

WRMR-FM, Wilmington, NC (98.7)
QUARTERLY LISTING OF COMMUNITY CONCERNS/ISSUES
AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROGRAMS
1st QUARTER 2024

The following is a list of issues and concerns for 1st Quarter 2024, and addresses in Public Affairs Programming, Public Service Announcements, Community Involvement and special programming on WRMR-FM.

1. ENVIROMENT
2. ELECTIONS
3. IMMIGRATION
4. EDUCATION
5. STATE COURTS
6. LATINO AFFAIRS
7. DEATH PENALTY
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PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROGRAMS

During January, February and March, WRMR-FM broadcast 13 hours of Public Affairs Programming on Sundays from 6:00AM-7:00AM.

NEWS & VIEWS WITH CHRIS FITZSIMON is a 30-minute program, focusing on state policy issues that air Sundays at 6:00AM.

North Carolina Newsmakers is a 30 minute program focusing on state and local issues with Nancy Benson and Reed Pence that airs Sundays and 6:30AM.

2024 1st QUARTER ISSUES

1. ENVIRONMENT

You don't have to be a newshound to have understood that 2023 was yet another big year for stories related to the environment – and the seemingly countless ways in which human wellbeing was (and continues to be) endangered by pollution.

2. ELECTION

In just over a month, early voting will commence in the North Carolina primary election. So, what are voters thinking?

3. IMMIGRATION

If you've paid any attention to the news from Washington of late you know that Congress is seriously discussing legislation that would both address problems at the southern border and provide a package of desperately needed foreign aid to Ukraine and other global hot spots

4. EDUCATION

North Carolina consumes a larger share of the state budget or more attention from state leaders than K-12 and higher education.

5. STATE COURTS

Throughout most of U.S. history, state courts (and judicial elections) have seldom been the site of pitched political battles.

6. LATINO AFFAIRS

If you're paying any attention to the national political debate these days, you know that the political right has made immigration and a campaign to demonize immigrants its top talking point for the 2024 election cycle.

7. DEATH PENALTY

This coming week in Johnston County, the death penalty – a punishment our state has not inflicted in close to two decades – will, effectively, go on trial, when one of more than a hundred pending challenges to the racially discriminatory way North Carolina long sentenced people to death is heard in the case of a defendant named Hasson Bacote.

8. PUBLIC POLICY

In the eyes of a growing number of observers, the future of democracy itself will be at stake in the 2024 U.S. elections and this sobering fact has enormous implications – not just for Americans but for the populations of dozens of allies around the world.

9. POLITICAL SCIENCE

Super Tuesday 2024 is upon us and that means it's primary election week in North Carolina and several other states as voters go to the polls to choose major party nominees for president and a host of other important offices.

10. GAMBLING

As you've no doubt heard, legalized sports gambling arrived in North Carolina this past week, just in time for college basketball's March Madness. And while many are treating this news as a ho-hum development, there are a lot of observers and experts who have some profound concerns and recently we caught up with one of them.

PROGRAMMING:

1. ENVIROMENT

News & Views for January 7, 2024

Guest: Environmental investigative reporter Lisa Sorg

You don't have to be a newshound to have understood that 2023 was yet another big year for stories related to the environment – and the seemingly countless ways in which human wellbeing was (and continues to be) endangered by pollution.

Here in North Carolina, NC Newsline environmental investigative reporter Lisa Sorg filed scores of stories documenting this hard reality, and recently, we sat down to discuss some of them – including the recent decision of the federal EPA to limit imports of the toxic forever chemical GenX, continued concerns about a new natural gas pipeline that's proposed for parts of central North Carolina, the advances and setbacks of the environmental justice movement, and how the 2024 elections will likely impact state environmental policy.

2. ELECTION

News & Views for 1-14-2024

Guest: Tom Jensen, Public Policy Polling's director of polling

In just over a month, early voting will commence in the North Carolina primary election. So, what are voters thinking? Are North Carolina Republicans seriously considering any other presidential candidate besides Donald Trump? What can we expect if November brings us a Trump-Biden rematch? Is a gubernatorial contest between Attorney General Josh Stein and Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson a foregone conclusion?

Earlier this week, I got some pretty definitive answers to all these questions -- as well some insights as to why voter unrest seems to remain so high at a time during which the economy is humming along -- when I sat down with one of the country's best and most accurate pollsters, the director of Raleigh-based Public Policy Polling, Tom Jensen.

3. IMMIGRATION

News & Views for 2-4-2024

Guest: States Newsroom Washington, DC Bureau reporter Ariana Figueroa

If you've paid any attention to the news from Washington of late you know that Congress is seriously discussing legislation that would both address problems at the southern border and provide a package of desperately needed foreign aid to Ukraine and other global hot spots. And while the package enjoys support from the White House and members of both parties, it's also drawing heat from immigrant advocates who think it will cause great harm to migrants fleeing violence and persecution and Donald Trump who's campaigning on an anti-immigration platform and wants to deny any policy victories to President Biden.

And earlier this week while the matter was still very much up in the air, we caught up with a journalist who follows it daily, States newsroom Washington, DC bureau reporter, Ariana Figueroa.

4. EDUCATION

News & Views for 1-22-2024

Guest: David Rice, executive director of the group Public Ed Works

As has long been the case, no other function of state government in North Carolina consumes a larger share of the state budget or more attention from state leaders than K-12 and higher education. Unfortunately, in recent years, those appropriations have steadily withered even as the attention lawmakers devote to our schools and universities has related more and more to the micromanagement of hiring and curriculum decisions and enforcing an ideological agenda than giving educators the funding and support they need.

One expert who keeps tabs on these trends and frequently critiques the performance of state legislators when it comes to public and higher education is the executive director of the nonprofit research and advocacy group Public Ed Works, David Rice. And recently he was kind enough to join us to review some of the top education issues currently facing the state.

5. STATE COURTS

News & Views for 1-29-2024

Guest: Attorney Douglas Keith of the Brennan Center for Justice

Throughout most of U.S. history, state courts (and judicial elections) have seldom been the site of pitched political battles. While these courts regularly issued important rulings with

significant impacts on public policy debates, the judges and justices who served on these courts were generally able to avoid being drawn into the bareknuckle politics that so often characterize races for other elected offices.

In recent decades, however, things have changed. In the late 20th Century, the political right launched an ambitious national effort to promote and fund the campaigns of conservative judges and in recent years, progressives have been doing their best to respond. These developments have had a big impact on the courts and American politics generally, and recently we had an extended chat with an expert who follows, chronicles, and weighs in on this subject, attorney Douglas Keith of the Brennan Center for Justice. In Part One of our conversation, Keith explained how this arose and just what big deal it's become.

In Part Two of our chat, we discussed some of the worrisome implications of his transformation, and perhaps most importantly, some of the changes that states can and should consider adopting in order to depoliticize state courts and restore public faith in the idea of an independent and impartial judiciary.

6. LATINO AFFAIRS

News and Views for 2-25-24

Guest: Ricky Hurtado, former state representative and current chair of the Governor's Advisory Council on Hispanic/Latino Affairs

If you're paying any attention to the national political debate these days, you know that the political right has made immigration and a campaign to demonize immigrants its top talking point for the 2024 election cycle. Republicans in the U.S. House have even sought to condition passage of a critical foreign aid package for Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan, on a Democratic agreement to, effectively, close the southern border.

Meanwhile, here in North Carolina – a place thousands of miles from the border in which immigrants are an essential and hugely beneficial part of the economy and society generally – we're hearing similar hateful rhetoric and proposals, and recently we

caught up with a leader who's working hard to counter them with facts and common sense, the chair of the Governor's Advisory Council on Hispanic/Latino Affairs, former State Representative Ricky Hurtado.

7. DEATH PENALTY

News and Views for 2-26-24

Guest: Noel Nickle, executive director of the North Carolina Coalition for Alternatives to the Death Penalty

This coming week in Johnston County, the death penalty – a punishment our state has not inflicted in close to two decades – will, effectively, go on trial, when one of more than a hundred pending challenges to the racially discriminatory way North Carolina long sentenced people to death is heard in the case of a defendant named Hasson Bacote. Lawyers for Mr. Bacote say they'll show that race affected not only jury selection and jury sentencing in his case, but in scores of cases across North Carolina.

The trial comes at a moment in which death penalty opponents have launched a spirited new effort to end the death penalty in North Carolina once and for all and last week we sat down with one of the leaders of that movement, the executive director of the North Carolina Coalition for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, Noel Nickle.

8. PUBLIC POLICY

News and Views for 3-5-24

Guest: Duke University Sanford School of Public Policy Professor David Schanzer

In the eyes of a growing number of observers, the future of democracy itself will be at stake in the 2024 U.S. elections and this sobering fact has enormous implications – not just for

Americans but for the populations of dozens of allies around the world.

One expert who's watching this matter closely and expressing deep concern on a regular basis is Duke University Sanford School of Public Policy Professor David Schanzer. Schanzer who heads the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security and holds forth regularly on the substack website, Perilous Times, says the current pro-Russia, pro-authoritarian turn of many U.S. Republicans is an extremely troubling development.

9. POLITICAL SCIENCE

News and Views for 3-12-24

Guest: Catawba College political scientist Michael Bitzer

Super Tuesday 2024 is upon us and that means it's primary election week in North Carolina and several other states as voters go to the polls to choose major party nominees for president and a host of other important offices. And while the primary season has been rather subdued here, with few of the top contests looking especially close or competitive, this week's primary will be enormously impactful – especially in congressional districts where gerrymandering has already assured which party's candidate will win in November. And earlier this week we got a chance to discuss where things stand in the presidential race, some of the controversies that have arisen, and some of the issues that will likely be front and center in the months to come with Catawba College Political Science professor, Michael Bitzer.

10. GAMBLING

News and Views for 3-19-24

Guest: Prof. Michelle Malkin, director East Carolina University's new Gambling Research and Policy Initiative

As you've no doubt heard, legalized sports gambling arrived in North Carolina this past week, just in time for college basketball's March Madness. And while many are treating this news as a ho-hum development, there are a lot of observers and experts who have some profound concerns and recently we caught up with one of them.

Michelle L. Malkin is an assistant professor of criminal justice and criminology at East Carolina University in Greenville and the director of ECU's new Gambling Research and Policy Initiative. Malkin told us that while there are safety advantages that legal and regulated gambling provides over illegal and unregulated gambling, there are also reasons to be concerned that the new system will entrap many people – particularly young men – in highly addictive behavior.

Additional Topics aired from News & Views

Guest: Congresswoman Kathy Manning

January 22 marked the 51st anniversary of the landmark Roe v. Wade ruling and for many supporters of human freedom and equality, it was a bittersweet day. For nearly half a century, Roe served as a beacon of hope and progress – a rare historical instance in which a male dominated society surrendered its unjust hegemony over the lives of women.

Of course, all that changed in June of 2022 when a conservative bloc on the court reversed the ruling and left millions of American women less free than their mothers and grandmothers.

Fortunately, and not surprisingly, however, Roe's reversal has spurred an energetic national movement to reestablish reproductive rights in state and federal law and recently we caught up with one of the champions of this effort in Washington, North Carolina sixth district congresswoman, Kathy Manning. In Part One of our chat, we discussed some of the many troubling impacts and new threats to personal freedom we're seeing as the result of Roe's reversal.

In Part Two, we continued our discussion of the battle over reproductive rights as well as some of the other matters of great concern in today's charged political environment, including the rise of right-wing extremism and threats to democracy. Happily, though, we were also able to discuss some more encouraging news, including some good economic reports and the Biden administration's latest efforts to dramatically increase access to broadband internet service in rural North Carolina.

Guest: Durham Tech Community College President JB Buxton

Despite the myriad challenges they face because of inadequate funding and the interference of meddling politicians and self-appointed culture warriors, North Carolina's public and higher education systems continue to generate a steady stream of new and exciting innovations. And earlier this week, we got a chance to learn about one that's being launched in the Triangle.

Thanks to a new multi-million-dollar grant, the Durham Public Schools are partnering with Durham Tech Community College to start a new high school program for students interested in pursuing healthcare careers after graduation. The program will enable students to attend an early college in which they'll be

prepared upon graduation to enter any number of several high demand healthcare careers. And earlier this week, we sat down with the President of Durham Tech, JB Buxton, to find out more.

Guest: Education Law Attorney Matt Ellinwood of the North Carolina Justice Center

Late last month, the North Carolina Supreme Court took the extraordinary (and what many see as the deeply worrisome) step of revisiting the landmark Leandro school funding case – a case that has long guaranteed all the state’s schoolchildren a constitutional right to a sound basic education.

At issue is whether state lawmakers can be ordered to appropriate the funds necessary to make the constitutional guarantee a reality throughout the state, and as I learned in a conversation, we had recently with attorney Matt Ellinwood - -the director of the North Carolina Justice Center’s Education and Law Project – the arguments before the court provided great cause for concern. As Ellinwood also noted, however, regardless of the outcome in the case, advocates have no intention of giving up on their efforts to secure adequate funding for public schools.

Guest: Dr. Lauren Fox, director of policy and research for the Public School Forum on North Carolina

A top challenge facing public schools in North Carolina right now is a chronic teacher shortage – a shortage attributable to pitifully low salaries and several other shortsighted policies. Fortunately, there are some obvious and doable actions that state leaders can take to address this problem – actions detailed in a recent report from experts at the Public School Forum of North Carolina.

And as we learned in a recent conversation with the Forum’s senior director of policy and research, Dr. Lauren Fox, many of these solutions –as well as solutions to the massive funding problem that afflicts several low wealth counties – can be addressed if state lawmakers simply get serious providing the necessary dollars to get the job done. Fox discusses improving North Carolina’s teacher pipeline and local supplement finance funds.

Guest: Peter Hans, President of the University of North Carolina System

Few public institutions in North Carolina have been at the epicenter of more highly charged political debate and controversy in recent years than the UNC System. Since Republicans took control of the legislature at the beginning of the last decade, they've systematically removed almost all Democrats from university governance, relieved the Governor's office of its higher ed appointment powers, forced the ouster of two system presidents deemed insufficiently obedient, and sought repeatedly to micromanage the details of campus life – from curricula to the faculty hiring to when and if schools would open during COVID. One figure, however, who seems to have found a way to thrive in this contentious environment is current system president Peter Hans. To hear critics describe the situation, Hans gets on well with the board and the legislature because he's been willing to do their bidding. And, indeed, in many instances, that's an assessment that's hard to deny. That said, Hans has increased his own authority since taking office and as you'll hear in the following special extended conversation we recorded recently, he's someone who publicly expresses a desire to build bridges and find common ground.

In Part One of our recent extended conversation with the University of North Carolina System president Peter Hans, we discussed some of the successes UNC campuses have had in keeping tuition and fees relatively affordable, while also dealing with some of the tough realities posed by shifting demographics. In Part Two of our conversation, we explored some of the more controversial topics that have been front and center during Hans's tenure in office – including the micromanagement of university affairs and chancellor searches by politicians and their appointees, the lack of diversity on the system Board of Governors, the recent decision to prohibit schools from switching athletic conferences without Board of Governors approval, and the threat posed to student wellbeing by the legalization of online gambling and a growing array of social media apps.

Guest: The executive director of the nonprofit advocacy group NC Child, Erica Palmer Smith

Finding affordable childcare: it's a huge challenge in North Carolina. While our state has one of the nation's highest rates of working parents with young children, 44% of the state's families live in a "childcare desert" where there are more than three times as many children as licensed childcare slots.

What's more, things could get much worse very soon. Thanks to actions of Republicans in Congress, federal subsidies that helped keep childcare facilities afloat during the pandemic have ended, and while the state legislature came up with a temporary fix last year, those funds will run out in June, and unless action is taken before then, thousands of facilities could be in grave jeopardy. Thankfully, children's advocates are lobbying lawmakers for a permanent fix and recently we caught up with one of the leaders of that effort, the executive director of the group NC Child, Erica Palmer Smith.

Guest: States Newsroom national reproductive rights reporter Sofia Resnick

It's been almost two years now since the U.S. Supreme Court reversed a half century of precedent by overturning the Roe v. Wade decision and ending the constitutional right to abortion care. And as had been expected, the ruling has produced a convoluted patchwork of laws that's left women in many states – particularly women of low-income – in incredibly difficult straits. What's more, a new case that will come before the court in the coming days involving the abortion pill mifepristone could make the situation even more dire. Recently, to get a better understanding of the state of reproductive rights in 2024 and what the future might hold if the Court were to side once again with abortion opponents, we caught up with States Newsroom national reproductive rights reporter, Sofia Resnick.

Guest: WRAL documentary producer Cristin Severance

It's a remarkable and deeply sobering fact that the leading cause of death when it comes to kids in our state is not an illness or disease. No, the statistics confirm that the Number One killer of children in North Carolina is gunshot wounds. In examining one

especially tragic story, a brand-new WRAL documentary looks at why this is so.

It's called "Unsafe: North Carolina kids dying from gun violence" and recently we caught up with the WRAL investigative documentary reporter who produced and hosts the program, Cristin Severance.

"UnSafe" will also explore a proven solution to stopping these types of tragedies with bi-partisan support among lawmakers and North Carolinians in general.

Guest: State Rep. Julie von Haefen

The United States Supreme Court heard its first major abortion case this past week since it issued the 2022 Dobbs decision, overturning Roe v. Wade. At issue this time is mifepristone – a safe and effective medication that was approved by the Food and Drug Administration a quarter century ago and that today is used in a large majority of the nation's abortions.

The arguments in the case drew advocates and elected officials from across the country to Washington, including Wake County State Rep. Julie von Haefen. Von Haefen, who was a signatory to a "friend of the court" brief in the case and had a chance to address a group of pro-choice advocates, returned to North Carolina the following day and was kind enough to sit down with News & Views for a chat to discuss both the abortion pill case as well as some other issues likely to be discussed in Raleigh next month as the legislature's 2024 short session gets underway.

Guest: Dr. Scott Brennen of UNC-Chapel Hill's Center on Technology Policy

Artificial intelligence of AI. It's a topic that generates a lot of talk, a lot of hope, and a lot of concerns these days. On the positive side, AI has the potential to aid in solving an array of vexing societal problems and to help average people work better and faster in numerous ways.

On the other hand, of course, AI also raises real concerns – both with respect to the ability of humans to control and manage it and the possibility that it will be abused by bad actors to mislead people with false or phony communications. This latter concern is

of relevance as Americans prepare to vote in the 2024 election. Fortunately, a lot of smart people are paying close attention to these kinds of issues and recently News & Views caught up with one of them for a special extended conversation on the topic, the head of online expression policy at the UNC-Chapel Hill Center on Technology Policy – Dr. Scott Brennen.

In Part One of our conversation, we delved into the subject of artificial intelligence (or AI) and some of the good and bad things it can do when it comes to communication.

In Part Two of our chat, we continued this discussion with a special focus on political communication – both with respect to the 2024 election and more generally. And as Brennen told us, while he remains optimistic that phony AI messaging poses only a limited risk to the national election, there are risks and some important steps that elected officials can and should consider taking to help preserve the health of our democracy.