**Address to the Ashe County Democratic Convention**

**March 30, 2019**

Good Morning!

Thank you, Ralph, for that kind introduction and thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for the privilege of speaking to you today.

* It is, indeed, an honor to have the opportunity to address such a distinguished (and friendly!) audience at such a critical time in the history of this state and this nation.

Why do I say that this is a Critical Time? After all, we just broke the Super Majority in the NCGA … elected many new progressive faces to that body … and seem to be on our way to reversing some of the horrible decisions made by the party in power and to restoring sanity to our state government.

* Well, the answer is in that same sentence --- “Seem to be on our way….”
* In spite of our accomplishments in the last election, we have not achieved all that we need to achieve at the local, state, or national level.
* There is much more work to do, and I am here today to ask each and every one of you to unite as you never have before to do that work!

But before I issue that formal charge to you, I want to tell you about some of the work that is being done in the General Assembly right now, much of which concerns education. I will follow that with what are deemed the critical issues that the NCGA needs to be addressing in comparison.

**Important Education Bills in the House:**

**HB 377: Reduced Testing**

* Introduced by Craig Horne, R-Union; supported by Jeffrey Elmore, my opponent in the election
* K-8: Would not reduce testing but would spread it out (teachers could use test data to prepare students for next test)
* HS: Eliminates EOC’s in favor of national standardized test; eliminates NC Final Exam and Graduation Project (Elmore, my opponent in the election: Justifies removing the Graduation Project = No way to be sure the work is the student’s.)

**HB 315: Expanding Instructional Material**

* Introduced by Elmore (R – Alex and Wilkes): “We are changing the definition of what is a textbook.”
* Gives school system flexibility around instructional spending
* Expands spending beyond textbooks to include digital learning (iPads, smart boards, etc.)
* Passed House K-12 Ed. Committee on 13-12 party line vote
* Graig Meyer (D – Orange): Concerned that purchasing at the local level could be even more expensive and, therefore, not equally affordable by all districts

**HB 266 and HB 354: School Performance Grades**

* **HB 266:** **School Amended Report Card** --- Splits academic performance and academic growth scores into 2 separate School Perf. Grades (Riddell – R)
* **HB 354:** **Modify Weighting / School Performance Grades** --- Changes current scale of 80% student performance and 20% growth to 50%-50% (Bipartisan sponsorship)
  + Elmore: Parents can see “balance” between growth and performance (greater transparency --- *implying that school reporting is not transparent)*
  + Horne: “Growth is the true measure of teacher success.”
  + *(BUT…it is how you measure that growth, Mr. Horne, that makes all the difference in the world. A standardized test will not accurately reflect a teacher’s performance.)*

**HB 362: Permanent 15-Point A-F Scale**

**HB 79: Calendar Flexibility** – Lets school systems tie their start date to start date of local community colleges (numerous such bills)

**HB 276: Low-Performing Schools Redefined (Riddell – R) --** Restricts such schools to a score of D or F and “not met expected growth” on an annual basis

**HB 295: Corporal Punishment Prohibited in Schools**

**Other House Bills:**

* **HB 74: School Safety** (R)
* **HB 75: Student Mental Health Screening** (R)
* HB 124: Smart Start Funds (SB 336)
* HB 128: High Achieving Tuition Scholarships (Elmore) -- HS to CC transition
* **HB 174: Home School Tax Credit** (R)
* **HB 229: Repeal Charter Municipality Schools** (Alexander – D)
* **HB 248: Restore Longevity Pay for Teachers** (Graham – D)
* **HB 249 (SB 17): School Annual Report Card** (Alexander – D); **HB 266**: Same (Riddell – R)
* **HB 381: School Construction & Broadband Act** (Arp – R)
* **HB 408: Expand Teaching Fellows Program** (Gill – R)
* **HB 428 & SB 329: K-3 Reading & Literacy Improvement Act** (Hunt – D)
* **Three Bills Protecting LGBTQ Community in the House:**

1. **HB 514: Equality for All Act**

* Intro by SEVERAL DEMS
* Bans discrimination against LGBTQ population in housing, jobs, credit applications, insurance applications, buying a home

1. **HB 516 & SB 426: Mental Health Protection Act**

* Intro by Marcia Morey and Chaudhui (D’s)
* Protects LGBTQ children and disabled adults from “conversion therapy”

1. **Act to Repeal HB 2 (“Bathroom Bill”) by repealing HB 142**

* **HB 454: Extreme Risk-Protection Order**
* Intro by Rep. Marcia Morey (D – Durham), Pricey Harris (D – Guilford), Grier Martin (D – Wake)
* Allows “extreme risk protection order” to restrict gun access if clear evidence person is danger to self or others

Bills to “watch out for”:

HB 172: K-12 Academic Freedom Act (R) – State BOE must adopt policy for Local BOE’s on academic freedom (Pittman)

* HB 216: School Self-Defense Act (Pittman – R) – Authorizes school personnel to carry gun to respond to violent acts / imminent threats of violence
* HB 241: Education Bond Act (Moore – R)

**Important Education Bills in the Senate:**

* **SB 424: Fully Fund School Counselors and Psychologists** (McKittrick – D)
* **SB 247: Charter School Study & Moratorium on Growth** (Blue – D)
* **SB 244: Restore Master’s Pay** for Teachers (Waddell – D)
* **SB 60: Restore Education Sales Tax Holiday** (Mohammed – D)
* **SB 236: Restore Child Care Tax Credit** (Mohammed – D)
* **Teacher Salaries:** 5% raise for all teachers!
* **SB 303: State Employees No Payroll Dues Deduction** (Hise – R)
* **SB 219: Modify Teaching Licensure Requirements** (McInnis – R)

**Other Senate Bills:**

**SB 184: Adopt ERA** (McKissick – D)

**SB 361: Healthcare Expansion Act of 2019**

* Intro by Sen. Joyce Krawice (R – Forsyth)
* Has GOP “wish list” items
* Includes another attempt to repeal NC’s Certificate of Need Law (CON) – Required before healthcare facility/provider can build facility, buy equipment, or offer surgical procedures

**SB 339 & HB 512: “We the People Act”** (Van Duyn & Nickel – D) – Send NC voters a Referendum urging Congress to pass amendment to Constitution stating that free speech *exclude*s the unlimited spending of money on political campaigns

**Other Bills in House and Senate:**

* Abortion /Reproductive Rights Bills
* Retirees’ COLA
* Agricultural Disasters
* Living Wage
* Pension Benefits
* Safety of School Drinking Water
* Mental Health: Suicide Risk, Teen Violence

**Why do I take the time to share that information with you?**

**Let me answer that question with another one: Do you not think it strange that the same Republican majority that has ridiculed and denounced our public schools and deprived them of the funding necessary to be successful for years suddenly has an “interest” in those schools? (Stu Egan, *Caffeinated Rage*, Mar. 29, 2019)**

* I certainly do.
* My opponent is a classic example of his Party in this regard:
  + Though he is a teacher, he has consistently voted against public education --- taking away tenure, professional development funding, money for salary increases, money for our students, and money for our schools.
  + However, now, he seems to be the voice of public education on the NCGA!
* **Why?** Because the Republican Party knows that they no longer have the upper hand that has given them absolute control:
* The 2018 Election = Helped swing many districts to Pro-Education Candidates
* Now, a Pro-Education Governor = Can veto their ridiculous policies
* Both Chambers = No longer veto-proof!
* Budget = Can no longer be approved via the “nuclear option.”
* **Finally, the Republicans must face this fact**: They can no longer ignore Public Education in this state!

**But – Do not relax at this point: Many Republicans are still determined to attack and destroy the public education system in North Carolina ….WHY?**

* Borrowing again from Mr. Egan’s blog: “Despite What Berger, Moore, and Johnson Say, They Actually Fear a Well-Educated General Public”
* A Well-Educated Public = Would not let current lawmakers be in a position of power where they provide an agenda favoring the few over the many --- over those they should be helping
  + Populism and Nationalism
  + Anti-science, education, critical thinking, “elite” (or anyone who is “different”)
  + One Leader or One Party = Knows what is best for the people
* Republican’s Efforts over the Last Several Years = Directed at spreading such philosophy and protecting the policies they have enacted:
  + Gerrymandering
  + Former Voter ID law = Struck down by Judicial System
  + Current Vote ID Law = Cannot decide on ID’s!
  + Assault on public schools = One of most progressive systems in South and Nation all of a sudden “needed reforming” ?
    - NCGA saw money allotted for public schools as an untapped reservoir for private entities.
    - So…Public suddenly started hearing about low test scores, school performance grades (tracked poverty, not achievement), and failing schools!
    - Teaching Performance = Shaped by the Business Model -- robbed teachers of professionalism
    - BUT . .DID they Do anything to help Public Schools? NO --Per Pupil Spending = 39th nationally --- shows NCGA’s…

1. relentless pursuit to contain their own fears of a well-educated public by keeping schools from thriving!
2. lack of investment in public schools:

Since the Republicans gained control in 2010, school funding has been cut in these areas:

* 1. Teachers
  2. Instruc. Support personnel
  3. School building administrators
  4. TA’s
  5. Transportation
  6. Low wealth schools
  7. Disadvantaged students
  8. Central office personnel
  9. Limited English Prof. students
  10. Academically Gifted students
  11. Small counties
  12. Dr Ed
  13. Technology
  14. Professional Development and Teacher Mentor Programs = Cut entirely
* **Orchestrated Attack on Public Education = Has not been limited to K-12: Higher Education has suffered as well**
* Over 50% of all Republicans say that Colleges have a Negative Impact on society!
* Results?
  + Higher tuition
  + Millions of dollars recalled each year
  + Tighter control of the University System and its philosophy

**CRITICAL ISSUES THAT THE NCGA SHOULD BE ADDRESSING:**

*(and they are addressing some of these…)*

1. End partisan gerrymandering (Supreme Court currently split on the case before it)

2. Renew commitment to and funding for public schools\*

3. Increase transparency and accountability for charter and private school voucher programs\* (Bills)

4. Solve environmental crisis

5. Address chaos within the UNC system

6. Revise tax system

7. Expand Medicaid (Bills)

8. School calendar flexibility (Bills)

\**Listed as 1 of Public School Forum’s Top 10 Educational Issues 2019*

**Public School Forum’s Top 10 *Educational Issues* 2019:**

1. Fix the Class Size Crisis

2. Invest in Our Children’s Education

3. Insist on Transparency & Accountability for School Choice Programs (bills)

4. Recruit and Retain the Best and Brightest Teachers and Principals

5. Fix the Faulty A-F School Grading System (bills)

6. Scale Up Successes for Our State’s Struggling Schools

7. Adopt a Whole Child approach to Health and Learning

8. Pursue Outcomes-Focused Strategies Towards Racial Equality

9. Increase NC’s Investments in Early Childhood Education ($50 of the $75 million)

10. Govern Our Schools Well and Govern Together

**So…after all that, what do we do now at this Very Critical Time?**

* Let me repeat what I said at the beginning of my speech:
* “We have not achieved all that we need to achieve at the local, state, or national level. There is much more work to do, and I am here today to ask each and every one of you to unite as you never have before to do that work!”
* My primary campaign slogan in the fall election was “Brave Enough to Say Enough!”
* That is what we need to say, Ladies and Gentlemen -- except that we ALL must say it in ONE UNITED VOICE:
* **Brave Enough to Say *Enough* of …**
  + Starving our public schools
  + Denying our students the funding needed for their success
  + Robbing the public school coffers to fund Charter and Private schools – without requiring the same accountability
  + Demoralizing our teachers with inadequate pay, fewer benefits, no Master’s Degree incentive, no tenure, no prof. dev. funding
  + Depriving our citizens of adequate and accessible healthcare
  + Mandating that the University System and community colleges revert to the state millions each year
  + Letting huge corporations have huge tax breaks while our hard-working middle class families struggle with higher taxes
  + Allowing those who pollute our water and land to pass the clean-up cost on to the people of our state
  + Doing the business of the people behind closed doors without the input of the people!

**Now, you may say, What can I do as one person?**

* Get up and Get Involved!
* Attend the Party meetings and Be Active in your local Party.
* Take an active role in the next election:
  + Campaign for the candidates you believe in …
  + Make the calls, canvass, host events, write editorials, design signs, donate money, sign cards …. and GET THEM ELECTED!
* Keep informed of the bills that your representatives are voting on … hold them accountable!
  + Stay in touch with them –
  + Let them know how you want them to vote … l
  + Let them know your approval or disappointment afterwards!
* **Most of All, everywhere you go, Be Brave Enough to Say ENOUGH!**

**If you don’t (or worse) if you won’t,**

**I have One Final Question for You:**

**WHO WILL?**

**I did not intend or want to run for office.**

* **Alexander County Retired Teachers: I could feel the passion inside me**
* **Calls from local folks … NCGA members … from LEAD NC … from Gov. Cooper … from Gov. Jim Hunt**
  + **“I know Jesus”**
  + **“He got his message out, didn’t he, Dianne?”**
* **Ecclesiastes Chapter 3: There is a time for everything….a time to speak and a time to remain silent …. I GAVE UP!**
* **I ran as hard as I could … and I lost ….**
* **BUT…. I have not lost my passion for what I was fighting for or for the people I wanted to help.**

**I encourage you to find that kind of passion for a candidate and a cause!**

**Please, Be Brave Enough to Say ENOUGH!**

**Because again, if you do not or will not,**

**WHO WILL?**

Sources: *Education NC, Daily Digest*, March 27, 2019; *Real Facts*, March 27, 2019