

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 are 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 do not favor one candidate or party over another; we advocate for policies, not politicians. We've taken on powerful industries and politicians of both parties. Here's a sample of our reports and complaints filed against Democrats and Republicans 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 State Board of Elections about \$100,000 in illegal campaign donations given by Stephen Pierce, owner of NC's largest chain of rest homes and major backer of Jim Hunt, Lt. Gov. Dennis Wicker (D), etc. A 3-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 occupational disclosure, which lead to enactment of major reform: disclosure law in 1997.
- 1998:** Hog Money – Reports document "Farmer for Fairness" corporate money and 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. Plus research on special interests investing in Lauch Faircloth v. John Edwards US Senate race.
- 1999:** Wealth Primary – analysis documents necessity of being the top money-raiser in order to win election in NC; former Supreme Court Chief Justice Jim Exum says this money-prerequisite violates NC constitution. Also analysis of how hog money delivers NC House to Democrats and gets payback: the top recipient of hog money is named to head Environment Committee.

- 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. Also report says dentists give 100 times as much as hygienists, block reform.
- 2002:** Slipshod Disclosure – Speaker Jim Black (D) given F grade for late and incomplete reports; Gov. Mike Easley (D) gets C-, Ag Commissioner Meg Scott Phipps (D) gets D-, etc. Another report analyzes campaign donations of Democratic appointees to UNC’s Board of Governors.
- 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 General Assembly seat tops \$100,000.
- 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. Reports on money in judicial and Council of State races, and bad disclosure reports.
- 2005:** Lobbyist Scandal – Reports show lobbyists disclose less spending than they did 15 years ago, and hundreds don’t file; with pay-to-play attention on lottery, a report reveals donations from lottery commission appointees. Also Utility of Giving: analysis of political money spent by Duke, Progress Energy and Dominion Resources. Reports on video poker, Black & Decker.
- 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.
- 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.
- 2012:** Toxics Lobby – The chemical industry pours \$9 million into NC politics, gets air toxic regs gutted. Report on consumer loan industry donations to Speaker Thom Tillis (R), after he bullied bill through House; he also fails to correctly identify major donors from the industry. Also report on Tillis and Phil 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 new 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.