THE PENDULUM

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ELON NEWS NETWORK

Left, Le'Von Barnes, right, Ian Baltutis on Election Day on Nov. 3. Baltutis and Barnes are two Democrats who helped flip the State House majority.

Blue tide overwhelms GOP

Democrats set to capture State House majority

Democrats take control of a NC General Assembly chamber for first time since 2010

Miles Hayford
Managing Editor of The Pendulum

As the Democratic Party flipped both chambers of Congress federally, the blue wave extended into North Carolina's state legislature as the Democrats are set to win the majority in the State House for the first time in 16 years.

As of early Wednesday morning, Democrats have control of 70 of the 120 seats in the State House. Democrats appear just shy of breaking the Republican majority in the Senate, but will break the supermajority that has blocked many of Democratic Gov. Josh Stein's vetoes. However, results are unofficial and several races could be recounted, but it looks likely there is a change of power in Raleigh.

Split control within the General Assembly could lead to political gridlock once new legislators arrive.

Alamance County proved to be a key factor in the Democrat's victory. In House Districts 63 and 64, the seats flipped, with Democrats Ian Baltutis and LeVon Barnes winning their races, respectively. Baltutis, a Burlington City Council member, defeated lawyer Ryan Moffitt. Barnes won in a rematch from 2024 general election, defeating longtime incumbent Dennis Riddell — a Republican who has held the seat since 2012. Alamance witnessed a sweeping Democratic victory with 12 Democrats winning across the county, bringing effects to down-ballot races.

"I'm looking forward to leading with a new generation of electric folks all across Alamance," Baltutis said after the victory.

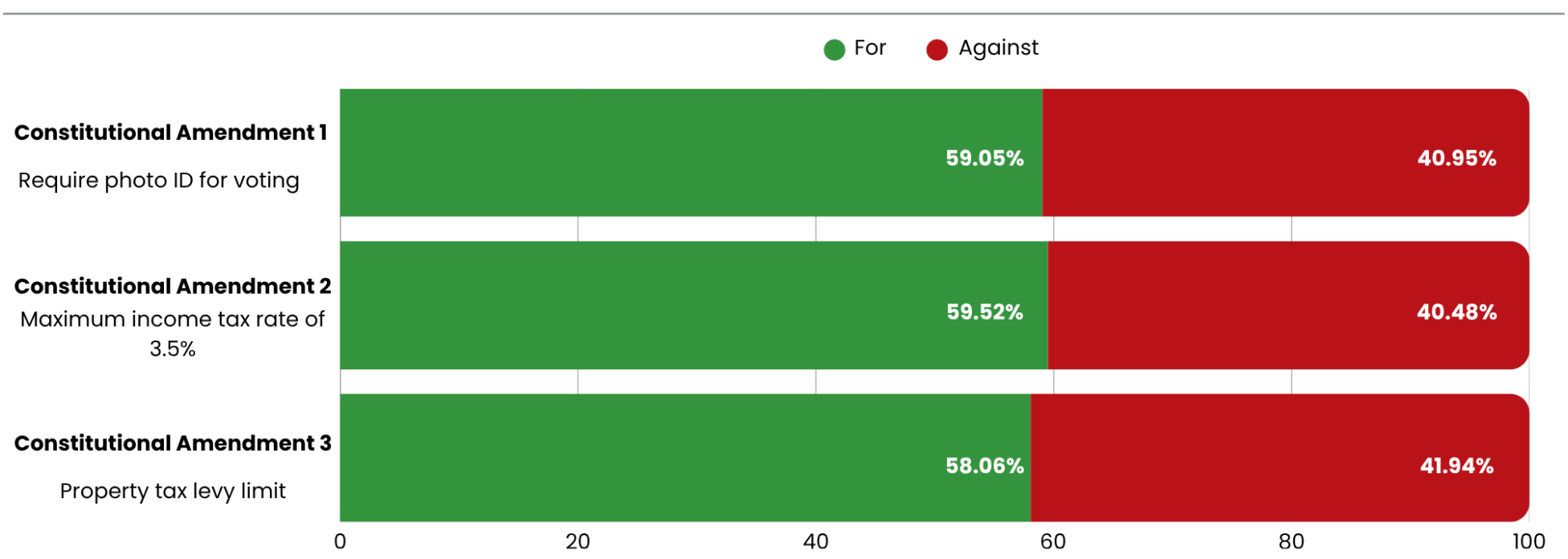
Republican House Speaker Destin Hall conceded the party's defeat, while House Democratic Leader Robert Reives claimed victory, per reporting from The Assembly.

"Relief is coming on its way," Reives said in Raleigh at an election watch party. "No more looking at the papers scared of what's getting ready to happen. No more wondering how many more times you're going to be undercut and kicked in the gut."

Elsewhere, Democrat Jen Wiles upset seven-term incumbent Donny Lambeth in Forsyth County. Sen. Michael Lee, widely considered to be one of the frontrunners to be the next Senate leader, lost his reelection bid to Democrat Jessica Bichler. In Mecklenburg County, Republican Tricia Ann Cotham, who switched parties in 2023, lost her reelection bid. Mecklenburg and Wake County were vital as all representatives from the two counties will be Democrats next year.

The Democratic victories in North Carolina come amid former Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper's nearly 20-point victory over Republican Michael Whatley — the biggest U.S. Senate win by Democrats since 1974.

Recounts could occur and some provisional ballots may be counted in the next few days. County boards of elections will certify results in the coming days.





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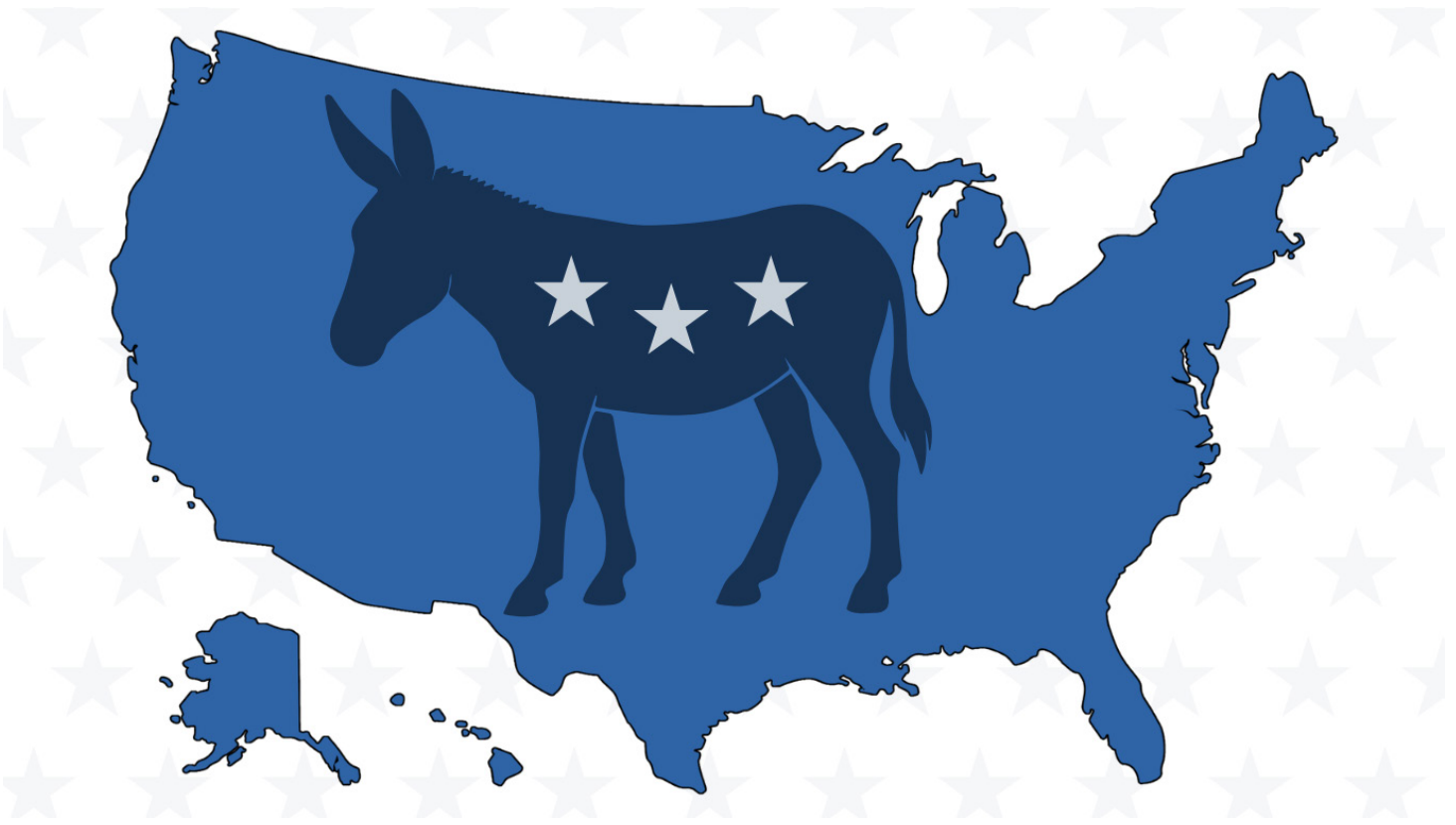
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Democratic Party flips U.S. Senate, House of Representatives in midterms



GRAPHIC BY AMELIA METZ

What happens now: The priorities of the Democratic party

Addison Hinson
Elon News Network

Democrats have officially flipped both the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives.

Daniel DiSalvo, professor at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill's School of Civic Leadership, said he expected the Republican party to lose some seats.

"Generally speaking, the president's party, going back a long way traditionally always loses some seats in the midterm," DiSalvo said. "The margins of majority control in both the House and Senate have traditionally been quite small. It doesn't take a lot of seats to change in order for control to flip."

Now that the Democrats have the majority in the Senate and the House, DiSalvo expects priorities to be centered around preventing President Donald Trump's agendas from passing.

"I would expect to continue to see more of the kind of executive-centered action, coupled with much more pushback on the president," DiSalvo said. "Certainly on the Iran war, many other areas, potential corruption cases, and so on."

Steven Greene, professor of political science at North Carolina State University, echoed a similar sentiment.

"I expect it's going to be a lot of investigations and attempts at accountability, and honestly trying to make a very strong case that not just Donald Trump but the Republican party is corrupt," Greene said. "They're going to want to have a broader charge against the Republican party, so that whomever is the nominee, that they are negatively affected by what Democrats will hope will be fairly negative perceptions of the Republican party."

Specifically in the House, DiSalvo expects the Democrats to focus on investigations into the current administration as well as budgetary concerns. As of early Wednesday morning, the Democrats held 225 seats with 74 more seats left to be called.

"I think there you'd see more contestation. They're going to use their investigative powers," DiSalvo said. "The House issues all revenue bills, so when it comes to passing budgets and so on, that'll be an important lever of power that the Democrats could exercise."

In the Senate, DiSalvo believes that the Democrats' priorities will be largely dependent upon how much of a majority they have over the Republicans. As of early Wednesday morning, the Democrats held 54 seats, with Nebraska, Mississippi, and Alaska yet to be called.

When the Democratic party won seats in the 2018 midterm elections, impeachment proceedings were kicked into full gear. DiSalvo thinks that this could possibly be repeated after the 2026 midterms.

> "POLICY IS PERSONNEL. IF DEMOCRATS CAN BLOCK FURTHER REPUBLICAN APPOINTMENTS, FURTHER TRUMP APPOINTMENTS BY CONTROL OF THE SENATE, THAT'S HUGE.
>
> **STEVEN GREENE**
> NC STATE POLITICAL SCIENCE PROFESSOR

"When a new party comes in and takes control of either the House or the Senate. They not only get the leadership positions but all the committee chairs," DiSalvo said. "One of the major powers is to run investigations. One can imagine a large number of investigations into the conduct of the Trump administration stemming from a Democratic legislature."

Greene also believes that the Democrats will use their investigative powers against the Republicans and Trump administration, but does not believe that Democrats will go so far as to make attempts at impeachment against the president — but they might go for members of his administration instead.

"The conventional wisdom is that attempts to impeach Donald Trump had some backlash that actually helped him. I think that conventional wisdom is probably right, and I think that conventional wisdom tends to guide conventional politicians," Greene said. "What I have been hearing is that Democrats will go after the lowest hanging fruit of the Trump administration. I'd be almost shocked if Pete Hegseth was not impeached."

In the Senate, Greene expects the Democrats to attempt to block further Republican appointments to federal offices and judgeships, as he believes the Democrats will not be able to get a two thirds majority to impeach or remove the president.

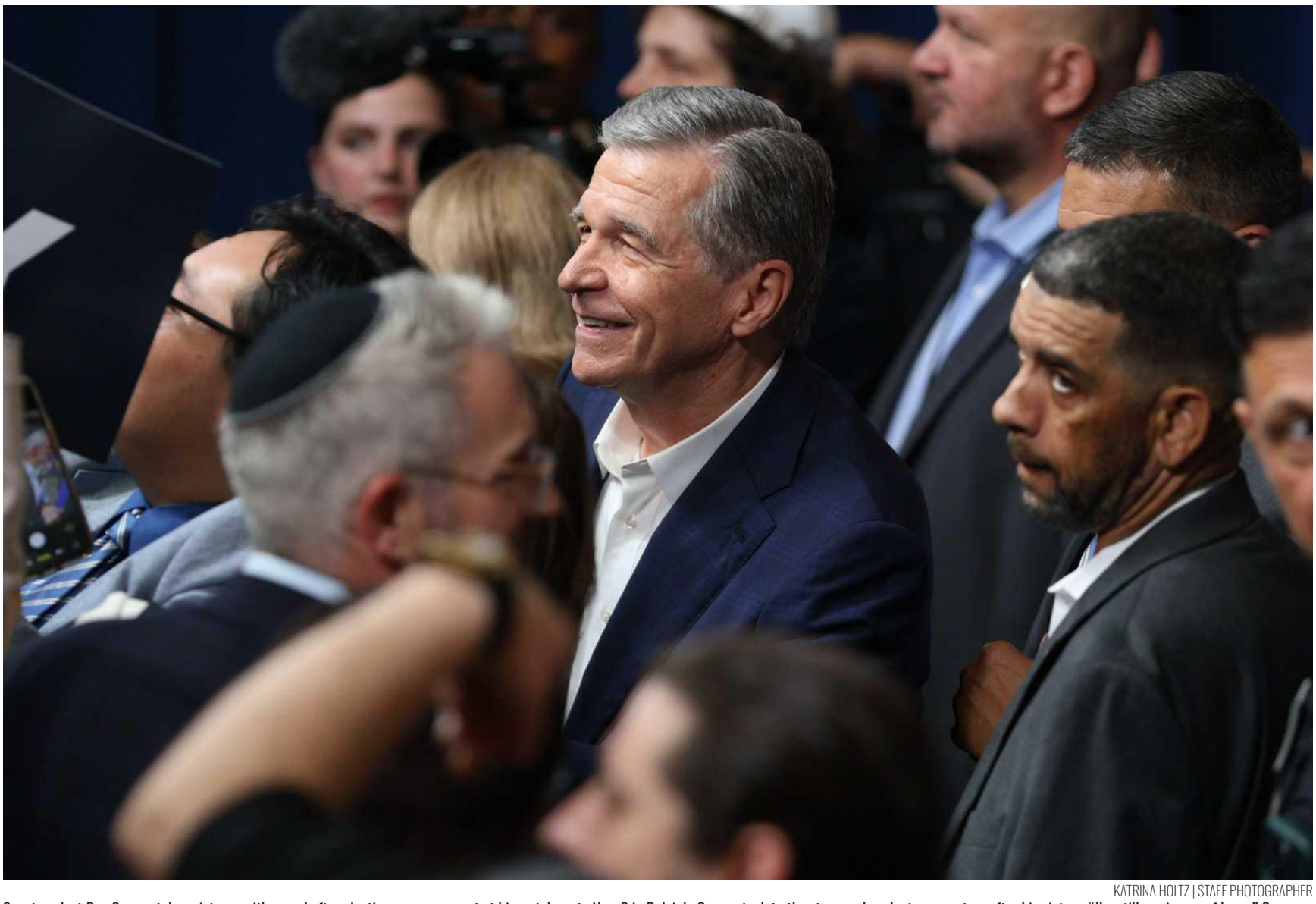
"Policy is personnel. If Democrats can block further Republican appointments, further Trump appointments by control of the Senate, that's huge," Greene said.

With only two years left in Trump's final term as president, DiSalvo believes that the Democrats are also likely going to be looking towards the 2028 presidential elections when passing legislation in the Senate or U.S. House.

"The Democrats are going to want to be setting themselves up for the future as well. I mean, part of it is perhaps some opposition and criticism of the president, but it's also going to be trying to get their message out," DiSalvo said. "Messages and policies about affordability, about the environment, about other legislative priorities that the Democratic party has to help put it in a better position in the public mind for the 2028 presidential election."

Visit our website for full election night coverage

elonnewsnetwork.com



KATRINA HOLTZ | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Senator-elect Roy Cooper takes pictures with crowd after election announcement at his watch party Nov. 3 in Raleigh. Cooper took to the stage and spoke to supporters after his victory, "I'm still a prisoner of hope," Cooper said. "I really think our best days lie ahead and we can make the course correction that our great country needs so badly. And the Carolinas and the United States have a future teeming with possibilities."



VENUS SOTO CASTANEDA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Attendees of the Alamance County Democratic Party's election night watch party cheer for U.S. House District 9 candidate Richard Ojeda and Alamance County Sheriff candidate Shannon Long Nov. 3. Both Ojeda and Long won their races, defeating Republican incumbents.



ETHAN WU | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Attendees chant "USA! USA! USA!" as U.S. Senate candidate Michael Whatley takes the stage along with his family 11 minutes after the results of North Carolina's Senate race were announced Nov. 3. Whatley opened his address stating that he called Roy Cooper to congratulate him right before walking on stage. "While results today are not what we've been working for, my commitment to you and this great state remain as strong as ever," Whatley said. "I will never stop fighting for North Carolina."



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR

Poll workers converse outside of the South Thompson polling location Nov. 3, surrounded by campaign signs.

Elon University sees expanded civic programming during midterm election cycle

Elon Votes! said there is more campus activity this midterm election in comparison to last presidential election

Brinna Hayes
Elon News Network



BRINNA HAYES | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

A whiteboard sign showcasing how many days are left until Election Day is displayed in the Elon Votes! office.

Open races across North Carolina and energized student leaders have helped expand election-related programming at Elon University during this year's midterm election cycle.

While registration drives, community engagement and early-voting processes are the same for election cycles, lessons learned by campus organizations and clubs alike have caused an increase in election-related campus events.

For midterm elections, local and state candidates are easier to access, according to Dillan Bono-Lunn, co-chair of the Council on Civic Engagement at Elon. As a result, Elon hosts more local and state candidates on campus during midterm elections than during presidential election years.

College Republicans and College Democrats have brought candidates and speakers to campus, whether that be community leaders, party chairs or those running for election.

> IT'S SUCH A UNIQUE TIME WHERE YOU'RE MAKING DECISIONS FOR YOURSELF FOR THE FIRST TIME. EDUCATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES OR POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IS REALLY IMPORTANT.
>
> **OLIVIA BROWN**
> CO-COORDINATOR FOR ELON VOTES!

Last spring, College Republicans brought Jason Simmons, chair of the North Carolina Republican Party, to campus. More recently, College Democrats hosted Anderson Clayton, chair of the North Carolina Democratic Party.

These types of events are comparatively new. Bono-Lunn said College Republicans and College Democrats at Elon have been more "dormant" the past several years.

This year, however, she said student leadership is more energized and willing to plan campus events.

Jodean Schmiederer, dean of student development, said she agreed. She said that leadership has been taking initiatives to collaborate more, which is fostering better debate on campus.

"In the last year, the leadership within those two organizations spent some time getting to know each other," Schmiederer said. "Although they disagree on some of the topics of politics, I think they get along and respect each other as people."

College Republicans and College Democrats recently hosted a debate Oct. 21. During his time at Elon, Bob Frigo, co-chair of the Council on Civic Engagement, has never seen a debate between the two groups. He said that these collaborative events on campus are a sign of what's to come.

"In terms of political polarization, they are modeling the way for the nation and how this can play out," Frigo said. "It's a wonderful snapshot of what could be."

The student body at Elon has seen changes as well.

Olivia Brown, co-coordinator for Elon Votes!, said she believes that presidential elections often get the most attention on campus. This midterm election, however, is different.

"There are so many big seats open," Brown said. "There are a lot of people that are interested in being able to make sure that their vote is counted."

This midterm, there are open seats for the U.S. Senate, U.S. House, N.C. Senate, N.C. Court of Appeals, N.C. Supreme Court and more.

Furthermore, Brown said she thinks students are becoming more civically engaged.

"It's such a unique time where you're making decisions for yourself for the first time," Brown said. "Education of political parties or political engagement is really important and students are very interested in that."

In Brown's experience, freshmen students have been the most excited. She says they're more motivated to figure out the resources they have access to, which she sees firsthand at Elon Votes!.

Frigo said the Kernodle Center for Civic Life, where the Council on Civic Engagement is located, aims to prepare students for elections.

"We've done a little bit more this midterm compared to the last presidential election," Frigo said. "Every election, we learn what students respond to and what works a little better, but we've been extremely consistent in the level of services we've offered."

Students from across the U.S. attend Elon, which impacts registration processes and who students are voting for.

"We have 50 voter registration forms with 50 deadlines and 50 absentee ballot forms with 50 sets of deadlines," Frigo said. "We have a one stop shop to help support students at all levels for all these elections."

How voting machines count your ballot

An inside look at the technology behind Election Day

Charlotte Pfabe
Executive Director of Elon News Network

When an Alamance County voter steps up to cast their ballot on Election Day, they use a voting machine called the DS200. This machine is a tabulator, which means it compiles all the votes together.

The ballot goes into the tabulator, down a chute and into a secure box in a sealed bottom compartment, according to Judson Higley, the voting equipment technician at the Alamance County Board of Elections.

"It collects the votes themselves," Higley said. "It reads them by taking an image of the ballot, and then adds that to the total count for whatever location the tabulator happens to be in."

Voters cast their ballots different ways depending on how and where they vote.

Early voters place a blank ballot into the machine and make their selections on the screen. Then, they print the ballot out and insert it into the tabulator, which counts their votes.

Mail-in ballots go into something called a central count tabulator, which Higley said is faster and larger. But all ballots are counted through tabulators, no matter the method of voting.

The machines used during early voting are not used again on Election Day, but they are the same type of equipment, Higley said.

For early voters, the Board of Elections collects their ballots and places them in a vault until Election Day. Then on Election Day, all results are compiled together.

Higley said these voting machines are airgapped, meaning they can't be connected to the internet. The votes are stored within the machines and then manually transferred to the Board of Elections office.



COURTESY OF ELECTION SYSTEMS & SOFTWARE, LLC

A breakdown of a DS200 voting machine and its functions.

"We then have to collect those results from each machine and bring them back here to the office to aggregate everything together," Higley said.

The computer that collects all the results is also airgapped, so Higley said the data is pulled off that official computer and shared with the state to post online.

"Once we have the unofficial results for the night, we take it off of that computer and we send it to the state, and the state is who posts them on the internet," Higley said.

Since 2020, voting machine security has been a repeated theme during election cycles. Recent claims out of Tennessee and Texas alleged that voting machines intentionally swapped votes, but a report from PolitiFact showed no evidence to support the claims that machines were designed to alter ballots. Election officials said the mistakes often come from voters accidentally clicking the wrong button.

Higley said every ballot cast is physically stored by the Board of Elections, so the number can be rechecked if needed.

"That is the key to North Carolina's system, is we have that paper record to go back to at any given time," Higley said.

He said these checks and balances ensure that elections are fair and accurate and all ballots are properly counted.

Democrat Roy Cooper flips U.S. Senate seat



KATRINA HOLTZ | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Senator-elect Roy Cooper and wife Kristin Cooper wave to the crowd after an announcement of his victory at Cooper's watch party Nov. 3 in Raleigh.

For the first time since 2008, voters elected a Democrat to the U.S. Senate

Elon News Network

Former Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper has won his bid to the U.S. Senate, flipping the seat and becoming the first Democratic U.S. Senator from North Carolina in 10 years. With 56.17% of the vote counted, Cooper secured BLANK defeating Republican Michael Whatley, who got 41.47%.

Cooper also beat Libertarian candidate Shannon Bray and Green Party candidate Michael Dublin.

> "I'M STILL A PRISONER OF HOPE. I REALLY THINK OUR BEST DAYS LIE AHEAD AND WE MAKE THE COURSE CORRECTION THAT OUR GREAT COUNTRY NEEDS SO BADLY.
>
> **ROY COOPER**
> U.S. SENATOR-ELECT

At his watch party in Raleigh, Cooper said that he now has to get to work to make healthcare, housing and groceries affordable, alongside working to end the war in Iran.

"I'm still a prisoner of hope," Cooper said. "I really think our best days lie ahead and we can make the course correction that our great country needs so badly. And the Carolinas and the United States have a future teeming with possibilities."

Cooper's race is one of 13 races within Alamance County to go blue during this midterm election.

For Cooper and Whatley, this race has been marked by attack advertisements on one another paid for by political action committees, campaign stops with President Donald Trump and large sums of money filtering into the race. In total Cooper received $49,585,341.29 in donations, while Whatley received $13,668,467.53, according to the Federal Election Commission.

In the primary elections, Cooper decidedly won the Democratic nomination with 92% of the vote, while Whatley beat his Republican competitors with 65% of the vote.

Cooper ran on a platform promising to lower costs of food and groceries, make healthcare affordable and lower housing costs.

"We knew that there were too many people in North Carolina, the middle class, that we had not just converted," Cooper said after the victory. "We knew that the Washington, D.C. insiders and the richest Americans were getting unimaginable wealth at our expense. And we knew that the chaos and corruption in Washington were hurting our people. Today, you said, this has to stop."

Meanwhile, Whatley ran on the platform of enacting the Trump agenda into the U.S. Senate, fighting illegal immigration and focusing on Hurricane Helene recovery.

> "WE KNEW THAT THE WASHINGTON, D.C. INSIDERS AND THE RICHEST AMERICANS WERE GETTING UNIMAGINABLE WEALTH AT OUR EXPENSE.
>
> **ROY COOPER**
> U.S. SENATOR-ELECT

Cooper has never lost an election in his political career.

He served in the North Carolina House of Representatives, as North Carolina's attorney general and as North Carolina's governor for eight years. As governor, Cooper expanded Medicaid to 600,000 North Carolinians, increased teacher pay by 19% and passed an energy bill that encouraged energy companies to cut carbon emissions.

His time as governor was also marked by disagreements with the Republican majority in the state house. Cooper vetoed 104 bills that came across his desk and the Republican majority government overturned 52 of those vetoes.

Cooper's victory came amid him pulling away in the final weeks of the campaign, leading in most polls by at least eight points. Republican Senate Political Action Committee also diverted funds they were planning to spend on behalf of Whatley to other races they believed were more competitive. Whatley's defeat also marks a defeat for President Trump, who endorsed him in March.

Cooper's win adds to Democrats gaining control of the Senate. Democrats now have 51 seats in the Senate compared to Republicans who have 39 seats, according to NBC News.

The race was called by AP News, early in the evening at around 8:30 p.m.

Governor Josh Stein spoke at Roy Cooper's watch party celebrating the win of whom he calls his friend.

"He has delivered for the people," Stein said during the celebration.

Whatley made his first appearance of the night after the election had been called, thanking President Trump, his family, his team and his voters for their support during the campaign.

"While results today are not what we've been working for, my commitment to you and this great state remain as strong as ever," Whatley said in his closing speech at a watch party in Gastonia. "I will never stop fighting for North Carolina."

For Cooper, the work starts now.

"I'm not going to Washington to be something," Cooper said. I'm going to Washington to do something."

Kathan Gandhi, Lilly Molina, Trista Panagakos and Miles Hayford contributed to the reporting of this story.



ETHAN WU | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Many attendees wore red and blue attire during Michael Whatley's election night watch party in Gastonia on Nov. 3.

Democrats win in 12 Alamance County races, six GOP incumbents lose



VENUS SOTO CASTANEDA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Attendees of the Alamance County Democratic Party's election night watch party cheer while listening to poll results Nov. 3.

Candidate-elects all across the county are celebrating wins

Elon News Network

Blue flooded the Alamance County election results page as Democrats won in 12 races, resulting in six Republican incumbent upsets.

Alamance County saw a major shift in the political landscape for the midterm elections that now will change the make-up of local government. Some seats held previously by longtime Republicans will now see Democrats take office. For example, Democrats secured all three open seats on the Alamance County Board of Commissioners. The county commissioners now transitions from a 5-0 Republican majority to a 3-2 Democratic majority.

Democratic wins extend beyond local government, but also to statewide races.

Federal races

Democratic candidate Richard Ojeda clinched a narrow victory over incumbent Republican Richard Hudson for North Carolina's ninth congressional district for the U.S. House of Representatives.

On Nov. 3 Ojeda posted on his Instagram account, "NC-09 , say Hi to your next congressman, Major Retired Richard Ojeda!!!!! P.S. WE UNSEATED THE NRCC CHAIR!!!!!"

Hudson, the fifth highest House Republican has served as a representative since 2013 and is the current chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee.

Votes from counties such as Alamance, Chatham, Cumberland, Guilford, Hoke, Moore and Randolph were cast in the race.

Local races

Democrats Ramona Allen and Sean Ewing won the Alamance County Board of Commissioners seats against Republican incumbents Steve Carter and Kelly Allen.

An Alamance County resident for 60 years, Ramona Allen said she is an active member of the community. She has worked with the police department, as a pastor and as a volunteer with the homeless population of Alamance County.

After her win, Allen said she still doesn't know how to feel yet.

"I'm in awe," Allen said. "It's so surreal to win this race and then be the first Black woman county commissioner."

Ewing, a Mebane City Council member, said he is looking forward to working alongside Allen.

> I'M IN AWE. IT'S SO SURREAL TO WIN THIS RACE AND THEN BE THE FIRST BLACK WOMAN COUNTY COMMISSIONER.
>
> **RAMONA ALLEN**
> COUNTY COMMISSIONER-ELECT

"It's a lot going through my head right now," Ewing said.

Ewing said he kept his eyes on the election results until all the votes were counted and tallied. He said that was his celebration.

Kourtney J. Royster also won a seat on the Alamance County Board of Commissioners in a special election against Republican incumbent Samuel Powell, winning 52.99% of the vote.

After his win, he told Elon News Network he hopes to "hit the ground running" and get "as much as possible done" in as little time as possible.

With three new commissioners, Royster said he has allies, including Ramona Allen, who will be helpful to his goals in accordance with his policies in the long run.

Elsewhere in the county, Stephanie Long Enoch, Samira Khan and Kyle Ward secured seats on the Alamance-Burlington School System Board of Education.

First-time candidate Samira Khan is the first Pakistani-Muslim member elected to a seat.

Seven candidates were running for three open seats on the board.

Enoch secured 18.28% of the vote, Khan secured 16.08% and Ward secured 15.14%.

The two current board members on the ballot, Charles Parker and Eric Hall, both lost their bids with 12.75% and 8.67% of the vote, respectively.

In one of the night's biggest upsets, unaffiliated candidate Shannon Long won his campaign for Alamance County Sheriff, defeating longtime Republican incumbent Terry Johnson.

Johnson has served as Alamance County Sheriff for 23 years and has 53 total years in law enforcement.

Long has served in the sheriff's office in patrol, detention and as a school resource officer.

In the state legislature, incumbent Republican Amy Galey defeated Democratic candidate Southey Blanton in their race to represent District 25 in the North Carolina State Senate.

> OUR GOAL IS TO ACTUALLY LEARN COLLABORATIVELY WITH THE LOCAL ELECTIVE LEADERS.
>
> **IAN BALTUTIS**
> NC HOUSE REPRESENTATIVE-ELECT

Galey also currently serves as Senate Majority Whip, which involves organizing members and helping advance legislation through the Senate.

The district includes Alamance and Randolph.

In the State House, Democratic candidate Ian Baltutis won the North Carolina House of Representatives seat District 63 against his Republican opponent Ryan Moffitt, winning with 50.36% of the vote.

District 63 includes Elon and parts of Burlington. The area encapsulates 87,116 citizens, according to Ballotpedia.

Baltutis previously served as mayor of Burlington for three terms and said he wants to be responsive to the needs of the community.

"Our goal is to actually learn collaboratively with the local elective leaders. Mayors, county commissioners and school board members to push forward the values that Alamance County has," Baltutis said.

Baltutis said he is feeling good about his campaign's success but says that it is closer than he would've liked. Democratic candidate LeVon Barnes won the North Carolina House of Representatives District 64 seat against Republican incumbent Dennis Riddell with 52.73% of the vote. District 64 includes Graham, Haw River, and parts of Burlington and Mebane. The area encapsulates 87,116 citizens, according to Ballotpedia.

Barnes is a public school teacher who describes himself as a husband, father and educator of 24 years. He first ran for District 64 in 2024. Barnes and Baltutis' wins flip two Republican-controlled seats.

In the judicial races, Democrat John Arrowood won the NC Court of Appeals Judge Seat 1 against Republican Michael Bryne. Democrat Tobias Hampson won the NC Court of Appeals Judge Seat 2 against Republican George Cooper Bell. Democrat Christine Marie Walczyk won the NC Court of Appeals Judge Seat 3 against Republican Craig Collins.

Doug Green, Democratic incumbent for North Carolina Superior Court Judge District 17 Seat 1, won his reelection campaign. Craig Turner also won his campaign to North Carolina Superior Court District 17. He ran as a Republican for Seat 2. Republican Bryan Ray won his reelection bid to the first seat in District 17 of North Carolina's District Court.

In another local race, incumbent Ricky Reid and Willie Holliday secured the two open seats for the Alamance Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor. As supervisors in Alamance County, they will primarily support rural and private landowners.

Scott Wells Drorbaugh won the District Attorney seat in District 17 with 51.7% of the vote against Republican incumbent Sean Boone.

Republican candidate Kristie Miller Culler won the Alamance County Clerk of Superior Court's race after running unopposed.

Changing demographics and voter access shape North Carolina's political landscape

Community leaders point to growing political engagement among minority, younger voters

Mia Torres
Producer of ENN On Air

As North Carolina voters head to the polls, changing demographics, increased political engagement and barriers to voting access are shaping conversations about representation across the state.

From growing participation among Black voters to younger generations becoming more politically engaged, community leaders say the state's electorate is changing.

Dreama Caldwell, executive co-director of progressive advocacy group Down Home North Carolina, an organization that builds political power among working-class communities, said she has witnessed those changes firsthand in Alamance County, where she grew up.

Caldwell said countywide political representation has been historically dominated by Republicans, leaving limited opportunities for other communities to have a voice in local government.

"Just to see the political landscape change in Alamance County has been amazing," Caldwell said. "It was just typically a county where, if you weren't Republican, you oftentimes did not have representation at all for a very long time on countywide seats."

Caldwell said she began noticing increased political engagement around 2020, when she ran for Alamance County Board of Commissioners and lost. Since then, she said she has seen greater representation across race, age and geographic communities, including residents from the eastern part of the county.

She said some of the growth is because of political education, community organizing and candidates coming directly from the communities they hope to represent.

According to the North Carolina State Board of Elections, Alamance County had 122,105 registered voters as of Nov. 3, 2026. Of those, 76,808 were registered as white and 25,293 as Black. The state also reported 8,321 registered Hispanic voters in the county, a separate ethnicity classification that can overlap with racial categories.

Caldwell said participation among minority voters, particularly Black voters, has increased. According to NCSBE, 23,489 Black voters were registered in the 2022 midterm election compared to 25,293 now. She believes voters are more likely to participate when they see candidates who reflect their communities and understand their concerns.

"I think also what has happened is the candidates are coming directly from the community, and so that also is driving increased participation in those races," Caldwell said.



KATHAN GANDHI | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Voters enter the Mayco Bigelow Community Center to cast their ballot Nov. 3 in Burlington.

Sailor Jones, state director of Common Cause North Carolina, a nonprofit focused on protecting voting rights and strengthening democracy, said similar changes are happening statewide.

"Black and brown communities are making their voices heard like never before in North Carolina," Jones said.

However, statewide election data show differences in turnout between demographic groups remain significant.

During the 2024 general election, 78.2% of registered white voters cast ballots, compared with 66% of Black voters. Hispanic or Latino voters had a turnout rate of 56.2%, according to the State Board of Elections.

Despite those differences, Jones said she has seen strong interest among younger voters and minority communities during the current election cycle. Rising gas prices, housing costs, access to healthcare and affordability are also motivating people to become more involved.

Election type also influences participation. North Carolina recorded a 73.73% turnout rate in the 2024 general election, compared with 51.14% during the 2022 midterm election.

Jones said early voting participation in Alamance County has been particularly strong this year.

In North Carolina as of Oct. 31, 35.7% of registered voters cast their ballots compared with 29% during the 2022 midterm election.

Caldwell said increased political awareness has also brought more attention to municipal and countywide races, as candidates connect local issues to residents' everyday lives.

However, increased participation does not mean every North Carolinian has equal access to the ballot.

Caldwell said rural communities can face challenges including limited transportation, long distances to polling locations and having to take time away from work. Early voting and mail-in ballots can help address some of those obstacles.

The removal of Sunday voting in North Carolina has created another potential barrier for voters who rely on weekend voting opportunities, particularly those with limited flexibility during the workweek.

Jones identified other barriers, including voter identification requirements, restrictions affecting absentee voting and partisan redistricting. He said gerrymandering can limit representation by dividing communities or grouping voters into districts in ways that influence election outcomes.

Both Caldwell and Jones emphasized the importance of ensuring eligible voters can participate without unnecessary obstacles.

For Caldwell, the changing political landscape in Alamance County reflects the importance of giving more communities an opportunity to participate in decisions that affect them.

As North Carolina's electorate continues to change, voter participation will play an important role in determining the state's political future.

"Every North Carolinian deserves to have their vote counted," Caldwell said.

Voter turnout among demographic groups in 2024 election in North Carolina

The chart shows the percentage of North Carolina voters in different demographic groups that turned out to vote in the 2024 election.



DATA VISUALIZATION BY MILES HAYFORD

Data from the North Carolina Board of Elections

Identity groups on campus encourage student voting

Different identity-centered organizations promote civic engagement

Sara Alfonzo Betancourt
Elon News Network

Identity groups across Elon University's campus are getting involved with civic engagement this election season, whether through hosting on-campus events, or sharing voting resources to help students hit the polls for the midterms.

Junior Sydni Mebane, vice president of community outreach and activism for the Black Student Union on campus, said she had an interest in policy and politics before coming to Elon, becoming a political science major with an interest in civic engagement within the undergraduate population.

BSU recently hosted a joint event with Elon Votes!, a civic engagement organization on campus. Members in the Community Outreach and Activism committee were at a table set up in Moseley Center to help students register to vote.

Mebane said part of her job as vice president is to make sure students have access to voting resources and accurate information when voting.

"Part of my job as vice president is just to send out that information about who's on the ballot, what they stand for, and giving students those resources so that if they do decide to go to South Campus to go vote, they can do so with the correct information in mind and make good choices as far as how their decisions on the ballot are going to affect them," Mebane said.

Mebane also emphasized the importance of unbiased media and information when it comes to voting, saying that having a more objective and educated standpoint for both sides allows for more engagement and conversation among students.

Luis Garay, director of the Gender and LGBTQIA Center, has been at Elon for the past seven years.

> "EVERYTHING FROM YOUR MAYOR TO WHO IS REPRESENTING YOU AT THE STATE LEVEL. SO MANY OF THOSE THINGS REALLY IMPACT THE LIVES OF MINORITIZED PEOPLE.
>
> **LUIS GARAY**
> DIRECTOR OF GLC AT ELON

They highlighted the importance of being aware of what is available around campus and paying attention to local elections.

"Everything from your major to who is representing you at the state level," Garay said. "So many of those things really impact the lives of minoritized people and ensuring that the people that you want to vote for are representing your beliefs and are also there to make change as they see fit, but also are representing the communities that you are passionate about as a voter."

Garay also stressed how critical voting guides are, recommending looking into organizations that have condensed voting resources and information about candidates into one hub that can be easier to digest and that voters can prepare to go to the polls with.

The GLC did not host any civic engagement or voting related events so far this year, but they are open to feedback from students.

When politics meets the bench: The debate over judicial elections

What it means when judges run under a political party

Lilly Molina
Elon News Network

Republican. Democrat. These are two political parties voters are familiar with on the ballot.

But when those labels appear next to the names of judicial candidates, it can raise some questions: Should politics influence who sits on the bench?

In 2016, the North Carolina General Assembly reinstated partisan labels to judicial candidates for the 2018 races. Judicial races were previously partisan up until 2004. The judicial races were then nonpartisan from 2004-2016.

"It's been a really interesting kind of rocky history of partisan identity in elections," said Allyson Yankle, an assistant professor of political science at Catawba College.

Yankle studies judicial decisions at Catawba. She said she thinks judges running in partisan elections might not lead to great outcomes.

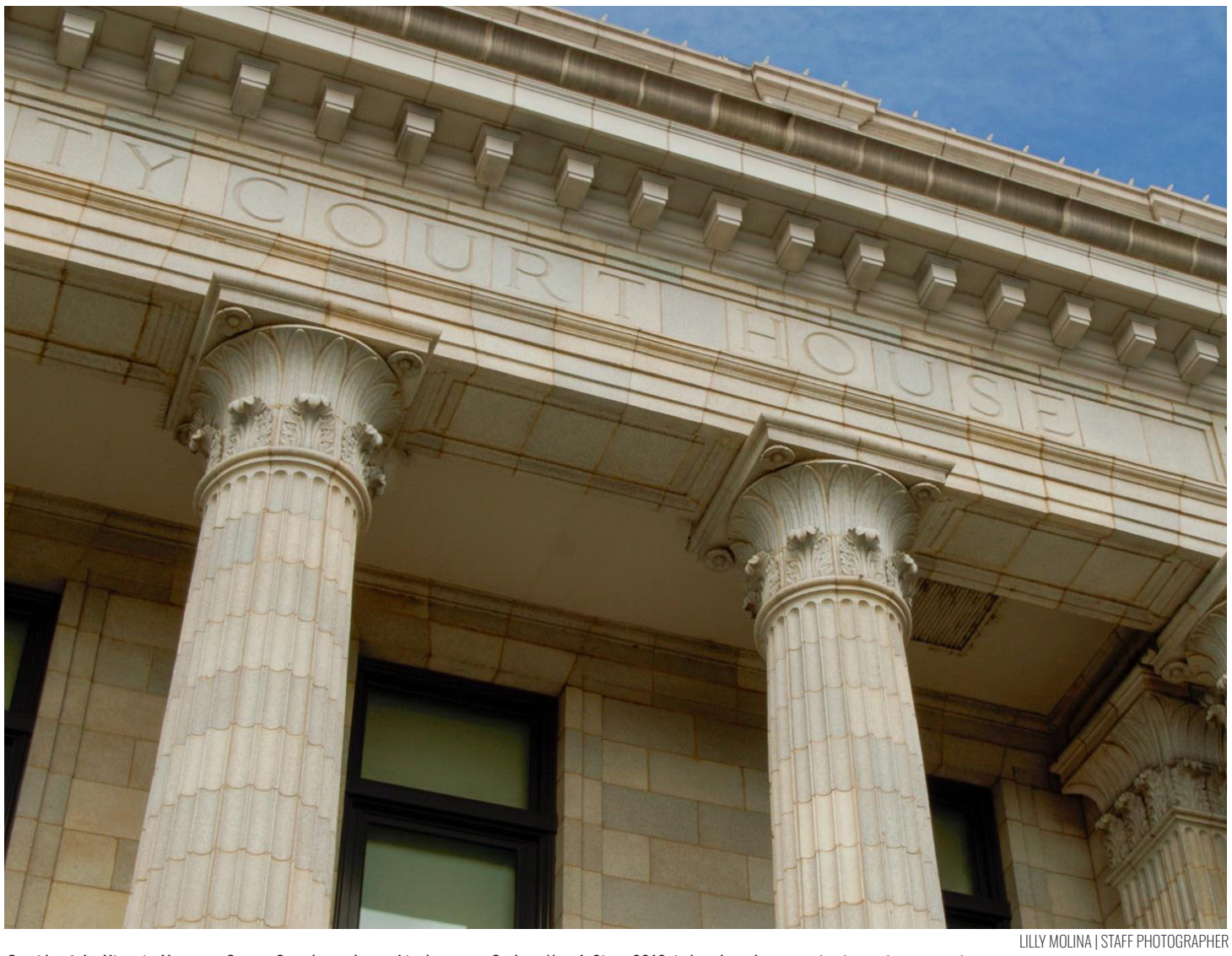
"They are becoming rapidly expensive, especially at the state Supreme Court level, and we know that they have implications for decision making by the judges and justices on the court, especially when you think about it, you have to raise that money somehow," Yankle said. "You have to get it from donors."

Republican candidate for the North Carolina Court of Appeals George Cooper Bell questions judges' ability to make impartial decisions when they receive money from donors.

Bell lost the race of NC Court of Appeals Seat 2. He had a total of $125,848 in contributions, including some from various Republican-leaning organizations. However, he said his judicial philosophy runs on fairness and treating every person that appears in court equally.

North Carolina State University professor of political science Elizabeth Lane said that judges don't want to consider themselves partisan.

"Judges don't like that," Lane said. "They don't like a partisan label. They don't like an ideological label, because that mixes them with politicians. And judges view themselves as distinct from politicians in that they are not simply just politicians in robes."



LILLY MOLINA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Outside of the Historic Alamance County Courthouse located in downtown Graham Nov. 1. Since 2016, judges have been running in partisan campaigns.

Lane said judges may not try to be political when it comes to decision making, but they may have policy preferences.

"Justices and judges, they're people too," Lane said. "Everything that makes them a human being, their lived experiences and the values and beliefs, that they hold that shapes their decision making."

While having an 'R' or a 'D' next to a judge's name does raise some concerns, Lane said there could be benefits.

"I would say one positive is that even if people don't do their due diligence and doing research on all the candidates, they have some information to go off of while they're in the booth voting," Lane said.

Lane said having the party label next to their name adds a bit of extra information for down ballot races.

"People don't have information, and so we call that ballot roll off, where they simply just stop voting," Lane said. "So it's like yes, they showed up to vote, but they didn't fill out their entire ballot."

However, Bell said seeing the 'R' or 'D' on the ballot just makes voters less likely to do research on judges.

"It's misleading in a way in that it takes away the need for that voter to have that intellectual curiosity of, 'Oh, this is a nonpartisan race,'" Bell said. "'I need to do a little bit more research about this judge, because I don't know what his party is.'"

Bell said he ran as a judge both in a partisan race in 2018 and nonpartisan race in 2016 before the law was reinstated. He said he remembers having more fruitful conversations with voters when running nonpartisan in 2016.

"People would ask about my race, and I'd say it's nonpartisan, and then that would immediately open up the conversation of 'Okay, well, tell me about your credentials,'" Bell said. "'Tell me about your experience. Tell me who you are.'"

Lane, Yankle and Bell said they encourage people to do research on judicial candidates regardless of what political party they are affiliated with.

"I don't necessarily know if since the blind has been pulled back that we can necessarily go back to seeing them as non-political actors," Yankle said.

After 20 years, poll worker continues welcoming voters

Longtime poll worker enjoys helping voters feel comfortable, seeing first-time voters participate

Mia Torres
Producer of ENN On Air

For more than two decades, Debbie Riggs has helped voters navigate the election process. She said one of the most rewarding parts of the job has remained the same: making people feel welcome.

What initially caught her attention was watching another poll worker greet voters during a busy presidential election when long lines stretched through the polling location.

"She was just coming up and down and going, 'It's just a few more minutes,' just being cheery, and I just fell in love with it," Riggs said.

During her first election as a poll worker, Riggs said she enjoyed talking with voters and helping them feel more comfortable during the voting process. That initial experience motivated her to get involved, and she has continued working elections ever since.

Riggs serves as a site coordinator. Her responsibilities begin before voters arrive, when she helps prepare the South Gym polling location on Elon University's campus and makes sure the computers and other equipment are ready for the day.

Once voters begin arriving, Riggs works on the computer side of the process, helping people get checked in and addressing any concerns.

As a site coordinator, some of her tasks include ensuring the voting process is completed correctly, verifying voter information and making sure each person is at the correct polling location.

Although the work involves several steps, Riggs said those procedures are important to maintaining an accurate election process.

"Making sure that the voter understands we're doing everything correctly has really changed the process," Riggs said. "When we make sure it's the right name, when we make sure it's the right address, when we see the ID, it just makes it full circle."

Riggs said one of her favorite parts of working during an election is seeing first-time voters participate. She enjoys watching their excitement as they register and prepare to cast their ballots.



LILLY MOLINA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Debbie Riggs smiles at the camera outside Elon University's South Gym polling location as voters enter and exit the polls.

"You have to ask a lot of questions, have to have proof of residence and whatnot," Riggs said. "And if I can make all that happen, and see the smile on their face, it means the world."

While poll workers are often mistaken for volunteers, Riggs clarified that they are paid for their work. However, she said her motivation for returning to the polls comes from truly enjoying the experience and helping voters.

Riggs said creating a welcoming environment is an important part of the job, particularly during an election season when political disagreements can make voting feel intimidating. For Riggs, that means treating every voter with the same level of kindness, regardless of their political views.

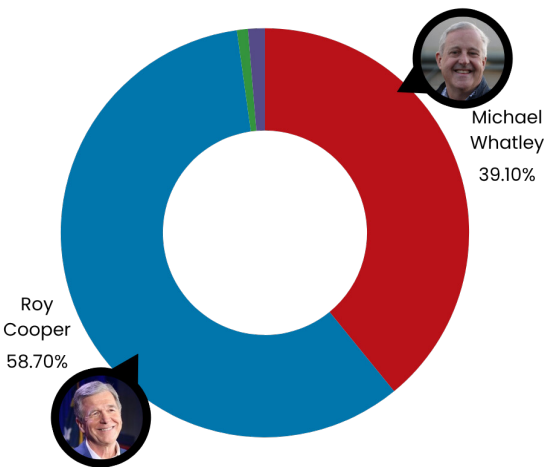
"Not everybody gets a smile every day, and I just think that's important," Riggs said. "I'd rather just be able to say, 'Hey, have a good day,' and it doesn't matter how you vote."

After more than 20 years of working elections, Riggs said those small interactions continue to make the experience meaningful. Whether she is answering questions, helping someone register or greeting voters as they arrive, she said she hopes everyone who enters the polling location feels comfortable participating in the democratic process.

NORTH CAROLINA ELECTION RESULTS

For detailed results visit Elonnewsnetwork.com

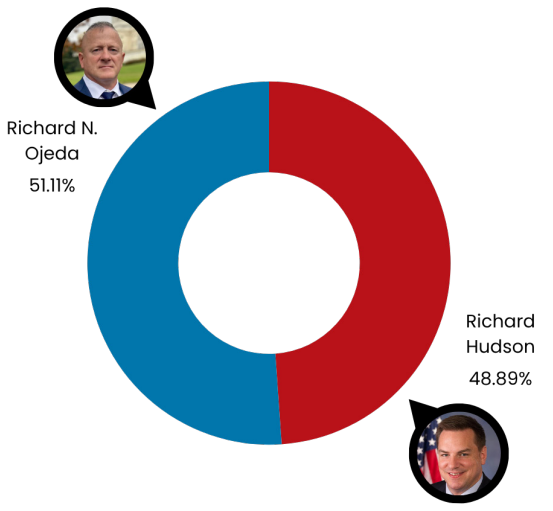
US Senate



Roy Cooper

Defeats Michael Whatley, Shannon W. Bray and Michael Dublin

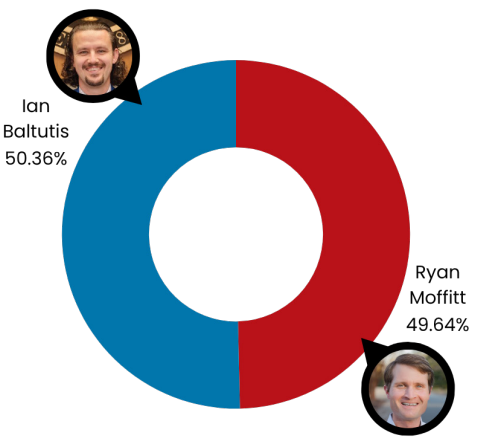
US House District 9



Richard N. Ojeda II

Defeats Richard Hudson

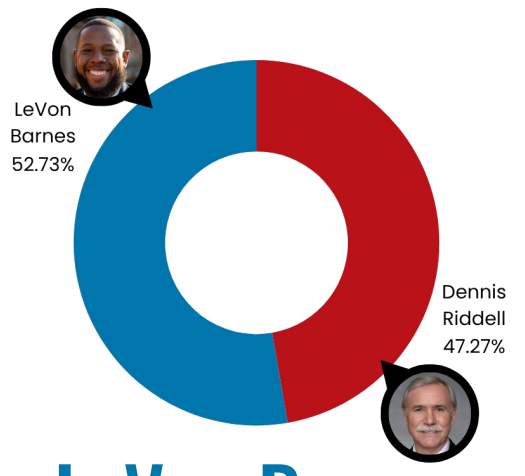
NC House of Representatives District 63



Ian Baltutis

Defeats Ryan Moffitt

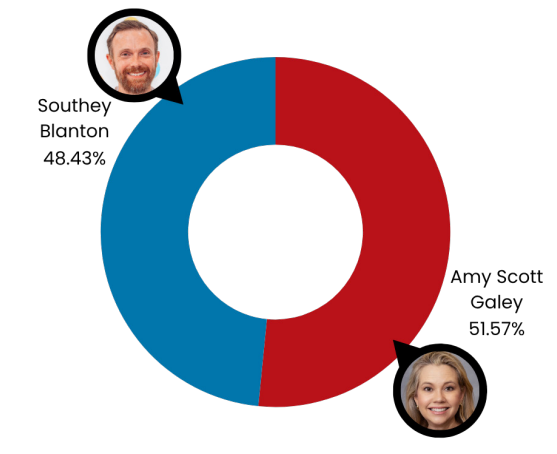
NC House of Representatives District 64



LeVon Barnes

Defeats Dennis Riddell

NC State Senate District 25



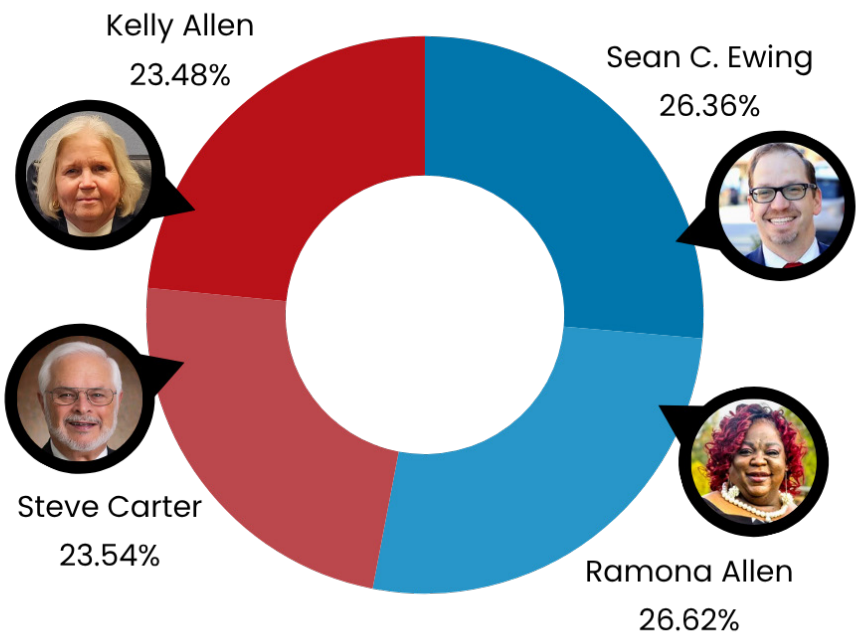
Amy Scott Galey

Defeats Southey Blanton

NORTH CAROLINA ELECTION RESULTS

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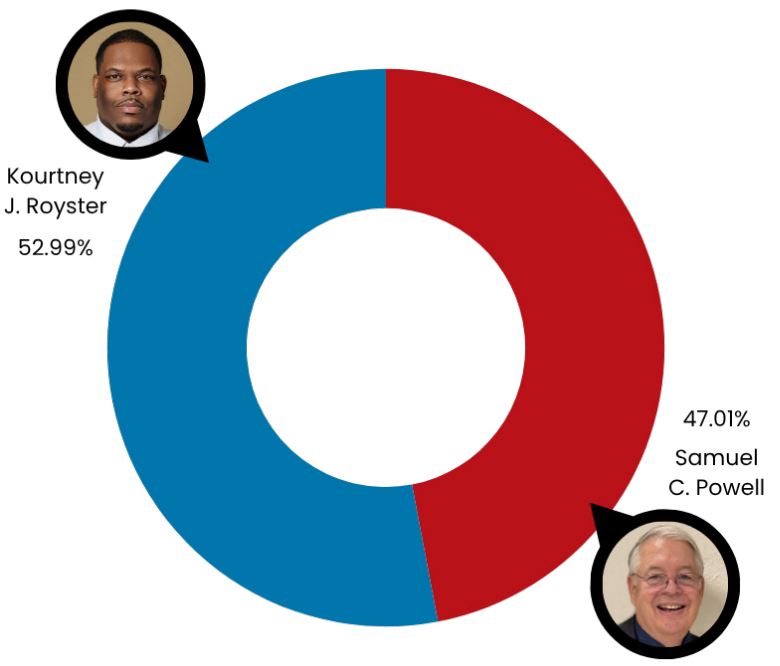
Alamance County Board of Commissioners



Ramona Allen & Sean C. Ewing

Defeats Kelly Allen & Steve Carter

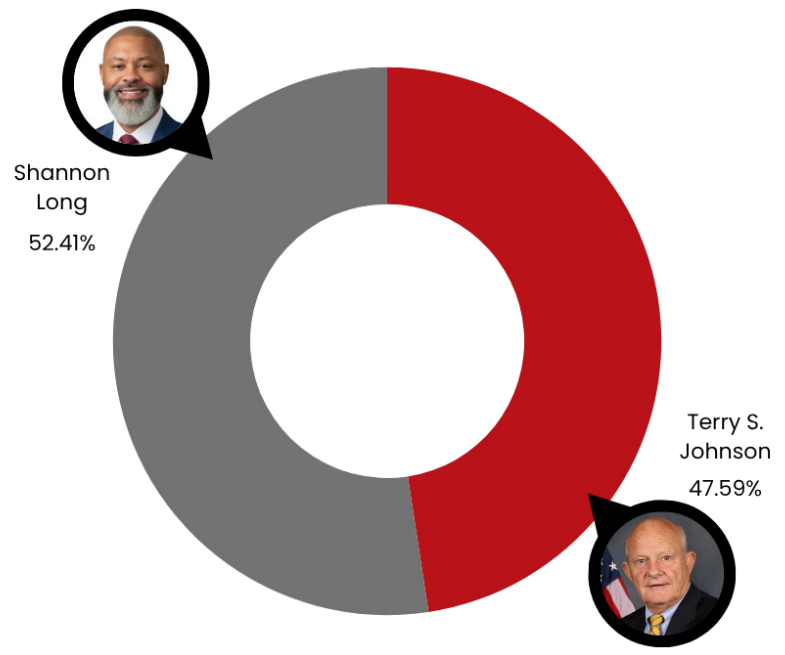
Alamance County Board of Commissioners (special election)



Kourtney J. Royster

Defeats Samuel C. Powell

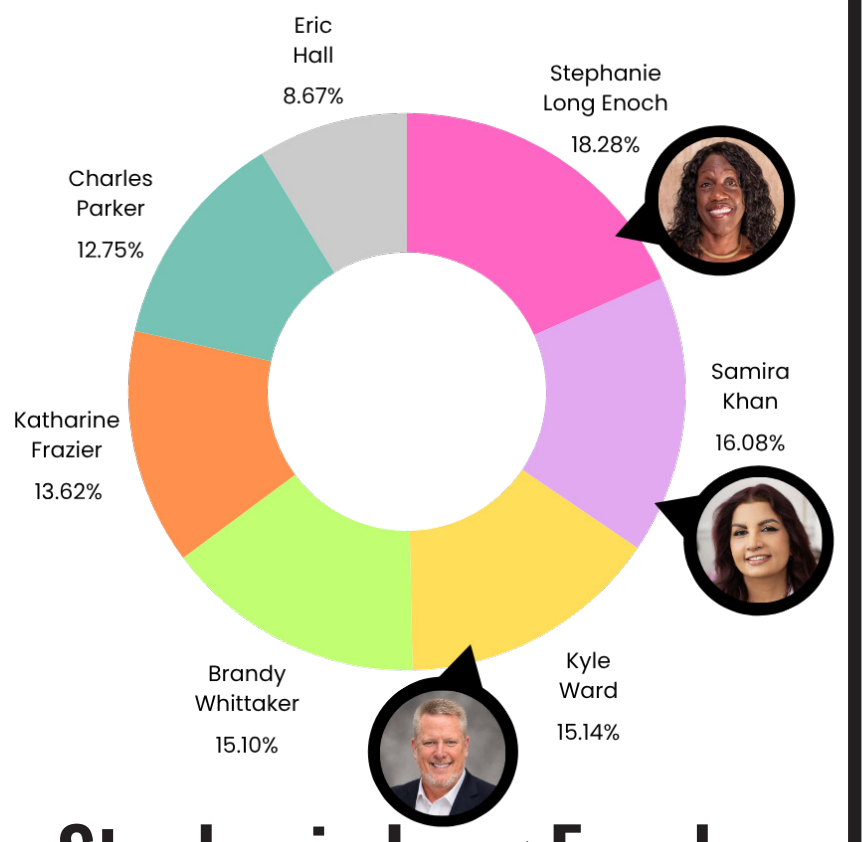
Alamance County Sheriff



Shannon Long

Defeats Terry S. Johnson

Alamance-Burlington Board of Education



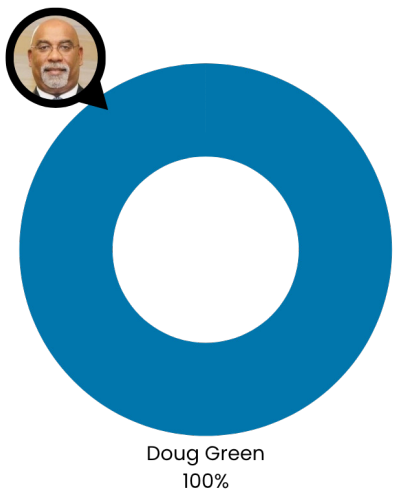
Stephanie Long Enoch, Samira Khan & Kyle Ward

Defeats Brandy Whittaker, Katharine Frazier, Charles Parker & Eric Hall

NORTH CAROLINA ELECTION RESULTS

For detailed results visit Elonnewsnetwork.com

NC Superior Court Judge District 17 Seat 01



Doug Green

Wins Unopposed

NC Superior Court Judge District 17 Seat 02



Craig Turner

Wins Unopposed

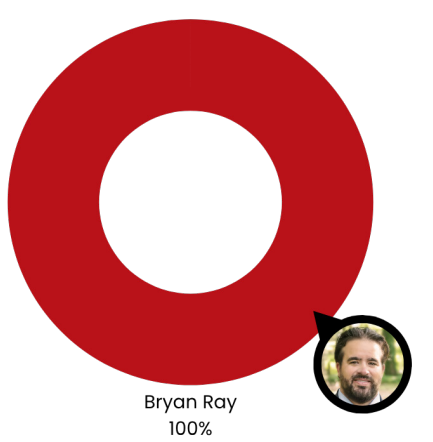
Clerk of Superior Court



Kristie Miller Culler

Wins Unopposed

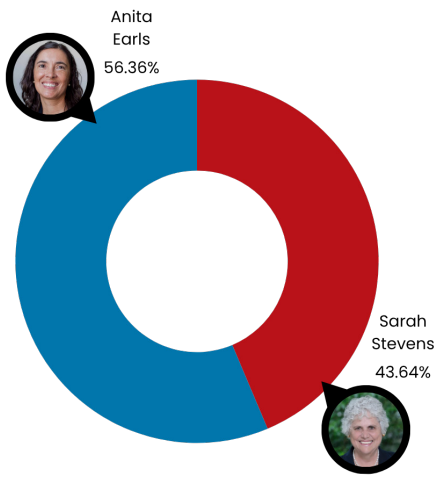
NC District Court Judge District 17 Seat 01



Bryan Ray

Wins Unopposed

NC Supreme Court Justice Seat 1



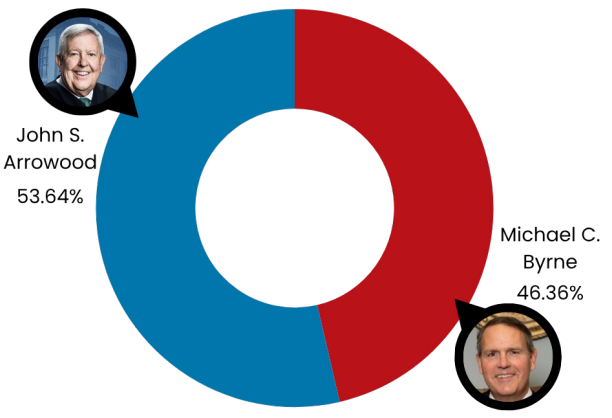
Anita Earls

Defeats Sarah Stevens

NORTH CAROLINA ELECTION RESULTS

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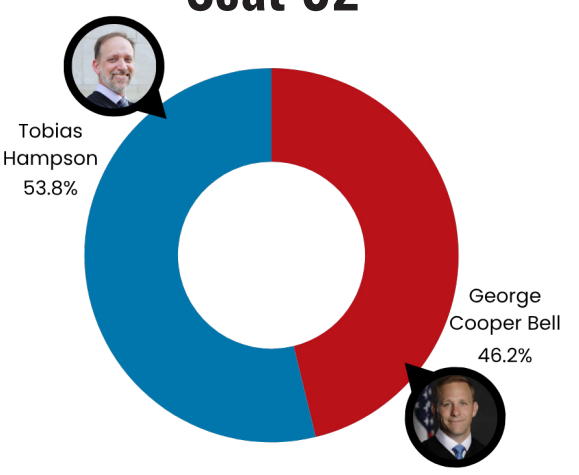
NC Court of Appeals Judge Seat 01



John S. Arrowood

Defeats Michael C. Byrne

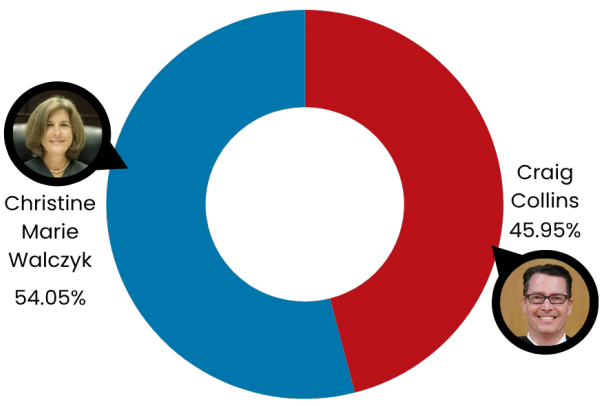
NC Court of Appeals Judge Seat 02



Tobias Hampson

Defeats George Cooper Bell

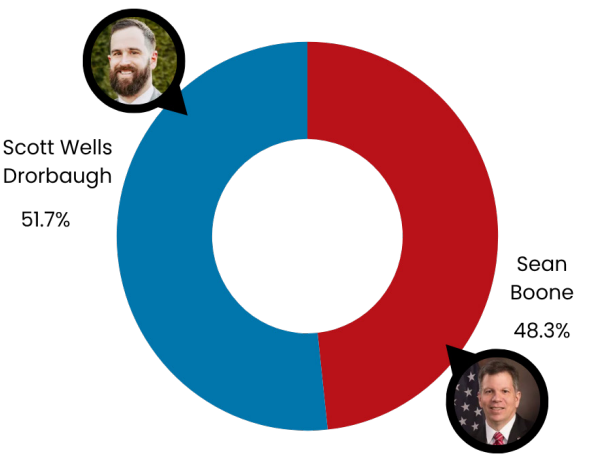
NC Court of Appeals Judge Seat 03



Christine Marie Walczyk

Defeats Craig Collins

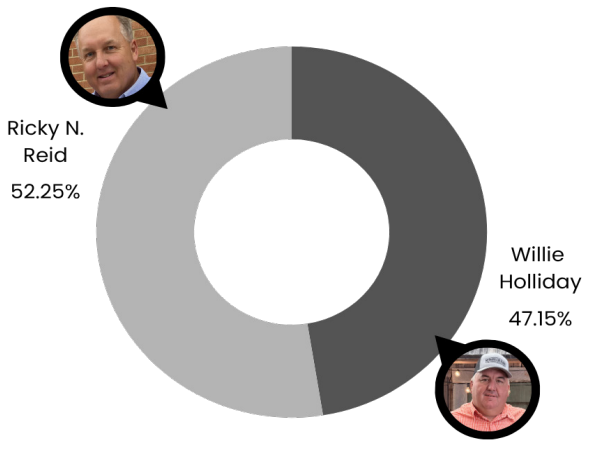
District of Attorney District 17



Scott Wells Drorbaugh

Defeats Sean Boone

Soil & Water Conservation District Supervisor



Ricky N. Reid & Willie Holliday