

Democracy NC: Over 25 Years of Speaking Truth to Power

For more than 25 years, Democracy North Carolina has challenged the corrupting role of money in politics and promoted greater voter participation. In the process, we've taken on powerful industries and politicians of all parties. Here's a sample of our reports, research, and reforms since 1991 — much of which is also available in our Research Library at democracync.org.

- 1991:** Report details \$10 million spent by special interests to lobby the NC legislature; also criticizes Democratic lawmakers for protecting “goodwill lobbying” loophole.
- 1992:** Four-part research series (with *Independent Weekly*) exposes how Gov. Jim Martin (R)'s Board of Transportation appointees misused DOT money for their businesses.
- 1993:** Report shows how medical, business and insurance lobbies killed healthcare reform bill. Also co-produced series with *The Charlotte Observer* analyzing donations to state legislators.
- 1994:** Report chronicles how 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. Also analysis of a tax breaks for NC banks, worth \$50 million a year, and how it is protected by industry's \$1 mil. annual spending on campaign donations and lobbying.
- 1995:** Produced series (with *The Charlotte Observer*) on PAC donations financing legislative campaigns; what they do in return. Also report on money from hog industry, used in *News & Observer* series.
- 1997:** Reports document patronage appointments of Gov. Jim Hunt (D) to BOT and their misuse of office; we call for investigations; State Auditor and FBI get involved; BOT members resign; leads to reforms. Also complaint filed with Elections Board re: \$100,000 in illegal campaign donations given by Stephen Pierce, owner of NC's largest chain of rest homes and major backer of Hunt, Lt. Gov. Dennis Wicker (D); three-part series (with the *Independent Weekly*) exposes influence of nursing and rest home industry money in controlling legislation and regulations affecting elder care. Several reports focus on secretive donations and need for disclosure, which lead to enactment of a major reform: disclosure law in 1997.
- 1998:** Reports document laundering of corporate donations by House Speaker Harold Brubaker (R) through Randolph County GOP, leading to complaint and new rules. Also report on use of soft money by both parties. Research on special interests investing in Lauch Faircloth v. John Edwards US Senate race.
- 1999:** Analysis documents need to be top money-raiser in order to win NC elections; former Supreme Ct. Chief Justice Jim Exum says money-prerequisite violates state constitution. Also how hog money delivers NC House to Dems and gets payback: top recipient of hog money named to head Enviro Committee.
- 2000:** Complaint filed with State Board of Elections against Democratic and Republican state and federal parties for flooding NC elections with \$7 million in “soft money” from unknown donors. Another report analyzes big donors behind the Easley(D)-Vinroot (R) race for governor.
- 2001:** Video Poker increases donations by 200% in 2000 over 1996. Reports show Gov. Easley (D) rewards big donors with seats on BOT and dentists give 100x as much as hygienists, block reforms.
- 2002:** Speaker Black (D) given F grade for late, incomplete reports; Gov. Easley (D) gets C-; Ag Commish Meg Scott Phipps (D) gets D-. Report reveals donations of Democratic appointees to UNC's BOG.

2003: Reports document corrupt ties of carnival donors to Meg Scott Phipps (D), Commissioner of Agriculture. Also report shows banks and utility companies gave Democratic lawmakers nearly \$400,000 in campaign donations in the month after receiving a huge tax break. Another analysis shows that average cost of winning NC General Assembly seat tops \$100,000.

2004: Complaint filed with State Board of Elections about illegal video-poker donations to Speaker Jim Black (D); triggered SBOE obtaining his bank records and finding illegal practices. Also reports on money in judicial and Council of State races, and failures in political disclosures.

2005: Reports show lobbyists disclose less spending than they did 15 years ago; hundreds don't file. With pay-to-play attention on lottery, a report reveals donations from lottery commission appointees. Also analysis of political money spent by Duke, Progress Energy, and Dominion Resources.

2006: Complaints filed with Elections Board: (1) against 527 attacking Republican legislators and (2) against coordination of FairJudges.net with Democrats. Speaker Black hearings exposes crimes. Reports on political giving by lobbyists; how public financing reduces special-interest money in judicial elections.

2007: Report on influence of realtors and home builders. Also reports on utilities, anesthesiologist, lobbyists, and PAC donations to Congressional and legislative candidates.

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 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.

2011: Art Pope invests \$40 million 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 session, establish Duke and Progress Energy as biggest corporate PACs.

2012: Chemical industry pours \$9 million into NC politics, gets air regs gutted. Report on consumer loan industry donations to Speaker Tillis (R), after he bullied bill through House and fails to identify major donors from industry. Also report on Tillis, Berger (R) each breaking fundraising record in one election.

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: Duke Energy hikes donations as coal ash controversy intensifies. Report on Monster Voting Law's impact on 2014 election. Reports on 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 given to bipartisan group of 24 state legislators.

2016: Files amicus brief highlighting voters harmed by Monster Voting Law; Report exposes Gov. McCrory (R)'s fraudulent election complaints and innocent voters targeted. Also reports on need for strong early voting plans and voters saved by same-day registration, out-of-precinct voting.

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2017: Files amicus brief exposing failures of GOP's redistricting public hearings. Report on Sen. Ralph Hise (R) pocketing \$10,000 from campaign and how billboard companies refuse to publicize violations. Reports on partisan efforts to combine ethics, elections agencies; momentum for redistricting reforms.

2018: Publishes report profiling voters' experiences during 2016, including long lines, machine problems, and negative experiences with poll workers; provides recommendations for election corrections. Also five-part series profiling 2018 voter turnout during one-stop and election day, including demographic trends and impacts of partisan legislation requiring uniform hours for early voting.

2019: Publishes reports analyzing high 2018 election turnout, impact of uniform weekday hours on Early Voting options, an expanding Latinx electorate, and missing money in NC sheriff's races. Research-driven advocacy helps restore popular final Saturday of Early Voting and win better 2020 Primary Early Voting options. Filed court briefs showing impact of gerrymandering and voter ID, resulting in new maps and injunction blocking ID requirements in the 2020 Primary.