. (Daily Reflector, 10/25/16)

### **Says Public Service Has Been Demonized**

- Brian Farkas said he wants to restore honor to the concept of public service. Farkas, said he has heard the knock that he has only ever aspired to run for public office. His answer: “So what?”
- “My experience was working in the public sector and working to make government operational. I only aspired to run for public office when I saw politics becoming so divisive and public service being demonized,” said Farkas, who worked for the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, part of the National Institutes of Health, before joining JKF Architecture, a firm his father founded, as director of client relations and development. He also holds a master’s of public administration degree from the UNC School of Government in Chapel Hill. (Daily Reflector, 10/25/16)

## Tone of 2016 Campaign

Overall, the 2016 campaign against Murphy was mostly cordial with one negative bump when Farkas wrongly accused Murphy of acting improperly by “playing politics with patient records.”

- Four doctors with Eastern Urological Associates mailed a letter addressed to “Dear Friends and Patients” asking them to support Murphy. The letter reminded recipients of Murphy's “...twenty plus years of delivering dedicated and compassionate care to patients in eastern North Carolina...” and his time spent as a medical missionary overseas.
- “He has never sought to be in politics and his life has not been led with that in mind,” the letter said. “It has rather been his natural born leadership qualities, his compassion and integrity that others have seen and thus sought him out to lead at a higher level. We simply cannot think of a better person and leaders to represent Pitt County.”
- On Oct. 19, the day before early voting began, Farkas sent out a news release accusing Murphy of “playing politics with patient records.”
- “The decision to use patient records raises concerns that the letter may violate the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, referred to as 'HIPAA',” Farkas alleged. HIPAA privacy rules said information that is patient identifiable, even the patient's address, is confidential and must be protected, Farkas said.
- A spokeswoman for the North Carolina Medical Board said the letter does not appear to violate HIPAA rules. “The medical board is not aware of any policy that prohibits or states this type of communication is unethical,” said Jean Fisher Brinkley, communications director N.C. Medical Board.
- A spokesman with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services said the agency can only determine if a specific conduct violates HIPAA rules in the contest of an investigation launched as a result of a complaint.
- Murphy said he doesn't understand why Farkas wanted to turn the letter into a campaign issue. “I got nothing but positive feedback. I am not going to talk about it. It's not an issue for me,” Murphy said.
- Farkas said he stands by his decision to send the news release. “Patients records should never be part of the political process, that is an intimate relationship between a patient and their doctor,” Farkas said. “I stand by thinking it was unethical and very poor judgement by Dr. Murphy.” (Daily Reflector, 11/6/16)

## 2020 Campaign

In 2020, Farkas ran again. He benefited from the fact that (1) the district was redrawn to add Democratic voters, and (2) Murphy had left to run successfully for Congress, and his appointed successor, Perrin Jones, proved to be a weaker candidate.

### Future Now – Controversy over Defund-the-Police issue

Jones, with the help of House Speaker Tim Moore, attempted to link Farkas to the “defund police” issue because Farkas took a donation from the group Future Now, which ultimately came out in favor of measures that meant defunding the police (Future Now used the term ‘reallocate’)

- N.C. House Speaker Tim Moore continued attacking a Pitt County legislative candidate for signing a pledge he says calls for defunding police. Moore stood with Republican state House District 9 Rep. Perrin Jones and two Republican sheriffs from nearby counties on Wednesday to denounce Jones' Democratic opponent Brian Farkas for signing the "America's Goal" pledge sponsored by Future Now, a political action committee that works to elect liberal and progressive candidates to state legislatures.
- "Sometimes they call it reallocation, but I can tell you if somebody showed up at work and their boss said 'Hey, we need to reallocate your pay,' what do you think that will mean? I think it means you're cutting it," Moore said.
- The allegation is false, Farkas said. “I do not support defunding the police. My policy priorities actually call for additional funding for our police as well as common-sense reforms like body cameras and de-escalation training," Farkas said in a written statement. (Daily Reflector, 9/18/20)

The subject came up in a debate.

- Farkas frequently referenced televised campaign ads that he said have made false claims about his views on calls to defund police departments in the response to the killing of black men and women by officers. The candidates were asked where they stood on the topic of "police defunding."
- "It's unfortunate that Perrin Jones and the (House Speaker Tim Moore) have chosen to lie and go negative on this issue," Farkas said. "I have never in my life said I wanted to defund the police. I've never in my life said I want to weaken police. ... All I have ever talked about was bringing accountability to law enforcement."
- Farkas said he wanted to see more money put toward training police in de-escalation techniques and toward the purchase of body cameras for officers to wear.
- "The reality is the status quo, where we are at, is wrong. I don't know why Rep. Jones is OK with keeping things as they are because people are getting hurt. Battle lines are being drawn and something different must be done," Farkas said. (Daily Reflector, 9/16/20)

- Jones said if Farkas is against police defunding he should return a \$5,400 donation from a group called "Future Now," a progressive political action committee.
- "The fact is in the immediate aftermath of George Floyd's unfortunate death there was what I consider a moment of true nation introspection where there were a number of people who wanted to see substantive change in how police interact work and interact with the community," Jones said. "Unfortunately the legitimate peaceful protest that a number of people undertook were usurped by people who wanted to add violence to the mix."
- Jones accused Farkas of not renouncing the violence that occurred in downtown Greenville on May 31 following a peaceful protest over George Floyd's death. The focus should be on bail bond reform and providing substance abuse assistance to people in jail, Jones said.
- He said a Farkas proposal to establish a statewide police oversight board is wrong because the entity could be politicized and promote Monday morning quarterbacking that would encourage more violence.
- Farkas said organizations like the state bar and N.C. Board of Architecture have committees that review complaints. A statewide police review board would eliminate the need for each community to have their own review board, which would save money.

Jones challenged Farkas to return the donation, which he refused to do.

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## **Other Campaign Issues**

An early October overview of the race highlighted the issues Farkas deemed the most important.

- Candidates for state House District 9 said that public education is a top concern among voters they've met, with one focusing on returning students to class and the other on teachers and facilities.....
- Farkas said improving education begins with ensuring teachers and students have the resources they need. He wants to re-establish the state's incentive pay program for educators who earn advanced degrees.
- "Education is the only field I've ever seen that people who invest in themselves see no reward," he said.
- He also wants to re-establish the North Carolina Teaching Fellows program with a focus on improving diversity among future teachers. "Internet access is a huge problem and we've got to make it a top priority of the next legislature," he said. Pitt County has 11,000 people without internet access, Farkas said. He has seen studies that show 50 percent of Pitt County students either don't have Internet access or don't have the capacity to stream live classes.
- Along with supporting education, improved internet access will make it easier for individuals to access health care through telemedicine. It also will help business people living in rural areas to get goods to the market, Farkas said.
- He also wants to introduce legislation that will "lock up" lottery funding so its revenue is used to fund teacher pay and facility construction instead of being shifted to non-education projects. "We've got buildings that are 40, 50 years old here that have done their time. There is water and pipes leaking through the ceiling," he said. "We've got to get ahead of this."
- Farkas said during his interview that building strong public schools would be his top issue as a legislator. He said he would work to bolster job creation and economic development opportunities by advocating for the completion of Interstate 587, which would make U.S. 264 Bypass West an interstate quality road. He also wants to restore the earned income tax credit, which aids working families with low- to moderate-income, he said.

Funding for a new Brody School of Medicine building and Medicaid expansion were also listed as priorities. (Daily Reflector, 10/4/20)

Farkas won a narrow victory by just 800 votes.

## State House, 2021-22

### Stressing Bipartisanship in First Month

A month into his term, he wrote a guest column stressing how his first actions were bipartisan in nature.

- In that spirit, my first vote as a legislator was for a bipartisan COVID-19 Relief Bill — SB36 — that supplements existing relief programs, extends deadlines for businesses and organizations to apply for assistance, and allocates \$31 million in additional emergency funding to Pitt County Schools.
- On Feb. 17, I introduced legislation — HB106 — that empowers the Pitt County Board of Education to adjust school start and end dates for the next three years according to guidance from local experts. I appreciate the support of Pitt County's other two representatives in the state House, Chris Humphrey and Kandie Smith, in joining me as sponsors of this legislation in a unified show of support.
- On Feb. 24, I joined my Republican colleagues in a bipartisan bill — HB 82 — to provide summer learning opportunities to help children make up learning losses from the 2020-21 school year. Additional COVID-19 relief legislation is on the way, and legislators are hard at work crafting those bills now. (Daily Reflector, 2/28/21)

### Bucked Most Democrats on Initial 2021 Budget Vote

Farkas's most significant break with the Democrats was voting for the first version of the 2021 GOP Budget to try and break the two year long stalemate with Governor Cooper. The budget providing funding for a new medical school building at East Carolina University, an issue of concern to the area for several years, was key.

- The North Carolina House passed its two-year state budget on Thursday, including nearly \$150 million of funding to Pitt County. But county legislators disagreed on the merit of the plan. The budget passed with a veto-proof majority and received bipartisan support. Republican Rep. Chris Humphrey of Pitt and Lenoir counties and Democratic Rep. Brian Farkas of Pitt County both said the budget is a bipartisan effort. "No budget is perfect, but the House budget goes a long way to address many of our needs statewide and local," Humphrey said in a statement Thursday.
- Farkas said in a statement Wednesday that more could be done, but acknowledged he was among nine Democrats to join Republicans and vote in favor of the bill. "Funding for the construction of a new building for East Carolina University's Brody School of Medicine is the biggest win for Pitt County in this budget," Farkas said of the \$125 million dedicated to the project. "This is a game-changing project and I am honored to be a part of the legacy former ECU Chancellor Leo Jenkins started when he made the Brody School of Medicine a reality." (Daily Reflector, 8/12/21)

By voting for the Budget, he ended up being on the negotiating team for the final budget compromise that was reached in November 2021.

- In the House, Democratic Rep. Brian Farkas of Greenville also served on the conference committee. Farkas said the House Democratic votes supporting the Republican-led budget “weren’t a given at any point until the very end when we all voted [Nov. 18]. To me, we leveraged that individually.”
- Farkas said “that was not a battlefield that we were on, and it’s not something we had to talk about a whole lot.” Asked if he would have overridden a veto, Farkas said: “It’s not something we gotta worry about.” (RNO, 11/23/21)

He pointed to what the Budget deal brought for the County. He will undoubtedly point to this as a success.

- State legislators said the two-year state budget signed by Gov. Roy Cooper on Thursday delivers much needed funding for projects that will benefit Pitt County residents including a new medical school and food processing center in Ayden.
- Cooper acted almost immediately after the Republican-controlled legislature sent the bill to his desk. The House voted 101-10 earlier in the day in favor of the measure, the day after the Senate gave the chamber's final OK to the bill by a vote of 41-7. Each chamber also held similar, preliminary votes backing the plan earlier in the week.
- The plan includes up to \$215 million for a new Brody School of Medicine building at East Carolina University in addition to more than \$82 million for additional renovations and repairs at the university, said Rep. Brian Farkas, who represents much of Greenville and southeast Pitt County in District 9.
- It also includes \$4 million for a long-planned food processing facility in Ayden, \$14.5 million for a workforce technology center at Pitt Community College, more than \$2 million for capital improvements at the Pitt-Greenville Airport, and more than \$3 million for more than a half dozen other initiatives.
- "Pitt County has a lot to celebrate today," Farkas said. "I'm proud to deliver a bipartisan budget that will make a positive, transformational impact for years to come."
- Farkas said the Brody funding was his top priority. "Our success on behalf of Pitt County clearly demonstrates that when you push past partisan games, build genuine relationships with people from all backgrounds, and hustle like there's no tomorrow, the sky's the limit. And we're just getting started." (Daily Reflector, 11/18/21)

Another dividend for Farkas from his being on the Budget negotiating team was getting an appointment to a committee to study Medicaid expansion, which is also one of his big issues.

- A legislative committee to expand access to health care for workers could pave the way for better health and economic opportunity, a Pitt County lawmaker said. State House Speaker Tim Moore on Wednesday announced the formation of the Joint Legislative Committee on Access to Health Care and Medicaid Expansion. The committee was outlined in the state budget passed in November and will consist of 18 members, nine from the House and nine from the Senate. The purpose is to consider various ways in which access to health care and health insurance can be improved for North Carolinians, the bill reads.
- "Members of the Joint Legislative Committee on Access to Health Care and Medicaid Expansion will thoroughly investigate the health care needs in our state and explore all options to improve upon the state of health care in North Carolina," Moore said in a statement. "I have every confidence that the result of this committee's work will benefit all North Carolinians."
- Brian Farkas, a Democrat representing Pitt County, was among the nine members of the House appointed to the committee. He said the committee's work could pay off as early as this year, since wording in the budget grants it the power to create legislation.
- "This committee was formed during budget negotiations as something that conferees including myself worked toward as we discussed Medicaid expansion," Farkas said. "I do not think it was any secret that we were talking about how we could expand Medicaid in the budget but the votes just were not there yet. This was a good faith gesture by the majority to work with us and start putting together a frame work that could start moving the needle here as early as the short session." (Daily Reflector, 1/5/22)

### **Voting Bill**

- Democrats on Tuesday also filed the Fix Our Democracy Bill. Primary sponsor Rep. Ashton Wheeler Clemmons of Greensboro said the bill takes a similar stand to HB 446 on automatic voter registration.
- It also addresses gerrymandering and a need for transparency among Political Action Committees. The bill also calls for North Carolina to reimplement nonpartisan primary elections and general elections for Supreme Court justices and judges of the Court of Appeals.
- The bill states that its supporters wish to see automatic voter registration in practice by 2022. North Carolina's midterm elections also fall at that time. Rep. Brian Farkas of Greenville is a cosponsor. (Daily Reflector, 4/13/21)



## **Gay Rights**

He attended a local Pride event in June 2021.

- Rep. Brian Farkas was also in attendance. He shared a few words on the region's progress as well as how pleased he was to see Pride on full display. "It is exciting to see this in Pitt County," Farkas, a Greenville native, said. "We keep making big strides. At the end of the day, no matter who you are or who you love, you deserve respect and resources available to help you." (Daily Reflector, 6/28/21)

## **Against Protecting Women Athletics**

At a town meeting, he came out against protecting women's athletic competition from letting transgenders compete in women's sports.

- Of civil rights, Farkas took a hard stance against politics encroaching on the rights of voters and transgender people. Yoshi Newman, an educational psychologist, questioned a bill filed by Republican legislators that would block trans-women from joining women's high school and college sports teams. "It's very frustrating to see politicians in Raleigh who can't seem to leave issues of a personal nature alone," Farkas said. "These people can't stop talking about the bathrooms. It moves us so off of where we need to be, talking about these kitchen table issues that actually impact people's lives."
- "Unfortunately you have a lot of people pushing partisan stuff, trying to put people in bad moods and bad positions. It's not good and, for people in our transgender community, it devalues them. Everyone deserves to be loved and accepted and not be discriminated against." (Daily Reflector, 3/26/21)

## **Guns**

He opposed eliminating purchase permits for handguns.

- Two Pitt County state representatives have opposing takes on a bill that would do away with sheriff's office-approved purchase permits for handguns in North Carolina. HB 398 passed 69-48 on May 5 in the state House of Representatives. All but two Democrats and a single Republican voted against. It currently sits in the state Senate Committee on Rules and Operations.
- The bill was backed by the North Carolina Sheriff's Association despite the organization's opposition to the bill in previous years. Republican Chris Humphrey and Democrat Brian Farkas, both who represent Pitt County in the House, took opposing views on the bill.....

- Farkas, who lives in Greenville, said that the bill sets a precedent for loopholes to be exploited. "As it's currently written, eliminating the pistol purchase permit would allow for the private sale or transfer of any handgun without any kind of background check," Farkas said. "This represents a massive expansion of what is sometimes called the 'gun show loophole' and makes North Carolina a more dangerous place for everyone. North Carolina's pistol purchase permit is not perfect but it has been an effective way to prevent guns from getting to people who legally can't own one," he said.
- The loophole allows buyers to seek out an unlicensed seller to acquire a handgun, Farkas said. That loophole is currently closed under state law. Rifles can be bought without a purchase permit.....
- Farkas said that he does not see the bill being made into a law under Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper. "It is hard to say exactly what will happen in the Senate, but I would expect Gov. Cooper to veto the bill should it come to his desk," Farkas said. (Daily Reflector, 5/20/21)

### **Miscellaneous**

At several town meetings in 2021, Farkas summarized some of his other bills and positions.

- One bill he wrote is House Bill 802. It involves piloting Support Team Assisted Response programs in three North Carolina police departments, including Greenville.
- "These folks would deploy in low-level incidents, nonviolent incidents, as opposed to traditional uniformed police officers," said Farkas. "You're talking about maybe a trespassing issue. Maybe mental health crises."
- Farkas also continues to work on improving broadband access in Eastern North Carolina. "I was really proud of a broadband bill, called the Broadband Empowerment Act," he said. "That would give DOT the authority to actually build empty telecommunications conduits when they're building roads so we can run fiber down the road."
- The representative recently passed his first bill. "It was to modernize public notice whenever there's sanitary sewer overflows anywhere in North Carolina," he said. (WNCT, 6/17/21)

## **Part IV Farkas – The News File, 1999-2022**

**1999**

### **JUL 1999 Dog Wins Dog Show**

In what should have been one of the dog days of summer, Sparky was shivering.

The 2-year-old Chihuahua didn't seem to mind wearing a bonnet, dress and blanket as he waited for the competition to begin July 19 at the Greenville Recreation and Parks Department's annual Kid's Dog Show. The outfit didn't win him any points, but at least it kept him warm as temperatures dipped into the 60s.

The 4-pounder, shown by Hayes and Brittney Gillahan, did score big in one category: smallest dog.

On the other end of the scale, Monty, a bull mastiff shown by Abbe Brooks, won the prize for biggest dog in the show. The 128-pound dog also won a second-place award for best-behaved.

Checkers, an English cocker spaniel, took an overall award as the best in show and also won first place for best-behaved and third place for best trick.

Owner Brian Farkas said Checkers had never been to obedience school.

"Everybody [the whole family] works with her," he said, adding that he had practiced with Checkers on sitting and following directions. This was the first dog show for the 1 1/2-year-old, so Brian said the win came as a surprise.

The show's other triple prize-winner, Nikki Noodlehead, shown by Kelsye Manasusa, received two dog bowls as first-place prizes for best looking and best trick, (catching hot dogs in the air). Nikki also won second place in the largest dog category. (Greenville Daily Reflector, 7/16/99)

**2001****OCT 2001 High School Column on "Haunted Forest"**

Whether it was someone with a mask chasing you with a chain saw or a person rising from the grave, the folks at East Carolina University did a pretty good job of depicting a "haunted forest."

I started my trip through the forest by being introduced to our guide, Dave. He was the person who would tell us where our next stop would be. I was in a group of about 10 people. As Dave led us through the entrance to the forest, we were almost immediately greeted with a surprise.

Usually in haunted houses or forests, the creators let you get used to the setting before giving you a scare. But these people got right down to business. They even made me jump, and that's not very easy. I gave them points for that.

After the first "encounter," I felt there was a bigger feeling of anxiety than actual fear. When I say anxiety, I mean not knowing which bush or tree was hiding your next surprise. Occasionally, there were a few things that I did not see coming, but I was usually able to spot the things ahead before they struck.

There were the usual settings that come to mind set up within the forest, such as the insane asylum, the haunted tombs and the shop of the mad butcher, in no certain order. There were other stops along the trail that were also quite interesting to visit. The forest continued to hide scary traps here and there, but by this point I was starting to get used to it and it wasn't that surprising anymore.

We started nearing the end of the trail and I thought that was it, but I was really wrong. Before I knew what was coming, a masked man with a really nasty looking chain saw gave me quite a scare. It was scary enough to send half of the group I was with running like a swarm of man-eating dogs were at their heels. It took them halfway through the parking lot to realize they were no longer being chased.

So that last surprise ended my tour of the Haunted Forest. On a scale of one to 10, I would give the overall scariness of the forest a seven. It kept the adrenaline flowing fast and was a real heart stopper. It was fun, exciting and a great time!

Brian Farkas is a student at J.H. Rose High School and a correspondent for The Daily Reflector's Youth Advisory Panel (YAP). (Daily Reflector, 10/30/01)

**2013**

**DEC 2013    Running For State House**

**BRIAN BROWN GETS A CHALLENGER:** Republican state Rep. Brian Brown, who represents a key swing district in the Greenville, is getting a Democratic challenger.

Brian Farkas, 26, is preparing to run against Brown in the 9th District. Farkas works at JKF Architecture in Greenville as director of client relations and development. He graduated with a master's degree in public administration from UNC-Chapel Hill in 2013.

"My past experience in successfully making government work for the people, coupled with my current work in my family's small business, provides me with the unique experience necessary to effectively represent the people of the 9th District," he said in a statement. (Under The Dome, 12/9/13)



A Pitt County native is the second Democrat to announce he wants to challenge Republican incumbent Brian Brown for his House District 9 seat.

Brian Farkas, 26, is director of client relations and development at JKF Architecture, the firm founded by his father, architect John Farkas.

"I'm running a candidacy that is about common sense, innovative solutions and civility in Raleigh. Making sure our eastern North Carolina values are heard," Farkas said.

Farkas received a master's degree in public administration from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He received his undergraduate degree in political science and government from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Farkas said he has had a number of unique work experiences while attending school and in the period between earning his bachelor's degree and beginning his graduate program.

While an undergraduate he worked with the U.S. Attorney Office Western District of North Carolina. He worked with the National Institutes of Health's Environmental Health Sciences facility in Research Triangle Park.

His graduate studies also exposed him to ways to improve the work of government.

Farkas said as a graduate of Pitt County Schools, and the brother of a school teacher, he wants to work to improve public education. He also witnessed the hard work that his father put into starting his own business.

Farkas is the third person to announce plans to challenge Brown for the House District 9 seat.

Greenville native and East Carolina University student Uriah Ward announced last month he is running for the Democratic nomination. Earlier this month, Ashley Bleau, owner of Dingbatters Seafood Restaurant and Shore to Door Seafood, announced he would challenge Brown for the Republican Party nomination. (Daily Reflector, 12/9/13)

**2014****JAN 2014    Won't Run For State House in 2014**

A Pitt County native has decided against a run for state House District 9.

Brian Farkas, 26, director of client relations and development at JKF Architecture, announced last month he wanted to run for the Democratic nomination for the district, which covers eastern Pitt County. Farkas said unexpected responsibilities led him to change his mind.

“Pitt County has always been my home, and I will continue to look for opportunities to give back to this community,” Farkas said. “I look forward to seeing how the Democratic field continues to develop, as well as to supporting our eventual nominee in November.”

Democrat Uriah Ward, an East Carolina University student, announced in November he plans to run for the seat. Ashley Bleau, owner of Dingbatters Seafood Restaurant and Shore to Door Seafood, announced he would challenge state Rep. Brian Brown for the Republican Party nomination. Brown is serving his first term in the General Assembly. (Daily Reflector, 1/9/14)

**2015****APR 2015 Appointed to Greenville Comprehensive Plan Committee**

The council made appointments to boards and commissions Thursday, including appointments to the Comprehensive Plan Committee. Each council member appointed one person to the committee: Mayor Allen Thomas: Bruce Sauter

Mayor Pro Tem/At-large Councilman Calvin Mercer: Brian Farkas

District 1 Councilwoman Kandie Smith: Bryant Kittrell

District 2 Councilwoman Rose Glover: Kevin Faison

District 3 Councilwoman Marion Blackburn: Ann Maxwell

District 4 Councilman Rick Smiley: Harry Stubbs

District 5 Councilman Rick Croskery: Jon Day (Daily Reflector, 4/9/15)

**SEP 2015 Will Announce Candidacy For State House**

A Greenville Democrat plans to announce his candidacy for N.C. House District 9 at a local high school Wednesday afternoon.

Brian Farkas, director of client relations and management at JKF Architecture, is scheduled to make the announcement at 12:30 p.m. at the main entrance to the J.H. Rose High School athletics Fields. In case of rain, the event will be held under the bus breezeway.

Farkas contemplated a run for the same seat in 2014 but cited unexpected responsibilities as the reason he changed his mind.

House District 9 encompasses eastern Pitt County, extending from the Lenoir County line in the south to the borders of Martin and Beaufort counties in the north and northeast.

Republican Brian Brown is serving his second term in the seat.

Farkas was raised in Pitt County. He received a bachelor's degree in political science at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and a master's of public administration degree from the UNC School of Government in Chapel Hill. (Daily Reflector, 9/8/15)



**SEP 2015     Announces Candidacy**

A longtime Pitt County resident said he is running for the General Assembly to restore the partnership between business, government and schools that enabled the state to prosper.

Brian Farkas, 28, announced Wednesday he is seeking the Democratic Party nomination for House District 9, which encompasses eastern Pitt County from the Lenoir County border in the south to the Martin-Beaufort county lines in the north.

Family and about two dozen supporters joined Farkas for his announcement at the J.H. Rose High School athletics field.

"Pitt County is my home. I was raised here," said Farkas, director of client relations and development at JKF Architecture, a business founded by his father, John Farkas. "Pitt County is what made me."

Farkas is running to challenge Republican Brian Brown in the 2016 general election. Brown is serving his second term in the General Assembly.

While they share a first name, Farkas said he and Brown have disparate views on many issues, especially education.

"No one will be a bigger champion for public schools than me," Farkas said.

His biggest concern is the lack of accountability and transparency among charter schools. The Republican leadership wants to reduce the accountability of charter schools by removing their supervision from the Department of Public Instruction, he said.

"Public money needs to be transparent, accountable and reportable," he said.

Farkas said Brown supports opportunity scholarships, which he likens to vouchers.

Competition has its place in education, Farkas said, but it should be among public schools and involve investing in the best teachers and programming.

He said he will work to reinstate the Teaching Fellows scholarship, which pays the college expenses of individuals who enter teaching. He also wants to restore salary increases for teachers who earn a master's degree.

North Carolina's success sprang from a strong partnership between businesses, government and public education, Farkas said. It was a partnership that recognized strong schools created strong communities, he said.

The Republican-led General Assembly is chipping away at that formula in the service of special interests, he said.

"Politicians in Raleigh ram divisive laws through the legislature that strip power from local governments, make it harder for people to vote and dismiss any real opportunities to solve problems," Farkas said.

"It's time we put a stop to all that. We need to bring everybody to the table again, and as your representative I'll work with anybody who's ready to make the smart investments Pitt County needs to be successful," he said.

The General Assembly is about 70 days late in approving a state budget for the next two years. Although Republicans lead both the state House and Senate, they cannot decide if funding will be available for teacher assistant positions, driver's education and if any changes should be made in the distribution of sales tax revenue to local governments.

The disagreements have stalled efforts to replenish economic development assistance programs, Farkas said.

"It's been frustrating to see the lack of progress in Raleigh, to see the divisiveness," Farkas said.

Farkas first must win the Democratic Party primary election for the seat. No other Democrats have announced plans to run. Typically, the primary is held in May, but the General Assembly is debating adding all the state's primary elections to the March presidential primary.

Among the people attending Farkas' announcement was Charles "Sonny" McLawhorn, chairman of the Pitt County Democratic Party.

"This seat (House District 9) is wide open," McLawhorn said. "I view this seat as a very competitive race, and I don't think the incumbent can count on winning just because he's an incumbent."

Farkas earned a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and a master's of public administration degree from the UNC School of Government.

Prior to joining JKF Architecture, he worked for the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, one of 27 research institutes that comprise the National Institutes of Health. While at NIEHS, he specialized in emergency management programming.

Locally, Farkas serves on the issues committee for the Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce. He is the vice chairman of the public transportation and parking commission for the City of Greenville and a vice president of the Greenville Museum of Art's Board of Trustees. (Daily Reflector, 9/10/15)

### **OCT 2015 Party Press Release**

The North Carolina House Democratic Caucus issued the following news release:

Pitt County businessman Brian Farkas, 28, of Greenville announced his 2016 candidacy to serve in the North Carolina House of Representatives. Farkas is the Director of Client Relations and Development for a local architecture firm based in Greenville.

”Politicians in Raleigh ram divisive laws through the legislature that strip power from local governments, make it harder for people to vote, and dismiss any real opportunities to solve problems,” said Farkas. “It’s time we put a stop to all that. We need to bring everybody to the table again and as your Representative, I’ll work with anybody who’s ready to make the smart investments Pitt County needs to be successful - investments in our universities and community colleges, investments in our roads and agricultural economy, support for our regional healthcare system, and especially Pitt County’s Public Schools.”

Farkas will run as a Democrat against incumbent Rep. Brian Brown in House District 9, which includes all of Eastern Pitt County.

”House Democrats are focused on recruiting quality candidates across the state who understand how to create jobs and improve our economy,” said Democratic Leader Larry D. Hall. “Too often, our rural communities are coming up short thanks to the politicians currently running Raleigh - but Brian Farkas understands the unique challenges facing Eastern North Carolina and Pitt County. Brian will fight to create jobs, improve access to education and put middle class families first. 2016 is going to be an exciting year in HD 9. “

Farkas earned a B.A. in Political Science from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and a Master of Public Administration from the UNC School of Government. Prior to joining JKF Architecture, Brian most recently worked for the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), one of 27 research institutes that comprise the National Institutes of Health. While at NIEHS, he specialized in emergency management programming to safeguard the lives and prized research of over 1,000 people.

Locally, Farkas serves on the Issues Committee for the Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce, is the current Vice Chair of the Public Transportation and Parking Commission for the City of Greenville, as well as Vice President of the Greenville Museum of Art’s Board of Trustees. His campaign website is [www.brianfarkas.com](http://www.brianfarkas.com). (Press Release, 10/14/15)

### **NOV 2015 Letter to Editor on Running**

Since announcing my candidacy to serve District 9 in the North Carolina House of Representatives, I’ve had the opportunity to meet many wonderful people and learn more about the communities that make Pitt County great. Our area is energized by the hard work of doctors, educators, farmers and small business owners, all of whom contribute to the unique fabric of cities, towns and farms that we’re proud to call home.

One of my campaign priorities is to make sure our state government does all it can to support downtown and main street revitalization in Pitt County. I strongly support the N.C. Main Street Program and Main Street Solutions Fund, which effectively provide funds for downtown development and revitalization in small towns through a competitive grant process.

Recently, The News & Observer highlighted a last-minute addition to this year’s state budget where Raleigh leaders sidestepped the main street programs and sent \$1.25 million in taxpayer money to 13 towns represented by the most powerful legislators and their allies. This pork-barrel spending flies in the

face of good government and is another example of the General Assembly picking political winners and losers. Communities in District 9 such as Grifton, Winterville and Grimesland would have all qualified to participate in these programs and deserved a fair opportunity to compete for those dollars.

The current way of doing business in Raleigh is broken. The only way to protect the integrity of our government and foster economic prosperity for all is with votes for change. We need leaders who understand that how our government goes about doing something is just as important as simply doing something. I'm ready to go to Raleigh, represent Pitt County and make sure our local communities have the same opportunity to be successful.

BRIAN FARKAS (Daily Reflector, 11/8/15)

### **DEC 2015    Running For State House**

House District 9 Democrats (Pitt County): Former Rep. Brian Brown, a Republican, resigned from this seat earlier this year, and Republican Greg Murphy was appointed to serve out his term. But Democrats think they could take this seat and have two candidates vying for the right to challenge Murphy in November. Brian Farkas, who works at a Greenville architecture firm, will face Walter Gaskins, a member of the Pitt County school board, in the Democratic primary. The Greenville area often has intriguing legislative match-ups, and 2016 should be no different - in the primary and general elections. (RNO, 12/21/15)

## 2016

### **JAN 2016    Preparing for Primary**

Brian Farkas, who is seeking the state House District 9 Democratic Party nomination, announced his candidacy in September so he already was organizing his campaign operations when the March primary was announced. He starting canvassing in December.

"People were really, really generous and appreciative," Farkas said. "They understand this March primary has really accelerated the campaign." (Daily Reflector, 1/14/16)

### **FEB 2016    On Regulation Changes For Small Businesses**

When asked what regulatory changes the candidates would support to help small businesses, Smith said the General Assembly needs to examine all aspects of change. She noted the legislature banned local governments from imposing business privilege licenses. The action costs the city \$1.2 million in revenue.

Farkas said a new rule requiring regulation reviews every 10 years should weed out useless rules. (Daily Reflector, 2/16/16)

### **MAR 2016    Candidate Survey**

The Daily Reflector asked candidates in the March 15 primary to fill out brief surveys outlining their qualifications. Following are responses from Democratic candidates for state House of Representatives District 9, Brian Farkas and Walter Gaskins of Greenville. The winner will face Republican Greg Murphy in November.

Farkas

List a few highlights from you personal and professional life that you think best show you are qualified for the office you seek.

Raised in Pitt County; master of public administration, UNC School of Government at UNC Chapel Hill; bachelor of arts in political science, UNC Charlotte; current director of client relations and development, JKF Architecture of Greenville; program specialist National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences in Research Triangle Park, 2012-2013; U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of North Carolina in Charlotte, 2008-2011; member Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce Legislative Issues Committee; vice chairman City of Greenville Public Transportation and Parking Commission; vice president Greenville Museum of Art Board of Trustees; member, City of Greenville Comprehensive Planning Committee.

Tell us briefly what you hope will be a signature achievement from your time in office if you are elected:

Creating an economy that works for everyone: I have been frustrated with the failure of the state Legislature to develop a forward-thinking plan to support a vibrant eastern North Carolina economy. A healthy economy is powered by good paying jobs and fair opportunities for everyone to be successful. As Pitt County's voice in the state House, I hope to champion smart, pro-business investments in infrastructure that benefit all Pitt County communities; ensure state support of urban core and main street revitalization programs that boost quality of life; strengthen North Carolina's "buy local" efforts; combat unemployment and poverty by rebuilding problem-solving partnerships between business, government and public education; bring oversight to the Department of Commerce and make sure it is meeting the needs of current and prospective businesses across North Carolina. Others points of emphasis include ending the divisive nature of state politics in Raleigh and creating strong public schools.

Tell us briefly what most distinguishes you from your opponents.

Our communities need a hands-on problem solver who will anticipate issues before they arise, reach across the political aisle whenever possible, and serve as a clear voice for eastern North Carolina. I represent a new generation of leadership ready to go to Raleigh and hit the ground running on Day One of my term. As District 9's representative in the State House, I bring a unique skill set from my time in both the public and private sectors that can build forward-thinking partnerships and solve problems. Pitt County does not need someone serving District 9 who will simply keep a seat warm. As I have campaigned across the District and listened to our voters, people are more interested in talking about the future than the past. I'm ready to serve the 9th District by working for Pitt County tirelessly every day and doing whatever it takes to leave our state in better shape than we found it. (Daily Reflector, 3/1/16)

### **MAR 2016 Profile**

Brian Farkas, who is running for the state House District 9 seat, said he has the skills to change the status quo that is holding the state back.

"Partisan politics have become so polarized that we can't work together," Farkas said. "And the (GOP) super majority have done a disservice to North Carolina. Democrats have been boxed out, even though they represent millions of people, and you end up with four people making decisions for the entire state.

"That's not OK," he said. "We need to shake things up in Raleigh."

Farkas, who holds a bachelors degree in political science from UNC-Charlotte and a master's degree in public administration from the UNC School of Government at UNC-Chapel Hill, said he can work with members of both parties to get legislation passed in a GOP-controlled House and Senate.

"People have to have an open mind in legislature," he said, "They have to be able to listen as much as hear themselves talk. As a moderate Democrat, I think I represent this district really well and I can work to help both parties find common ground and start working together. The status quo doesn't work for me and it isn't working for the people of this state."

Farkas said that if elected he will advocate for comprehensive campaign finance reform, put an end to gerrymandering in the drawing up of voting districts and protect voter rights.

“We need to make sure that government is responsible, ethical and accountable to the people,” he said. “Legislators need to get out of the fundraising business and back into the policy-making business. We need to create a bipartisan, independent redistricting commission to stop legislators from drawing their own job descriptions and roll back voter suppression laws that discourage people from getting involved in the political process.”

Farkas said that unless teacher’s salaries in the state move toward the national average and funds stop moving away from public schools to for-profit schools, education in the state will continue to suffer.

“As a proud product of the Pitt County Schools, I know first hand that our schools directly reflect our communities,” he said. “The success of our public schools, and most importantly the children they educate, has major ramifications for economic prosperity, quality of life, and equal opportunity in the state.”

Farkas said that his work with the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Charlotte, as well as serving on several committees and commissions with the City of Greenville, has given the experience to start work as soon as he is elected.

“I plan to hit the ground running on day one,” he said. “I bring a unique skill set from my time in both the public and private sectors that can build forward-thinking partnerships and solve problems. I’m ready to serve the 9th District by working for Pitt County tirelessly every day and doing whatever it takes to leave our state in better shape than we found it.” (Daily Reflector, 3/1/16)

### **APR 2016    On Student Debt**

Farkas, who is running for the District 9 seat to represent Pitt County in the state House, said legislators need to step in to help fix what he called a “student loan debt crisis.”

“It’s absolutely wrong, some of the debt we’re seeing students leave college with,” he said. “The rates shouldn’t be so high and cost them so much more to pay them back over time. Our elected leaders in Raleigh and in Washington can do something about this, but the truth be told, Republicans who are currently running the show, including in the U.S. Senate, have showed a tendency to put student needs last, and that’s gotta stop.” (Daily Reflector, 4/30/16)

### **JUN 2016    Will Have Monthly Town Meetings**

The Democratic nominee for the state House District 9 race said Tuesday a series of monthly “town hall” meetings will give voters a a chance to express concerns.

Brian Farkas will hold his first “First Tuesday Town Hall” at 7 p.m. June 7 in the Winterville Community Room, part of the town's public safety building.

“I am committed to running a top-notch campaign that sets a new bar for what Pitt County should expect from local legislators,” Farkas said. “Part of raising those expectations means taking my message directly to the voters as well as making time to listen to their concerns about our state.”

Farkas is running against Greenville urologist Greg Murphy, a Republican who was appointed in October to fill the unexpired term of Brian Brown, who stepped down to take a job with U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis.

Farkas, director of client relations and management at JKF Architecture, said he while he plans to discuss his positions the meetings also will be a time to hear from voters.

“There are a lot of people who are frustrated and want to be heard,” Farkas said. “At the same time, I'll talk about my vision and what my leadership will be like in the General Assembly.”

Good government makes it as convenient as possible for citizens to be heard, Farkas said.

House District 9 encompasses eastern Pitt County, extending from Grifton to the Beaufort-Martin county lines. Farkas said he plans to visit different locations to reach as many people as possible.

Farkas said he intends to maintain a similar schedule once elected.

“Too many times politicians talk a big game about engaging votes and then we never see them again until the next election,” Farkas said. “I am committed to maintaining a monthly engagement schedule with District 9 voters through the election and into the future. Pitt County deserves the best.” (Daily Reflector, 6/1/16)

### **JUN 2016 — Introduces Resolution Calling for Zero Pedestrian Fatalities in Ten Years**

Halfway through 2016, five people have been hit and killed by a vehicle in Greenville.

To keep the conversation going about pedestrian safety, one citizen-led commission is taking action. At the Public Transportation and Parking Commission's meeting Wednesday, Brian Farkas, member, presented a resolution.

The document calls for zero pedestrian fatalities by the end of 2026. Farkas hopes the approved measure will inspire city leaders to take action.

"Everyone is really frustrated about this issue. This is a glaring weakness for the city of Greenville, but we've got an opportunity here to come up with a local solution that can help us move where we need to go," said Farkas.

His idea behind the resolution is a part of "vision zero," a policy used in a number of cities across the country. (WNCT-6/15/16)



A Democratic hopeful for the state House of Representatives is calling for city leaders to take actions that will eliminate pedestrian fatalities in Greenville within the next decade.

N.C. House District 9 Democratic candidate Brian Farkas sponsored a resolution calling for the Greenville City Council to adopt a “Vision Zero” commitment to reduce the annual rate of pedestrian fatalities to zero by 2026.

Farkas, who serves as the vice chairman of Greenville’s Public Transportation and Parking Commission, introduced the resolution during the commission’s June 15 meeting, where it was unanimously approved.

“In the first six months of 2016, five pedestrians have been hit and killed by a vehicle in Pitt County, and 14 fatalities have been recorded in the last 17 months,” Farkas said. “It doesn’t take an expert to realize there is a major problem in our city and that something must be done. I am pleased that my resolution passed with unanimous support and hope it will help spur some real movement on this issue from the City Council.”

Vision Zero is a multi-national road traffic safety project that aims to achieve a highway system with no fatalities or serious injuries in road traffic.

Vision Zero is based on the principles of:

Traffic deaths and injuries are preventable; therefore, none are acceptable;

People will make mistakes; the transportation system should be designed so those mistakes are not fatal;

Safety is the primary consideration in transportation decision-making;

Traffic safety solutions must be addressed as a whole.

Since 2014, more than a dozen major U.S. cities including New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Boston have made Vision Zero commitments to eliminate traffic deaths by a specified date.

If the City Council adopts the resolution, Greenville will be the first city in North Carolina to adopt a Vision Zero commitment, Farkas said.

“No city in North Carolina has taken a leadership role yet,” Farkas said. “This gives us the chance to establish Greenville as a leader in our state. We have an opportunity to strengthen our city by fixing one of the community’s most glaring weaknesses.”

Farkas selected the 10-year target date to coincide with Horizons 2026, the update of Greenville’s Horizons Community Plan. Farkas is part of the 22-member Comprehensive Plan Committee reviewing Greenville’s 10-year plan to address citywide issues like transportation and safety.

“There is a lot of overlap between Horizons 2026 and Vision Zero,” Farkas said. “Syncing these together gives the city a measurable timeline to meet the goal of zero pedestrian fatalities. This proven strategy

brings people together around common-sense solutions, bolters public safety and will help resolve this problem once and for all.”

Farkas said copies of the Public Transportation and Parking Commission’s resolution were sent to members of the Greenville City Council. He said he hopes the City Council will consider adopting the resolution during its next scheduled meeting in August.

“The commission was excited to give council something that sets clear and realistic safety objectives,” Farkas said. “Now it is up to the City Council to move forward with this.” (Daily Reflector, 6/27/16)

### **JUL 2016     Response to Democratic Convention**

Residents were joined by N.C. House of Representatives candidate Brian Farkas, a Democrat running for the District 9 seat. Farkas said he’s been pleased by the positivity of the DNC this week.

“It’s refreshing to see a convention this week that has yielded actual solutions and an optimistic vision for where our nation can go,” he said.

Farkas urged the crowd not to forget to vote in local races, too.

“Let’s make sure we keep Donald Trump out of the White House, but know the local elections, they matter so much,” he said. “It’s that local, state-level stuff that’s very intimately involved in our lives.” (Daily Reflector, 7/29/16)

### **AUG 2016     On Campaign Trail**

SIMPSON — The people of Pitt County want a fair opportunity to be successful and need a legislator who wholeheartedly supports public education, protects the rights of voters and wants to promote growth in eastern North Carolina, the Democratic candidate for state House District 9 said during a Tuesday campaign event.

More than a dozen people met with Brian Farkas at the Simpson Rural Fire Department to discuss a range of issues.

The meeting was one of a series of monthly meetings Farkas is having across the district to talk to voters about their concerns.

Dale Stevenson, a Simpson volunteer firefighter, first met Farkas when the candidate introduced himself to the department. He wanted to hear more from him.

“I am the here and now, he is the future,” Stevenson said. “For this region and the state to grow we need him in office. We need young people stepping up to the plate like this.”

Stevenson and several audience members discussed their concerns about how the Republican-led legislature has changed the state tax system.

Farkas said he believes the Republicans have created a tax system that picks winners and losers, keeping tax breaks in place for purchasing luxury items such as sports boats and aircraft while doing away with the 529 savings plan that allowed families to save for college without paying taxes on earnings.

Farkas was asked what strategies he would employ to work in a chamber that will likely remain under Republican control.

The Republicans do not believe they have to work with Democrats because they hold a super majority in the House and control the Senate and governor's mansion.

“We've got to get rid of that super majority in the House and we have elect Roy Cooper governor,” Farkas said. If Democrats win more than four House seats the super majority will be broken and it will force Republicans to work with Democrats.

House District 9, which is nearly 45 percent Democrat, nearly 32 percent Republican and 23 percent unaffiliated is primed for a Democratic takeover, Farkas said. He is running against Dr. Greg Murphy, a Greenville urologist who was appointed to the seat last fall to fill the unexpired term of Brian Brown, who resigned to work for U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis.

House District 9 encompasses eastern Pitt County, incorporating Grifton, a small section of Ayden, part of Winterville and Greenville and ending at the Pitt-Martin-Beaufort county line.

Farkas started the meeting by sharing his background. Raised in Greenville, he was a graduate of J.H. Rose High School who earned degrees from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and the UNC School of Government.

He worked with the U.S. Attorney Western District of North Carolina's office and the National Institutes of Health before returning to Greenville to work at his father's architectural firm. “I knew if I wanted to engage myself in public service I wanted to do it in my home town,” he said.

Farkas said he is troubled by the General Assembly continuing push to reduce public education funding by directing more resources to charter schools.

Farkas said the original idea of charter schools, institutions that pursued innovation, was good, but current practices are allowing organizations from out of state to operate them without the same oversight of public schools.

Farkas said he was pleased the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the state's Voter ID law. He urged young voters to exercise their right by turning out in record numbers.

Farkas said he also wanted the legislature to develop a grant program that would help eastern North Carolina communities clean up for industrial sites that are littered with hazardous materials. Cleaning these sites would make them attractive to new industry, he said. (Daily Reflector, 8/3/16)

## **AUG 2016 Guest Column Criticizes Legislative Session**

Now that the dust has settled on the General Assembly's 2016 Short Session, it's important to take a good look at how their decisions affect Pitt County. I wish I could say lawmakers worked across party lines to solve some of North Carolina's biggest issues, but the reality leaves a lot to be desired.

As a proud product of Pitt County Schools and the brother of a high school teacher, I understand how strong public schools create strong communities. It was disappointing to see this legislature — including my 2016 opponent — continue to undermine our schools. The state's controversial voucher program will now increase \$10 million every year until 2027. Spending will be locked in at \$144.8 million per year after that, which means millions of taxpayer dollars ripped from public schools across our state, including here at home. Public money should go exclusively toward supporting strong public schools.

Lets' be honest, it's an election year. Predictably, these lawmakers are trying to convince public educators and state employees that they've long supported their efforts. While I'm happy to see any dedicated public servant receive an overdue raise, the legislature has not put forward a long-term plan to attract and retain high-quality workers. The raises boasted by incumbents barely cover the costs associated with new taxes and fees passed by this legislature. North Carolina sadly continues to hemorrhage high-quality educators and public servants to other states and professions.

According to the General Assembly's nonpartisan fiscal staff, families making between \$10,000 and \$30,000 will save about \$60 a year from current tax plans. Considering how many services are subject to new taxes — car repairs and appliance deliveries, for example — people will end up paying more money than they're saving. On top of that, the failure of this legislature to expand Medicaid means 250,000 North Carolinians in this state will not have access to health care. Expansion would not only help people get access to affordable health care, but will serve as a catalyst for economic development and job creation across Eastern North Carolina.

Most frustrating is the failure of this legislature to work in a bipartisan fashion to get things done. North Carolina's national image as a forward-thinking state is being replaced with concerns about unpredictability and divisiveness. The House Bill 2 controversy is a prime example that has cost North Carolina businesses millions in revenue. House District 9 needs a state representative that will go above and beyond to clean up government and work with anybody — Democrat, Republican, or Independent — to make the smart decisions Pitt County needs to be successful.

It's clear that leaders in Raleigh have their work cut out for them, especially because of the divisive nature of state government. Despite the leadership out of Raleigh, I am optimistic about the future. North Carolinians across the state are hungry for leadership that puts good policy over good politics, and the upcoming election will likely be a testament to voter frustrations.

Brian Farkas is a candidate for the District 9 seat in the N.C. House of Representatives. (Daily Reflector, 8/3/16)

## **AUG 2016 Council Considering “Vision Zero” Initiative**

Greenville could be the first city in North Carolina to make a commitment to eliminate pedestrian fatalities within the next decade.

The City Council on Thursday unanimously approved a motion to consider a resolution to adopt a “Vision Zero” commitment to reduce the annual rate of pedestrian fatalities to zero by 2026.

Brian Farkas, vice chairman of Greenville’s Public Transportation and Parking Commission, introduced the resolution during the commission’s June 15 meeting, where it was unanimously approved.

“In the first six months of 2016, five pedestrians have been hit and killed by a vehicle in Pitt County, and 14 fatalities have been recorded in the last 17 months,” Farkas said in June after the commission voted to approve the resolution and send it to the City Council. “It doesn’t take an expert to realize there is a major problem in our city and that something must be done.”

Vision Zero is a multi-national road traffic safety project that aims to achieve a highway system with no fatalities or serious injuries in road traffic.

Vision Zero is based on the principles of:

- Traffic deaths and injuries are preventable; therefore, none are acceptable
- People will make mistakes; the transportation system should be designed so those mistakes are not fatal
- Safety is the primary consideration in transportation decision-making
- Traffic safety solutions must be addressed as a whole

Since 2014, more than a dozen major U.S. cities including New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Boston have made Vision Zero commitments to eliminate traffic deaths by a specified date. If the City Council adopts the resolution, Greenville will be the first city in North Carolina to take the safety initiative.

“I realize this is a simple equation ... less deaths are better,” Charles Moore, chairman of Greenville’s Public Transportation and Parking Commission, said during Thursday’s meeting. “However, government is never that simple. We should look at this resolution as an aspirational framework for what we can do as a city.”

Brian Glover, chairman of Greenville’s Bicycle and Pedestrian Commission, also spoke in favor of the resolution on Thursday.

“We don’t have bad drivers in this city, we have bad roads,” Glover said. “Our roads have not kept pace with the city’s growth. Fortunately, there is something we can do about it ... we need a long-term commitment to making safety a priority.”

At-Large Councilman Calvin Mercer, who requested a discussion on Vision Zero be added to Thursday's agenda, made the motion directing staff to evaluate the Vision Zero plan and develop a recommendation on ways Greenville can implement the safety initiative. (Daily Reflector, 8/19/16)

### **SEP 2016    Speaks At Education Forum**

Teacher concerns reached a deafening crescendo Wednesday night as professors and educators from eastern North Carolina gathered at Crave Restaurant and Bar to discuss growing problems in higher education.....

Brian Farkas, the democratic candidate for North Carolina House District 9, talked about restoring incentive pay for professors with master's degrees and bringing back "Teaching Fellows Program." Farkas described his own predicament of dealing with student loans and criticized the current government of "making a profit off of the back of students." (East Carolinian, 9/15/16)

### **OCT 2016    Overview of Race**

Incumbent Republican Greg Murphy hopes to retain his N.C. House District 9 seat as he faces Democrat Brian Farkas.

"This is my first run for elected office," Farkas said. "I have served on a number of different boards and commissions. I'm the vice chairman for the city of Greenville Public Transportation and Parking Commission, I sit on the Greenville Chamber of Commerce Legislative Issues Committee. I've felt called toward public service."

Farkas' opponent, while the incumbent, is also new to the world of political campaigning.

"I was appointed to the term a year ago, but this is my first time running for office," said Murphy, who was appointed to fill the unexpired term vacated by Brian Brown in October 2015. "I'm not a politician, I'm a doctor."

While Murphy said he reluctantly agreed to join the General Assembly, Farkas felt a calling to fix a General Assembly.

"More than anything, I felt there is a level of divisiveness and controversial politics coming out of our state capital," Farkas said. "That sort of thing is normal in Washington, but unacceptable in Raleigh. We need a new generation of leadership with a new voice in Eastern NC to get our fair share of investments."

The eastern region of the state needs is experience, Murphy said, adding that although he has only been with the General Assembly for a year, he is proud of what he has accomplished during that time.

"In a short term, I got more done in the six to 10 weeks than a lot of folks get in two terms," Murphy said. "I got the Naloxone Bill passed. That allows the purchase of an opioid antidote to be purchased by anybody, so families who have the unfortunate circumstance of having an addict in the home can treat

them should they come across their child that is overdosed. It used to be that only EMS would carry those. At best it's eight minutes and 15 (for EMS) to get there. During that time people die."

Murphy touted his medical experience, saying the General Assembly benefits from having a physician in office.

"There was no physician in the entire General Assembly," Murphy said. "It was necessary that we have someone in place with expertise in that area."

For his part, Farkas plans on emphasizing a wide range of topics, education in particular, should he be elected.

"The priority of public education has been under attack," Farkas said. "I want to be a fighter for public schools. From day one I have made a pledge to be the strongest champion of public schools and I have an endorsements from the Pitt County Chapter of the North Carolina Association of Educators."

Farkas wants to make North Carolina competitive in teacher pay again, he said.

"I want to get teachers' salary truly to the national average over the next four years," Farkas said.

Both Murphy and Farkas plan on using their positions to make an economic impact on the region.

"I think we need to continue on the excellent road of economic recovery that we experienced," Murphy said. "Our individual tax rate has dropped. People are keeping a lot more money in their pockets."

His history with the Greenville Chamber of commerce and other committee's makes him an ideal advocate for eastern North Carolina, Farkas said.

"I believe I bring a unique level of experience and vision when it comes to representing this area," Farkas said. "I worked in the public sector and private sector. My opponent votes with the power players in Raleigh. We need someone who shows an independent streak and get things done. We don't need a rubber stamp, we need someone who really can be a bridge builder."

Murphy reiterated his experience, saying constituents deserve someone who knows what they are from the get go.

"It's important that voters have somebody that they believe in has credentials and experience," Murphy said.

Farkas said that, ultimately, he is confident Pitt County residents will pick him for the position.

"I'd say that this community is my hometown," Farkas said. "It has invested in me and I'm committed to public service and giving back. We need to cast aside that partisanship and get things done. I want to be a champion for everybody." (Grifton Times-Leader, 10/12/16)

## **OCT 2016 Sees Honor in Public Service**

Brian Farkas said he wants to restore honor to the concept of public service.

Farkas, who announced 13 months ago he wanted to be the Democratic candidate for state House District 9, said he has heard the knock that he has only ever aspired to run for public office. His answer: "So what?"

"My experience was working in the public sector and working to make government operational. I only aspired to run for public office when I saw politics becoming so divisive and public service being demonized," said Farkas, who worked for the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, part of the National Institutes of Health, before joining JKF Architecture, a firm his father founded, as director of client relations and development. He also holds a master's of public administration degree from the UNC School of Government in Chapel Hill.

Farkas is running against Republican Greg Murphy, a Greenville urologist who was appointed to the seat last fall to fill an unexpired term.

Farkas said education is his top priority.

"Public education is so critical to everything," he said. "To me it's the silver bullet that lets people really have the opportunity, if they work hard, if the system works, to get in there and be successful. I think the legislature has moved us in the absolute wrong direction."

Farkas opposes Opportunity Scholarships, grants of up to \$4,200 given to low-income families so their children can attend private schools. He said he does not believe there is enough accountability in the process and wonders if families turn to loans to pay the remaining tuition costs.

Farkas also wants to reverse the expansion of charter schools brought about by the Republican-led legislature.

The original intent of charter schools -- laboratories for exploring differing educational techniques -- has been distorted, he said. Many charters are now operated by for-profit companies whose focus is the bottom line, he said. While charter schools must undergo the same accountability testing as public schools, he believes they are less accountable to taxpayers.

"It's a very cloudy situation. If they are being used to innovate, like they say they are, we need to know what is going on so we can bring that into (public) schools," he said.

Traditional public schools pursue innovative work if given a chance, he said, such as the dual language immersion program at Belvoir Elementary School.

Per-pupil spending needs to be increased to help schools purchase more textbooks, digital devices and materials, he said.

Farkas said the legislature also should focus on the biggest determinate of student success — teachers.



“Teachers need to be trusted, and good teachers need to be retained,” he said.

Farkas wants to restore raises for teachers who earn advanced degrees. Teacher pay also needs to be raised to the national average in a four-year period, he said.

Enrollment in undergraduate and graduate teaching programs is decreasing, Farkas said, and he wants to re-establish the North Carolina Teaching Fellows program, which provides free tuition in exchange for teaching in North Carolina schools.

These proposals cost money, but it’s available, Farkas said.

Lottery revenues should be reserved only for teacher salaries and school construction projects, he said. Transferring money to charter schools should end.

Finally, Farkas said tax reforms implemented by the General Assembly need to be changed.

“I think the tax proposal and plan put in action by the General Assembly exhibited misplaced priorities time and time again,” he said.

Reducing the state’s income tax rate did not help middle class families because new sales and service taxes were implemented to make up the lost revenue, he said.

Farkas said he supports a progressive tax system that requires the wealthy to pay more of their income.

“If we’re going to have tax reform, it's got to be tax reform for everybody. You can't pick and choose winners,” he said.

The Republican-led leadership said its tax reform package was needed to attract industry and business to North Carolina. He agrees the corporate income tax needed to be reduced to match surrounding states, but relocating companies have other priorities, he said.

“Companies do look at taxes, but they also look at quality of life,” he said. “They look at your schools, your infrastructure investments, to know if they can set up shop here. There are a whole bunch of things on a check list right up there with taxes.”

North Carolina's economic development efforts should focus on retaining and growing existing industries and businesses.

He wants legislation that gives local businesses the first chance to bid on state contracts. He also wants a microloan program that would make short-term loans of less than \$100,000 to help new and small businesses expand.

If anything has hurt North Carolina's business since the 2008 recession, it's the unpredictability of the General Assembly, which was highlighted by the passage of HB2, he said.

HB2 legislation required individuals to use the rest room assigned to the gender on their birth certificates and prevented local governments from adopting ordinances that counter that requirement. It was adopted after the Charlotte City Council adopted an ordinance allowing individuals to use the rest room of their choice.

Farkas said he would have voted against HB2.

“HB2 was a lot more about bathrooms. It was designed to fire up the bases of both parties and tried to play to the extremes,” Farkas said.

Farkas said he also wants to pursue governmental reform, starting with the appointment of an independent commission to redraw congressional and legislative boundaries. Democrats and Republicans are both guilty of drawing partisan districts, he said. Moderate, balanced districts are more competitive and better for voters he said. (Daily Reflector, 10/25/16)

## **NOV 2016    Overview of Race**

While the presidential and gubernatorial races take center stage on the North Carolina voting ballot, the election for Pitt County's House of Representatives seat remains a pivotal decision for East Carolina University students and Greenville residents.

The heated contest for North Carolina House District 9 centers around Republican Dr. Greg Murphy and his bid for reelection and Democratic candidate Brian Farkas. Both candidates rallied voters yesterday outside of polling locations situated throughout the county.

Farkas, 29, is a Pitt County native and a recent graduate from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The Democratic candidate is a current member of several Greenville public service committees, including the "Horizon's Committee," which serves as a task force for planning the city's future growth and improvement.

Dr. Murphy, a small business owner, employer and licensed physician in Greenville, is also a product of the UNC School System. Dr. Murphy has previously held esteemed positions in Greenville's main institutions like Vidant Medical Center, where he served as Chief of Staff.

In this election season, North Carolina voters and ECU students alike have dealt with divisiveness on various issues impacting the state. With a large population of the Pitt County electorate still undecided on their choice for the White House, voters are looking for an appeal from candidates that will represent their voice in the state legislature.

Farkas sees this election as an opportunity for ECU students to elect a candidate that will champion the cause of the college-age generation, which he described as being representatively marooned.

"Our age is not represented in the North Carolina assembly," Farkas said. "Current state legislatures do not have the unique perspective of a student or a recent college graduate."

College debt, unfair or unadjustable loan interest rates and the growing cost of required textbooks for college students is an issue Farkas knows first hand. He said he too is still paying off the staggering price tag issued for higher education.

Farkas said he will initiate or vote to alleviate the financial burden of North Carolina college students, but also stressed the importance of improving wages and job stability for our state's educators.

"We need to make sure our faculty and staff are paid at level that attracts and retains the high quality workforce required to make ECU an incredible institution for innovation," Farkas said. "I will always work to keep costs down for students, but that shouldn't come at the expense of top teaching talent."

Farkas says he wants to make voting easier for college students, which he believes is under siege by voter identification policy.

"State legislature went out of [its] way to make it harder for students to vote by deeming college administered ID cards an invalid form of ID at voting polls," Farkas said.

Dr. Murphy was appointed to the District 9 legislative seat by a committee of lawmakers in Raleigh with the approval of Gov. Pat McCrory in November of last year. In this short year however, Dr. Murphy has voted on several noteworthy laws.

At the time of production, Dr. Murphy's office hadn't responded for a comment.

House Bill 2, or the "Bathroom Bill," is one bill that Dr. Murphy voted in favor of in the first days of holding office.

In the aftermath of HB2's ratification in March, which Farkas described as a "bill to fire up the extreme left and right," questions of the bill's constitutionality from federal courts arose and several businesses including high-profile NCAA events have fled the state.

Although HB2's ramifications are bipartisanly unopposed by many who have also signed the bill, Farkas criticizes his opponent for his voting record as a whole.

"Dr. Murphy has voted 96 percent of the time in line with established Republicans in North Carolina's legislature. He doesn't show independent thinking or any unique vision," Farkas said.

Besides HB2, the issue of police body cameras and their designation as public record has taken center stage in the scope of pressing national issues.

North Carolina's House Bill 972 passed in July with the support of Dr. Murphy, making the often controversial law enforcement recordings inaccessible to the public unless authorized. Farkas says that he opposed this ruling as well, describing the law as breach of transparency by government.

With early voting coming to an end Saturday and the official Election Day approaching, voters are cementing their choices for the highest office of the nation and state. Further down the ballot, the election between two candidates for Pitt County's house seat will determine who voices genuine local and personal concerns of Greenville residents. (East Carolinian, 11/3/16)

## **NOV 2016 Reflector Overview of Race**

The two candidates vying to be the only state legislator with a Pitt County address have been battling for every ballot, often side by side, during an election year that's focused most voters on the top of the ticket.

Republican Greg Murphy and Democrat Brian Farkas are vying to represent House District 9, the only district located entirely within the county lines. Two other House seats and two Senate districts include portions of the county, but the candidates for those seats live in Wilson, Greene and Wayne counties.

District 9 encompasses eastern Pitt County, from the Lenoir and Craven county lines in the south to the Martin and Beaufort county lines in the northeast. The eastern parts of Greenville and Winterville are in the district along with Chicod, Grimesland, Simpson and Stokes.

Murphy was appointed to the seat last fall to fill an unexpired term. This is his first campaign; it's also Farkas' first campaign.

### Party lines

They could be called poster boys for their respective political parties. Murphy supports charter school expansion and allowing private entities to run some low-achieving public schools.

Farkas said charter school expansion should be stopped along with diverting public school funding to them. He wants to restore the Teaching Fellows program cut by the General Assembly several years ago and reverse tax reforms implemented by the Republican-led General Assembly which he said benefited the wealthy at the expense of public schools.

Along with differing political views, the men bring different life experiences.

Farkas, director of client relations and development at JKF Architecture, a firm his father founded, grew up in Greenville, graduating from J.H. Rose High School.

He received a master's of public administration degree from the UNC School of Government in Chapel Hill and worked for the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, part of the National Institutes of Health before returning to Greenville.

"My experience was working in the public sector and working to make government operational," Farkas said last month. "I only aspired to run for public office when I saw politics becoming so divisive and public service being demonized."

Murphy is a urologist, surgeon and president of Eastern Urological Associates. He has held multiple positions with the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University and Vidant Medical Center. He also has led medical missions to Haiti, Nicaragua and in the United States.

"I always make sure (voters) understand I am not a person wanting a political office but I am there as a servant of our public," Murphy said. He is the only physician in the legislature and said his experience is "something the General Assembly desperately needs."

## Meet and greet

Since early voting started Oct. 20, Farkas and Murphy have spent the majority of their time at the community schools building in Alice F. Keene Park on County Home Road, historically the early voting site with the largest turnout.

The opponents greet voters and offer flyers. Many voters keep their eyes on the ground, ignoring them as they enter the building.

“There are many people who genuinely seem interested in having a conversation with the candidate,” Farkas said. “I think they appreciate I made the time to do that. People give us a fair shot out there.”

“A lot of people come out specifically and say the only reason they are coming out to vote is to to vote for me,” Murphy said. Others are only interested in the presidential, gubernatorial and U.S. Senate races and are not as aware of the other elections, he said. Those people are more willing to listen to the candidates at the polls.

When people learn he is a doctor they talk to him about the opioid crisis and the status of the state's mental health system, two medical issues he's given top priority to in the legislature.

“People do realize there is a (legislative) race going on. We've been very intentional in trying to raise the level of the debate and let people know this is one of the few truly competitive districts in the race,” Farkas said. “Our sense is it is absolutely razor tight and it's going to come down to who put in the most time on the ground and engaged voters and I think it's going to be us.”

## Top of the ticket

There's been a continuing national conversation about of how the presidential contest will affect the outcome of down ballot elections. Murphy said he's not sure how it's affecting his race against Farkas.

“I've had people say the don't like Trump, I've had many, many say they don't trust Hillary and I've had many people say it's the worst top of the ticket we've had in our history,” Murphy said. “I think it's bringing a lot of people out.”

A lot of people are really concerned about the direction of the nation, Murphy said.

Farkas views voters' reactions as mixed.

“It depends on how far down the ballot people go,” Farkas said. “I could see there being a little bit of an influence, but I think we've done a good job letting people know Brian Farkas is an independent voice in this area with a proven record of leadership.

“I have been able to have a broad base coalition of Democrats, Independents and Republicans who have rallied behind me. There may be an increase in turn out numbers and that could go either way,” Farkas said.

Any disillusionment voters experience is because they are upset with the divisive tone in the General Assembly. Farkas said voters want legislators who are willing to work together.

Murphy said voters are concerned about the direction of the nation and want it to be in a better direction. He believes that is why, despite talk about voter dissatisfaction with Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, North Carolina voters are turning out in record numbers.

“They realize it's the most important election in our lifetime,” Murphy said.

Consensus, controversy

Often standing side by side when greeting voters, Murphy and Farkas said they have talked occasionally during the 17-day early voting period.

“We do talk about ideas and about North Carolina and what our thoughts are,” Farkas said. They disagree on issues, but Farkas said he tries to find areas of consensus.

“We've become friends,” Murphy said. “We just have very different motives for (seeking) office, different belief systems. It's been a cordial relationship.”

There has been some controversy.

Four doctors with Eastern Urological Associates mailed a letter addressed to “Dear Friends and Patients” asking them to support Murphy.

The letter reminded recipients of Murphy's “...twenty plus years of delivering dedicated and compassionate care to patients in eastern North Carolina...” and his time spent as a medical missionary overseas.

“He has never sought to be in politics and his life has not been led with that in mind,” the letter said. “It has rather been his natural born leadership qualities, his compassion and integrity that others have seen and thus sought him out to lead at a higher level.

“We simply cannot think of a better person and leaders to represent Pitt County.”

On Oct. 19, the day before early voting began, Farkas sent out a news release accusing Murphy of “playing politics with patient records.”

“The decision to use patient records raises concerns that the letter may violate the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, referred to as 'HIPAA,’” Farkas alleged. HIPAA privacy rules said information that is patient identifiable, even the patient's address, is confidential and must be protected, Farkas said.

A spokeswoman for the North Carolina Medical Board said the letter does not appear to violate HIPAA rules.

“The medical board is not aware of any policy that prohibits or states this type of communication is unethical,” said Jean Fisher Brinkley, communications director N.C. Medical Board.

A spokesman with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services said the agency can only determine if a specific conduct violates HIPAA rules in the contest of an investigation launched as a result of a complaint.

Murphy said he doesn't understand why Farkas wanted to turn the letter into a campaign issue.

“I got nothing but positive feedback. I am not going to talk about it. It's not an issue for me,” Murphy said.

Farkas said he stands by his decision to send the news release.

“Patients records should never be part of the political process, that is an intimate relationship between a patient and their doctor,” Farkas said. “I stand by thinking it was unethical and very poor judgement by Dr. Murphy.”

#### Final days

Early voting ended Saturday but two days remain before Election Day and both men will be busy. Farkas plans to spend this afternoon going door-to-door, asking House District 9 residents to vote for him.

“We know this is the kind of campaign they like out here,” Farkas said. Television advertising isn't what voters want. “They want that directed engagement and I'm going to give the people what they want.”

Murphy said he has some legislative work on several health committees he wants to complete. He also has work at his medical practice he must do.

“I also will spend a little time with my wife (Wendy) who has been supporting me the whole time,” Murphy said. “I feel proud that I have run my campaign without any negativity and without trying to make my opponent look bad.”

Reaching people during early voting was crucial for the candidates as the majority of voters typically cast their ballots during the early voting period.

More 50,000 people voted between Oct. 20 and Saturday. That is more than half the total of all votes, 79,334, cast in the last general election in 2012 (Daily Reflector, 11/6/16)

#### **NOV 2016 Loses Election**

Locally in Pitt County, Democrat Brian Farkas lost his bid for the open North Carolina House District 9 seat to Republican Dr. Greg Murphy. (East Carolinian, 11/9/16)

Republicans swept nearly all the major races across North Carolina on Tuesday including the two contested legislative races in Pitt County.

Republican Greg Murphy, appointed Pitt County's lone resident representative last year, won his first election Tuesday, defeating his Democratic rival by nearly 6,000 votes, according to complete but unofficial results.

In the county's other contested legislative race, incumbent Republican Susan Martin narrowly defeated her Democratic challenger, Charlie Pat Farris by 202 votes.

The victory of Pitt County's two state representatives appears to have mirrored Republican victories across the state with U.S. Sen. Richard Burr retaining his seat, receiving 52 percent the ballots counted over Deborah Ross' 45 percent; Gov. Pat McCrory squeaking by with 49.5 percent of the vote to Roy Cooper's 48.31 percent; and Lt. Gov Dan Forest receiving 52.45 percent of the votes cast in his race against Linda Coleman, who had 44.6 percent.

That was with 2,677 of 2,704 precincts reporting at about 11:20 p.m. Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump also had been declared the winner of the state on his way to an apparent victory over Democrat Hillary Clinton.

Secretary of State Elaine Marshal was the only Democrat elected on the Council of State. Registered Democrat Michael Morgan also defeated incumbent Republican Robert Edmunds for a seat on the state Supreme Court.

Murphy won his House District 9 race by receiving 22,540 votes to Democrat Brian Farkas' 16,648 votes, a difference of nearly 57 percent to nearly 43 percent, according to unofficial results. (Daily Reflector, 11/9/16)



## 2019

### **NOV 2019    Running Again For House Seat**

Two candidates are seeking the Democratic Party nomination to run for the state House District 9 seat.

Brian Farkas, a Pitt County businessman, announced his candidacy on Tuesday while East Carolina University economics professor Jake Hochard made his announcement at Saturday's Pitt County Democratic Party meeting.

Both men said the General Assembly isn't working under its current leadership and is unable to accomplish its main task, adopt a two-year budget, because of an unwillingness to compromise.

Hochard and Farkas also said that the leadership has held promised funding for a new Brody School of Medicine facility hostage in an effort to secure support for their budget instead of compromising.

Both said they would not override the governor's veto of the budget.

"I think the voters in 2018 made it very clear to the legislature that they wanted people to negotiate and talk to each other and that means the governor needs to be in the room," Farkas said. "I stand with the governor on the veto and I think our community is constantly being used through the budget right now.

"They are playing political games and we owe it to our people to have a budget that works for all North Carolinians," he said.

Hochard said legislators have two jobs: Represent their community and represent what is best for the state.

"Getting financing for the Brody School of Medicine is going to be a huge win for Pitt County, but at the same time it shouldn't be held hostage by a budget crisis," Hochard said. "Neither should the salaries or compensations of our public educators more broadly."

Hochard, a native of Gardner, Mass., an industrial town, describes himself as a "first-generation college student from a blue-collar family.

"In that way I am very much like many of our ECU students and our neighbors in Pitt County," he said.

Hochard self-financed his undergraduate degree from Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania and earned his doctorate in economics at the University of Wyoming. He has taught at ECU for five years.

"I believe our community deserves to be represented by someone who understands that access to education and quality health care levels the playing field," Hochard said. "There is no better investment in North Carolina or no better stimulus for growth ... enhancing opportunity than through a healthy and educated people. It's the American ideal."

Farkas is director of development and client relations with JKF Architecture, a business his father founded.

Farkas said he's proud to call Pitt County home.

"I grew up here, I work here, this area has made me who I am," he said. "I am a product of our North Carolina public education system from our Pitt County Schools to a master's from the UNC School of Government."

Farkas ran for House District 9 in 2016, but was defeated by Republican Greg Murphy, who now is a United States representative.

Farkas said his focus if elected will be funding for public schools, expanding Medicaid to close the coverage gap and securing funding to establish broadband internet service across Pitt County.

He also wants to secure funding to complete improvements that will allow U.S. Highway 264 to be upgraded to Interstate 587.

"A mentor taught me to put more back in the barrel than you took out so that way there is something left for the next person who comes along," Farkas said. "It's a simple concept that I have taken to heart."

He also touts his experience as president of the Greenville Museum of Art. At a time the museum's finances were perilous, Farkas said he brought together a diverse board that pursued new funding opportunities that resulted in a \$50,000 profit.

Half of state's budget funds public schools, community colleges and the University of North Carolina System, which includes ECU. This means Hochard would be setting policy and voting on budgets for his employer.

"I have pledged not to accept any UNC system pay raises during my time in service at the state legislature," Hochard said. "This pledge will ensure that my voice at the General Assembly is received firmly as an advocate for a stronger North Carolina public education system."

Hochard said his candidacy has been vetted and approved by the university systems leaders, beginning with his department chairman and extending to the UNC Board of Governors.

"There are fewer than five educators in the North Carolina House of Representatives," Hochard said. Only one is an active university professor.

"In an ideal world, I would like many teachers and many educators at the table," Hochard said, because they are the people who are experts in what works in education.

Hochard's area of study has been in reducing poverty while promoting growth and how it relates to education, health care infrastructure and climate change. He has published 13 journal articles and written two book chapters and brought nearly \$1 million from the Environmental Protection Agency and National Science Foundation to research those areas.

He wants to apply his knowledge and the knowledge of other educators to solve problems facing the state.

The House District 9 seat is held by Perrin Jones, a Greenville anesthesiologist, who was appointed to complete Murphy's unexpired term. Jones said he plans to run for the seat in 2020.

Filing for the 2020 primaries begins on Dec. 2. The state's Republican and Democratic primaries will be on March 3. (Daily Reflector, 11/13/19)

**2020****JAN 2020    Running Again in More Competitive District**

NC House District 9 -- Pitt County Former incumbent Republican NC House member Greg Murphy ran successfully last year for the US Congress in NC-3 in a special election. Republican Perrin Jones was appointed to his empty seat in the NC House and is running for election. Two Democrats have also filed and will face one another in the March 3rd primary. Following the most recent remapping of General Assembly districts, NCH9 lost over 6% of its likely Republican vote, so the district is now rated "Competitive -- Lean Democratic." This district ought to be one of the easier "flips" this year, but everything depends on whom the Democrats nominate.

Brian Farkas is a 32-year-old millennial born in 1987, raised in Pitt County, and he's running an energetic campaign and attracting some significant support. Freshman Rep. Zack Hawkins of Durham County gave the keynote at the Farkas launch party (Rep. Joe Sam Queen of western NC also attended along with Jenna Wadsworth, who is making some waves herself[1] as a new kind of candidate for Commissioner of Agriculture). Farkas has been endorsed by Now Or Never NC, an organization that backs candidates who support public education, redistricting reform, voter access, and local governance, and by the Long Leaf Pine Slate[2], a project by Blair Reeves to help favored Democratic candidates raise money. Four years ago, while he was still in his 20s, Farkas challenged Greg Murphy for this seat. Farkas understood the importance of a good ground game for an under-funded campaign, and he got 17,000 votes to Murphy's almost 23,000 -- a loss, yes, but a loss that showed some promise for the future, especially considering Farkas's age at the time. He's a graduate of UNC-Charlotte and earned a Master's of Public Administration at Chapel Hill. He interned with Congressman Brad Miller in DeeCee in 2007, worked almost three years in the US Attorney's office in Charlotte, spent ten months as a graduate assistant in the School of Government at UNC, worked 20 months as a program specialist with the National Institute of Environmental Health at Research Triangle Park before joining the JKF Architecture firm in Greenville as Director of Client Relations and Development, where he's been since 2013. A man on the move, picking up experience in all sorts of real world arenas. He's also been very active as a volunteer with many local development and eleemosynary orgs including the Greenville Museum of Art, the Rocking Horse Therapeutic Riding Program, and the Greenville-Eastern North Carolina Alliance for economic empowerment. (Watauga Watch, 1/8/20)

**JAN 2020    AFL-CIO Endorsement**

A debate between the Democratic candidates for N.C. House District 9 will be held 7:30 p.m., Feb. 5, in Hendrix Theater, Mendenhall Student Center, on the main East Carolina University campus.

Brian Farkas and Jake Hochard are vying for the Democratic Party nomination in the March 3 primary. The winner will face Republican Perrin Jones in November. Jones was appointed to the House District 9 seat in September to replace Greg Murphy, who resigned after winning a special congressional election.

Early voting for the March 3 primary begins Feb. 13.

Endorsements

A Pitt County candidate for the State House District 9 Democratic Party nomination was endorsed this week by a labor union and LGBTQ advocacy group, according to his campaign.

Brian Farkas, who works an architectural firm, has been endorsed by the North Carolina State AFL-CIO and its regional affiliate and Equality North Carolina.

The union made its endorsements after members of its Eastern North Carolina Central Labor Council reviewed questionnaires and interviewed candidates.

"He understands what working people want — to secure a fair return on our work, provide for ourselves and our families, and enjoy life," the organization's president, Montez Davis, said.

Farkas was among the nearly 30 state legislative candidates endorsed by Equality North Carolina.

"We are living in dire and terrifying times for some of our community's most vulnerable members — particularly trans and gender-nonconforming people of color and other individuals living at the margins. These voters deserve leaders committed to creating a more equitable and safer world for them to live, work and raise families," said Kendra R. Johnson, executive director of Equality North Carolina.

"We believe the politicians that we've endorsed are the most well-equipped to help build that world, change the dangerous trajectory that this country is currently heading towards, and create a better North Carolina for us all." (Asheville Daily Reflector, 1/27/20)

### **FEB 2020 Primary Debate**

East *Carolina* University's Campus Voter Initiative will host a democratic debate between two District 9 candidates on Wednesday in the Hendrix Theatre from 7 to 8 p.m.

The debate will be between ***Brian Farkas*** and Jake Hochard, who are running for a seat in the NC House of representatives.

The event will be moderated by members of the Campus Voter Initiative, according to co-founder of ECU's Campus Voter Initiative, Peyton Pacshke.

Pachske said the Campus Voter Initiative is a group within the Honors College focused on bringing political issues to the campus and they have been an organization for almost a year.

"Our goal is basically to get as many people on campus engaged in political activities, getting people out to vote, getting people registered to vote, we've passed out fliers with polling and candidate information," Pachske said.

Pachske said the idea of the event came to mind when her organization had heard that Jake Hocard, an ECU economics professor, was running for the position.

The debate will start with opening statements from the candidates, followed by questions asked by the moderators and then each candidate will have the opportunity for closing statements, according to Paschke.

"During the question portion we will be distributing note cards or we have a hashtag on Twitter that people can use to submit questions. Other members of our group will be leafing through those seeing the most liked, the most important, and then we will ask about three or four of those at the end of the question portion," Paschke said.

She said candidates were given debate questions beforehand and will include topics on gun violence, livable-wage and healthcare.

The democratic primary voting is on Mar. 3 and will determine the democratic nominee to run against the current seat holder, Perrin Jones, according to Paschke. (East Carolinian, 2/3/20)

### **FEB 2020 Primary**

One of the Democrats running for the District 9 seat in the N.C. House of Representatives said economic development is the greatest need for the district, the other said it was support for public education.

Brian Farkas, 32, faces Jake Hochard, 32, in the March 3 primary. The winner will challenge Republican incumbent Dr. Perrin Jones.

Jones was appointed to the District 9 seat in September to replace Dr. Greg Murphy after Murphy was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.

Farkas, who lives in Greenville, is a director of development and client relations at JKF Architecture, a small business founded by his father in 1998.

Hochard and his wife, Kayla, live in Greenville. He is a research scientist and assistant professor of economics at East Carolina University.

Neither man has ever held an elected position. However, Hochard has been appointed to several positions, including serving as a research fellow for both the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Center for Natural Hazards Research, a researcher with the N.C. Agromedicine Institute and an advisor for the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership.

Farkas has been involved in several Democratic campaigns and has held officer positions in organizations including serving as president of the Greenville Museum of Art, vice chairman of Greenville's Public Transportation and Parking Commission, a member of the board of directors for the Young Professionals of Pitt County and more.

Farkas said he is tired of political games undermining the integrity of the government while stopping progress and leaving eastern North Carolina out in the cold.

"I'm running for office because our state legislature is broken. ..." Farkas said. "Unlike state legislators, our hospitals, businesses and schools can't just take their ball and go home when people don't get along.

"We have to work the problem as a team and can't reject ideas based on a person's political politics," he said.

Hochard said he is running for the state house because educators need to be a part of the conversation.

"Educators are not at the decision-making table in Raleigh," he said. "Pitt County with its 40,000 ECU and Pitt Community College students needs to lead on this issue. While 56 percent of our state's budget is spent on public education, less than 5 percent of our elected representatives have any formal background as educators."

Hochard feels his teaching experience at ECU and his knowledge of climate change and poverty traps qualifies him to serve as a state representative.

"My vantage point, teaching students from all 100 counties, is that the zip code a student comes from too often determines their educational opportunity," Hochard said. "That experience puts me in a unique position to fight against educational disparities that are influenced by the legislation and budget passed in our General Assembly.

"I have the real-world experience and depth of understanding to help prepare our community and our coastal neighbors for the impacts of sea-level rise and increasingly severe storm events with targeted, smart investments that improve and protect livelihoods from our changing climate," he said.

Farkas feels his deep roots in Pitt County and his experience in both the private and public sectors qualify him to represent District 9.

"I am proud to call Pitt County home," he said. "I'm a product of North Carolina public education, from the Pitt County Public Schools all the way through a Master of Public Administration at the UNC School of Government."

Farkas has worked for the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences where he specialized in emergency management programming to safeguard lives. He also worked at the U.S. Attorney's office for the Western District of N.C., serving under both Democratic and Republican presidential appointees.

"I have dedicated my life to fixing problems and leaving things better than I found them," he said. "I'm excited to bring smart, common-sense solutions to governing, to be an authentic voice for Pitt County and to raise the level of civility in our policymaking process."

Farkas feels the greatest challenge for District 9 is its Tier I economic ranking. The county recently fell from Tier II to Tier I, which includes the 40 most distressed counties in the state.

"There's no excuse for Pitt County to receive the Tier I designation," he said. "Don't be fooled by politicians who claim the new designation makes the area more eligible for grant support. Pitt County should not aspire to be part of a race to the bottom in order to secure funds. We deserve better."

He plans to address the issue by fighting to remove obstacles to economic growth, including strong support for public schools, smart investments in critical regional infrastructure and expanding Medicaid.

Farkas also wants to work to ensure full funding for the Brody School of Medicine and for critical workforce development programs at Pitt Community College.

"When it comes to reducing Pitt County's high poverty rate, which has been over 20 percent for over 20 years, I'll help rebuild critical coalitions between the business, government, public education, nonprofit and faith-based communities to tackle economic issues," Farkas said.

"Eliminating corruption in elections and in our government is critical to a healthy North Carolina," he said. "That is why I'll sponsor legislation to finally establish an Independent Redistricting Commission to stop politicians from choosing their voters."

Support for public education is the greatest challenge for Hochard, who feels education needs to be a top priority for the community.

"Access to a supported public education system is what determines whether economic growth reduces poverty or keeps the most vulnerable in our community impoverished," Hochard said. "When the state defunds public education, as it has for the past 12 years in our public schools and for decades with East Carolina University, it suppresses the potential of our children, which ripples between communities and across generations."

Hochard feels the first step to addressing the issue is to elect educators to the state legislature. From there, he plans to introduce legislation to fund support staff, incentivize graduate degree training, end salary plateaus and keep teaching pay competitive.

"The legislator is tasked with arguing for the value of a teacher's time," Hochard said. "No person can do that better than someone who has spent years teaching students from every corner of our state.

"We must also establish higher education funding metrics that recognize educating first-generation college students, students from low-income families and students that go on to serve our underserved communities east of I-95 create tremendous value to our state that many other UNC system schools cannot replicate like ECU," he said.

Hochard feels like he is the best choice for state representative of District 9 because he is an educator, an economist and someone with a deep understanding of climate science, not a businessman or attorney like most politicians.

"If Democrats are to lead on public education, promoting economic prosperity and making smart investments to combat climate change, they must put forth educators, economists and those with a deep understanding of climate science," Hochard said. "My expertise in these areas will enable Pitt County to distinguish itself on these challenges as a statewide leader at the General Assembly."

Farkas feels he is the best choice because he has a proven track record of service in the community, including knowing how to make government work to serve its populations.



"I am the only candidate in the Democratic Primary, as well as the November General Election, with a proven track record of service across Pitt County," Farkas said. "For years, I have rolled up my sleeves and immersed myself in our community. I have forged genuine relationships with people from all backgrounds and political stripes." (Daily Reflector, 2/17/20)

### **MAR 2020 ZOOM Profile**

Brian Farkas is the Director of Development and Client Relations at JKF ARCHITECTURE . Brian received a B.A. in Political Science from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and a Master of Public Administration from the UNC School of Government in Chapel Hill. Using his developed skills and experiences, he has engaged a number of governmental and economic development organizations on issues affecting North Carolinians and delivered tangible projects to improve the lives of citizens across the State.

Prior to joining JKF ARCHITECTURE , Brian most recently worked for the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), one of 27 research institutes that comprise the National Institutes of Health (NIH). He specialized in emergency management programming to safeguard the lives and prized research of over 1,000 people.

Brian has served on the Legislative Issues Committee for the local Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce , the Public Transportation and Parking Commission for the City of Greenville, as well as President of the Greenville Museum of Art's Board of Trustees. (ZOOM, 3/20)

### **MAR 2020 Wins Primary**

In other local primaries, Brian Farkas won the Democratic race for the District 9 seat in the state House of Representatives, and Democrat Virginia Cox-Daughtry won the race for the District 12 state House seat in complete but unofficial totals.

Farkas, 32, who works in client relations at JFK Architecture in Greenville, won 5,407 votes to 3,245 votes for opponent Jake Hochard, 32, an economics professor at East Carolina University. Farkas will face Republican Perrin Jones of Greenville in November. The district includes eastern Pitt County.

He thanked community members who helped him reach out to voters. He said he is ready to roll up his sleeves and work to win in November.

"I'm going to use this campaign to raise the level of expectations for this community. People are going to have a whole new standard for what they should expect when a state representative asks them for their vote," Farkas said. (Daily Reflector, 3/4/20)

**JUN 2020 Rips Jones Bill on Medical School Funding “Political Ploy”**

A Pitt County legislator announced Wednesday he has filed a bill that would fund construction of a new medical school building at East Carolina University.

Pitt County Rep. Perrin Jones, an anesthesiologist, filed the bill May 26. He anticipates it will go before the appropriations committee at the state House of Representatives next week.

"Residents of eastern North Carolina should have confidence that future health care providers, so many of whom will be practicing throughout our region after graduation and certification, are learning in the best facilities and with the best technology we can offer," Jones said. "This is a necessary step towards improving regional health outcomes, East Carolina University's profile for attracting medical talent, and further energizing our regional economy."

Jones, a Republican, was appointed to the House District 9 seat last year when Greg Murphy was elected to fill the unexpired term of the late U.S. Rep. Walter Jones.

Funding for the medical school project was included in the state's fiscal year 2019-21 biennium budget that was vetoed by Gov. Roy Cooper last year.

While the House overrode the veto in a vote on Sept. 11, the state Senate's leadership was unable to muster needed votes, so no money made it to East Carolina University.

The General Assembly passed several mini-budgets last year to fund pay increases for several groups of state employees. Jones said this is not a mini budget proposal.

"I wanted it to be a stand alone bill because I think it's important for Greenville, Pitt County and eastern North Carolina to be a stand alone bill," Jones said.

He said construction of a new Brody School of Medicine would provide 1,700 jobs and have an economic impact of \$395 million.

Jones also said that by 2028, the new facility is projected to have an annual impact of nearly \$300 million.

The legislation states \$15 million would be appropriated in fiscal year 2020-21 and \$13 million would be appropriated in fiscal year 2021-22 to begin planning for the building.

While it does not state when remaining funding will be awarded, Jones said it is his intention to follow the timeline laid out in FY 2019-21 budget language.

The bill also states that the allocation is conditioned upon the continued affiliation between the medical school and Vidant Medical Center, which serves as its primary teaching hospital.

Jones said he is talking with state senators to muster support for the legislation.

"I am an eternal optimist. I am very hopeful this bill will pass," Jones said. "I know we are in a very tough cycle right now in regards to tax revenues in the state because of COVID-19. But I am very hopeful it will pass."

The bill has bipartisan support and Jones said attention focused last year on the funding puts the new bill in a better position for success.

Jones' announcement was quickly followed by a statement from Brian Farkas, the Democrat challenging him in the Nov. 3 state House District 9 race.

"It's unfortunate that the legislature failed to negotiate with Gov. Cooper last year, whose compromise budget fully funded the building through a bond," Farkas said. "The GOP-led legislature has had 10 years in power to make this happen, so let's be sure to call appointed Rep. Jones' move for what it is — a political ploy in an election year to try and make Pitt County voters forget about the last decade of politicians leaving eastern North Carolina behind." (Daily Reflector, 6/10/20)

### **AUG 2020 Liberal Blog Acknowledges “Slim Resume”**

Brian Farkas in House District 9

(Pitt County). The seat is open because the former occupant, Greg Murphy, was elevated to the US House in a special election. The Republican candidate is Perrin Jones, a Greenville doctor who was appointed to fill out Murphy's term last September. District is rated "Toss-Up," though it deserves note that Trump actually lost the district to Clinton in 2016, 48.77% to 48.24%. East Carolina University could make a difference in 2000.

Brian Farkas is "a Pitt County native who works at a local architecture firm." "He's also worked for the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, where he specialized in emergency management measures." "He has a long record of public service and is a vocal proponent for independent redistricting reform." "With the elimination of the extreme Republican gerrymander in Pitt County, a strong Democratic candidate is favored to win NC-H9 in Greenville. The district leans about 10 points further left than it did in 2018." (

Farkas has a slim resume -- he's young yet -- but the video bestows maturity and strength and brain-power, and he's been making a real campaign of it. (Watauga Watch Blog, 8/7/20)

### **AUG 2020 Being Outraised**

Surprises: Where Democratic Insurgents Are Trailing  
NCH9-- Democrat Brian Farkas ... \$140,053.68

Republican Perrin Jones ... \$176,122.71 (Watauga Watch Blog, 8/15/20)

## **SEP 2020 Received Future Now Funding**

Forty-Seven Democratic members of the state House and candidates running to join the Democratic caucus have signed a pledge to defund the police, restrict the ability of law enforcement to obtain basic protective equipment and strip citizens of Second Amendment rights with no due process. The pledge includes ending cash bail and the assignment of court fees and costs, one which would return some dangerous criminals back to the streets, the other which would further defund the police by eliminating revenue for police training and police retirement. Eight Democratic state Senate members and candidates also signed the pledge. While not all current Democrat house members signed the pledge, if all 47 of the pledge signers were elected, they would represent 85% of the current 55 Democrat members of the state House.

Included in part of the pledge is the policy statement:

”Police funding...has been shown to have no connection to crime rates “

House Speaker Tim Moore (R-Kings Mountain) scheduled a press conference for Monday, Sept. 14 and released the following statement:

”This radical pledge by House Democrats to defund police in North Carolina is a betrayal of the basic public trust to keep families safe, particularly in times of crisis, as crime rates rise in other areas led by the radical left ,” Moore said.

” Assessing expenditures on policing to identify evidence-based ways to generate savings...especially communities most impacted by current policing practices,” is an official policy promise of House Democratic leaders and candidates to North Carolinians,” Moore continued. “It is stunning that House Democrats in North Carolina would sign a pledge to defund law enforcement, and that so many in their caucus would join with radical national liberals promising to cut funding for police officers who protect innocent people.”

Moore further noted that in exchange for at least \$100,000 in donations, House Democratic candidates pledged to enact legislation requiring “a comprehensive review of thestate’spolice funding” to “reduce excessive policing.”

The pledge is advocated and promoted by the organization Future Now Fund, and found at this link: <https://www.futurenow.org/>

The group is classified as a 501(c)(4) issue advocacy organization with the sole purpose of helping Democrats win state-level races.

Published reports indicate the Future Now Fund is a new PAC that is spending \$4 million on key legislative races in Arizona, Michigan, Maine, North Carolina and New Hampshire.

North Carolina Democratic candidates for the General Assembly not only signed a pledge to support this radical anti-public safety agenda, Future Now Fund has become a major funder of Democrat campaign efforts. The North Carolina State House joint campaign fund (House Caucus) and at least 9 individual

candidates have accepted the maximum contributions from this fringe group that appears to want to threaten public safety.

During the June 25th “#NCDayofGiving,” the House Democratic Caucus featured the Future Now Fund as a partner organization, and they donated \$50,000 to the joint campaign operations.

Among those who accepted the maximum \$5,400 contributions from the Future Now Fund are key swing seat Democrats that are central in Democrat efforts to regain control of the chamber including:

Nicole Quick (D), who is challenging Rep. Jon Hardister (R) in a Greensboro seat that only slightly leans towards the GOP. It is rated as GOP plus three (R +3), in the Civitas Partisan Index, a measure of the partisan leanings of North Carolina state legislative districts. It is a measure of the base partisan leanings of a North Carolina state legislative district compared to the state as a whole  
 Sydney Batch (D) who is defending her (R+3) Western Wake County seat against Erin Pare (R)  
 Joe Sam Queen (D) in a slightly Republican-leaning seat (R+2) that covers Haywood, Jackson and Swain counties facing former Rep. Mike Clampitt (R)  
 Democrat Dan Besse, facing Republican Jeff Zenger in Winston-Salem area House District 74, an open seat left with the retirement of Rep. Debra Conrad. Besse has already been accused of “defunding” the Winston-Salem Police by voting to support reallocating \$1 million in police appropriations for an anti-poverty initiative on 6/15/2020  
 Democrat Christy Clark is facing a rematch against Republican John Bradford, whom she narrowly defeated two years ago. Civitas rates that seat as R+5  
 Democratic Rep. Ray Russell represents Watauga and Ashe County in a Republican-leaning district (R+3) and is facing Blowing Rock Inn owner Ray Pickett  
 Democrat Kimberly Hardy is facing Republican Diane Wheatley in Cumberland County’s open house seat 43 (D+1)  
 Democrat Brian Farkas who is challenging Republican Rep. Dr. Perrin Jones who was appointed to the Pitt County District 9 seat  
 Democrat Aimy Steele running against Kristin Baker in House District 82 in Cabarrus County. Dr. Baker was appointed to the seat on the death of Rep. Linda Johnson (R+4)

According to the New York Times, the two-year-old Future Now Fund worked with the progressive think tank Data for Progress to apply pressure to the 2020 Democratic presidential candidates by ranking them in terms of who is doing the most to help Democrats win state legislative races. (CE Think Tank, 9/14/20)

### **SEP 2020 Farkas-Jones Debate**

Questions about funding law enforcement, Medicaid expansion and a new medical school drew contrasts between the candidates in the State House District 9 contest during a virtual forum on Tuesday.

Republican State Rep. Perrin Jones, who was appointed to the District 9 seat last year, and Democratic challenger Brian Farkas sparred during the online event hosted by the Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce.

District 9 encompasses eastern Pitt County and includes Grimesland, Simpson and portions of Greenville and Winterville. It is one of three state House seats in the county with contested races in the Nov. 3 election.

The candidates were asked how they would have voted on the state's 2019-21 biennium budget that Gov. Roy Cooper vetoed, an action the General Assembly failed to override.

The budget included \$215 million to build a new facility for the Brody School of Medicine, funding for a food commercialization center in Ayden and utility improvements in Bethel.

The governor's vetoed the budget because it did not include Medicaid expansion and would not hold subsequent talks about its inclusion. House Speaker Tim Moore offered to discuss expansion once the budget was approved but Senate leader Phil Berger signaled his chamber wouldn't take up an expansion vote.

"I am not going to speculate on how I would have voted; I'm not in office I don't think that's fair to ask. I will say I would be a champion for ECU," Farkas said.

"It's kind of amazing I'm being blamed for not passing a budget and I'm not in the legislature," Farkas said. Current legislators need to be accountable and answer the question, he said, including why the Republican leadership did not compromise with the governor.

"One thing about consensus building is you need to understand when you have a good deal," said Jones, who was appointed to the House District 9 seat in September 2019, after the governor vetoed the budget. "This was a good deal for Greenville and Pitt County. This was an opportunity lost for Greenville and Pitt County."

The candidates were asked where Medicaid expansion fell among their priorities. They also were asked for "common sense, cost-effective" solutions to fill the state's health care coverage gap.

Farkas said Medicaid expansion has been implemented in states with both Democratic and Republican leadership. About 13,000 Pitt County residents and an estimated \$113 million in revenue would be brought in the county if expansion was implemented, he said.

Rural hospitals have been left teetering without expansion dollars and Vidant Health's leadership has urged elected leaders to develop a reimbursement strategy.

No other business in the state could do a third of its work for free, Farkas said, but hospitals are required to provide care without funding.

"This is one area where there may be some consensus between Mr. Farkas and myself," Jones, an anesthesiologist, said. "I'm for expanding Medicaid in a responsible way." Farkas' proposal for expansion is irresponsible, he said.

"Quite frankly it's much too simplistic and the answer to a very complicated system," he said.

Republican leadership has not brought expansion proposals from party members to a vote.

Jones said the medical system needs to be reformed to focus on the value of care given by promoting systems where providers form networks to provide care. Farkas said the medical system needs to focus on preventive care.

### Police funding

Farkas frequently referenced televised campaign ads that he said have made false claims about his views on calls to defund police departments in the response to the killing of black men and women by officers. The candidates were asked where they stood on the topic of "police defunding."

"It's unfortunate that Perrin Jones and the (House Speaker Tim Moore) have chosen to lie and go negative on this issue," Farkas said. "I have never in my life said I wanted to defund the police. I've never in my life said I want to weaken police. ... All I have ever talked about was bringing accountability to law enforcement."

Farkas said he wanted to see more money put toward training police in de-escalation techniques and toward the purchase of body cameras for officers to wear.

"The reality is the status quo, where we are at, is wrong. I don't know why Rep. Jones is OK with keeping things as they are because people are getting hurt. Battle lines are being drawn and something different must be done," Farkas said.

Jones said if Farkas is against police defunding he should return a \$5,400 donation from a group called "Future Now," a progressive political action committee.

"The fact is in the immediate aftermath of George Floyd's unfortunate death there was what I consider a moment of true nation introspection where there were a number of people who wanted to see substantive change in how police interact work and interact with the community," Jones said. "Unfortunately the legitimate peaceful protest that a number of people undertook were usurped by people who wanted to add violence to the mix."

Jones accused Farkas of not renouncing the violence that occurred in downtown Greenville on May 31 following a peaceful protest over George Floyd's death. The focus should be on bail bond reform and providing substance abuse assistance to people in jail, Jones said.

He said a Farkas proposal to establish a statewide police oversight board is wrong because the entity could be politicized and promote Monday morning quarterbacking that would encourage more violence.

Farkas said organizations like the state bar and N.C. Board of Architecture have committees that review complaints. A statewide police review board would eliminate the need for each community to have their own review board, which would save money.

### Online learning

The candidates were asked how they would help educators manage workload expectations created by having to prepare lessons for both in-person and virtual instruction to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Farkas said the limitations of internet capacity mean student needs aren't being met so he wants to pursue the expansion of broadband internet access.

Teacher pay needs to be raised, the N.C. Teaching Fellows scholarship needs to be restored and lottery revenues need to be rededicated to education spending.

Jones said the state Department of Health and Human Services has to come up with an effective testing and tracing program so schools can reopen.

COVID-19 economy

The candidates were asked how the state should position itself to avoid harm if exports to other countries drop because of the pandemic damaging their economies.

"Quite frankly I think what we are going to see is an economic realignment of the states with those that are able to open in the safest, most efficient way possible being the ones that are most prosperous," Jones said.

The state's current COVID-19 response is jeopardizing its ability to reopen and gain normalcy, he said.

Jones supports re-establishing the state's manufacturing base by bringing industries that moved overseas, like some pharmaceutical companies, back to the state.

Farkas said it's the federal government that failed the state "because people did not get the information they needed and the shared sacrifice wasn't instilled in us from the top."

Grants and low-interest loans targeting small businesses should be created.

Farkas said he specialized in emergency management when he worked for the National Institutes of Health and can use that experience to plan for the state's economic recovery. (Daily Reflector, 9/16/20)

### **SEP 2020 "Missteps" By GOP In Race According to Liberal Blog**

Sep 21, 2020( The Daily Haymaker: <http://www.dailyhaymaker.com> Delivered by Newstex) There are indications that Raleigh Republicans are getting a little nervous about the possibility of holding the state House seat vacated by now-congressman Greg Murphy and currently held by appointee Perrin Jones. (A significant chunk of the district is Greenville and Pitt County.).

Greenville is a college town, so you'd expect liberal tendencies to reign there. But, in recent years, there has been a dramatic swing to the right. Local Democrats are running Brian Farkas, their 2016 nominee who lost by 14 points to Murphy. I am hearing from local folks about some serious political missteps by Jones that are potentially costing him support Murphy had easily in 2016. Outside left-leaning groups are showing interest in Farkas as well. Locals are telling me 2020's race for this state House seat could turn into quite the shocker. <https://dailyhaymaker.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/lies-politics-244x300.jpg> What has me thinking Raleigh is worried? Well, they put out THIS website[1] attacking Farkas with terms



like 'Baby Brian.' (It looks like someone within the GOP campaign apparatus recognized it as the 3rd-grade playground tactic that it was and had it scrubbed.) That move fell on its face. So, the next step was to send[2] the House's diminutive leader, Speaker Timmy, out to Greenville to throw a little shade Farkas's way. Speaker Timmy, upon his arrival in Pitt, bedazzled the local media with allegations that Farkas and a number of other Democrat candidates for House had sworn to 'defund the police.' His 'proof'? Moore & co. point to a pledge drawn up by liberal advocacy group Future Now. [3] Moore proceeded to inform his Pitt audience that Farkas and other Democrat candidates had signed on to the group's alleged desire to 'defund the police.' I took a look at the page listing the items Future Now was seeking endorsements for. 'Defunding the police'[4] was nowhere to be found. According to one of the propaganda organs of the Art Pope Conspiracy[5], Democrats were not happy with this rhetorical stretch from the House's little leader: Speaker of the House Tim Moore, R-Cleveland, says nearly 50 N.C. Democratic House lawmakers and candidates have backed a dangerous pledge to defund the police, but House Minority Leader Darren Jackson, D-Wake, says that's a lie.[] (Daily Haymaker, 9/21/20)

### **SEP 2020 Signed Future Now Pledge; Denies Wanting Police Defunded**

”Defund the police. Sound crazy? Not to Nicole Quick. She has backed a radical plan to defund our police.

The radical activists who call this peaceful are bankrolling Nicole Quick. She was quick to take their pledge, quick to take their money. And She will be quick to take their side. Stop Nicole Quick. Fast.”

Jon Hardister for NC House TV Ad

The 30 second television spot launched by Jon Hardister against his Democrat opponent Nicole Quick, in State House District 63, is about as tough as you will find in a state house race. Using the all too familiar images of riots and breakdown of law and order we have seen this year, the ad accuses Quick of wanting to defund the police, signing a promise to do so, and taking money from a group promoting such efforts.

State Rep. John Szoka (R-Fayetteville) has a similar ad that both attacks his Fayetteville area District 45 Democratic opponent Frances Jackson, while contrasting his support for “good cops” while holding “bad cops” accountable.

Quick and Jackson are two of 47 state House Democrat candidates and eight state Senate candidates who signed pledges with a group that supports an agenda to reallocate money away from policing efforts.

State House Republicans have gone on the offensive across North Carolina in key districts accusing Democrat candidates for the General Assembly of being bankrolled by a radical out of state group that wants to defund the police. Many of the Democrat lawmakers and candidates signed a pledge with the group to do just that, as recently reported by Civitas.

Republicans have launched a substantial direct mail offensive.

In a piece that began hitting mailboxes around September 18, just four days after House Speaker Tim Moore held a press conference highlighting the issue, a hard hitting mail piece was sent to voters in

western Wake County, highlighting Rep. Sydney Batch's (D-Raleigh) signed pledge with Future Now Fund, to defund the police, restrict the ability of law enforcement to obtain basic protective equipment and strip citizens of Second Amendment rights with no due process. The pledge also includes ending cash bail and the assignment of court fees and costs, one which would return some dangerous criminals back to the streets, the other which would further defund the police by eliminating a revenue source for police training and police retirement.

Included in part of the pledge is the policy statement:

"Police funding...has been shown to have no connection to crime rates "

Batch is one of 11 Democratic House candidates that signed the pledge and then received a \$5,400 contribution from the group, the maximum allowed by law. The Raleigh News and Observer reported that "the Future Now Fund gave \$59,400 to 11 Democratic candidates for state House along with \$50,000 given to the Democrats joint house campaign fund."

Rep. Batch took to Twitter to respond to the charges:

However, she did not respond to direct questions of what exactly were the "lies."

Speaker Tim Moore is also conducting press events in local districts, such as one in Greenville, attacking 9th district Democrat candidate Brian Farkas.

At the same time, the Republicans campaign arm has launched a mail effort against Farkas, highlighting his signed pledge.

Despite signing the pledge with Future Now Fund, and accepting the maximum \$5,400 dollar contribution from the group, Farkas denied wanting to defund the police to WITN . "I do not support defunding the police," said Farkas. "I do not support weakening law enforcement. My policy priorities actually call for additional funding for our police as well as common sense reform."

The denials by Democrats are weakened by the fact that the organization that produced the pledge, and funded the Democratic state House efforts, edited the website that hosts the pledges after the controversy broke, apparently causing press outlets to unknowingly report the edited pledge as the original content.

Archived screenshots of the original pledge, compared to the current version , show the webpage pledge was edited as news of its contents broke.

A new sentence was immediately added saying " Signing the America's Goals pledge is not an endorsement of any specific bill," so that news outlets unknowingly reported that added sentence as part of the original pledge.

To find the details on police funding, however, one must go to the original source (see more below).

The change to the pledge was not mentioned by House Democrats or the group proposing it, despite their persistent denials it was “a lie” that the pledge would defund law enforcement.

House Speaker Tim Moore released a statement asking, “If House Democrats have supposedly not pledged to defund the police, why was it necessary to immediately change the website when news broke?”

Yet the active Future Now pledge still explicitly recommends defunding law enforcement separate from its model bills – which are supposedly not part of the pledge anymore despite still being indexed directly under the pledge’s organized agenda under Section 5C. (CE Think Tank, 9/24/20)

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N.C. House Speaker Tim Moore continued attacking a Pitt County legislative candidate for signing a pledge he says calls for defunding police.

Moore stood with Republican state House District 9 Rep. Perrin Jones and two Republican sheriffs from nearby counties on Wednesday to denounce Jones' Democratic opponent Brian Farkas for signing the "America's Goal" pledge sponsored by Future Now, a political action committee that works to elect liberal and progressive candidates to state legislatures.

"Sometimes they call it reallocation, but I can tell you if somebody showed up at work and their boss said 'Hey, we need to reallocate your pay,' what do you think that will mean? I think it means you're cutting it," Moore said.

The allegation is false, Farkas said.

"I do not support defunding the police. My policy priorities actually call for additional funding for our police as well as common-sense reforms like body cameras and de-escalation training," Farkas said in a written statement.

Anyone who looks at the pledge, available at [www.futurenow.org/pledge](http://www.futurenow.org/pledge), will see police funding isn't mentioned, he said.

Farkas and Jones are running for N.C. House of Representatives District 9, which encompasses eastern Pitt County including Grimesland, Simpson and parts of Greenville.

Jones was appointed to the seat a year ago after Greg Murphy won a special election to serve in the 3rd Congressional District.

Moore's attack is based on a pledge written by Future Now, a political action committee that also funds a policy group called America's Goals. Moore first discussed the pledge during a Monday news conference that named Farkas and other Democrats running for the House seats.

The policies Moore pointed to discuss reviewing law enforcement budgets to identify and fund programs proven to reduce crime and reallocating money from unproven programs into mental health, employment and housing programs.

The word defunding is not used in any of the documents.

Jones read the Merriam Webster dictionary definition for reallocate that said it means redistributing resources in a different way or for a different purpose.

"It means defund," Jones said. "People can argue otherwise but essentially, to reallocate resources means to defund."

Jones accused Farkas of "needlessly dividing" the community.

"We are at a point and time in our society where we have had police officers actively receiving death threats. We have had officers who have been injured or killed in the line of duty," Jones said.

"At the same time we have officers who have worked tirelessly to build strong relationships between police and their communities one neighborhood at a time," he said. (Daily Reflector, 9/18/20)

### **OCT 2020 For Medicaid Expansion**

If Democrats want to win a majority in the House of Representatives , they'll need to gain six seats in addition to the 65 seats they currently hold. One seat they might be able to flip is the one we're talking about today: House District 9 in Pitt County.

This race looks like it will be a toss up; it leans ever-so-slightly Democratic, though it's currently occupied by a Republican.

Rep. Perrin Jones, an anesthesiologist, is the incumbent. The Democratic candidate is Brian Farkas, who grew up in Pitt County. Jones was appointed almost exactly a year ago to replace now-Congressman Greg Murphy, and Farkas previously ran for the seat in 2016.

There's something these candidates have in common that you might not expect: They both support some form of Medicaid expansion.

Both candidates also want to allocate funding to revamp the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University in Greenville.

Two things worth noting about this district: Vidant Health , the hospital system where Rep. Jones works, is vital to Eastern North Carolina and the economy of Pitt County.

The Brody School of Medicine is also really important to this district because the school graduates thousands of students who go on to practice medicine and serve throughout North Carolina, including in the more rural areas of the state. Vidant Health is affiliated with the Brody School .

The legislature has tried for years to pass legislation that would fund a revamp of the Brody School , including in the infamous budget bill that was vetoed in 2019, which included funding for the school.

Learn more about this district, the candidates and the issues here on the podcast that aired Monday. You'll also hear from a health care expert, Austin Vevurka, who talked with me about the role of health care in this district. (RNO, 10/1/20)

### **OCT 2020 Campaign Issues Overview**

Candidates for state House District 9 said that public education is a top concern among voters they've met, with one focusing on returning students to class and the other on teachers and facilities.

Republican Perrin Jones and Democrat Brian Farkas are vying for the seat that represents much of eastern Pitt County in the Nov. 3 election. Two other state House seats and a state Senate seat that represent Pitt also are contested. Early voting starts on Thursday at seven sites in the county.

Jones, 48, an anesthesiologist, was appointed to the seat in 2019 after it was vacated by Republican Greg Murphy, who won a special election to fill the late Walter Jones' congressional seat. Farkas, 33, who works in client development at an architecture firm, is making his second run for the office.

"Students right now tend to learn best when they are taught in person as opposed to being online," Jones said during a Sept. 28 interview. "If we continue the online route or some kind of hybrid model, then we need to make sure that the teachers are given the resources and knowledge of how to effectively teach online." Students need direction on how to learn online.

Jones is concerned that online instruction will further widen the achievement gap because parents with resources hire tutors and bring outside resources to the table.

Returning to in-person instruction restores the baseline, Jones said. "Let's get back to baseline so we can work on the underlying inequalities we had going into COVID," he said.

Farkas said improving education begins with ensuring teachers and students have the resources they need. He wants to re-establish the state's incentive pay program for educators who earn advanced degrees.

"Education is the only field I've ever seen that people who invest in themselves see no reward," he said.

He also wants to re-establish the North Carolina Teaching Fellows program with a focus on improving diversity among future teachers.

"Internet access is a huge problem and we've got to make it a top priority of the next legislature," he said.

Pitt County has 11,000 people without internet access, Farkas said. He has seen studies that show 50 percent of Pitt County students either don't have Internet access or don't have the capacity to stream live classes.

Along with supporting education, improved internet access will make it easier for individuals to access health care through telemedicine. It also will help business people living in rural areas to get goods to the market, Farkas said.

He also wants to introduce legislation that will "lock up" lottery funding so its revenue is used to fund teacher pay and facility construction instead of being shifted to non-education projects.

"We've got buildings that are 40, 50 years old here that have done their time. There is water and pipes leaking through the ceiling," he said. "We've got to get ahead of this."

Farkas said during his interview that building strong public schools would be his top issue as a legislator. He said he would work to bolster job creation and economic development opportunities by advocating for the completion of Interstate 587, which would make U.S. 264 Bypass West an interstate quality road.

He also wants to restore the earned income tax credit, which aids working families with low- to moderate-income, he said.

Questions about securing funding for a new Brody School of Medicine facility and Medicaid expansion dominated discussion when the candidates participated in a forum sponsored by the Pitt-Greenville Chamber of Commerce last month.

Farkas said he is already talking with Democratic leaders about the project's importance and will immediately file a funding bill for the project.

"I'll also work with the governor to get funding for Brody in his budget as well, so that when negotiations begin the facility is already something both sides can agree on out of the gate," Farkas said. "With the right consensus-building leadership in place, we can get this done on behalf of Pitt County and eastern North Carolina."

Jones said he will continue advocating for full funding of the new facility, emphasizing that expanding the facility will allow the school to graduate 40 more doctors a year.

"Our community has advocated for a new Brody School of Medicine for a long time, the fulfillment of this project will be big step towards cementing Pitt County's leadership both regionally and throughout the state," Jones said.

Farkas said pursuing Medicaid expansion will also be part of his legislative agenda.

"Both red states, blue states across our nation are already doing this. The legislature is behind in our state," Farkas said. His argument for expansion focuses on the additional jobs and revenue Pitt County would gain and the 13,000 residents who would be insured. It would also bring additional revenue for Vidant Health and other medical practices

Jones did not list Medicaid expansion when asked about priorities during his interview but said during the forum that it needed to be funded responsibly and that the plan Farkas supports is irresponsible.

When Jones was asked to identify his top issue, he said it was preserving a civil society and continuing to work toward a more perfect union.

"Despite flaws in our society, there are a lot of good things in our society," Jones said. "While we should take into account events and make improvements, it doesn't mean we should throw the system out and start fresh."

People can have disagreements, he said, but shouldn't harbor hate.

"It doesn't mean we should allow violence to enter into the conversation," he said. The violence that sprang from protests involving the death of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor at the hands of police overshadowed, "a real moment of national introspection."

Jones said since joining the General Assembly he has worked with local judges and Pitt County Sheriff Paula Dance on issues related to pretrial services and mental health and substance abuse treatment for people in the Pitt County Detention Center.

He is now serving on a community relations committee created by state House Speaker Tim Moore.

"I wanted to see criminal justice reform that we can standardize in some fashion and try to apply across the state," he said.

The committee has held several meetings and there has been a number of presentations.

"The nature of legislation, the nature of our system is that some of these changes take a little bit of time. People have to have their say, people have to have time to digest what has been said and then coalesce that into policy positions that can be taken forward," he said. "We are in the stages of listening to people and coalescing."

Issues related to COVID-19 make up a lot of the discussions voters have with him, Jones said.

People are concerned about getting their kids back in school, their finances, the college football season, specifically East Carolina University's season, and if they'll get sick from COVID-19, he said.

A full discussion about COVID-19, one that isn't solely focused on disease transmission, is needed. An isolated older adult can become depressed, stop eating, stay in bed and stop thriving.

It may not be the same as catching the virus, Jones said, but potentially to mortality could be the same.

"We have to balance those issues," he said. One way is to implement good surveillance testing protocols for nursing homes and other congregate care facilities for the elderly, he said.

As political leaders sort through these issues, Jones advised people to wear face coverings, wait 6 feet apart and wash hands or use hand sanitizer. (Daily Reflector, 10/4/20)

**NOV 2020    Narrow Victory**

Complete but unofficial local results from the Nov. 3 election show that Democrat Brian Farkas has defeated Republican Perrin Jones in a hotly contested race for the N.C. House 9 seat.

Farkas' win is among a number of Democratic high points in local contests.

Farkas won with 18,949 votes to Jones' 18,135. Jones was appointed to the seat earlier this year to fill a vacancy left when Greg Murphy won a special election to the U.S. Congress. (Daily Reflector, 11/3/20)



There will be a new face representing State House District 9 in Raleigh.

Political newcomer Brian Farkas defeated Republican incumbent Perrin Jones by a very small margin. Democrat Farkas told 9 On Your Side crews before Election Night his race would be one of the closest in the state, and he was right.

But Farkas says Representative Perrin Jones called him to concede just minutes after election officials released their results.

"No one's going to out-hustle me when it comes to fighting for my hometown," said Farkas. Farkas had one feeling after winning a spot in the General Assembly Tuesday night: gratitude.

"To be able to offer myself in this form of service and to be given this opportunity by my hometown is an incredible honor," he said. "I'm ready to get to work."

The Pitt County native will be in Raleigh this January representing House District 9. Farkas wants voters to know he's here for them, even if they wanted someone else.

"Not only the people that elected me in Pitt County's 9th district, but the people who didn't," said Farkas. "I'm going to be a champion for them. I'm going to work hard to earn their support over the next few years."

9 On Your Side crews reached out to Farkas' opponent, Perrin Jones, Wednesday and he didn't respond to our messages. (WNCT, 11/5/20)



Pitt County voters turned State House District 9 blue for the first time since 2012, electing Democrat Brian Farkas by a narrow margin, according to Tuesday's unofficial results.

Farkas' win was a highlight for Democrats in a number of local contests in an election that drew more than 86,500 voters, about 70 percent of the total registered. Pitt County's incumbent Sen. Don Davis, Rep. Kandie Smith and District Court Judge Wendy Hazelton all held off Republican challengers.



Tuesday's unofficial results show Farkas, a Pitt County native, defeating current state Rep. Perrin Jones 18,949 votes to 18,135 votes, an 814-vote lead. The results of Tuesday's election won't be finalized until provisional and late mail-in absentee ballots are approved and counted when the canvass is conducted on Nov. 13.

"We did it. Pitt County flipped the 9th District blue," Farkas said, during the Pitt County Democratic Party's virtual election night celebration. "I am excited to join that great delegation."

Farkas said he and his supporters laid out a positive vision for the county and eastern North Carolina and that appealed to voters.

"We rolled out a number of policies that had what I thought was great, broad-based appeal. We stayed true to that and we stayed true to our authentic self," Farkas said. (Daily Reflector, 11/4/20)

### **DEC 2020 Bio Profile**

Brian Farkas (D) – District 9 (Pitt)

Occupation: Works at his family's small business, an architecture firm, in Pitt County. Political

Experience: Has never held elected office but has worked in the U.S. Attorney's office and serves as a member of the Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce Legislative Issues Committee, is the Governor's Appointee on the Disciplinary Hearing Commission of the North Carolina State Bar, and is a voting member of the Greenville-ENC Alliance Interim Board of Directors. Top Priorities: Raising teacher pay, freezing college tuition, Medicaid expansion, obtaining funding for a new Brody School of Medicine facility, and helping formerly incarcerated people re-enter society and achieve economic security through good paying jobs. (JD Supra Blog, 12/14/20)

**2021**

**JAN 2021 Bill to Revamp ECU Medical School**

A bipartisan group of North Carolina state lawmakers filed legislation Wednesday that, if passed, would fund renovations to the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University in Greenville.

The school is known for graduating physicians who choose to stay in Eastern North Carolina and continue practicing, and an upgrade to its facilities would mean ECU can graduate even more physicians every year, legislators said.

In turn, funding the school could give rural North Carolinians better access to health care.

”This is a huge step for North Carolina,” said Republican House Majority Leader John Bell, who is sponsoring the legislation with House Speaker Tim Moore. “This is the stepping stone to be able to put more health care providers in our state.”

Speaker Tim Moore.jpgN.C. House Speaker Tim Moore speaks with reporters on Jan. 13, the opening day of the North Carolina General Assembly’s 2021 legislative session.

Democratic Pitt County delegates Rep. Brian Farkas and Rep. Kandie Smith are also sponsors of the legislation, along with Sen. Jim Perry, a Republican from Kinston, and Sen. Don Davis, a Democrat from Greenville, who filed another bill in the Senate Wednesday.

”ECU and the Brody School of Medicine has been a beacon of hope in our community, and the future doctors educated there deserve the very best learning environment we can provide,” Smith said Wednesday in a joint press release with Davis and Farkas. “I am hopeful that HB 9 will finally be the key to delivering this long overdue, highly anticipated project to our area.”

Similar versions of the bill have been filed in previous legislative sessions, including In 2019, when funding for renovation and improvements to the school was included in the proposed budget. Gov. Roy Cooper vetoed that bill over unrelated objections and other attempts to fund the school in separate legislation failed.

Three separate bills — two in the House, one in the Senate — filed this year would allocate a total of \$28 million over two years. The first batch of funding, \$15 million, would come in the 2021-2022 fiscal year, slated to fund the planning of a new school. An additional \$13 million would be allocated the following year for construction. (RNO, 1/28/21)



An effort is afoot in the General Assembly to secure funding for a new Brody School of Medicine facility.

Three bills were filed Wednesday in the state House and Senate that call for a \$15 million appropriation of nonrecurring funds in fiscal year 2021-22 for facility planning and \$13 million appropriation in 2022-23 to begin construction. Both sums would be funded through the State Capital and Infrastructure Fund.

The bills state the total amount authorized for the project is \$215 million, but do not specify the source of funds.

"East Carolina University appreciates the support of the Pitt County delegation and both House and Senate leaders in filing legislation today to construct a new medical education and research building," Interim Chancellor Ron Mitchelson said. "We value current and any future support for the Brody School of Medicine that enables us to continue to deliver on our mission to serve the people of eastern North Carolina and our state."

The medical school is recognized nationally for graduating primary care physicians, Mitchelson said, and is committed to caring for people in undeserved communities.

The first legislation, House Bill 6, was filed by House Majority Leader John Bell, R-Wayne. Its other primary sponsors include Speaker of the House Tim Moore, R-Cleveland, and Rep. Chris Humphrey, R-Lenoir, whose district includes southern Pitt County, and Rep. Ed Goodwin, R-Chowan.

House Bill 9 was filed later by Pitt County's Democratic Reps. Kandie Smith and Brian Farkas. Farkas also is a co-sponsor of Bell's bill along with five other legislators.

The Senate bill is cosponsored by Sens. Don Davis, D-Pitt, and Jim Perry, R-Lenoir.

"I am proud to lead the effort to fund the construction of a new Brody School of Medicine and reaffirm our commitment to improving healthcare access in eastern North Carolina by filing this important bill on the first day of legislative work," Bell said. "The Brody School of Medicine has a long history of training and preparing physicians who stay right here in rural eastern North Carolina. Our region desperately needs more providers and the construction of this facility will be a huge benefit and asset to our area and the entire state."

Humphrey is optimistic about the bill's passage.

"I think the pandemic has really brought to light the need for more doctors in rural areas," Humphrey said. "There's a shortage of doctors across America, especially in the rural areas of North Carolina and North Carolina as a whole."

The two House bills show there is bipartisan support for the Brody School of Medicine, Smith said.

"Since we see the Speaker is a part of this as well ... it's a great thing because it's part of my prayer he can help push this," she said.

Smith said while she would have liked to collaborate on one piece of legislation, "It does not stop the work that needs to be done, and sometimes we have to put aside the differences in party to make sure we are working to meet a common goal. I think everyone now sees we are interested in a common success."

The \$215 million appropriation for the new medical school facility was part of the 2019-21 biennium budget Gov. Roy Cooper vetoed because it didn't contain Medicaid expansion funding.

The House voted to override the veto but the Senate never voted because Republican leaders couldn't recruit one Democrat to join the override.

Pitt County's Democratic Sen. Don Davis faced local pressure at the time because he had voted for the original budget. Davis said he couldn't support the veto override because he wanted bigger pay raises for teachers, retired teachers and state employees and non-certified public school staff.

"This is a reflection of our priorities. Brody is a top priority for us," Davis said. "Before the pandemic and even more so now, as we're fighting this virus, we understand the importance of health care professionals and access to those professionals remains key. That's what the new Brody is designed to do."

The new, larger facility will allow Brody to increase its class size from 80 to 120 slots, Davis said. Many of these students will be from rural areas who want to return home to practice.

"The state House is committed once again to accomplishing this healthcare priority for eastern North Carolina, where residents depend on graduates from the Brody School of Medicine for access to care," Moore said in a news release. "Building this facility as soon as possible is a vital initiative that the General Assembly has budgeted carefully to afford, and I urge all of my colleagues in state government to ensure funding for this priority is delivered in 2021."

Bell said construction of the new facility would provide 1,700 jobs and create an economic impact of \$395 million.

"The new medical facility is critical to attracting quality healthcare practitioners equipped to serve Lenoir and Pitt counties along with the surrounding rural communities," Humphrey said. "I am committed to getting this important legislation approved and signed into law for the betterment of rural eastern North Carolina."

Farkas, who is newly elected to the legislature said he signed on to both bills to signal the project's bipartisan support.

"I think it is very encouraging," he said. "I've been working very hard behind the scenes to beat the drum on this project, including speaking with leader Bell about its importance to the area.

"There is still a process we have to get through to make it happen and get the governor's signature on it, but it's definitely a big step in the right direction," Farkas said. (Daily Reflector, 1/28/21)



Student Government Association Director of Local and State Affairs Caleb Gass at East Carolina University led a Town Hall meeting on March 30 which featured two of North Carolina's politicians, Senator Don Davis (D-NC) and House Representative Brian Farkas (D-NC). Gass introduced topics such as military and college experience, COVID-19, work and life balance, regional transformation and Brody School of Medicine funding. He began the meeting as he allowed each representative to explain their background education and time at ECU.

Davis said his undergraduate experience consisted of his time at the The United States Air Force Academy, before he came to ECU to take classes and work with students.

"Obviously, I spent a lot of time on campus between working with students and teaching students," Davis said. "So that experience was, for me, more humbling in terms of being able to connect the social aspects of life."

Davis said his advice to students amid the COVID-19 pandemic is to find and explore their passions, practice self-care and continue to work hard. He said it is important to experience failure because it leads to growth.

Farkas said he earned his undergraduate degree at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte . He said the opportunities he faced on campus was what his experience was all about.

As a native to eastern Carolina, Farkas said only a few students from Greenville attended UNCC, so he had to become accustomed to the City of Charlotte on his own.

"I give a lot of credit to the university's honor college," Farkas said. " really allowed you to have some smaller class sizes and kind of engage people with a heavy, heavy emphasis in all that it did on community service."

Farkas said with COVID-19, students should still try to enjoy their college experiences while they are in them. He said he recommends students focus on activities and extracurriculars that make sense to them. In regards to the topic of a balance between work and life, Davis said COVID-19 has impacted his career intentions and experiences, though he has been able to find time to commit to his family.

"It's important to me to see my children, I want to at least, even if it's a late night, to try to put an eye on them," Davis said. "Just as I'm passionate about serving the public too, I'm passionate about my family." Davis said as his work is personal and impacts the lives of community members, he keeps family in mind when he makes decisions. He said he asks himself how he would want his children to be impacted by his work.

Farkas said though he does not have children, he has a fiance who has taught him that communication is important to a balance between work and life. He said it is important for the people in his life to understand the passions he has for his job.

"Open communication is key to everything if you're going to have people invest in what you do," Farkas said. "You got to have people around you, friends, significant others, that understand what it is you're trying to achieve, are bought into it and are ready to just acknowledge it as an adventure that you're ready to go on together."

Farkas said he feels fortunate that his fiance has balanced her efforts between both of their careers as she has attended his campaigns. He said while communication is important for personal relationships, it is important between employers as well.

Gass introduced the topic of funding for a new BSOM building as he asked both representatives what a new BSOM building would do for regional transformation in Greenville.

Farkas said the BSOM's need for a new facility has been a discussion for over 10 years and his aid in the matter has felt important to him. He said currently, there are two bills filed in the state House of Representatives to bring in money to start the process.

"The Brody School of Medicine is just a crown jewel and when it comes to healthcare access, we need to have the top-notch facilities," Farkas said. "The idea that we can improve and increase the Brody School of Medicine's class size to 120, that's a really big deal."

Davis said the entire legislature delegation has coordinated to work to fund a new facility for the BSOM. He said the matter is important to ECU.

"We have to get this done, everybody," Davis said. "This is critical to, not only the health of eastern North Carolinians, but also livelihoods. The economic impact that's associated with Brody is huge. This is a matter of access to health."

Davis said an additional 40 students in the BSOM would help the shortage of healthcare officials in eastern North Carolina. (East Carolinian, 3/31/21)

## **FEB 2021    WNCT Feature**

It's hard being elected during a global pandemic that has caused financial hardships and hundreds of thousands of deaths.

9 On Your Side wanted to go to Raleigh to follow NC Rep. **Brian Farkas**, Pitt County's political freshman, to learn his hope and challenges.

"There's something about working with other people for something that's bigger than yourself that I really respond to," Farkas said.

That's the attitude that got Farkas' name on the ballot for North **Carolina**'s House District 9 race.

"I was excited to put my name forward after giving it some thought about what it was I wanted to achieve and how I could maybe do things differently," he said.

Flash forward to January 2021 and Farkas is settling into his new space in the North **Carolina** Legislative Building in Raleigh. It's a tiny office with no windows that he's trying to make feel like home.

"The Greenville Museum of Art, which I was the president of for a few terms, loaned some of their artwork," said Farkas. "Stuff that's uniquely Pitt County, Greenville, Grimesland, Simpson."

Farkas is still in the process of getting that art on the walls, but he's not worried about it.

"That's secondary," he said. "I'm just talking about legislating and getting to work."

Farkas has hit the ground running in his new role. He gets to work early in the mornings and goes over legislation that will require immediate action. Then he devotes a chunk of his morning to addressing the concerns of people in Eastern North **Carolina**. It's a tactic he didn't learn on his own.

"I was raised in Pitt and was represented for a very long time by two really great public servants, House District 9 Marian McLawhorn and U.S. Congressman Walter Jones," said Farkas. "One's a Democrat. One was a Republican. They raised the standard for constituent services."

Up next, Farkas has committee time. He is serving on commerce, transportation, education and two appropriations committees. To end his day, the House gavels into session.

"Vote on issues as they come out that have come through these committees," he said. "Some of them, I won't see until they've been on the floor because I'm not on the committees. But I'll keep tracking them. Others, I will hopefully have had a hand in ushering them through."

Then, it's back to Pitt County, where Farkas says he wants to spend as much time as possible.

The job hasn't come without its challenges.

"To get things done, you have to leave the politics at the door," said Farkas.

Farkas said he was raised in a household where it didn't matter what your political affiliation was.

"You listen to everybody," he said. "You treat everybody with respect. Everybody has value and let's find those common threads that bind us."

He using that mantra to face his challenges and get things done for Eastern North *Carolina*.

"I've gone out of my way to engage other representatives," he said. "I've gone and visited their districts and gotten to know them and spent a lot of time listening."

Farkas is grateful for the support he's receiving. He says he will continue to fight for Pitt County, hopefully for more than one term. (WNCT, 2/9/21)

## **FEB 2021    Guest Column on Priorities**

It is an honor to serve Pitt County's 9th District in the North Carolina House of Representatives. As we approach my first two months in office, I wanted to reach out directly to constituents and provide updates on what is happening on the ground in Raleigh. It is important for elected representatives to maintain regular contact with the people they work for, and make sure to provide every opportunity for feedback.

During the 2020 election, I campaigned hard on governing with civility and operating in good faith with anyone who is serious about solving some of the biggest problems we face. I have been very clear with my colleagues in Raleigh about those intentions and worked hard to build bipartisan relationships founded on those principles. As North Carolina recovers from a global pandemic that has claimed the lives of over 500,000 Americans, we need a government that leaves partisanship at the door and makes sure no one is left behind.

In that spirit, my first vote as a legislator was for a bipartisan COVID-19 Relief Bill — SB36 — that supplements existing relief programs, extends deadlines for businesses and organizations to apply for assistance, and allocates \$31 million in additional emergency funding to Pitt County Schools.

On Feb. 17, I introduced legislation — HB106 — that empowers the Pitt County Board of Education to adjust school start and end dates for the next three years according to guidance from local experts. I appreciate the support of Pitt County's other two representatives in the state House, Chris Humphrey and Kandie Smith, in joining me as sponsors of this legislation in a unified show of support.

On Feb. 24, I joined my Republican colleagues in a bipartisan bill — HB 82 — to provide summer learning opportunities to help children make up learning losses from the 2020-21 school year. Additional COVID-19 relief legislation is on the way, and legislators are hard at work crafting those bills now.

I'm also excited to report a major early victory for Pitt County — bipartisan legislation has been filed in both the House and Senate to fund the construction of a new facility for the Brody School of Medicine. This will have broad-based impacts across Eastern North Carolina, attracting the next generation of

physicians to train here at East Carolina University and improving healthcare access across our region. I look forward to working with both my fellow legislators, as well as Gov. Roy Cooper, to make this new facility a reality.

I am continuing work on several other top priorities, ranging from improving broadband access to underserved areas in Pitt County to other critical infrastructure investments, and plan to update my constituents on a regular basis.

In an effort to make myself as available as possible to our community, I am pleased to announce the launch of my quarterly town hall series, which will begin at 7 p.m. on March 24. More information will be publicly provided soon. As always, my legislative office stands readily available to serve all the people of House District 9 — folks who need to get in touch with my legislative office can email [brian.farkas@ncleg.gov](mailto:brian.farkas@ncleg.gov) or call (919) 733-5757.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to serve my hometown. I look forward to building a better North Carolina, together.

Brian Farkas, a Greenville Democrat, represents District 9 in the N.C. House of Representatives. (Daily Reflector, 2/28/21)

### **MAR 2021 Town Hall Meeting Remarks**

Rep. **Brian Farkas** held his first virtual town hall Wednesday night.

It's a chance for the people of Pitt County to hear what Farkas is working on in Raleigh and to voice their concerns and suggestions.

"I really want above all to raise the bar for what people should expect from a representative out of Eastern North **Carolina**," said Farkas, who represents Pitt County's 9th District in the North **Carolina** House.

Rep. Farkas wants to have an open-door policy.

"Too many times we hear politicians who just will talk and talk and it's tough to get a word in, and I want people to know that when I knocked doors during the campaign, I was listening and that doesn't change because I got elected," he said.

That's why Farkas has a series of virtual town halls planned where he can interact with Pitt County voters.

"To spend a lot of time listening about the issues that are important to our area and talking about how we can make those issues align with the priorities of Raleigh," said Farkas.

The representative said it's important to keep the people of his district in the loop.

"A lot of the time we watch the news and we see all the stuff about Washington D.C. and we don't hear enough about what's going on in Raleigh," he said.



Farkas discussed several bills with his name on them at Wednesday night's meeting, including what he calls 'good government' bills.

"The first one is a bill to make sure that when a lawmaker ends his or her career here and they become a lobbyist, they have to wait more than six months to do that," said Farkas.

The second bill would require the legislature to follow the same public records laws as the rest of state government.

"Transparency, sunshine is the best form of disinfectant when it comes to making sure that our government is not doing stuff in the dark and making sure people know what's going on," said Farkas.

Farkas wants his constituents to know he's working for them.

"A lot I want to do and we're working hard to make it happen," he said.

Farkas plans to hold these town halls quarterly. He hopes to host in-person events in the future. (WNCT, 3/25/21)

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Medicaid expansion and mental health were the primary constituent concerns at the first town hall held by Pitt County's new state House representative.

Brian Farkas, whose 9th District includes much of Greenville and east-central Pitt County, delivered remarks and fielded questions via Zoom from the State House floor in Raleigh. About 40 people were in attendance at any given time. Of the questions asked, half were related to mental health or Medicaid, including how expansion would affect the state's economy.

The 33-year-old Democrat told constituents he supports expanding the coverage but Republicans who hold power in the legislature fear the costs despite assurances that the federal government and private insurers will foot most of the bill.

"There is a concern on their end that at some point the state would have to take a much more significant percentage of that Medicaid burden onto our budgets," Farkas said. "That was an argument made close to a decade ago, and is still made, but what we have on our side now is data. What we see going on in other states. It is not happening.

"I believe that was something of a false flag. I believe the Medicaid system to be a lot more stable than others are leading on to believe."

Farkas said that his approach has been largely nonpartisan in his first few months representing the district. He has partnered with Democrat Kandie Smith, the representative for District 8 in north and western Pitt, as well as Republican Chris Humphrey, who serves southern Pitt and Lenoir County, on a number of bills.

Those included House Bills 6 and 9, aimed at providing funding for East Carolina University's Brody School of Medicine, he said. The three also are primary sponsors of House Bill 106, which would allow Pitt County Schools to have additional flexibility in adopting its school calendar. Current state law requires public schools to start no earlier than the Monday closest to Aug. 26 and to end no later than the Friday closest to June 11.

Two residents in attendance also breached the question of mental health in the time of COVID-19, including recent frightening trends among young people and students. One constituent questioned the efficacy of having 18 social workers divided among 38 schools in the district.

"We know that mental health issues, we've seen numbers skyrocket," he said. "Candidly, I had a conversation with someone at the schools and they've had a number of more suicides this year which they were really shocked by. We really need to invest in these things."

"You put one school counselor at Rose High School, that's 1,600 kids. We have to make sure we have more in these schools. We also have to make sure people know these resources are available in some cases. Growing up, I went to Rose and my mother made sure I had a good relationship with the school counselor ... It's so integrated, and I believe it is worth spending the money. Some things you have to spend public money on."

Farkas also co-signed House Bill 348, which aims to get a nurse in every school in the state. He said that the bill does not apply to social workers or school psychologists but that implementing those practitioners would be something to look into.

Of civil rights, Farkas took a hard stance against politics encroaching on the rights of voters and transgender people. Yoshi Newman, an educational psychologist, questioned a bill filed by Republican legislators that would block trans-women from joining women's high school and college sports teams.

"It's very frustrating to see politicians in Raleigh who can't seem to leave issues of a personal nature alone," Farkas said. "These people can't stop talking about the bathrooms. It moves us so off of where we need to be, talking about these kitchen table issues that actually impact people's lives."

"Unfortunately you have a lot of people pushing partisan stuff, trying to put people in bad moods and bad positions. It's not good and, for people in our transgender community, it devalues them. Everyone deserves to be loved and accepted and not be discriminated against." (Daily Reflector, 3/26/21)

### **APR 2021    HB 499 Co-Sponsor**

The North Carolina Justice Center issued the following news:

North Carolina lawmakers have filed a new bill that will provide an income boost to families hit hardest by the COVID-19 recession and help them meet basic needs while also improving education and health outcomes of their family members.

The Recovery Rebate for Working Families Act (SB 576/HB 499), filed by Senators Kirk deViere (District 19 - Cumberland), Michael Garrett (District 27 - Guilford), and DeAndrea Salvador (District 39 - Mecklenburg), and Representatives Wesley Harris (District 105 - Mecklenburg), Linda Cooper-Suggs (District 24 - Wilson), Brian Farkas (District 9 - Pitt), and Brandon Lofton (District 104 - Mecklenburg), will serve as a bottom-up tax cut for North Carolina working families. While most tax cuts disproportionately benefit large companies and wealthy people, the Recovery Rebate is targeted to support North Carolina working families that earn middle and low wages and have been most negatively impacted by the COVID-19 recession. (Press Release, 4/9/21)

**APR 2021 HB 446 (Voting)**

North Carolina House Democrats are advocating for bills they say will safeguard voting rights as a voter ID mandate backed by Republicans is on trial.

Rep. Kandie Smith of Greenville was among legislators who spoke in favor of legislative efforts in Raleigh Tuesday morning.

She said House Bill 446, filed at the end of March, would create an automatic voter registration process and protect access to absentee ballots and early voting among other measures.

Smith said the use of absentee ballots, a practice that became even more widespread in 2020's presidential election, was not a subject of controversy prior to their use by black voters.

"When they were used by older, whiter Republicans there was no issue," Smith said. "When they start being used by communities of color, that's when we start seeing restrictions coming up and those restrictions, of course, have now caused a great divide."

Lawmakers in several states have passed laws Democrats see as restrictive. Republicans say rules, like the voter ID law in North Carolina, protect election integrity.

"I find it difficult to believe that it's OK to find ways to restrict people from voting," Smith said. "That's what we're doing overall, and we need to make sure that we do something different."

The bill's sponsor, Rep. Marcia Morey of Durham said it will allow greater access to voting regardless of party.

"We look at 2020's election and, despite being during a pandemic, we had a record turnout," Morey said. "During that election we had over a million voters vote by mail, absentee voting. We had 3.6 million voters vote early, which is remarkable, and we want to make sure those safeguards stay in place when there's not a pandemic."

Republican Rep. Chris Humphrey, who represents Lenoir County and southern Pitt County, was not available for comment on Tuesday because he was on the House floor.

A Republican-backed voter ID amendment approved by voters in 2018 was declared unconstitutional. Attorneys are challenging the ruling in a hearing that started Monday. Many Democrats say it disproportionately prevents black people from voting.

Smith compared efforts to inhibit voting freedoms to poll taxes and literacy tests that were common until the civil rights movement and passage of 24th Amendment in 1964.

"Some of the GOP proposals will strangle the overall election system, and I think that we all know that," Smith said. "Particularly in states with a history of disenfranchisement with people who are those of color. We want to make sure we are looking at those things and make sure what we are doing is different."

She is "disappointed" that her state is included among states with "restrictive voting," she said. "In North Carolina we're better than that."

In the ongoing voter ID hearing, defenders of the law pointed out the fact that a black Democrat sponsored the bill. Republican legislators also mentioned that voter ID laws "improve confidence in the electoral process."

Sen. Paul Newton, a Republican from Eden, said in a news release that a number of House Democrats publicly praised voter ID in the past.

Democrats on Tuesday also filed the The Fix Our Democracy Bill. Primary sponsored Rep. Ashton Wheeler Clemmons of Greensboro said the bill takes a similar stand to HB 446 on automatic voter registration.

It also addresses gerrymandering and a need for transparency among Political Action Committees. The bill also calls for North Carolina to reimplement nonpartisan primary elections and general elections for Supreme Court justices and judges of the Court of Appeals.

The bill states that its supporters wish to see automatic voter registration in practice by 2022. North Carolina's midterm elections also fall at that time.

Rep. Brian Farkas of Greenville is a cosponsor. (Daily Reflector, 4/13/21)

### **MAY 2021   Against Bill to Eliminate Pistol Purchase Permits**

Two Pitt County state representatives have opposing takes on a bill that would do away with sheriff's office-approved purchase permits for handguns in North Carolina.

HB 398 passed 69-48 on May 5 in the state House of Representatives. All but two Democrats and a single Republican voted against. It currently sits in the state Senate Committee on Rules and Operations.

The bill was backed by the North Carolina Sheriff's Association despite the organization's opposition to the bill in previous years. Republican Chris Humphrey and Democrat Brian Farkas, both who represent Pitt County in the House, took opposing views on the bill.

Humphrey, who is from Lenoir County, said that the bill is a means of eliminating redundancies that occur during handgun purchases.

"It speeds up the process and really, it affects the good guys," Humphrey said, "the honest gun owners who are purchasing a weapon to protect themselves and their families."

Humphrey said that pawn shop owners and other gun sellers run the same background checks as sheriff's offices across the state. The need to remove the language for pistol permits came as a result of extensive backlogs on permits, he said. Most of the concerns voiced came from representatives and sheriffs from larger counties.

"With a lot of other pressing legislature being worked on, a lot of the frustrations came from Wake County," Humphrey said. "I don't believe the backlog is as much of an issue in Lenoir County or Pitt County for that matter."

Last month, Pitt County Sheriff Paula Dance was granted three new clerk positions for the sheriff's office in order to help with permit backlogs, both for concealed carry and purchase permits. Concealed carry permits already are allowed to take the place of a purchase permit in North Carolina. Dance could not be reached for comment.

County Manager Scott Elliott said Wednesday that, regardless of the bill's passage, he does not foresee those positions going away.

"We are still tracking it," Elliott said. "I don't expect the commissioners to come back and take those roles away. Those positions are still important to other operations of the sheriff's office."

Farkas, who lives in Greenville, said that the bill sets a precedent for loopholes to be exploited.

"As it's currently written, eliminating the pistol purchase permit would allow for the private sale or transfer of any handgun without any kind of background check," Farkas said. "This represents a massive expansion of what is sometimes called the 'gun show loophole' and makes North Carolina a more dangerous place for everyone.

"North Carolina's pistol purchase permit is not perfect but it has been an effective way to prevent guns from getting to people who legally can't own one," he said.

The loophole allows buyers to seek out an unlicensed seller to acquire a handgun, Farkas said. That loophole is currently closed under state law.

Rifles can be bought without a purchase permit.

Humphrey did not weigh in on how the bill was received in the Senate.

"I've been around long enough that I can say you never know which direction that's going to go," Humphrey said.

He agrees background checks are necessary but that they can be handled by business owners.

Farkas said that he does not see the bill being made into a law under Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper.

"It is hard to say exactly what will happen in the Senate, but I would expect Gov. Cooper to veto the bill should it come to his desk," Farkas said. (Daily Reflector, 5/20/21)

### **MAY 2021 First Bill Passed (Sewage Systems)**

A bill that passed the state House 110-3 would update the system that reports sewage system overflows. It's the first piece of legislation filed by Rep. Brian Farkas of Greenville.

North Carolina Riverkeepers mapped 22,968 sanitary sewage overflows in the state between 2002-2017 — an average of 1,500 spills per year, according to Farkas' office. Under current law, polluters are only required to notify the public via news release if there is a spill over 1,000 gallons. If the spill is over 15,000 gallons, polluters are also required to put a paid ad in the newspaper with details of the spill.

In addition to keeping the print requirements, Farkas' legislation requires posting notifications to the wastewater treatment works' website. The legislation also requires the notification of local health departments in the affected county and the chairs of the Environmental Review Commission.

House Bill 885 earned approval on May 12 after a second reading. It currently is with the Senate Committee on Rules and Operations. Farkas said updating the reporting system will help keep more people informed about the pollution of waterways, especially rural residents who didn't have easy access to these important notices. "This bill tackles that problem head-on and helps more people know when there's pollution in their water."

Jillian Howell, the Pamlico-Tar Riverkeeper with Sound Rivers, voiced her support for the bill.

"We're excited to see this legislation move and are thankful for Rep. Farkas' leadership on this issue," said Howell. "Working on the water, I see firsthand the negative impacts SSOs have on our communities and the environment. People should know when their waters are being polluted and this legislation is a move towards greater transparency around SSOs. We're fortunate to have a champion for clean water here in the east."

The bill passed unanimously through both the Energy and Public Utilities Committee and the Rules Committee. Farkas said it saw significant bipartisan cooperation. If signed into law, it would come into effect Oct. 1 of this year.

"I enjoyed working with all my colleagues to make this bill happen," said Farkas. "We brought in good ideas from both Democratic and Republican colleagues to make sure the bill is something everyone could rally behind. Our top priority should be protecting the public, and HB885 takes a meaningful step toward making that happen. Regardless of where you live, all North Carolinians deserve a modern notification system so we can all boat, fish, and swim without worry." (Daily Reflector, 5/31/21)

### **JUN 2021 Town Hall Meeting Remarks**

-- NC Rep. ***Brian Farkas*** hosted his second quarterly town hall Wednesday night.

The virtual setting was a chance for the people of Pitt County to hear what Farkas is working on in Raleigh and to voice their concerns and suggestions.

"Really trying to raise the bar in Eastern North Carolina about what people should expect from a legislature," said Farkas, who represents District 9 in the North Carolina House.

Farkas said he's been hard at work in the past few months.

"We're gearing up for the budget right now and it looks like we're going to be working on that in the next few weeks trying to get the (NC) Senate and the (NC) House on the same page," he said.

One bill he wrote is House Bill 802. It involves piloting Support Team Assisted Response programs in three North Carolina police departments, including Greenville.

"These folks would deploy in low-level incidents, nonviolent incidents, as opposed to traditional uniformed police officers," said Farkas. "You're talking about maybe a trespassing issue. Maybe mental health crises."

Farkas also continues to work on improving broadband access in Eastern North Carolina.

"I was really proud of a broadband bill, called the Broadband Empowerment Act," he said. "That would give DOT the authority to actually build empty telecommunications conduits when they're building roads so we can run fiber down the road."

The representative recently passed his first bill.

"It was to modernize public notice whenever there's sanitary sewer overflows anywhere in North Carolina," he said.

Farkas encourages people of District 9 to continue bringing their questions and suggestions to him.

"Your voices in Pitt County and Eastern North Carolina are critical to that," said Farkas. "They help guide my decision-making. I'm going to do what's best for Pitt County and my district."

Farkas will host his next town hall in September. He also holds district days, where he sets up at a local brewery or coffee shop and invites people to come talk with him. (WNCT, 6/17/21)

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Pitt County Representative Brian Farkas wants his constituents to know he is staying busy in Raleigh.

At a virtual town hall Wednesday night, Farkas told attendees that he has sponsored 177 bills in total since being elected as a junior representative. Among those, one announced earlier that day would provide funding for specialized mental health and de-escalation teams for police departments.

Earlier on Wednesday, Farkas announced that he has filed legislation to pilot Support Team Assisted Response (STAR) programs in three North Carolina police departments, including Greenville's.

The program would allocate \$990,000 in nonrecurring funds each year from 2021 to 2023 to the N.C. Department of Public Safety. The money would provide grants for mobile mental health teams to work with police.

"When there's a low-level incident, say trespassing or perhaps a mental health crisis, instead of dispatching a uniformed standard police officer or squad to the situation, we instead deploy a specialized van equipped with food, blankets, medicine if needed and powered by a paramedic, social services or mental health professional and a police officer to make sure everyone is safe in that situation," Farkas said. "They go in with expertise needed to meet the situation."

The program has similarities to GPD's existing Mobile Crisis Unit, a group that provides mental health advocacy to non-violent offenders. Farkas said that the program is a proven asset that brings the Mobile Crisis Unit to its next phase.

Greenville Police Chief Mark Holtzman pointed him in the direction of STAR programs in Denver, Farkas said.

"In the 748 cases they have deployed to in the first six months, they had zero result in arrests," Farkas said. "(The Mobile Crisis Unit) is limited in time and resources. Basically, this new unit would come in and be the Cadillac version of where Chief Holtzman is trying to go."

Greenville's crisis unit was the first co-responder mental health response program in eastern North Carolina and launched in February.

The program is supported by Disability Rights North Carolina, a legal advocacy agency.

"People in mental health crisis are 16 times more likely to be killed in a police encounter," said Disability Rights North Carolina Policy Attorney Tara Muller in a news release. "STAR programs save lives by ensuring de-escalation and connecting people in crisis to mental health resources. We appreciate Representative Farkas' leadership on this critical community issue."

The bill is sponsored with Republican Rep. Jon Hardister of Guilford County and Democratic Rep. Terry Brown of Mecklenburg County. Twelve others have co-sponsored the bill as well, the release said.

During a public hearing, Carol Williams asked Farkas for an update on concerns of gerrymandering in the state amid upcoming redistricting. Redistricting was delayed along with the census in 2020, something Farkas attributed both to COVID-19 and management issues. He focused on its importance as the state prepares to gain a 14th congressional seat.

"They did not give us the data we needed," Farkas said. "That will have impacts on my race, too, as well as our county commissioners and congressional seats. ... I'm going to keep pushing for doing it the right way as much as we can, but we've fallen a little short of the ability to have independent redistricting."

"It is going to be really important for people, when these meetings are going, that people know that you all are watching," Farkas said.

He also mentioned that June 19 is a "District Day," where he will be at Alice Keene Park in Greenville to speak with constituents. (Daily Reflector, 6/17/21)



### **JUN 2021 Attends Pride Event**

Rep. Brian Farkas was also in attendance. He shared a few words on the region's progress as well as how pleased he was to see Pride on full display.

"It is exciting to see this in Pitt County," Farkas, a Greenville native, said. "We keep making big strides. At the end of the day, no matter who you are or who you love, you deserve respect and resources available to help you." (Daily Reflector, 6/28/21)

### **JUL 2021 Medicaid Expansion**

"North Carolina has lost seven rural hospitals since 2010. Health care specialists leave when a hospital closes. In Pitt County, we've got to keep these rural hospitals open and allow our hospitals to not just get by - but we've got to help them in any way we can. Medicaid expansion is the way to do that," said Rep. Brian Farkas (HD-9). (Press Release, 7/30/21)

### **AUG 2021 Breaks With Dems to Vote For Budget**

The North Carolina House passed its two-year state budget on Thursday, including nearly \$150 million of funding to Pitt County. But county legislators disagreed on the merit of the plan.

The budget passed with a veto-proof majority and received bipartisan support. Republican Rep. Chris Humphrey of Pitt and Lenoir counties and Democratic Rep. Brian Farkas of Pitt County both said the budget is a bipartisan effort.

"No budget is perfect, but the House budget goes a long way to address many of our needs statewide and local," Humphrey said in a statement Thursday.

Farkas said in a statement Wednesday that more could be done, but acknowledged he was among nine Democrats to join Republicans and vote in favor of the bill.

"Funding for the construction of a new building for East Carolina University's Brody School of Medicine is the biggest win for Pitt County in this budget," Farkas said of the \$125 million dedicated to the project. "This is a game-changing project and I am honored to be a part of the legacy former ECU Chancellor Leo Jenkins started when he made the Brody School of Medicine a reality." (Daily Reflector, 8/12/21)

### **AUG 2021 On Budget Conference Committee**

Democrats who voted in favor of the state budget have a hand in negotiating the final budget compromise.

North Carolina lawmakers are getting to the final version of how to spend \$25.7 billion in taxpayer money via the state budget. It Almost two months into the new fiscal year, the House and Senate have each passed

their own versions and the two chambers are now deciding what will be in the final version they'll send to Gov. Roy Cooper's desk.

It appears that some Democrats will have more of a say in the final budget process led by the Republican-majority General Assembly, including the Democratic governor.

At stake are raises for tens of thousands of state employees, including teachers. The budget is also likely to include tax cuts for individuals and corporations. And the state will also decide how to spend more federal coronavirus relief funds, likely on bonuses for workers.

The General Assembly is now in the "conference" budget process, in which the House and Senate, along with input from Cooper, work out a final version of the budget they plan to pass that the governor will sign into law. Both chambers have appointed their conference committees, who will do the behind-closed-doors negotiating on the budget to come up with a consensus. The committees each have some Democrats on them — those who are already friendly to the Republican-written budgets.

Both chambers passed their budgets with enough votes to override a veto, which requires a three-fifths supermajority. The House budget has higher raises for teachers and other state employees, along with lower tax cuts, than the Senate budget.

Democrats on committee voted for budgets

The Senate's conference committee includes four Democrats. All four of those Democrats voted for the Senate budget. They are Sen. Don Davis, Sen. Kirk deViere, Sen. Paul Lowe and Sen. Ben Clark.

The House's conference committee also includes several Democrats, all of whom voted in favor of the House version of the budget. The nine Democrats are Rep. Cecil Brockman, Rep. Brian Farkas, Rep. Charles Graham, Rep. Howard Hunter III, Rep. Marvin Lucas, Rep. Garland Pierce, Rep. William Richardson, Rep. Shelly Willingham and Rep. Michael Wray.

Farkas, a Pitt County Democrat, said in a statement after the vote last week that, "this bill is not perfect, but I am hopeful leaders from both chambers will now work in good faith with Governor Cooper in the conference committee to negotiate a final budget that both Democrats and Republicans can agree on."

Farkas said that the House budget's funding for a new building for East Carolina University's Brody School of Medicine was "the biggest win for Pitt County."

That echoes what deViere said when he voted for the Senate budget — that it was not perfect, but part of the process.

Some Democratic priorities made it into the House budget. A Senate Democrat's failed amendment to restore master's degree pay for teachers ended up there, as did paid parental leave to teachers who are new mothers.

In 2019, Cooper vetoed the state budget and it was not overridden. Spending levels remaining the same as the 2018 budget, along with billions of dollars in surplus and an influx of federal money, means the state is

flush as it plans its financial future for the next two years. The 2019 budget fight was a stalemate that lasted into 2020. In the end, a series of piecemeal budgets were passed and teachers did not get raises.

This time will be different, state leaders say.

Cooper isn't saying he'll just sign the budget, though.

"We're going to work on getting a budget, but at the end of the day we're not going to enact a bad budget and will veto it if we have to," he said.

"There's a number of policy issues that would take hours and hours of meeting time and many amendments to try to get right that really ought not to be in the budget," Cooper said. "And you can see from my budget we want to invest more in education and educator salaries. We want to expand Medicaid, we want to make sure that the children have a sound basic education. My priorities are pretty much out there and have been out there for awhile, and I think the leadership knows that."

He wants lawmakers to drop provisions that impact his issuing states of emergency. That has been a constant issue for the past year and a half as Cooper issued executive orders imposing statewide restrictions on businesses, a mask mandate and gathering size. There are currently no statewide mandates or restrictions related to the coronavirus pandemic. Cooper let the last of the restrictions expire in July, instead letting local jurisdictions impose any new mask mandates or other rules.

"The key thing is they're going to let me and Senate, House Democrats actually see the budget before they ... vote on it. Also understanding there are things I want to change, see moved, added, and they want to negotiate things at that point," Cooper said Wednesday.

"What's so different about this situation, is that we want to have these discussions before the budget is voted on and then I would have to make a decision whether to veto or sign based on a budget I really have not had a chance to see or have any input in. I think that we realized that process didn't work last time, and it needs to happen this time," he said. (RNO, 8/19/21)

### **NOV 2021    What Budget Brought to County**

State legislators said the two-year state budget signed by Gov. Roy Cooper on Thursday delivers much needed funding for projects that will benefit Pitt County residents including a new medical school and food processing center in Ayden.

Cooper acted almost immediately after the Republican-controlled legislature sent the bill to his desk. The House voted 101-10 earlier in the day in favor of the measure, the day after the Senate gave the chamber's final OK to the bill by a vote of 41-7. Each chamber also held similar, preliminary votes backing the plan earlier in the week.

The plan includes up to \$215 million for a new Brody School of Medicine building at East Carolina University in addition to more than \$82 million for additional renovations and repairs at the university, said Rep. Brian Farkas, who represents much of Greenville and southeast Pitt County in District 9.

It also includes \$4 million for a long-planned food processing facility in Ayden, \$14.5 million for a workforce technology center at Pitt Community College, more than \$2 million for capital improvements at the Pitt-Greenville Airport, and more than \$3 million for more than a half dozen other initiatives.

"Pitt County has a lot to celebrate today," Farkas said. "I'm proud to deliver a bipartisan budget that will make a positive, transformational impact for years to come."

Farkas said the Brody funding was his top priority. "Our success on behalf of Pitt County clearly demonstrates that when you push past partisan games, build genuine relationships with people from all backgrounds, and hustle like there's no tomorrow, the sky's the limit. And we're just getting started."

The Democrat was joined by District 12 Rep. Chris Humphrey, a Republican who represents parts of southern Pitt County, in praising the spending plan.

In addition to funding for local projects and investments in education, health care and infrastructure, it delivered fiscal savings and tax cuts, Humphrey said.

"I'm proud of our work to deliver this strong, conservative budget for our community," he said. "The resources we're putting into these critical local projects, along with our fiscal restraint and tax cuts, will prove to be a worthy investment for decades to come." (Daily Reflector, 11/18/21)

## **NOV 2021 Budget Stalemate Over**

No balloons dropped from the House ceiling after the final vote on the state budget on Nov. 18, ending two years of a state budget stalemate.

Nor was there a ceremony a few hours later when Gov. Roy Cooper signed the spending plan into law.

Senate leader Phil Berger came to the House to watch the final vote. It was 101-10. Not a surprise, as Cooper said he would sign it before Democrats voted, giving extra leeway for bipartisanship.

House Speaker Tim Moore signed the massive printed document with a grin and then showed it off to reporters. That was the most public display of fanfare. Asked about the potential for a bill signing ceremony, Berger said he would let the budget speak for itself.

There may have been little fanfare, but the moment was years in the making. In the end, the spending plan had passed because after three years with no budget compromise, lawmakers of both parties and their constituents had run out of patience for any more delay, especially after the long-running coronavirus pandemic. It was also because Democrats who had a hand in negotiations pushed for a compromise that would lead to a budget, even if it wasn't everything they wanted.

The pressure was on.

Here's why it happened the way it did.

How it started

Legislation is a numbers game. Do you have the votes? If you don't have the votes, you don't have a law.

The 2019 budget battle never ended. Cooper vetoed the conference budget. The House overrode it because Moore called the vote when most Democrats weren't there in a surprise move the morning of Sept. 11, 2019. But the House needs the Senate, and Senate leaders never called the override vote. Because they didn't have the votes.

Instead, small bill after small bill was passed. Some workers got raises, but many did not, including teachers. Instead of adjourning, lawmakers kept going through the fall and into winter. In January, a one-day session was dominated by a failed override of a teacher raises bill. Everyone went home.

Less than two months later, the coronavirus pandemic arrived in North Carolina.

Everything changed.

A change in tenor

Amid the pandemic in late spring 2020, lawmakers worked together to allocate billions of dollars in COVID-19 relief funds from the federal government. The 2021 session started with a different mood. For nearly a year, the governor had imposed statewide restrictions, and attempts to end them without Cooper's say-so failed.

There was still a lot to argue about, but the budget process was going to be different this time.

One major reason was the 2020 election. The presidency changed, but not much changed in the politically purple Old North State. Cooper won again. Berger won again. Moore won again. The Republicans kept their legislative majority. The Democrats kept them from getting a supermajority.

Cooper, Berger and Moore like to tell the same story: Cooper didn't get rid of them, and they didn't get rid of Cooper. So they resolved to work together for North Carolina.

That became clear early in the year with a compromise that allowed schools to reopen. It could be done. Would it again?

Rep. Marvin Lucas, a Spring Lake Democrat, is a retired principal. He played a lead role on the Democratic side of budget negotiations, according to Republicans and Democrats with knowledge of negotiations.

Lucas saw his role as an ombudsman.

"I thought it would have been detrimental to the state to have three years running of no budget, because the real losers were the citizens of the state, teachers, state employees — regular folk who are just ordinary

citizens — counties, cities. Everybody really suffered from lack of a budget,” Lucas said in an interview with *The News & Observer* after the final House vote.

Lucas was one of the Democrats who voted for the House budget, so he was appointed to the conference committee, meaning he had a hand in what the final budget looked like. Its members are referred to as “conferees.”

Lucas, in his 11th term in the House, said Cooper had “really, really been working very religiously to find a way to sign a budget.”

”And so I thought the conferees could play an instrumental role in ombudsmanship in allowing a budget that the governor could sign, and eventually he did feel comfortable enough to sign it. Even though we recognize that poor children ... are still are left way behind in this budget,” he said.

Democrats wanted a budget, not a veto

Republicans have maintained that they had the votes to override a budget veto from Cooper. Democrats have — well, they won’t say publicly if they would have overridden a veto, because it didn’t come to that.

In June, the Senate passed its budget proposal with four Democratic senators in support. That’s enough to override a veto. In August, the House passed its budget proposal with nine Democratic representatives. That’s enough for an override, too. But would they override a budget veto?

Berger told *The N&O* he didn’t think Cooper would veto the budget, “because it was pretty clear that there was enough support that that would have been problematic for him.”

Did Republicans have the votes?

Remember, teachers didn’t get raises. Projects went unfunded. Things were stagnant, for years. Fatigue with politicians was exacerbated by the pandemic.

Republican Rep. Jason Saine, the gregarious and powerful head of Appropriations, said he had enough Democratic votes for a successful override in the House.

If vetoed, the budget would have had to go to the Senate first. Republican Senate Whip Jim Perry’s job is to count votes.

”I personally believe [Senate Democratic conferees’] goal was never to have to take an override vote,” Perry said in an interview.

”It was to force communication and force conversation. ... They didn’t want to be put in that position.”

At Cooper’s news conference announcing he would sign the budget, he said he knew that he would have the votes to sustain a veto in the Senate. Senate Republicans only need two Democrats to vote with them for an override. Cooper didn’t mention the House.

When Cooper wants to make sure a potential veto is sustained by fellow Democrats, he will call them on the phone or to an in-person meeting at the Executive Mansion.

Democrats have lined up behind Cooper in the past. In March, Sen. Paul Lowe, a Winston-Salem Democrat, told The N&O that he changed his vote on the schools reopening bill because the governor asked him to do so.

”He asked. I am a Democrat. He’s the governor, and a Democratic governor,” Lowe said about sustaining the schools bill veto.

Sen. Kirk deViere, a Fayetteville Democrat, also met with the governor back then, but still voted to override the schools bill veto. The measure failed because it did not have Lowe’s vote nor Sen. Ben Clark’s, who wasn’t there. Soon after, the deal to reopen schools was announced between Cooper and Republican leadership.

It was, along with the energy bill that will shape the state’s energy and environmental future, the biggest public display of the most powerful politicians in the state working together in 2021 — until this budget.

Lowe, deViere, Clark and Sen. Don Davis all voted for the original Senate budget in June and were on the conference committee.

RAL\_BUDGET03-063021-EDH.JPG Sen. Ben Clark, left, and Sen. Kirk deViere listen to a speaker during a meeting of the Senate Finance Committee in Raleigh, N.C., Wednesday, June 30, 2021.

DeViere said for budget negotiations, he had group talks with the governor and a single one-on-one talk. He describes all their conversations as mutually respectful.

”My conversations with him were always around that, ‘Governor, North Carolina needs a budget, and we need to get to a negotiated budget, first and foremost. This has to be a compromise,’” deViere told The N&O in an interview.

”I was very clear that I believe we needed to get to a budget, and if we didn’t, that was failure in my mind,” he said.

DeViere acknowledged there was pressure in the conversations from Cooper, but also him.

”I have a job to do as a legislator, and he has a job to do as governor,” he said.

In the House, Democratic Rep. Brian Farkas of Greenville also served on the conference committee.

Farkas said the House Democratic votes supporting the Republican-led budget “weren’t a given at any point until the very end when we all voted [Nov. 18]. To me, we leveraged that individually.”

The N&O asked Lucas, who led House Democratic budget conferees, if he would have sustained a veto from the governor.

"I will work with the governor," Lucas said.

Farkas said "that was not a battlefield that we were on, and it's not something we had to talk about a whole lot."

Asked if he would have overridden a veto, Farkas said: "It's not something we gotta worry about."

The N&O also asked Rep. Charles Graham, a Robeson County Democrat running for Congress, and one of the budget conferees.

"All politics are local," Graham answered, and the budget is "transformational" for Robeson County. He said his No. 1 concern is his district, and that he was straightforward that he, first and foremost, wanted to have a budget that became law.

"I made it very clear I wanted a budget, and I made that very clear throughout the process," Graham said.

#### Cutting the military pension tax

DeViere spent 10 years in the U.S. Army infantry, first enlisted and then as an officer. He lives in a military town: Fayetteville, which is right next to Fort Bragg. He left the Army as a captain after commanding two infantry companies, and owns a marketing firm.

"Really what drove me to run is we were leaving a lot of people behind in different ways and the military ethos in me is: you can't leave anybody behind," he said.

DeViere said in an interview with The N&O that "good government happens when people come to the table and be reasonable and find a pathway forward."

Finding a "reasonable" compromise was central to his push. He also wanted to exempt military pensions from income tax.

Other lawmakers credit DeViere with getting the elimination of the tax in the final budget, though it also passed the House as a separate bill sponsored by Fayetteville Republican Rep. John Szoka earlier in the session.

"That particular thing is what I hear every VFW meeting I go to, every active duty change of command," DeViere said. Service members making the decision to plant roots in North Carolina or move away ask about the pension tax.

He said a high-ranking officer looked at him and said: "'Kirk, that's your number one mission.' 'I said, I got that mission sir, I'm all in.'"

"We say we're the most military-friendly state. We need to put our money where our mouth is," DeViere said.

#### Raises and fatigue



Davis, a Greenville Democrat and one of the Senate Democrats who voted for an earlier version of the Republican-written Senate budget, has voted with Republicans previously on controversial issues.

He is also running for retiring U.S. Rep. G.K. Butterfield's congressional seat.

Asked if he would have overridden or sustained, a Cooper veto on the budget, Davis said he wanted to focus on getting the budget over the finish line.

"It was a lot of work, and I've been around some time now, and I've not seen a perfect budget yet," Davis said.

Davis talked about the stress on everyone during the pandemic.

"There's a lot of fatigue, and a lot that's been going on, and when I think again about this budget and all the teachers have been going through — I mean, we owe them this budget."

RAL\_XGRBUDGET-NE-111721-RTW\_6.JPG Senator Don Davis, who represents Greene and Pitt counties speaks during the Senate session on Wednesday, November 17, 2021 in Raleigh, N.C.

The budget includes an average of 5% raises over two years plus bonuses for most teachers across the state, and even more for teachers in 95 rural counties, including his district. It also includes getting non-certified school employees to a \$15-per-hour minimum wage within two years, which some lawmakers pushed for during the last budget process.

"Just imagine looking at your colleagues out there, all state employees, getting to \$15 an hour. And these individuals — bus drivers, cafeteria workers, custodians, assistants, and even in our community college system," he said.

"We owe this to them," Davis said. Other important items in the budget to him were broadband internet expansion, eliminating the military pension tax and giving bonuses to retired state employees.

Brody School of Medicine

Farkas, another Eastern North Carolina Democrat and a freshman lawmaker, wore an East Carolina University pin on his suit lapel the day of the final budget vote in the House. He said funding a new Brody School of Medicine at ECU was the biggest win for his Pitt County district. A win for Democrats, he said, was the \$15 minimum wage.

Farkas said the House Democrats on the budget conference committee met with the governor a few times early in negotiations, as a group.

"I made it clear to him that I wanted to do what I could to strengthen his negotiation position," Farkas said. Farkas told The N&O that budgets should only be about money, and that "policy provisions had no business in there." (RNO, 11/23/21)

**2022**

**JAN 2022     Committee on Medicaid Expansion**

A legislative committee to expand access to health care for workers could pave the way for better health and economic opportunity, a Pitt County lawmaker said.

State House Speaker Tim Moore on Wednesday announced the formation of the Joint Legislative Committee on Access to Health Care and Medicaid Expansion. The committee was outlined in the state budget passed in November and will consist of 18 members, nine from the House and nine from the Senate.

The purpose is to consider various ways in which access to health care and health insurance can be improved for North Carolinians, the bill reads.

"Members of the Joint Legislative Committee on Access to Health Care and Medicaid Expansion will thoroughly investigate the health care needs in our state and explore all options to improve upon the state of health care in North Carolina," Moore said in a statement. "I have every confidence that the result of this committee's work will benefit all North Carolinians."

Brian Farkas, a Democrat representing Pitt County, was among the nine members of the House appointed to the committee. He said the committee's work could pay off as early as this year, since wording in the budget grants it the power to create legislation.

"This committee was formed during budget negotiations as something that conferees including myself worked toward as we discussed Medicaid expansion," Farkas said. "I do not think it was any secret that we were talking about how we could expand Medicaid in the budget but the votes just were not there yet. This was a good faith gesture by the majority to work with us and start putting together a frame work that could start moving the needle here as early as the short session."

The committee is chaired by Rep. Donny Lambeth, a Winston-Salem based Republican.

"Our committee will explore and seek solutions to critical health care issues with the goals of broadening access to quality health care for working people, lowering health insurance premiums for everyone, addressing the cost of uncompensated care, especially for rural hospitals, and providing more affordable healthcare options to help small businesses retain employees," Lambeth said in a news release on Wednesday.

Farkas said that expansion of health care services would be felt in the eastern part of the state, especially areas like Pitt County where the hospital serves a rural region. The economy would benefit too, he said.

"With rural hospitals like ours, we are often teetering on the edge, serving a much larger population that cannot pay for access to care," Farkas said. "In Pitt County, if we expand Medicaid that could mean 13,000 additional people. There are also economic advantages, as I have seen the possibility of 500 more jobs. I have also seen projections of over \$114 million in Pitt County alone."

The budget also provided up to \$215 million for a new Brody School of Medicine building at East Carolina University in addition to more than \$82 million for additional renovations and repairs at the university. Farkas said that the Brody expansion and Medicaid access will complement one another.

"Those two really go hand in hand as far as expanding rural care and rural access," Farkas said. "We will be able to have a state-of-the-art facility ... up and running and have the next generation of doctors and nurses stay here in North Carolina. At the same time, people will have insurance and be able to access that care."

"Ideally, this new Brody project is expected to increase the class size and the amount of physicians graduated each year by a third. Having those additional practitioners and citizens able to access that care, that is what I mean by walking hand in hand."

Lambeth and Farkas are joined on the committee by Reps. Larry Potts, Kristin Baker, Larry Sasser, Donna White, Keith Kidwell, William Richardson and Charles Graham the release said. Kidwell also serves as a deputy majority whip.

Six members are Republicans, with Farkas, Richardson and Graham being Democrats.

State Senate President Pro Tem Phil Berger also announced the nine members from the Senate. The include Republicans Joyce Krawiec (co-chair), Ralph Hise, Earl Britt, Lisa Barnes, Kevin Corbin and Michael Lee and Democrats Dan Blue, Kirk deViere, and Mike Woodard. (Daily Reflector, 1/5/22)

### **APR 2022 For Passenger Rail Service in County**

On Thursday, North Carolina State Rep. Brian Farkas announced the first steps for a hopeful passenger railroad in Pitt County.

The first step is doing a feasibility study to look at route options, engineering requirements and population demographics.

"We have to pay for a feasibility study that will be done by the N.C. rail division," Farkas said. "What I'm doing in my office is trying to facilitate those funds to secure them at the state and local level. We're applying through the NPO for some grants at the federal level."

Once the study is completed, Pitt County might be eligible for other funding.

"It opens us up for some bigger funds that has been made available from the bipartisan investment act," he said.

The current west to east line runs from Charlotte to Raleigh, and partly into Wilson.

"I think it would be ideal for us to use existing rail that's in Wilson and then runs through Farmville and into Greenville," Farkas said.

Farkas is envisioning a train station in Greenville behind the G.K. Butterfield Transportation Center. The site already has existing tracks.

"We'd be able to get folks to Charlotte and more importantly get people from Charlotte and the Triangle area to visit Greenville on the weekends and see why this area is so great," he added.

Farkas hopes to have the funds secured and the feasibility study started by this September. (WNCT, 4/1/22)

### **APR 2022 For Community College Re-Entry Program**

A Pitt County legislator on Wednesday announced his advocacy for a budget appropriation of \$400,000 to a program that helps the formerly incarcerated re-enter society.

Rep. Brian Farkas, a Democrat representing District 9, said that figure would be the initial amount filed for Pitt Community College's Local Re-entry Council (LRC). Staff for PCC and the LRC joined Farkas at the council's office on Evans Street for the mid-week news conference, which coincides with Gov. Roy Cooper's announcement of "Second Chances Week" in N.C.

Farkas said he would be taking action at the state legislature's short session, scheduled to begin on May 4.

"This is about lifting up our neighbors," Farkas said. "I'm confident we can keep the politics out of this and do the right thing in the upcoming budget. I will work with anyone who is serious about a solution here."

Farkas said the LRC is important not only for eastern N.C. but for the state as a whole. He said that it has been looked at by various entities including the North Carolina Department of Public Safety as a possible model for replication among re-entry programs.

The program provides recently released individuals with a support system as well as essentials like housing, transportation and job training.

Ralph Soney, PCC's re-entry coordinator, said that since the college adopted the LRC in August 2021 more than 179 people have been helped. He said that the program provides a serious return on investment.

Soney and staff visited Greensboro earlier this week for the state's summit on re-entry where they engaged in programs like re-entry simulators. Tashika Thigpen-Lilley, adult re-entry case manager for the council, said that she met various roadblocks in the scenario, which puts people in the shoes of a recently released person to see what the first week out is like.

"I remember I lost my ID," Thigpen-Lilley said. "Then I had to pay \$15 to get a new ID, so I went to go donate plasma and they said I needed my ID to do that."

A staffer who has seen the benefits of the LRC, back when it was the nonprofit organization STRIVE, said that bringing education like the simulator to Pitt County is a great way to promote empathy and keep young people from making the same mistakes he did.

"It allows people a firsthand kind of experience of what it's like to enter back into society with limited resources and limited support," said Brenton Grice, a participant navigator with the LRC's youth program. "It's almost — I don't want to say insurmountable — but it's a very hard, hard task at hand."

In 2016, Grice was released from prison after serving almost 10 years for armed robbery and other charges. He now works with 14-17-year-olds who are at risk. He said when he got out, the LRC gave him a place to readjust and got him reacquainted with technology.

"They're little mes and I'm trying to save them before they end up in front of a judge who's not going to work with them," Grice said.

In addition to possible programs like the simulator, Farkas and staff said the LRC is in need of funding to hire a full-time substance abuse counselor as well as get transportation contracts. The decision on how to spend the money will be left to Soney and his team.

The program's current primary funding is a \$300,000 grant from the Department of Public Safety that pays out over two years. In addition to youth, the LRC has a branch to serve the general population and another for women.

Farkas said Pitt County's Board of Commissioners has discussed increasing funding to the program and he hopes that the City of Greenville will increase its current \$20,000 yearly commitment.

Department of Public Safety stats say that 25 percent of North Carolinians have some sort of criminal record. (Daily Reflector, 4/28/22)