

Our choices for NC treasurer, labor and agriculture

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD

Voters have strong candidates to consider in the race to replace North Carolina treasurer Dale Folwell, who ran unsuccessfully for governor. Democrat Wesley Harris has a Ph.D in economics and has worked in international tax accounting, and he's a three-term member of the NC House. Republican Brad Briner is a member of the UNC Board of Trustees and a retired financial investor with a quarter-century of financial and investment experience.

Both candidates have run refreshingly non-partisan campaigns, and both believe North Carolina's pension fund has underperformed under Folwell. Briner's

vision for the office is more narrowly focused on growing investments without taking on unnecessary risk, and he offers a meticulous blueprint on how he would get there. Harris wants the treasurer to take on a more active role advocating for state employees and laying out an economic vision for the state.

We share Briner's vision for the office, and we believe he brings a deeper experience and a more sophisticated knowledge in the financial and investment sector. We recommend **Brad Briner** for NC Treasurer.

LABOR COMMISSIONER

Voters are choosing between two Commissioner of Labor candidates who would bring distinctly

different backgrounds and approaches to the job.

Republican Luke Farley is a Wake County lawyer who works with companies cited by the state labor department for workplace safety violations. "I'm going to always approach this job with balance," he told the editorial board.

Democrat Braxton Winston, a former Charlotte City Council member and mayor pro tem, is a union member and a stagehand and grip by trade. "I think it's high time we had an actual worker be an advocate for workers across the state," he told the editorial board.

Farley touts the endorsement of former labor commissioner Cherie Berry, and like Berry, he would approach the job with a

more business-centric focus. He told the Editorial Board that what's good for businesses is also good for the workers they employ.

Winston wants the department to perform more inspections and hold businesses accountable for workplace safety. He also wants to expand the reach of the office with a "whole worker approach" that calls for collaborating with other agencies on issues such as affordable housing and transportation.

This board appreciates Winston's intent with his whole worker approach, but we believe the commissioner and his staffing-challenged department should instead concentrate on its core, constitutional responsibilities. We also believe that North Car-

olina's labor department, particularly under Berry, was too aligned with businesses on workplace issues and unfair wage practices. We were disappointed that Farley, in his conversation with the editorial board, so fully embraced Berry's tenure and her endorsement.

Winston's experience as a worker would be transformative to an office that needs change. We endorse **Braxton Winston** for labor commissioner.

AGRICULTURE COMMISSIONER

The Democratic and Republican candidates for agriculture commissioner would bring vastly different experience to an office that maintains and protects the state's agribusiness industry and regulates food, animal health, the state fair and other areas.

Republican Steve Troxler is hoping for a sixth term as agriculture commissioner. He's long had a strong rapport with farmers and success in promoting North

Carolina's diverse agriculture industry, which is contributing more than \$100 billion to the state's economy in 2024. His experience and relationship-building also is valuable in challenging times, as he's shown with his leadership in marshaling resources to help farmers and others in the wake of Hurricane Helene.

Democrat Sarah Taber has worked with family farm holdings and helped launch a series of vegetable greenhouses and indoor farms that are now worth over \$4 billion. She told the editorial board that the agriculture commissioner should more actively advocate for diversifying what we grow in North Carolina.

We believe Troxler should be open to new ideas that might help slow the farmland loss our state is experiencing. But Troxler is a capable leader and advocate for North Carolina agriculture. We recommend **Steve Troxler** for another term.

Let's be smart in addressing the housing crisis

BY RAQUELLA THAMAN
Progressive Perspectives

The price of housing in many areas of the United States is too high for many Americans, and in some areas the demand for affordable housing outstrips the supply. There is a heated debate as to how, exactly, to target this crisis.

Some would like to address the shortage of housing using the basic economic theory of supply and demand. Others believe that in order to make housing affordable, it is necessary to remove housing from a purely laissez-faire economic dynamic, and provide some guardrails to prevent out-of-control prices.

In California, for example, a measure on the Nov. 5 ballot seeks to overturn a 1995 state law that limits a municipality's ability to enact rent controls. Opponents argue that rent control will cause a decline in property values and lead to a decrease in home construction, which will perpetuate the shortage of housing. They simultaneously argue that the shortage of housing is responsible for high property values and the inflation of rents.

While this seems to be a logical glitch, it is more likely an indication that free market forces are not well-suited to maintaining a reliable supply of affordable housing. A key tool used by investors, for example, is the 1% rule – the monthly rental return on a property must be at least 1% of the purchase price. Given such formulas, it is not possible to lower the rent and have steadily increasing property values.

Over the last several weeks, President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris have moved the creation of more housing to the forefront of their platforms. Prior to announcing his withdrawal from the 2024 presidential campaign, Biden called for action on two fronts.

On the one hand, he

proposed to add a set of brakes to spiraling housing prices by seeking to place a temporary cap on rent increases by large corporate landlords. On the other, he promised to add to the supply of housing both by building new housing and by rehabilitating existing housing.

Whether or not you believe that supply side economics alone can dampen the skyrocketing price of housing in the United States, the time is now for a coherent national housing policy based on human need and available resources.

The federal government should participate in the creation of housing in a manner that improves the standard of living in the communities it hopes to serve. For example, rather than adding new units to a region that has already outstripped its water supply, it would be better to support economic development and increase housing in regions that can easily accommodate the population increase.

While there is certainly a marked shortage of affordable housing in some areas of the country, other areas have vast numbers of vacant properties, which negatively impacts the quality of life in those neighborhoods.

If we are going to facilitate the addition of a million new homes in a given region, we also must provide hospitals, schools, public safety, sanitation and an adequate water supply. We must avoid bringing people to places from which they will almost inevitably have to evacuate due to high environmental risks.

We as a nation have done great things. Let our approach to solving our housing crisis be one of those and not another transfer of rights, protection and wealth to bolster the profit margins of a few.

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The North Carolina Legislative Building in downtown Raleigh, N.C., pictured on Tuesday evening, Sept. 6, 2023.

Endorsements: Our choices in Mecklenburg legislative races

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD

DISTRICT 98

Huntersville Mayor Melinda Bales, a Republican, has a strong grasp of the issues facing her district, and is particularly passionate about education. Her opponent is Democrat Beth Helfrich, a first-time candidate with a strong community presence who is also well-versed in issues like education and health care.

Both candidates would be capable representatives for their district, but Mecklenburg County would benefit from having at least one Republican representing it in the House. We give a slight nod to **Bales**.

DISTRICT 99

Incumbent Democrat Nasif Majeed and Libertarian candidate Rob Yates are running in this east Charlotte district.

Majeed says he is especially passionate about affordable housing and teacher pay, and he values bipartisanship and building relationships with his colleagues across the aisle. Yates has interesting ideas on issues like criminal justice reform and upward

mobility, but Majeed has been a capable representative for his district. We recommend **Majeed**.

DISTRICT 103

Democrat Laura Budd seeks a second term in this district, which now includes Matthews and the Ballantyne area. Budd has had a successful first term in the legislature, proving herself to be a thoughtful legislator who is willing to work across the aisle.

Her opponent, Joshua Niday, does not have the same sophisticated grasp of issues facing his district. We recommend **Budd**.

DISTRICT 104

Incumbent Brandon Lofton seeks another term in this district that includes the SouthPark area. He faces a challenge from Krista Bokhari. Bokhari is a thoughtful conservative who presents herself as much more moderate than many in her party, and she would be a good addition to the legislature. But Lofton is one of his party's most impressive members. He's taken on a leadership role within his caucus, and he has worked across the aisle on regulatory and child care legislation. He's

earned another term. We recommend **Lofton**.

DISTRICT 105

Tricia Cotham, now running as a Republican, seeks reelection in this district that includes Mint Hill and parts of south Charlotte.

We endorsed Cotham in 2022 because we believed she was the person she said she was: an experienced candidate with progressive values. But mere months after taking office, she turned her back on her constituents and the values she claimed to espouse. Cotham deceived and betrayed voters. Republicans might like the results, but voters of either party should be wary of someone who is so wholly untrustworthy.

Democrats have fielded a strong opponent in Nicole Sidman. Sidman has a strong grasp of the issues her district cares about, and she's determined to build back the trust voters lost when Cotham switched parties. She would be a representative for all of her district. We recommend **Sidman**.

SENATE DISTRICT 37

Iredell County compris-

es most of this district, but the bottom of it dips into northern Mecklenburg County. It's currently represented by Republican Vickie Sawyer. She has also been a productive member of the legislature and co-chair of the Senate's transportation committee, which will be critical if the county hopes to get a transit tax referendum on the ballot next year.

Sawyer is challenged by Democrat Kate Compton Barr, who is running for a simple and admirable reason: because she believes that voters in her district deserve a choice on their ballot.

We commend Barr for giving voters a choice, but we recommend **Sawyer** for another term.

SENATE DISTRICT 42

The Democrat running in this south Mecklenburg district is Woodson Bradley, a community advocate with an inspiring story of surviving domestic violence and sexual assault. Her opponent is Stacie McGinn, an attorney who holds strong conservative positions on issues like school choice and tax policy.

Voters have two strong choices in this district, but we give a slight nod to **McGinn** for her breadth of experience and knowledge of relevant issues.

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