

Democracy North Carolina

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25 Years of Speaking Truth to Power

Democracy North Carolina grew out of Democracy South, which began as a project of the Institute for Southern Studies. For 25 years, we have challenged the corrupting role of money in NC politics and promoted greater voter participation. We're conservative because we champion the core principle of a democratic republic: *one person, one vote*. We're liberal because we trace our roots to the Civil Rights Movement and champion equal rights. We are non-partisan: we promote policies, not politicians. We've taken on powerful industries and politicians of both major parties. Here's a sample of our reports and complaints since 1991. Most can be found on the Research Library on our website.

- 1991:** Major report details the \$10 million spent by special interests to lobby the NC legislature; it also criticizes Democratic lawmakers for protecting the "goodwill lobbying" loophole.
- 1992:** Highway Robbery – 4-part series (with the *Independent Weekly*) exposes how Board of Transportation appointees of Gov. Jim Martin (R) misused DOT money for their businesses.
- 1993:** Health care – report shows how medical, business and insurance lobbies killed reform bill. We also co-produced a series with *Charlotte Observer* analyzing donations to NC legislators.
- 1994:** Elite Donors – 350 individuals and business groups account for one third of the \$30 million given by individuals to NC politics from 1989-1992. Top of the list: Democrat Walter Davis, patron of state Senate leader Marc Basnight. Davis objects to us calling him a "kingmaker."
- 1994:** Bank Heist – analysis of a tax break for NC banks, worth \$50 million a year, and how it is protected by the industry's \$1 million annual spending on campaign donations and lobbying.
- 1995:** Special-Interest Legislature – produced series (with *Charlotte Observer*) on PACs and other donations financing state legislators' campaigns, and what they do in return. Also report on money from hog industry; our research is used in *News & Observer* series on Boss Hog.
- 1996:** Pollution Lobby – investigative series (with *Independent Weekly*) on how money from big polluters and developers decides the fate of environmental legislation. Also Democracy Index shows correlation of states with high voter turnout and high quality of life.
- 1997:** Board of Transportation scandal – several reports document patronage appointments of Gov. Jim Hunt (D) to BOT and their misuse of office; we call for state and federal investigations; State Auditor and FBI get involved; BOT members resign; leads to reforms of BOT.
- 1997:** Complaint filed with Board of Elections about \$100,000 in illegal campaign donations from Stephen Pierce, owner of NC's largest chain of rest homes to Democrats. Series with *Independent Weekly* exposes influence of rest-home industry money on policy affecting elder care. Reports on poor campaign disclosure lead to major disclosure law in 1997.
- 1998:** Hog Money – Reports on "Farmer for Fairness" corporate hog money and laundering corporate donations by Speaker Harold Brubaker (R), leading to complaint and new rules. Reports on soft money and *quid pro quos* in Lauch Faircloth v. John Edwards US Senate race.
- 1999:** Wealth Primary – analysis documents necessity of being top money-raiser to win election in NC; former NC Chief Justice Jim Exum takes our case to court, says money prerequisite violates NC constitution. Also more analysis of Boss Hog's big money influence in legislature.
- 2000:** Complaint filed with State Board of Elections against Democratic and Republican state and federal parties for flooding state elections with \$7 million in "soft money" from unknown donors. Another report analyzes big donors behind the Easley-Vinroot race for governor.
- 2001:** Video-Poker increases its donations by 200% in 2000 over 1996. Another report shows Gov.

- Easley (D) rewards his biggest political donors and fundraisers with seats on the Board of Transportation. Report says dentists give 100 times as much as hygienists – and block reform.
- 2002:** Bad Disclosure – Speaker Jim Black (D) gets F grade for late, incomplete reports; Gov. Mike Easley (D) gets C-. Report on donations of Democratic appointees to UNC’s Board of Governors. Analysis of judicial fundraising helps win public financing option in appellate elections.
- 2003:** Reports document corrupt ties of carnival donors to Meg Scott Phipps (D), Ag Commissioner. Banks and utility companies gave Democratic lawmakers \$400,000 after huge tax break.
- 2004:** Complaint filed with State Board of Elections about illegal video-poker donations to Speaker Jim Black (D), which triggered SBOE obtaining his bank records and finding other illegal practices. Report on value of out-of-precinct voting helps cement it in state law after attacks.
- 2005:** Lobbyist Scandal – Reports show lobbyists disclose less spending than they did 15 years ago, and hundreds don’t file. Pay-to-play reports on lottery commission appointees, video poker, Black & Decker. Utility of Giving analyzes political money from Duke, other electric utilities.
- 2006:** Two complaints filed with Elections Board: (1) against 527 attacking Republican legislators and (2) against coordination of FairJudges.net with the NC Democratic Party. Speaker Jim Black hearings expose crimes against democracy. Report on political giving by lobbyists and lack of disclosure. Also, public financing reduces special-interest money in court elections.
- 2007:** Sprawl Lobby – Report on influence of realtors and home builders. Also reports on utilities, anesthesiologist, lobbyists, and PAC donations to Congressional and legislative candidates. Reports on fundraising conflicts help enact public financing for 3 Council of State offices.
- 2008:** Complaint filed with State Board of Elections about illegal donations of Republican Governors Association. Also report on good and bad compliance with disclosure rules.
- 2009:** Complaint filed with State Board of Elections about Democratic Party serving as an illegal conduit for Mike Easley’s campaign. Report profiles tax loopholes protected by big special-interest donations. Also reports on Big Tobacco, Blue Cross, Billboards, Healthcare money.
- 2010:** Request to State Elections Board to fine Democrat Rusty Carter \$200K for illegal donations. Report examines fundraising of NC candidates for US Congress. Analysis of the success of the judicial public financing program: reduces special-interest influence, adds diversity, etc.
- 2011:** Art Pope – \$40 million invested in advocacy groups and politics in last decade. Report says consumer loan industry shifts donations to Republican challengers, then gets favorable bill pushed through House. Reports on aggressive fundraising practices of GOP leaders before (and between) legislative sessions. Duke + Progress Energy PACs = biggest corporate PAC. Analysis of who lacks a photo ID and impact of voting restrictions help defeat anti-voter bill.
- 2012:** Toxics Lobby – The chemical industry pours \$9 million into NC politics, gets air toxic regs gutted. Reports on consumer loan industry donations to Speaker Thom Tillis (R), after he bullied bill through House; and on Tillis and Phil Berger (R) breaking fundraising records. Report profiles Latino voters in NC and analyzes their future political strength.
- 2013:** Republican House and Senate caucuses raise and spend record amounts in 2012 elections. Complaint filed against sweepstakes gambling vendor Chase Burns (the biggest donor to legislative campaigns in 2012) and lobbying firms related to apparent illegal donations.
- 2014:** Silenced Voters – Report on 30,000 voters silenced by new voting law; details from 100 precincts; victims become “fact witnesses” in court challenge. Also Duke Energy hikes donations as coal ash controversy intensifies. Incumbents’ fundraising advantage and poor disclosure.
- 2015:** Complaints filed about DMV and NC Dept of Health & Human Resources violating National Voter Registration Act. Sunshine Awards go to 24 state legislators (Dems & Reps) for their campaign filings. Report on Shelton family donations. Voter ID rules and rollout analyzed.
- 2016:** Reports document: major problems with ID law (filed in amicus brief); need for robust early voting plans; and false claims by Gov. Pat McCrory’s campaign about felons voting.