

Opinions

The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Revenge budget move harms rural healthcare



Colin Campbell
Guest columnist

“It’s petty, y’all” was how Sen. Don Davis, D-Pitt, described part of the state Senate’s budget proposal last week.

He’s right, but it didn’t have to be that way. Senate leaders rolled out their two-year spending plan in a news conference Tuesday, highlighting strong proposals to give state employees a 5 percent raise, give veteran teachers a \$1,000 bonus, expand rural broadband internet access and cut taxes for individuals and businesses.

But the news conference was deliberately held before the actual budget documents were made public. Reporters can’t ask good questions about a plan they haven’t seen, so it took another day for the more controversial hidden budget provisions to emerge. And when they did, tax cuts and education funding were buried under the more eye-popping headlines.

One revenge provision would target Eastern North Carolina’s largest healthcare provider, Vidant Health. Lawmakers are currently in a dispute with Vidant and Pitt County leaders over whether the UNC Board of Governors should have seats on Vidant’s governing board.

Because senators are mad that they won’t have seats on the board -- and perhaps because Vidant’s CEO is a vocal supporter of Medicaid expansion -- a budget provision would cut \$35 million from Vidant’s Medicaid reimbursement. Lawmakers are also considering revoking Vidant’s status as the teaching hospital for East Carolina University’s medical school and instead spending your tax dollars to build a whole new teaching hospital in Greenville.

It’s an absurdly drastic solution to a minor dispute over board seats, and it could have a catastrophic effect on healthcare access in struggling rural communities. Vidant’s current structure uses profits from its big hospital in Greenville to subsidize hospitals in smaller communities like Bertie, Chowan, Beaufort and Duplin counties. If Vidant loses funding, it might have to close some of those hospitals.

Sen. Rick Horner, R-Nash, pleaded with his GOP colleagues to “look into your hearts” and spare Vidant, but he was the only Republican to join Democrats in opposing the provision. Two senators, Sen. Brent Jackson, R-Sampson, and Sen. Bob Steinburg, R-Chowan, ultimately made a politically dumb move to shaft hospitals in their own districts.

When your party’s leaders routinely use the budget to punish anyone who crosses them, it can be hard to muster the courage Horner showed to vote against leadership -- even if it means voting against your own constituents’ healthcare.

Another vengeful provision was eventually reversed before the final budget vote. It would have eliminated half of the six-person staff assigned to newly appointed N.C. Supreme Court Chief Justice Cheri Beasley, a Democrat. She’d become the only appellate judge in the state with only one law clerk to help her issue rulings.

Budget writers offered a bizarre, nonsensical explanation for the cut: They noted that most law firms in smaller cities west of Charlotte get by with fewer staff attorneys than the state Supreme Court. It’s unclear how a small-town law firm’s workload would compare to the state’s Supreme Court.

The real reason was likely the Senate’s animosity toward Beasley, who Gov. Roy Cooper picked over Republican Justice Paul Newby. Cutting Beasley’s staff could also advantage GOP lawmakers by slowing down the Supreme Court’s ruling process.

With a Democratic majority on the court, it’s likely to strike down some GOP laws and could even rule against partisan gerrymandering.

After several days of outcry, senators backtracked and restored the cuts, but the Vidant cut remains. Let’s just hope state House leaders and Gov. Cooper use their power to stand up to bullies and keep that provision out of the final budget too.

Colin Campbell is editor of the Insider State Government News Service. Follow him at NCInsider.com or @RaleighReporter. Write to him at ccampbell@ncinsider.com.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Protect the world’s poor

“Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, it is an act of justice. Like Slavery and Apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.”

-Nelson Mandela

Most Americans believe about a quarter of the federal budget goes to foreign aid, however, less than 1% of the United States federal budget goes to foreign aid. The amount of money that is spent per American on foreign aid is approximately 73 dollars, compared to 1,763 dollars per American on defense.

It is my opinion that more needs to be done in addressing foreign aid and global poverty. By protecting funding in the International Affairs Budget, we would make a crucial investment in foreign aid.

A benefit from foreign aid is that when people transition out of poverty, there is a big return on investment for the United States. Eliminating poverty creates new consumers who will purchase American goods, expanding our exports and increasing national income.

I urge Senator Richard Burr and Senator Thom Tillis to protect the International Affairs Budget and change millions of lives for the better because the world’s poor are counting on it.
Sydney Gang, Asheville

Foreign aid is nonpartisan

Many people are surprised to learn that 85% of military officers agree that the U.S. International Affairs development and diplomacy efforts should be at least equal to defense efforts. Development and diplomacy are a long-term solution to deterring violence and poverty, yet we as a nation neglect these solutions.

The Global Fragility Act is a bill aimed at further implementing long-term solutions to violence and terrorism. I know many grew up in an era where corruption made it difficult for aid to reach those it was intended to reach. This is not the case any longer. The United States created the Millennium Challenge Corporation in 2004 whose sole mission is to make sure aid recipients actually receive their aid.

Foreign aid is not a partisan issue, developing nations currently buy 40% of American exports. This grows as those nation's economies grow. In turn, more jobs are created here in the U.S. When they do better, we all do better.

The point of this letter is to urge whoever's reading it to contact Senator Thom Tillis and Senator Richard Burr. Tell them to support The Global Fragility Act. It only takes a few seconds to do so.
Megan Lance, Asheville

Stand up for climate change today

On June 11th I will be one of nine members of the

Asheville Citizens’ Climate Lobby (CCL) going to Washington, DC to meet with our Representatives and Senators. We’ll join 1500 citizen lobbyists from across the country (and the political spectrum) who will conduct over 500 lobby visits in one day. We’ll respectfully call for a bipartisan climate solution that is effective, good for people, good for the economy and revenue neutral – the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act.

We are politically diverse, and disagree on many issues. But, we all believe in a livable world and are willing to put our differences aside. In fact, a new poll conducted by GOP strategist Frank Luntz revealed that carbon dividends have majority support across party lines including: 4-1 support overall; 2-1 support from GOP voters and 75% support from Republicans under 40. In addition, 4 out of 5 voters want Congress to put politics aside and reach a bipartisan solution.

If you believe that climate should be a bridge issue please let your lawmakers know. We’d be grateful if you could have our back on Wednesday, June 5 and take 10 minutes to call your representatives. All the info you need to deliver a clear message is available at CCLUSA.org/call.

Don Kraus, Asheville

Life beyond birth

Alabama, whose governor recently signed a draconian abortion bill claiming that the state believes in “the sanctity of life,” just executed an inmate. I struggle to understand how Alabama can justify these two actions.

Susan Mycroft, Asheville

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