

Our choice for North Carolina's next governor

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD

We hear the phrase "the most important election of our lifetime" so often that it's practically lost all meaning. But for North Carolina, this one really might be.

On Election Day, North Carolinians will have a critical choice to make between two men who want to be the next governor of our state. It's a choice that can be framed in very stark terms: integrity and immorality, decency and demagoguery. It should be an easy one to make.

Democrat Josh Stein and Republican Mark Robinson offer two competing visions for North Carolina's future. Stein is a known quantity, some-

one who has served this state capably for eight years as attorney general and for years before that as a state senator. Robinson is a known quantity, too, and the most virtually extreme statewide candidate in memory.

Robinson did not agree to an interview with the Editorial Board despite multiple attempts to reach him during the primary and general elections. But since he vaulted to political stardom several years ago, everything we have learned about Robinson has been a lesson in why he cannot and should not be our next governor.

As lieutenant governor — a largely ceremonial role with few real responsibilities — Robinson has

been a stain on our state and the party that allowed him to come into power. He finds himself in the national spotlight far too often for his vile rhetoric, using his bully pulpit to demean and discriminate against groups he doesn't like. And what we know about his past is not reassuring. Failing to pay taxes. Questionable business activity. Tinfoil hat conspiracy theories on social media and meticulous reporting on lewd, disturbing comments on a pornography website. He has been a disgrace and an embarrassment to North Carolina, one who has few qualifications for the office he is seeking to hold.

The outcome of this

election will have consequences. The next governor not only can serve as a check on extreme legislation passed by the legislature. The office is also about more intangible things, including the way our state is represented on the national stage and the comforting presence of a leader in times of crisis. There's little evidence we can trust that Robinson will be a good ambassador for North Carolina, let alone a steady leader in a tragedy.

North Carolinians should be assured that in voting for Stein, they are not merely voting against Robinson. The attorney general is well-equipped to be the next governor of North Carolina, and he

possesses the temperament, qualifications and vision necessary to succeed in the role. As AG, he has been an advocate for North Carolinians on critical issues like voting rights and the opioid epidemic.

We've criticized Stein in the past for being too cautious at times, such as when his office didn't proactively speak out or counsel against UNC's ill-advised Silent Sam deal with the Sons of Confederate Veterans. Overall, though, Stein fights for what is right, even when it's not easy — and he has shown himself to be a leader who lifts up the vulnerable instead of picking on them. Voters can be certain he would be a governor for all of North Carolina.

North Carolina deserves better than Mark Robinson. Gay and transgender North Carolinians deserve better than a governor who calls them "filth" and says transgender people should

urinate in the streets. Jewish North Carolinians deserve better than a governor who allegedly praises "Mein Kampf," declares himself a "Black Nazi" and questions whether the Holocaust really happened. Female North Carolinians deserve a leader who does not want to rob them of their bodily autonomy, tell them to "keep their skirt down," downplay sexual assault and domestic violence and say society is "called to be led by men." Black North Carolinians deserve better than someone who believes Black people owe reparations, attacks the Civil Rights Movement and expresses support for reinstating slavery.

Electing Mark Robinson might not mean our state radically changes overnight. There is, after all, only so much power the governor can wield. But it matters who we elect to lead and represent our state. We recommend **Josh Stein** for governor.

UNC students representing school is tough

BY GENE NICHOL

I was asked, some months back, by a group of University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill student leaders to speak about navigating the political challenges of the Tar Heel State at their fall orientation. Being a careful sort, I first wondered whether the General Assembly or the Board of Governors had somehow made it illegal for me to do so. I couldn't find anything. I recalled that I had been asked in the past to explain to all audiences "I do not speak for the University of North Carolina." But I'm not sure if that specific Nichol dictate is still active — all the chancellors and provosts who imposed it seem to have been dispatched for failing to please their political masters. So, I figured, why not take up the invite?

When I arrived on the appointed afternoon, I was glad I'd said yes. It was an astonishing group of Tar Heels. Young folks from all over the nation and the world. Greatly diverse — Black, white, brown, every shade between; women, men, trans folks; some students looking like fraternity guys, lots looking anything but. Brilliant, idealistic, bold, ambitious. The kind of room that can't help but give you hope for the future.

I decided to be brief, figuring no such assembly, despite the invitation, could have much interest in the thoughts of a 73-year-old professor. First they have an important job, representing Carolina students, but a tough one. Why tough? Because UNC is now controlled by boards of governors and trustees that are an occupying force, not good faith officials. They are foot soldiers of the Republican General Assembly. No more, no less. And that's tough, I told the students, because I'm pretty sure the occupying force's actions won't easily be squared with the way students see the world.

I mentioned some things they likely already knew. These folks forced the journalism school to engage in one of the most

derided acts of overt racial discrimination in decades — refusing to tenure famous African American journalist, Nikole Hannah-Jones. They gutted the law school's civil rights center — because they didn't like the idea of lawyers and students representing poor people of color. They entered into a shameful agreement over Silent Sam with the Sons of the Confederate Veterans — trying to give the outfit, which has been tied to white supremacy, millions of dollars. They kicked the chair of the UNC Press off the board for criticizing the sweet Confederate veterans deal. They abolished our diversity programs last year, firing staff members and ending vital support for often marginalized students — because they appear to hate the term diversity and, even more, the reality of it. They've taken upon themselves the power to create courses, requirements and departments in rank violation of American traditions of faculty governance and freedom. As the American Association of University Professors determined, the school-governing boards have repeatedly engaged in partisan political interference and racial discrimination — crushing the central values and future prospects of a great American university.

I also explained that administrators and even faculty don't always stand up to oppose these outrages, as might be assumed. Faculty want to be left alone to teach their classes. Administrators know they'll get fired if they do their jobs. So they don't do their jobs. But students have a surprising voice in public universities when they choose to use it. These board members are pawns, but, oddly, they still want students to like them. Most board members don't want to be seen as out to crush students' idealism and engagement to please their overseers. Thank God, students aren't as easy to frighten as faculty and administrators.

Columnist Gene Nichol is a professor of law at UNC



U.S. 64 where it passed in front of Caulder Realty & Land Co. in Bat Cave, North Carolina. The pavement is covered in several feet of mud and debris or, like most of the Caulder building, was washed away by the Rocky Broad River, right. Photo taken Thursday, Oct. 10, 2024.

Don't tell me we can't build better in western NC

BY JONATHAN PHILLIPS

As soon as roads allowed last week, I arrived at my property in Bat Cave, North Carolina with a car full of water, food and supplies for neighbors. There was only one thing I had that was of interest to people — gasoline and diesel fuel. For days, military helicopters and good Samaritans had been air-dropping supplies up and down Highway 9 near my house. Pallets of pre-made military meals, water and other supplies were already piling up in garages. What people wanted was energy to drive the machinery needed to dig out, power the wells that pump water and generate electrons that keep the lights and communications devices operating.

This is also what I find every day in my work in Africa and South Asia on energy poverty. People are willing to spend enormous shares of their income on energy. It is the essential backbone to modern life. Billions of dollars are siphoned off annually to pay for expensive fuel. Badly needed investment flows elsewhere because businesses don't set-up oper-

ations where power supplies are unreliable. People remain stuck in poverty.

Western North Carolina already had a major power reliability problem. People who can, including my family, own generators to compensate for an extremely weak grid in the region. But everyone should be able to access reliable power. Building back smarter right now means building to new specifications. Bury power lines where necessary. Build redundancies into the grid. Update flood maps to reflect a world that is changing because of climate change. These are exactly the types of policies that recent legislation — the bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act in particular — are helping enable.

These measures represent hard work that will take time, but people in the region are hurting now. Unfortunately, the Trump campaign is driving an exploitative misinformation campaign that pins suffering on immigration policy, preying on people's vulnerability and anger while providing no relief.

These lies are spreading across North Carolina mountain country like wildfire right now. They are part of a new climate change denial messaging playbook that we do not have time for.

Leaders should be focusing on how the southeast must prepare for storm devastation it's never seen before and what that means — building more resilient power grids, avoiding building in vulnerable locations, providing better risk information to people so they can buy insurance. Virtually nobody in western North Carolina owns flood insurance so they will not get benefits from the policies they've paid into for decades. Instead, the misinformation specialists blame, dodge, and stoke anger. All of this is to avoid talking about the fact that the Gulf of Mexico was an abnormally warm 85 degrees as Helene gathered strength, and those waters are fueling bigger and more devastating storms, according to scientists.

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My property is buried two feet deep in toxic sludge, and I have a new creek running through my yard. I'll have no grid power or water for months.

Don't tell me that I live in an area that doesn't flood. Don't tell me we can't build homes to higher resilience standards. Don't tell me we can't climate-proof power systems. Don't tell me cowardly lies like recovery money is going to illegal immigrants. We live in a new, harsher environment here in the Southeast. Tell me how we as Americans are going to rise to the challenge of surviving and thriving in it.

It is disappointing that someone running for the highest office in the land has chosen to exploit this natural disaster for political purposes. Efforts such as the bipartisan infrastructure act and new regulations that will help FEMA develop better flood maps backed by the current White House are only the beginning of the real work needed to harden our infrastructure and ready our communities for what is to come.

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