

Is Bidenomics working? In NC, the answer is clear

BY NED BARNETT

Former President Donald Trump’s campaign has rolled out a new ad featuring a laughing Vice President Kamala Harris saying, “We are very proud of Bidenomics. Bidenomics is working.”

The ad counters the Democratic presidential nominee’s claim with references to record-high gas prices, soaring interest rates, unaffordable housing and rising unemployment, and the narrator’s saying: “Kamala Harris is clueless.”

But for many in North Carolina, the takeaway may be that the Trump campaign is clueless. In this battleground state, there’s strong evidence that Bidenomics is in fact working.

Yes, North Carolina, like

most of the nation, has been facing a shortage of housing, higher grocery prices and a spike in insurance costs. But overall, the North Carolina economy is strong. The unemployment rate is 3.8 percent – lower than even the low national rate of 4.2 percent – interest rates are going down, wages are up, inflation has eased and the state budget is running surpluses.

Given those numbers, it’s Trump who appears out of touch. When he delivered a speech on the economy in Asheville in August, he said, as he often does, that “our country has become a Third world nation.”

A month later, the economic picture continues to improve. The average cost of a gallon of gas in North Carolina has dipped below \$3, the Federal Reserve

cut its benchmark interest rate by half a percentage point, and inflation dropped to 2.2% last month, down from a high of 9.1% in June 2022., and consumer confidence and the gross domestic product are up.

State Sen. Dan Blue, a Wake County Democrat and Senate minority leader, thinks Democrats can make a strong case about Biden’s handling of the economy. “If you asked anybody three years ago if there could be a soft landing, most economists predicted we were going to have a crash landing,” he said. “This has been as smooth a landing as a perfectly operating 747 jet.”

Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said after announcing the recent interest rate cut, “The U.S. economy is in good

shape. It’s growing at a solid pace, inflation is coming down, the labor market is in a strong place, we wanna keep it there.”

While the North Carolina economy is in good shape, it is also uneven. The state’s biggest metro areas are flourishing, but some smaller cities and rural areas are not. “We have a state with some of the fastest-growing economies in the nation and some of the slowest-growing economies,” said Gerald Cohen, chief economist at the Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise at UNC Chapel Hill.

Cohen noted that while the Research Triangle, Mecklenburg County, Asheville and some coastal counties are prospering, areas such as those around Rocky Mount and Hickory are not. “We have been

very successful, but the success has been more concentrated than I would like to see,” he said.

That is a gap in which Trump’s criticism of Biden’s economic stewardship resonates, but it shouldn’t, for two reasons.

First, the economies of small metros and rural areas have been hurt by the Republican state lawmakers who represent them. The Republican-controlled legislature held out for a decade before expanding Medicaid. The delay led to the closing of rural hospitals and the loss of jobs. Meanwhile, the legislature’s refusal to adequately fund public schools and increase teacher pay has undercut a major employer in rural areas. The move to offer universal vouchers for private school tuition will further deprive rural school districts.

Second, legislation signed by Biden will help increase and spread the wealth in North Carolina. The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the

CHIPS Act will bring infrastructure improvements – including improved water systems and expanded broadband internet access – and jobs to rural areas and smaller cities.

Of course, these realities don’t matter to many Trump supporters. Their dim view of the economy will only improve if Trump regains the presidency.

But others are beginning to see how government investments instead of tax cuts mostly benefiting the wealthy are helping to create broader prosperity. U.S. consumer sentiment improved in September. The rise mirrors Democrats’ excitement over the switch from Biden to Harris as their party’s nominee and confidence in Harris’ proposals to lower grocery prices and reduce child costs and increase the housing supply.

Bidenomics is working.

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Take Trump seriously or literally? Both?

BY JOHN M. CRISP
Tribune News Service

Salena Zito, writing for The Atlantic in September 2016, may have been the first to describe, in a triumph of pithy efficiency, why Donald Trump is able to survive and thrive despite provocative statements that would endanger the career of nearly any other politician: “When he makes claims like this, the press takes him literally, but not seriously; his supporters take him seriously, but not literally.”

I thought of this expression recently when Trump, speaking at a rally in Pennsylvania, made a provocative statement that is easily unnoticed in a forest of many others. Trump said it should be illegal for citizens to criticize the Supreme Court: “These people should be put in jail the way they talk about our judges and justices, trying to get them to sway their vote, sway their decision.”

Should we take this statement seriously or literally?

A MAGA acquaintance told me not to take this statement “seriously.” He also may have meant not to take it “literally,” either. In other words, Trump doesn’t seriously or literally intend to throw citizens in jail for criticism of the court, which would be a clear violation of the First Amendment.

According to this way of thinking, Trump’s threat of jail time for critics is rhetorical, similar to saying that critics of the court should be hung up by their toes or given 50 lashes with a horsewhip. After all, this threat echoes the familiar rallying cry of the 2016 campaign, “Lock her up,” and nothing came of that.

In other words, nothing to worry about.

Still, one of the things that Trump supporters say that they like about him is that he says what he means and means what he says, which, if true, should give pause to anyone who opposes him in light of his social media post recently: “Those involved in unscrupulous behavior will

be sought out, caught, and prosecuted at levels, unfortunately, never seen before in our Country.”

In fact, on Sept. 21, the New York Times published a lengthy report by Michael Schmidt on Trump’s efforts while in office to initiate investigations and prosecutions against political rivals and others he saw as threats. Sure, it was in the Times, but this isn’t a left-wing fabrication. Schmidt’s reporting is based on documents, court filings and interviews, often with people who were appointed by and close to Trump.

For example, according to witnesses, in spring of 2018 Trump, dissatisfied with Attorney General Jeff Sessions, threatened to personally prosecute Hillary Clinton, John Kerry and former FBI Director James Comey, startling his aides and provoking his White House counsel, Donald McGahn, to produce a memo advising Trump of how outside the customary bounds of the justice department, and possibly the law, such an action would be.

As it happens, little came of Trump’s threats. But a second Trump term would be different. He’s unlikely to employ a White House counsel like McGahn or a chief of staff like John Kelly, who both worked hard to stall and restrain actions by Trump that would have violated important democratic norms or legal boundaries.

Further, Trump probably feels entitled to payback due to his evidence-free contention that he’s been the victim of “lawfare” waged by the Biden administration.

Trump is known for being transactional, but he’s also transgressive. The norms, and even the laws, that prevent officials from prosecuting their perceived enemies mean little to him.

Thus, when he says that, in a second term, critics who speak out against the Supreme Court should be thrown into jail, it would be extremely naïve to fail to take him both seriously and literally.



Swannanoa residents share rolls of toilet paper on Sunday, Sept. 29, 2024. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees and power outages in western North Carolina.

Western NC needs our help now and long after the waters recede

BY ISSAC BAILEY

The headlines will fade. Our focus will return to the presidential and North Carolina gubernatorial races.

The water will recede. Rivers will return to usual levels and flows. The tears will dry.

It’s then residents of western North Carolina and other areas hit hard by Hurricane Helene will need our help most, for us to not forget their suffering.

They need an enormous amount of help today, too, of course, to just be able to survive. The rescues, the tree-cutting, the restoration of basic infrastructure – roads and electricity and schools and the like – must continue. Prayers and good will from those who can’t assist directly are also invaluable.

But it’s over the long-haul the suffering will need our help the most, just as the state’s and nation’s attention will once again be pulled in a thousand different directions.

I saw it happen as a high school student in the aftermath of Hurricane

Hugo, which nearly wiped my native St. Stephen, S.C., off the map 35 years ago. At least that’s the way it felt the morning after the storm passed. It took our house and kept us out of school for weeks as we tried to re-establish what little we had. My fondest memory are the hot meals we received from the American Red Cross. They remain the best thing I’ve ever eaten.

The rest of the world seemed to just get on with other more important things, things more important than us. That’s the way it felt. Intellectually, I understood why it had to be that way. The Earth doesn’t stop rotating on its axis because a group of vulnerable people are struggling. It still felt cold, though, made us in a sense feel forgotten.

I saw a repeat a decade later when I was a journalist covering the aftermath of Hurricane Floyd. There was the initial rush to help, to pray, to prioritize community above politics and partisanship. But as the Waccamaw River returned to its banks, that collective spirit began fading. Even the short drive between Myrtle

Beach and Conway felt like leaving one country for another, the damage that starkly different. Helene left a similar haphazard path of damage.

In Asheville, flood waters nearly reached the roof of a Wendy’s restaurant and dislodged a house from its foundation, sending it down the river until it crashed into a tree. There were reports from small communities such as Banner Elk in Avery County, Black Mountain and beyond that they were effectively cut off from the rest of the state.

Rescuers had to leave bodies behind to get the living to safety.

There was more death and extreme destruction in Florida, where Helene came ashore. In South Carolina, Greenville residents reported tree lines in their backyard being knocked over.

In my part of North Carolina, there was no death and little destruction. On the morning after Helene, I saw a large uprooted by the storm. It had been removed within hours. Oh, our power went out, for maybe 30 minutes.

That’s typical of natural

disasters. They don’t care if we plan to vote for Kamala Harris or Donald Trump, don’t care about the size of our house, how important the roads we need to get to work.

They are unimpressed by our business acumen or the number of degrees hanging on our walls.

They don’t discriminate even if we do.

We are all always in the path of natural disasters. It’s just that Helene’s chosen path was through western North Carolina rather than the eastern part of the state – this time.

That’s why this is a time to remember the fellow human beings who got hit hard will need our help long after we’ve begun debating who won Tuesday night’s vice presidential debate.

The next Hugo, Floyd or Helene might come knocking on our door, if not knocking over our homes.

We should wise enough to want a strong infrastructure in place to help us when our time come. Because that time is likely coming.

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