

# What to know about our 2024 endorsements

BY PETER ST. ONGE

Of all the content our opinion team produces each year, we get the most interest — and the most questions — about political endorsements. Are we doing them? Why are we doing them? Are we telling you how to vote? Why should you care?

Good questions, all. Early voting begins Oct. 17 in North Carolina, so let's get the first question out of the way. Yes, the combined editorial boards of the Charlotte Observer and News & Observer of Raleigh are endorsing candidates in the general election. The recommendations will begin Tuesday online and in print Wednesday. You can find all of them on our main opinion pages online in Charlotte, Raleigh and Durham. We'll also provide a one-stop, regularly updating story that contains links to every endorsement we make.

Why are we doing them? We're proud each day and each week to have a voice in conversations important to our communities. Few of those conversations are as important as debating who represents us in local, state and national offices. Each year, subscribers read our endorsements more than anything else we publish.

As with our editorials and columns, we put a lot of work and thought into them. In each race we pursue, members of the editorial board conduct extensive research and offer candidates the opportunity to answer our questions. We also talk to others who know and have worked with the candidates. We then discuss what we've learned as a board and make recommendations. We're not telling you what to think or how you should vote. We're telling you what we think as the Observer's and News and Observer's editorial board.

A little about us: In 2019, the boards of The Charlotte Observer and News & Observer of Raleigh joined forces to

provide fuller opinion content to our readers. I'm joined on the combined board by deputy Opinion editors Ned Barnett in Raleigh and Paige Masten in Charlotte, along with Observer Executive Editor Rana Cash, interim News & Observer Executive Editor Thad Ogburn, writer Barry Saunders and op-ed editor David Travis Bland.

As with editorials on local issues, members of the board in Charlotte do not participate in endorsements of Triangle-specific races, or vice versa. The full board does discuss and recommend candidates for statewide races, as well as the U.S. House races on your ballot this year.

We are selective in our endorsements, which means we will make recommendations in competitive and notable races, but not all races. We weigh a lot of factors in those endorsements, including some that go beyond individual races to the makeup of the larger body the candidates want to join. We generally don't want any institution — whether that's a city council, state Senate or Supreme Court — to have such a majority that the minority is powerless.

We'll also continue to consider whether a candidate believes the 2020 presidential election was stolen, as many Republicans disturbingly do. It's not true, and it threatens the integrity of our election and the roots of our democracy. These claims remain relevant to North Carolina voters, as many 2024 candidates may be casting votes on state and national election measures.

Finally: No, we're not predicting winners. We're telling you which candidates we think deserve your consideration. We hope our thoughts and recommendations are helpful. Mostly, we hope you care enough about the election that you participate, too. Please vote.

*Peter St. Onge is Opinion editor at the Charlotte Observer, News & Observer in Raleigh and Durham Herald Sun.*



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A fifth-grade class sets up their iPads during the first day of school at Lake Norman Charter Middle School in Huntersville on Aug. 10, 2023.

## NC's vouchers for all may hurt charter schools

BY NED BARNETT

In their zeal to expand school choice in North Carolina, Republican state lawmakers may be sabotaging their own efforts.

The Republican-controlled General Assembly has approved a massive expansion of school vouchers known as the Opportunity Scholarship Program. Originally intended to give low-income families a choice beyond their district public school, the program would offer tax dollars to families of all income levels to help with private school tuition, including to those families that already have children in private schools.

Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper vetoed the legislation that offers vouchers for all, but the veto is likely to be overridden.

By offering private school vouchers to all families, the Republicans may undercut their first choice for school choice — charter schools. One concern is that the wider availability of vouchers may prompt parents to remove their children from charter schools to attend private schools. Another is that some charter schools may go private

to avoid the accountability requirements that apply to them as public schools.

Chris Heagarty, chair of the Wake County Board of Education, pointed to vouchers' threat to charter schools during a recent news conference where he and other Wake school officials opposed the expansion of the voucher program.

"If you think about the parents that have looked for an alternative to our traditional school systems and have enrolled in charters, how many of them will then go to private schools once these vouchers are available?" Heagarty asked. "What sort of destabilization will you see in some of these programs that have been operational for decades and produced good results?"

Public schools advocates say charter schools should ally with traditional public schools to oppose giving more public dollars to private schools. Heather Koons, communications director for the group Public Schools First NC, said, "I wonder when the charter school folks are going to start sounding the alarm."

So far, they aren't. That may be because charter school leaders, like Repub-

lican state lawmakers, are so committed to school choice that they are unwilling to criticize a school choice initiative that has gone too far.

Charter school leaders say vouchers are not a threat to their schools.

"Data shows that over the last five years, charter school enrollment continues to rise even in states with robust private school choice programs," said Starlee Coleman, president and CEO of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. "In fact, public charter schools are the only segment of public schooling that continues to see enrollment growth."

That is the situation now, but universal vouchers are still new. Enrollment and funding erosion may hit charter schools as more parents become familiar with the subsidies available to attend private schools.

Joshua Cowen is a professor of education policy at Michigan State University and author of the book "The Privateers: How Billionaires Created a Culture War and Sold School Vouchers."

He told me vouchers are a threat to all public schools — but particularly charter schools.

"The charter school movement has become sort of an orphan in this space," he said. "They are certainly caught in the middle, for sure, and the data would say they are going to lose kids."

Cowen said parents of charter school students will be more inclined to use vouchers because they have already experimented with an alternative to a traditional public school.

"The best market for those who might be considering a move are the charter kids. They've already made a move," he said.

Charter schools, when limited in number, can and have provided valuable alternatives to traditional public schools. But the reckless move by Republican lawmakers to spend hundreds of millions of tax dollars on private school tuition will diminish that sound and innovative alternative.

Charter schools and district schools are in the same boat. They should join to stop a voucher expansion that could sink them both.

*Associate opinion editor Ned Barnett can be reached at 919-404-7583, or nbarnett@newsobserver.com*

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Price gouging is occurring daily on Interstate 77 toll lanes. I-77 Mobility Partners should rename their "dynamic pricing" to "opportunistic pricing." It is just another unintended consequence of this plan's debacle. With I-40 west shut down for maybe a year, the traffic on I-77 has the southbound lanes bumper to bumper. Residents of Mooresville, Davidson, Cornelius and Huntersville are facing a decision to spend time staring at brake lights, or for the next year, pay a ridiculous amount of money to use the toll lanes where the it can cost \$4.90 to travel two exits. Can anyone in government get us some relief?

*Carl Brooks, Cornelius*

#### Young voters

Millennials and Gen Z together will form the

largest and most diverse voting bloc in history this year, representing nearly one-fifth of voters. With over 40 million Gen Z voters, including 8 million newly eligible since 2022, our collective power is immense. In North Carolina, people aged 18-35 make up nearly a quarter of the electorate. Our generations face significant challenges — threats to reproductive rights, an urgent climate crisis and an economic system that often feels stacked against us. Young people must make their voices heard this November. We hold the power to create lasting change.

*Brennan Steele, Charlotte*

#### Trump lies

My heart is heavy over the unimaginable suffering

in western NC. Hundreds of people dead and still missing. Thousands who have lost everything. We have only begun to grasp the scope of this event that will reverberate through our lives and communities for years. I am a long-time unaffiliated voter. It is despicable when politicians use tragedy to sow division, confusion, and conspiracy theories. Aren't the victims suffering enough? At a time when we need for our leaders to encourage us to pull together, to support each other, to lend a helping hand, and to put partisan divisions aside, the ex-president, who cares about nobody but himself, tries to capitalize on human suffering, including the suffering of many members of his own political party, by pushing lies about the federal government's Helene response.

*Robert Dulin, Charlotte*

#### Tillis tilt

I went from being so proud of Sen. Thom Tillis for speaking a non-partisan truth that people in North Carolina were getting help from the federal and state governments to being in disbelief and sad. He said no finger-pointing or conspiracy theories should be happening at a time when lives are devastated by Hurricane Helene. Now Tillis is upset that Kamala Harris quoted him correctly. Now he is saying he meant that Harris is doing the finger-pointing. Sen. Tillis doesn't love North Carolina as much as he says. He loves being loyal to Trump more.

*Willa Hackney, Charlotte*

#### Middle East peace

As Rabbi Judy Schindler said in her Observer op-ed, we pray for peace for Israelis and Palestinians.

The only path to peace is the two-state solution. Unfortunately, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu does not support this solution. He is the wrong man to lead Israel now. Supporters of peace for Israel and innocent Palestinians and other Arabs must be protected. In an ideal world, Jews and Arabs would demonstrate together for the two state solution.

*David A. Nachamie, Lincolnton*

#### Harris' instincts

I am grateful someone of any gender, religion or race can today become president. But that does not mean Kamala Harris is ready for promotion. Harris is a genuine person who fully delivers on good vibes and joy. Unfortunately, saying something with a smile does not make it good policy. Harris appears politically inauthentic,

parroting rhetoric she thinks will win votes, leading to many policy flips on immigration, energy and more. Her initial instincts were bad. Switching positions after the impact is already felt is meaningless. By casting the tie-breaking vote for the Inflation Reduction Act, Harris directly contributed to our bad economy. As vice president she cast the most tie-breaking Senate votes in history. When proactively voting for something — you must own the outcome. Harris proudly states she was the last person in the room when the Afghanistan exit strategy formed. She recently said nothing comes to mind when asked what she would do different than the past administration. Harris has bad instincts.

*Jennifer Louis, Charlotte*

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