

0:00: Hi everyone, I'm an independent journalist. My name is Annie Dance. I love to be a brother for County North Carolina, which is nestled between Asheville and Charlotte. I also have a sub-stack newsletter, feel free to subscribe, Annie Dance.substack.com, called Cops and Congress. I'm working to shine a light on police and policy issues in Western North Carolina, with a particular focus on the Lake Lower Area, which is the Western section of Rutherford County. I also founded a public Facebook group called Western NC Deaf Community. It's a group for those who are deaf and want to learn more about the deaf community who live and or work in the 19 counties of Western North Carolina. Feel free to check that out. You can search Western NC Deaf Community in Facebook, or there's a handy short link, bitly.com slash WNC Deaf. WNC is capitalized enough. Now I'm myself MDF. I'm mostly deaf. I'm pretty much 100% deaf in one year with a significant loss in the other. I use hearing aids, but I also rely on close captioning transcripts, the written word, and my hearing aids, unfortunately, don't capture everything that's always being said. Technology only goes so far. You sometimes you have to find workarounds to live life with a disability, and not just for me, but for any type of disability, and for even those who don't have disabilities, sometimes reading is easier than listening. So it seems to be a fad in North Carolina, and really nationally, but I've seen it more in North Carolina, where politicians go on podcasts, and they do that, I think, for a few reasons. Certainly, it's a quick way to get the word out for people to listen into a conversation, but I also am a little more skeptical in thinking this because I cover public records. I think when someone discusses something verbally, they're not always putting it in writing, right? So they're going to be talking about things that may or may not be controversial, but they don't want to be tied to the written word. So I think that's important to keep in mind as I go forward and discuss for about an hour today what I'd like to keep to talk about. So right now, I'm speaking on Wednesday, December 6, 2023, the candidate filing is underway for the 2024 election. It goes through noon on December 15. You can go NCSBE.gov to learn more, and you can view candidates list, you can file yourself if you want to file for office. You can also look at your own voter registration status, and that will show you if you're registered to vote, if you need to update registration, stamp about for upcoming elections, your voting districts, and past elections that you participated in, just call your voter history. So that's a really helpful tool to navigate as legislators, they recently approved redistricting. So it can be redistricting can be confusing, and that's one of the key parts of our democracy is understanding not only your right to vote, but who are you voting for? Who are these people who are running for office? Where can you learn more? So if you go to NCLEG.gov slash redistricting, you can see all the maps for not only the State House, State Senate, and congressional maps, but today I'm going to talk about the State House. Rutherford County is really interesting. So I live in the Green Hill section of Rutherford County, which is kind of the western part, me zoom in here a bit, and you can see Rutherford County a little bit better, hopefully. So Rutherford County is divided by two State House representatives. The 113th district, which is where I am, is covered by Jake Johnson, who's a Republican from Paul County. Now that district covers part of Henderson County, Paul County, and Rutherford County, and part of McDowell. And that's because of really complex reasons, but at the end of the day, it has to do a population, and there has to be a certain number per district. So Rutherford County, like I said, is a split district, the 111th district, House Representative District. Currently today is wrapped by Tim Moore, who's the North Carolina House Speaker.

4:51: Now you probably may know he is running for Congress. He's opted not to run a re-election to the House.

4:57: He's going to run in the new congressional district. Let's take a quick look at the congressional maps.

5:05: So Rutherford County currently is a split district as of today between the

Kemp and 11th congressional district. Come 2024, that map has been changed with redistricting, and now Rutherford County is completely full, is what they call a full county, under the newly formed 14th district.

5:32: Now that's not, the number isn't new to the state, it's, but the maps and the way they re-draw the maps Rutherford County is now part of the 14th, not the 11th. And Paul County is going to be part of the split between the 11th and 14th. So keep that in mind in a minute while I share something else.

5:55: So, like I said, Jake Johnson is our my state rep, and he yesterday filed for re-election for the North Carolina House. And if he's re-elected, he said I want to thank family friends for their continuing encouragement. If you live in the Hummer 13th, the Crosshangers in Polk and Rutherford in McDowell counties, I look forward to your chance to earning your vote and support. And so he filed to run for re-election. Now another independent journalist has a podcast called Polklor. Polklor is really interesting, unfortunately, as I mentioned, because I'm mostly deaf. Podcasts are really challenging for myself and for other people who may be deaf or hard of hearing to understand what is being said. And not only that, what is being said is sometimes so important, but there's no easy way unless that person is actually going through the trouble to have a transcript of what is being said to actually say that. So I'm going to play the podcast in the entirety, and I'm going to post this on my YouTube page. Now YouTube has a really cool way to, I can extrapolate the YouTube video to make a full transcript. And I can get that full transcript to really digest what is being said.

7:15: And I do that for accessibility not only for myself, but for others. Again, please subscribe AnnieDance.substack.com. And now I'm going to play Polklor Democracy in the ballot. Jake Chonston does some explaining. Polk County has taken on the chin this year when it comes to democracy.

7:32: He says, take a listen. From the southeastern corner of western North Carolina, this is Polklor.

7:45: I'm your host, James Hurnisham. Polk County has taken it on the chin this year when it comes to democracy.

7:51: The state legislature, where the Republican Party enjoys a veto-proof majority, thanks for the opportunity to talk to the state. And I'm going to play the podcast in the future. I'm going to play the podcast in the future. I'm going to play the podcast in the future.

8:10: The state legislature, where the Republican Party enjoys a veto-proof majority, thanks to the defection of a single-wayward Democrat, seems to have targeted our 244 miles of the state for a massive electoral makeover. Beginning next year, elections for seats in the Polk County Board of Education will be partisan affairs. Anyone who wants to run for one of the three seats sub for grabs has to choose between publicly embracing one of the two main parties, or fighting to get on the ballot as an unaffiliated candidate, which isn't all that easy to do.

8:42: The state GOP encouraged Polk County to make this change ourselves a few years ago, but that went over like a lit balloon. It was rejected by the current school board, current and former superintendents of education, and our entire county commission, which is composed solely of Republicans by the way. And it's not hard to see why.

9:02: Look at a list of school districts in the state ranked by performance. The top districts are almost all non-partisan. Across the country, more than 75% of school boards are non-partisan, and some states even forbid partisan school board elections. But, legislation converting Polk School Board to partisan status sailed

through the House and the Senate anyway.

9:24: Polk County also lost its off-year elections, which means that the municipal election scheduled for this fall were put off until next year. And every term of office at the local level will be four years long for now on. And the county got split in two as part of Congressional redistricting. Come 2024, the saluda and Cooper's gap precincts will stay in NC11, where Chuck Edwards will be running for re-election, possibly against Democratic State Representative Kayla Bruto, unless someone upsets either of them in the March primary. The rest of the county will be moved to NC14, where state house speaker Tim Moore wants to run against whoever the Democrats dare put up against him. Some of the folks in White Oak and Mill Springs areas will have to check out the Board of Elections website to find out which side of the dividing line they live on.

10:13: Our state representative, Jake Johnson, supported all of these changes. And over the next hour, I ask him why. I also ask him why he had funding for the saluda grade rails to trails project hold off the budget negotiating table at the 11th hour, threatening the whole project, only to reverse course soon after. Does that sound a little confrontational? Maybe, but we're now officially into the campaign season, so the questions are only going to get tougher. Our representative had answers prepared for all of them, so I'll let you judge whether those answers are up to snuff. Jake and I talk in the conference room above the House of flags museum in Columbus on December 4th, which happened to be the opening day of candidate filing for election 2024.

11:00: Jake Johnson, welcome back to Polklor. Absolutely, Jess. Thanks for having me on, I appreciate it.

11:05: Well, hopefully we can do at least one more before the election. Next year or maybe before the primary. Yes, right. We'll actually go back into session officially. I think the rough day we're looking at is late April, so as we get in and start looking at what that agenda looks like, maybe what the field looks like. We can do one early next year. I understand that because of the way in which the districts are drawn in this state, and we can talk about that a little bit this later, but what happens in the primary is actually pretty darn important because the outcomes kind of predetermined after that, isn't it? Well, I tell you in mind, we got a kind of a raw deal last time for anybody that remembers when redistricting happened. We actually got drawn in with another incumbent at the time. So I know a little something about having to go through primaries and that ended up being a very expensive race that, frankly, there was, I think, six in the House double bunked across the state. When I say double bunk, I mean, Republican, Drone in with Republican, and they have to run against each other or vice versa, Democrat, Drone in Democrat. And I think there was six Republicans drawn in with each other across the state lucky me got to be one of them.

12:21: So we went through a rough one last time and hoping we can avoid that this time at all possible.

12:27: Well, I certainly, I'll be paying real close attention now. You're going to be filing for re-election right after this interview. Correct. As soon as we wrap up, we're about five minutes of board of elections. So we'll be rolling right over there to file again, 2024. Right. I'm going to be advising everybody who's listening to pick real close attention to who files because it is.

12:46: I think the primaries are where it all happens. Absolutely. There's a handful of swing districts across the state. I don't know the exact number. By that, they could go either way at each year and really, you see, go anyway, but you got it. There's a handful that are going to be true swing districts across the state. And those are going to be obviously more expensive, weighted in the general.

And then you're going to have a lot that are really heavy weighted toward the primaries.

13:09: And last time, like I said, we got in kind of a rough situation last time. So, trying to have ordered this time. All right. Well, enough about the future. Let's talk about what's been going on for the last year. And Pope County has had several things happen to it, thanks to what your party has done in the legislative assembly with regards to elections.

13:31: And we can start off with what I think everyone in Pope County is most concerned about. And that is the introduction of partisan elections to the school board. It was that the idea was floated a couple of years ago and swatted down with, you know, unambiguously. Nobody around here wanted to see partisan school board elections introduced. And yet, we now have them. And I just want to go forward a little bit of history because what happened was there was a bill way back in February.

14:02: And that was just going to be Kataba County with Hickory and Newton Conover City School Board.

14:10: So all in Kataba County, they're going to switch to partisan. And then a committee added Pamela County and then a committee added Pope County and took out Pamela County and added Bunkham County to keep them from being partisan. Okay. So, given that we couldn't find anybody in Pope County with pushing for this, why did we end up with Pope County on that bill? Well, I will honestly say in our feedback, it was about 50-50.

14:40: It's what we were hearing. It's about 50-50. And that's people calling in person to everything.

14:47: And really, I think the catalyst for, and this was this initiative out of the Senate.

14:52: But the catalyst that really got us talking about it was the voter drop-off.

14:57: And just how little participation there was in those elections.

15:01: And when we say drop-off, I mean, from an election like mine where you've got the cleared parties on either 2-1, where they're not running under a platform per se. To drop-off, I believe was sore between 20 and 30%. And we heard a lot of good arguments both ways. Don't give me wrong. We heard this, we don't want this to become a partisan issue. Everything to people to start participating in these elections because they have no idea what the candidate stands for. And we heard those arguments both ways for months. And really, it didn't come down to personnel. It came down to just this year numbers of people who were participating in these elections at the level they were in other elections. And, you know, kind of the logic was, it was probably they didn't understand what they stood for and what platforms they were running under. And I think in a politically charged environment, people didn't want to vote for somebody that they didn't know any basis of what they stood for. Well, I can understand the argument of wanting to increase participation. This is obviously something America suffered with in the past, historically low compared to other Western nations. But let's look at the end result here. The whole county schools are consistently rated among the best in the state. Nitch.com, which is one of the popular rankings, again, put Polk County number two in the state. A report from a group called the North Carolina Forum for Education or something like that. I'll put it in the show notes. Just rang Polk County number one in addressing the needs, especially of economically disadvantaged students. Yeah. So, you know, we have been extraordinarily successful for a small

rural county. So given our success in the past using a nonpartisan school board, the fact that the existing school board didn't want partisan elections, the administration, the staff, the all five county commissioners, all of whom are the same parties you all opposed this. And that mean it was floated and they talked about maybe referendum, but it was there was unanimous agreement at the public meetings. So, I don't doubt that you heard some dissent, but it really did seem like what you're doing is changing something that doesn't need fixing. Yeah. And again, this was this was something that we heard good arguments on both sides. And it was this was a really tough one because at the end of the day, it really just did come down to the numbers and getting that participation up. And people came to us and said, you know, we're being asked to vote for people. We have no idea where they stand on anything. There's not enough money to get the messaging out. Well, okay. That's in part why this podcast exists is I want a lot of you know, I do want to help people get the word out. But if you wear small county, it's not that hard to figure out what people are all about. Right. I mean, how long does it take to find out whether where someone stands with some important issues like school vouchers or how channels just to books and libraries are made? I mean, it's you don't have to spend a lot of time like I do conducting long interviews. So I'm curious, cool. You don't have to name names. But what what type of people will telling you that they're really concerned about low turnout? I said it was a Senate initiative that something they've been pushing for for a while.

18:21: And at the end of the day, we did have a lot of people in the county. I mean, I know obviously they're not the ones probably coming on your show and talking to you. But we did have a large portion of the county emailing texting and frankly, when I was doing community events coming up and saying other other counties are doing this, we deserve to know where our school board members stand on certain issues. And they're hiding behind this nonpartisan thing, not tell where they stand. And I you know, and I not know the I know these people personally. So, you know, I can call them and ask, but to the average citizen, they felt like we, you know, we're being not we're being misled by not knowing where they allow uncertainties. Okay. Okay. That was so and that was a we get our on-board that's all day and I'm going to waste up all the time. But one more issue, what this means, a practical downside of this is that if you're not a registered member of the Democrats or Republicans, you have to get like 650 people to sign a petition to get you on the ballot. That's not going to be easy for unaffiliated members of the school board or people want to be members of school board who are unaffiliated, who are tired of the polarized partisanship in this country because it's really crazy these days.

19:32: What do you tell somebody who's unaffiliated and says, you know, that's an awful lot of work.

19:38: It's hard enough getting the word out there what I stand for. Now you want me to find 650 people in Pope County to sign a petition to let me on the ballot. That's the way it's always been. It's always been really hard when we've had independence run for county commissioner here many times.

19:54: And frankly, it's you know, and I don't think you have to be an extreme view of the party. If you are, you know, I think you just, it's just a political reality that to be competitive, you need to be aligned with one of those political parties to be able to, and it's not said can't be done. I mean, I'm sure it has been done, but it does make it extremely difficult and those elections. So in other words, what you're advising is if you're unaffiliated, just swallow your little bit of your independence and join one of the parties because that's the way you get to, you have a better chance of succeeding. I'm saying historically that's been, that's been the way it's worked. Okay.

20:33: Well, let's go to issue number two. Pope County used to have elections in

so-called off-election years, like odd numbered years, and we got that taken away from us this year. What was that all about? As far as the county commission races? Yeah, the municipal and county commission races. So that just come down to a sheer cost of administering elections that if we could get those synced up onto the same number of years, and there was very little pushback on that when you look at the sheer numbers of how expensive it is to administer elections. Again, helps turnout. That's, that was a big push in a lot of these bills is to get turnout up, and I think that when you have those off-number years, a lot of people don't know they're going on. A lot of times these are votes that are decided by the total vote turnout may only be in the double digits. So you've got extremely low turnout. It's very hard for people to make people wear this in elections just from a cost standpoint, and then the actual cost of administering the election itself through the Board of Elections. If we can get those all synced up, it makes a whole lot more sense. And then folk always did it a little strange. Even when I was on the county commission, folk always did it very strange to where the high vote getter, actually the two high vote getters, could have four-year term. The third person gets a two-year term. I don't know. I've talked to a lot of people across the state to try to figure out do other ones do it this way. It's, I don't, maybe one I've talked to across the state does it. So it was very rare. It was confusing to a lot of the voters because there's a, we just voted on you last time in the support year term. Well, I didn't get the two high votes, so you have to vote on me again this time. Or I did, so I'm not up for re-election.

22:15: Securiting that and making them all four-year terms made a lot of sense. Just for the public understanding of how elections work and making sure everyone was on the same page, going forward.

22:26: And again, I can't even think of all the top of my head of another one that did it that way across the state. So are we heading out everything four-year terms? Yes, yes. This, this, in the county that's headed to four-year terms as to where before, I believe it was the top two got a four-year bottom. You still won, but you only want a two-year term. So that was the way it was staggered.

22:47: Now it'll be staggered by when you get that four-year term. That's the way other counties historically do it. But, you know, we get municipal elections. We didn't have any this year, even though some terms were scheduled to be up, but they were just given another year and obviously.

23:01: But you still have to run every two years. I still have to run every two years, and that, that is something that is, and you know, a lot of these races, you truly legislate for, and I know I think we talked before about the long term or long session versus the short session. So in our long session, which we just came out of, you think we got out in November. So we legislated practically January through November, only having a few weeks off and all that. You get to November and you like, woo, okay, we're out of session. I got a file next month, and then you turn around and you file in December, and then oftentimes we'll have races that were early voting starts in February, mid February. So you turn around and it is an absolute sprint to that primary. Then once you, once you get by that, if you've got a general, you got a campaign all summer and go through that, you win, you turn around, you go back into session. So it really is a, a never ending cycle of getting through those sessions. Then you got a campaign year. And it's, it's, it's, it's challenging at times just because you're having to travel to Raleigh. Now, if you look 30 minutes from Raleigh, it may be a little different. But when you're having to get back to campaign events for and a half hours away, that, that, you know, logistically, you got to plan well. Would you like to see state reps go for four year terms? I think you would make a lot more sense. I mean, it, you know, it's never easy to do that just because you were, you were extending terms, but is like this year when we, we did homes that you can't, you know, you don't want to cut a term short. So if you extend that term, that's just always hard to do. But

especially when you're extending it, you know, by, by that.

24:34: But we've got a situation now where these races have become so expensive. I mean, we've got seats in the house and senate that are costing millions of dollars. But I mean, that's for, to reach in the house, you're reaching between 90 and 100,000 people in the Senate. I think it's two 25 to 25,000 people. So you've got these races that are so expensive. So you're having to raise so much money and having to spend so much money and so many of these races. And then you're having to go back and legislate. And so it's, it really is difficult on a two year cycle. I think it would make a whole lot more sense. We were all four years. So, you know, but maybe there needs to be a big public out craft for that. I think that means a, well, you know, you know, it brings up an interesting question because a lot of these changes, and we'll continue talking about them, don't seem to be grassroots complaints because people really aren't aware of what's involved in running an election or running for an office, right? So, I mean, it seems to me this is a function of people at the top going, this is how we can better run our elections, right? This isn't grounds while people being fed up with too many elections. And, you know, I would say, you know, I don't know how many people out there actually know we'd run every two years, you know, because they all got a blitz together. Congress does the same thing. I mean, you think how much money is spent in a competitive congressional election and that goes on every two years. And, you know, the politicians always talk about having to hate raising money. Well, people also hate hitting the mails and everything that would have to be set out there in these things and seeing the TV ads and all that.

26:06: Especially if you're in one of those competitive seats, I mean, you're going to get inundated with the political stuff, but you got to do it if you're again, you've got to do it to get your message out. Well, it seems like there's almost like there's conflicting notions here.

26:18: On the one hand, you want to increase voter participation. On the other hand, you're saying, why don't we do this to any elections? I mean, percentage wise, we won't increase it.

26:29: The propensity of it, I think, two years, you know, it's just, it becomes a logistic of being able to focus and being able to actually legislate. I mean, because like I said, right now, even during the short session, people will be running in elections. I think it's more than if we go to remember, you're not actually a full-time legislator. That is also, what's your salary? \$14,000 a year?

26:52: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Then whatever they give you, they don't even think covers the hotel.

26:56: But right. So you're a part-time legislator and yet every two years, you've got a amount of chem. You're over again, just like Congress, which is, which is more full-time. And so we've got, you know, really, it's, and again, it depends on where you live, too. You know, you live 30 minutes from the Capitol. It's a lot different than if you live four and a half hours, or if you're a buddy car or a lesbian on the western part of the state, I want to say he's six and a half seven hours away.

27:20: So you've got folks having to really commit a lot of time just being on the road. And frankly, doing what I do now, if it wasn't for the technology and being able to do some of it remotely online, I'm not sure I'd be able to be up there right now. I mean, 20 years ago, before we're able to do so many things remotely, you really had to be somebody that had the flexibility to do that. And, you know, someone working in a normal nine to five, that's really difficult. And especially, again, if you're having to commute that far. So, you know, just the logistics of it, do present a lot of challenges. What do you think about the idea of paying?

This is self-interrithing.

27:58: Yeah, I mean, really, if you don't pay legislators, part-time legislators, enough money, you can only attract people who are more or less independently. Yeah, or, or, or are able to do things remote, doing back in the district, and then be able to go to Raleigh three days a week. And we we've talked about putting together, I know this has been floated in the past. I'm not sure where it landed, being able to float a commission to say, based on the hour's work, based on this, based on the work, what, you know, it really, it, it, it, it, it, it, it, it, it, it, it, it, it, it, never looks good for us to say, hey, past this much. But, you know, I think there has been even retired legislators or some of the biggest advocates for this. There was a legislator in West from part of the state who recently, just was a huge advocate for this, and we got to put together some kind of commission that says, based on the time spent there, based on the amount you have to try out, based on this, this is what it needs to be set at. So it's not us saying, hey, this is what it will be. But somebody putting together the actual metrics of, you know, based on how much time you're there, this, this makes the most sense. All right, I'm glad you raised the notion of a commission because I got another idea for a commission that we should talk about, uh, drawing district boundaries.

29:08: This talks specifically about congressional district boundaries because, but put it bluntly, we had a really good system up until a few months ago because, uh, that there was 14 congressional districts in North Carolina. And the last time using the district boundaries that were drawn by the courts, seven went Republican and seven were Democrat.

29:30: And that accurately reflected the more or less 50 50 split in the popular vote in this state.

29:35: For statewide offices, it's very, very close to 50 50. So we had a system, again, it was working really well. But now the new boundaries which your party is just drawn, give you a 10 to 3 or 11 to, you know, 11 to 3 or 10 to 4 advantage. Um, so there's two questions about that. One is, again, it wasn't broken. Why fix it and two? Why did Pope County have to guess Clinton too?

30:04: Well, and I would back up and say any districts of court drawn, that is broken because the Constitution is extremely clear. And frankly, I'm not lawyer and I think I've disclosed that in every interview. I'm not a lawyer. I read the Constitution says the legislature shall draw the maps. And that is, that has been interpreted, you know, way too many different ways, but it says, what it says. So the fact that a court was even touching that map was blankly illegal to make.

30:31: Well, wait, but hold on, because that theory, the independent state legislature theory has been thrown out, okay, and buy every, every superior court. And, but not our Supreme Court.

30:42: Well, the new Supreme Court, but the point is that, but then the US Supreme Court and the, the only reason the court was drawing it was because the previous ones, which your party had drawn, throw an out for being unconstitutional, the basis of discriminated against people based on their race, which is a far greater, egregious, you know, a violation of basic rights than which, in its modern standard, no racial data was used in the in the last drawing that no racial data was used. And I don't remember what the court's actual ruling was. I believe it was that partisan data could be used, not racial data. Right. That's what they concluded. And they concluded that the previous district boundaries were discriminatory to African-Americans. That was their finding.

31:28: So that's why we ended up with a court drawing it. I don't think anyone can disagree that that had to happen. Right? If the court threw it out, you had to give

it to the courts to draw. No, absolutely not. So the way the Constitution reads, they cannot like our maps. They can't touch. And that's where this news Supreme Court came in. So you kid me, said you just blindly violated the Constitution by touching those maps. You can say you don't like them. And you know, every justice has their own opinion. That's why they're elected to. What they can't do is say, I don't like them so I'm going to draw. Because then you're you're blindly in constitutional violation. Okay. Well, look, obviously, hey, neither of us are lawyers. Yeah. Okay. But to my lawyers, but ultimately what the the boundaries that the court, sorry, the districts that the court drew produced a a a electoral distribution that was right in line with the way that people of North Carolina think about their politicians.

32:22: 50, 50, 7 and 7. And now the new ones again are going to be very, very skewed towards the Republican party. And I know in counties like Pope where most people who vote, vote Republican, they're not going to get upset about that. But fundamentally, again, the question is if the previous system produced a very representative, this is not an opinion, this is an objective statement, a very representative system that accurately reflected the politics of North Carolina. Why would you need to redraw the boundaries? Well, what I would say is if you if you look at the maps of today that are drawn that split very little voting precincts is is is and and that really the the I believe is the Stevens. I don't want to misquote this. The Stevenson ruling this says don't split where you don't have to pretty much. And it really just works out to a base on population. It's sometimes you're going to have county split. I mean, that's just that's just the reality of it that it's going to be split. And frankly, I'm not on redistricting and I so I don't get all the briefs on what the rules are. And I asked not to be on reaches. So which committees do you want? I said, I can tell you which ones I don't want to be. I would agree that would be a thankless committee assignment.

33:39: I want to be on redistricting because I said it's there's there's so many court cases you have to comply with. Frankly, it's it's extremely it would be extremely frustrating to me just to be on that committee because there's just so much you have to comply with and I'm looking at it. I'm like, okay, if you comply with one, I mean, how are you how are you compliant with both? Because that some in my header contradictory. So what what I'm looking at is, you know, one, the old districts and I say, Oh, I mean, early 2000s that that Republicans one under did not pass the I test. I would I would challenge anyone to go back and look at the maps of the early 2000s and then look at the maps that we drew and just based on that, which passes the I test of actually drawing districts that make sense. You know, we use the term communities of interest.

34:28: We use the terms not splitting the there's an acronym for it, but it's pretty much the voting.

34:38: I can't remember the acronym, but it's the voting areas. There's so many criteria you have to do.

34:42: Go back and look at one from the early 2000s. Go back and look at the ones that we most recently drew.

34:48: And I think that will put a lot in perspective. Yeah, but I'm just trying to compare the ones in the last election, which again, the courts had a master draw. And the ones that you just enacted.

34:58: And the bottom line is, uh, Republican Party in the United States is going to pick up three or four seats due to that. Not do not do to any changes in the way North Carolinians are voting, but simply because of the way you drew the election boundaries. Now, isn't there something fundamentally wrong with that? I think these maps, we did more to comply. I think then I'm not going to see any legislature

before us because I was there, but since I've been there, these maps were compiled more than any I've seen. And frankly, I'm not saying, you know, they they did it. So, you know, we can do it, but historically, the party and power has drawn the maps. And that's the way the Constitution was set up. Well, that brings me up into the point I want to bring up the commissions.

35:44: And I think 11 states in this in this nation, independent electoral commissions draw out the boundaries, specifically because too many Democrat parties and too many Republican parties have been gerrymandering way out of control. And, uh, when you New York, the Democrats drew districts that heavily favored them. And that's the courts are having serious problems with that. And in North Carolina, the Republicans are drawing gerrymandered districts that give them an unfair advantage.

36:11: So, what do you think the idea of an independent commission taking over responsibility for that?

36:16: Well, historically, whenever, and I will say this, when Republicans came in came into power, it was under Democrat maps that were drawn. So, I think a lot of times people put way too much focus on the map and lose sight of and a lot of these areas, it has to do with you've got a lot of people moving to the urban areas that are historically more Democrat. You have a lot of people moving to the rural areas that are historically more Republican. And we have 80. You have 80, I believe, it's 80 or maybe more than that now. Uh, Republican are rural counties in the state that tend to go more Republican. And, you know, if you look at the counties that Roy Cooper won in his first election versus this last election, I mean, you're going, I think you want 60 something counties in the state, I believe in the first time you ran for Attorney General versus I think we're getting down in the maybe low teens now. So, you're really looking at it's a population shift. So, when you're looking at the criteria of how you draw maps and you're looking if you can't, if you're not supposed to split those counties, especially, you know, you're looking at legislative districts, only 100,000 people or something like that, mine's a little bit of anomaly because I live in Polk County, which is only 20,000 people. So, I have to go get population in other places. But when you're looking at that criteria, it has a lot to do with where people are moving and where those population centers are, and then you compare that with a criteria you have to use. I mean, that's what gives you a lot of that dynamic. But that's why we do, we redraw the boundaries every 10 years based on the census results because those shifts do happen. And again, my point is, wouldn't it be better to ensure that because one day the Republicans will lose power in North Carolina, Democrats will take over. And we know it'll happen eventually, even with the jury managers. So, wouldn't you be more comfortable knowing that independent nonpartisan commission is going to produce boundaries every 10 years based on the population shifts that makes sense? I know historically, every party that's lost to the election talks about the commission and then every time it shifts back, it does. And that's the the Evan flow of time. And, you know, I think frankly, sometimes I think this will set on the house floor. So, I'll say it here. Instead of complaining about the districts, it may make more sense to look at the platform and how you've outran the headlights for some of your voters.

38:43: And if you're getting too extreme for the districts you represent, your voters will check you, and you will you will turn it over to the other side. Where else would happen in the early time? I could use that to say, Mark, get them back against you though, saying that there would be no reason to heavily skew the district boundaries in favor of one party if the party platforms were in sync with what the public wanted. And it's clear, it emanates clear, for instance, abortion, which I know is an important issue for you. The vast majority of Americans support Roe v. Wade.

39:15: vast majority. We're talking 70 to 80% want some form of abortion

legalized, not all the way to birth, but Roe v. Wade was a compromise that the most Americans get get behind. And yet, the Republican party in many places like Ohio is even refusing to listen to its own voters on a referendum that said, hey, we want some form of legalized abortion. And it was tear a lot. I think we we tried to do a good job here in all the groups. And the bill I think we passed was I said the word common sense. I think this was something that didn't didn't outlaw everything, you know, from conception, but also, you know, we had some people pushing for, you know, voting against the Born Alive bill, which I thought was, you know, that's that's if a child's already born, you know, survives the abortion survives that. I mean, yeah, we would take too long to get into the weaves. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I brought it up, but we're talking about the legislation that is cut off at 12 weeks, right? And which is half the length of Roe v. Wade. So it kind of sounds like a compromise between Roe v. Wade and a pure pro life. Yeah, and North Carolina was, was at 20 weeks, but prior. And so this just just pill it off eight weeks, which I think we'll do a lot good and saving babies within that eight weeks. But when you when you look at it was what we could get passed. And so, you know, I think it did do any good to put a bill out there that, you know, frankly, we weren't even get to be able to get on the floor. So, you know, even even within your own caucus sometimes, I mean, even we represent a lot of districts across the state, even within our own caucus, when you've got 72 people there. So being able to get some cassettes is and, you know, you know, when we have those discussions, we, we, you know, those are those are oftentimes very passionate discussions, even within your own party about where that is.

41:09: And, you know, we got to a point where that was that was bill we're going to be able to pass. So there was a lot of consensus building there and it was, you know, not what a lot of people were very frustrated. They wanted something more strict, maybe a heartbeat bill. Some wanted to leave it where it was and we settled on 12. Okay, well, you know, I can respect that level of compromise and give and take because not everyone agrees. But when it comes to, you know, fundamentals of democracy and again, electoral boundaries are kind of like that, it doesn't seem like there was an attempt to find a reasonable middle ground that a lot of Democrats could live with. I mean, 10, 4 or 11, 3 is going to be is the new split and with like one district kind of uncertain.

41:55: The end result for Polk County was was saluda and white and Cooper's gap get put in a district 11 and everybody else gets puts in district 14 and I know some counties got to get split because before there were some and there still are other counties under split. But I mean, we're such a small county. It really seems to me like we were sacrificed for no good reason because we're so small there probably wasn't there probably was a boundary you could have drawn the KEPPO county hold.

80:21: Well, and frankly, I just making requests to DC. I see a lot of benefits in being split and some people don't see it this way. I can tell you from counties I represented that are split, see a lot of benefit from it because you've got two votes instead of one for anything you're advocating for and I'll give you another example that if brother for county split now in the state house district when you've got myself and another member advocating for that if we've got a member project or something that we're advocating for and that's mostly capital projects the dam or something like that. If we're advocating for something like that having two people you can call and you've almost got an extra build-in vote and an extra build-in person advocating for this stuff and then you look at the historical context of it and frankly this was there was a couple different versions of the map one spoke with split one wasn't and you know for me you're looking at communities of interest and you look at saluda saluda has historically been very tied in with Henderson County this because I mean you got saluda addresses that are actually Henderson can't part of Henderson County. I mean it's where I do my shopping. Yeah I mean it's where you've got you've got you know 176 that ties in flat rock up

there you've got a lot of you've got a lot of infrastructure things whether it be you know I know some of the internet providers kind of tie in on that backside and watering things like that so you've got you've actually got a decent case to make that for communities of interest and I believe saluda historically was part of Henderson County way back in the day or was to or part of was tied in Henderson County so you've got that argument but really the thing that why I'll put it this way why I didn't fight it too bad was it's always worked out really well in my situation where you've got two advocates instead of one that and they may sit on different committees so if I've got a bill that would benefit Pope County whether it be I don't know emergency funding or something or something like that where I need something pushed through for Pope County that needs to go through a certain committee or maybe a case workload or things like that I find called Chuck Edwards or whoever wins this 14th district which I'm very familiar with all the candidates running there and feel very very very good about the ability to get and touch with them and Chuck's been great in the 14th or the 11th being able to y'all a number shift the 11th being able to get in touch with him so for me looking at it just seeing what I've seen at the state level where I've had split counties whether be McDowell Henderson, Rutherford being able to call that other representative and say hey I'm putting the request in but when it comes down to vetting these through appropriations if you could help advocate for that there's two of us advocating for it it increases our odds of being able to get that pushed through well it's a really logical argument however when you're talking about a small county like ours and relatively low population say you know my part saluda and the folks up in northern part it's not a lot of us isn't it kind of just as easy to ignore our interests because well you got a good state representative that's the thing you know you got somebody can call these guys and get it pushed through and I had to say that to say in my experience the split county is not not a bad thing at all and and I'll use Rutherford County as an example there was a lot of I mean it's a tier one county as my first time having having represented Rutherford County when I really got to diving in with the local officials there was truly a lot a lot of capital need I mean they got a jail we got a new jail here a few years ago and it's it's been one one flat out here and just for officer safety prisoner safety everything else but they're going to need one down there we got them some some good funding for that just a lot of be capital projects under that needed to be done I'm not sure those could have been done without having multiple people advocating for it if I had to put in that kind of request just by myself the amount that amount of money I am very skeptical I'm very skeptical it would have got approved but when you add two people saying hey you know we all have kind of our caps that we can put in for we get a lot of that they can say hey you know I'll use some of my caps based to help you out with this that that is huge so you know it probably works a little bit different in DC but in my experience having two people advocate for you there's a lot of advantages to okay and that brings up something I forgot to talk when we were talking about non-partisan school boards because I believe you know I think I emailed you when this was going on and your response was that you weren't pushing for the non-partisan for the partisan school boards but you're willing to accept it because you got to make deals in in state house and you didn't mention what was what was what were you hoping to get in return specifically what kind of things are you working on through committees that you can get in return for your support for some things which may not go down well in your own hometown well and here's the other part of it you've got rules committee on both sides so I'll I'll try to paint this kind of abstract you got rules putting on both sides and we usually try to trade off bills that if I've got something over there you guys and it may not be like you know that one for that one or something like that but we generally try to move those bills and and frankly it came down to is this the hill you know we want to die on when we got half our count and I'm yeah I know you don't believe me but we did have a lot of people advocating for this and frankly the numbers are what sold it for me at the end of the day when I'm going to and I'm going okay we have this voter drop off it's it's really at no point during that negotiation was it we oh we want to get rid of so it's that was never that that was

never the point that was used when the Senate was negotiating for it and they had a very logical thought out argument and when they come and presented that you know I'm looking at it going okay if I could get some bills moved and it wasn't like that one for that one it was just if I could get some of my stuff moved this this does make sense I've got a lot of people promoting for it is that really where we want to shut the whole process down over this and yeah wasn't about shutting the whole process down this was a bill that was started off in Kataba County and poke was added to it you know a month later couldn't you just said hey you know we just had a big debate in poke county because we had less than two years before and it was shut down here couldn't you've just said let's let's maybe put poke county further down the list let's just you know why add poke county and I mean at especially since bunkham county was added to the list but in the opposite way to make sure that partisan elections couldn't go in unless face it we both know why that's true that's the Democrats control but but bunch of county okay so it was quite clear that what you what the leaders in Raleigh were doing was making counties where Republicans are more likely to win you know give them partisan school boards and places where Democrats were likely to win make sure they couldn't have partisan school boards I mean there's no other way to interpret that well and that was never the way it was sold I mean that was that was never the way it was presented us it was simply we've got people coming to us saying they don't know what these people stand for and we we won't so and it was the same I mean I don't know if you remember the judges when when some of the judges were made to partisan across the state it was the same exact argument that was used people are not voting in these elections because they have no idea what these judges stand for and they don't want to vote their own way and then you know find out later that they voted for somebody who didn't believe the way they did it was it was really the same argument that it was used not we want to get this person in over that person it was these people have no idea people contacting us and I see it at the polls I saw it at the polls because when I'm standing out there you know oftentimes when it's non-partisan you know those are ones that are kind of left off the voter got so people are handing out I mean you've been to the polls you people trying to hand you everything and there's a left off there and they're like hey how do we vote on these how how you know the and they have no point of reference and I think it was the same argument that was used and that's the biggest parallel I can draw was when this was implemented for the judges same logic that was implemented for the school board was that some basic understanding where they stand okay but just one I know won't be labored the pipe but one next time then why make pumpkin county forbid them from having partisan elections I don't know I believe it was a local bill and I'm not sure if there was a local delegation issues I really don't know because it's it's local bills not like statewide bills it banks a lot more on the local delegation so I can't speak and just you know it's just a little bit of a conflict there as I was gonna say I don't even remember I don't know if there was any conversations with the bump from delegation I don't remember all right well I guess we've beaten that course for a little bit um let's talk about the other big thing that's going on in post county that's the rails to trails project which is almost certainly gonna happen right we'll see let me know okay but I guess because you know South Carolina like a year ago committed like 15

million dollars to the project and I think a similar amount of money is included in this year's budget for North Carolina it is okay but that wasn't always certain was it I mean didn't you kind of push back a little bit go LA and I'm happy to give you the whole run data and frankly the room we're sitting in on other viewers can't see air those six can't see but the room we're sitting in right now is kind of where we we we we have the talk about things so so what happened was those are generally put in as member requests uh in generally put in and you know they're vetted through and that way we can uh we can we can more or less see those plans compared to other projects being requested in the county and kind of vet those out on priority uh this I'm not gonna say snuck in but but it was it was tried to being put in the budget a different way behind behind some of the appropriators backs and it was really just a lack of communication I think between some of the groups

involved and what their people and Raleigh were trying to do and uh and and frankly I'll tell you the one who was who was a great advocate for both sides because he's been on both sides of the fence chuck him a great he's he is I've worked with him on a ton of projects he sees it from both sides and he certainly understood uh um the method had a lot to be desired for for how it was done and so you know when I called him and said listen there's not the way we operate up here we're not gonna try to do things behind people's backs we're gonna vetted on we're gonna vet this thing based on what it can bring to the region um and not try to slide it in other avenues and so when we sat down and had that conversation uh that that's when we got things back on back on the rails for for for like better words and and we were able to get that put in the one the one thing that that was um had to be in there for me was a feasibility study to see if there was um what the economic benefit would be and the coffee cup I got right now is the smoking out on Raleigh wrote up there I was I I wanted I wanted to go do it in person and say you know what what is the demand what are the logistics of this and just kind of fill it out what what is the feasibility of it and we put some money in there for a feasibility study on that so for the money to be released that feasibility study has to be done first now just the eye test of what I know and what I've seen the bottom part is in the bottom part of the rails and when I say bottom half I mean solute to try on or an aren't rough shape there's a lot of areas washed out um just looking at I'm not an engineer or a large uh uh it looks like it would be a lot more expensive to rehab that part of the track from solute to Hendersonville uh where it ties into Watco and then goes into downtown Hendersonville looks way more feasible for that now that's without having done any feasibility study yet um that's just having talked to people who know more of our railroads and I do they said it's way more feasible to potentially have a passenger car going up the grade then going down the grade just because of the amount of repairs and the topography and things like that oh a passenger car yes yes okay but but the the the rails to trails project is primarily about creating bicycle and walking path correct yes and uh and and that was with the media cover that was not necessarily the conversations that were going on during that whole time and we haven't ruled out those coexisting together so there's some scenarios where you have a railroad and a bike trail um and there's and we've got a couple of examples across state where there's who's this but just from a feasibility point of view I can see just my vision solute of being the hub to where going down the mountain you have a bike trail walking path and everything else going from solute to Hendersonville you have a passenger car that really fits more of kind of the historical railroad town solute characteristic and you've got the best of both worlds with solute kind of being the hub for both and uh then you got to figure out parking and everything else which will get to that when it comes but that's kind of the overall vision of what this feasibility study is looking to figure out well I certainly not the vision that was originally described I mean I did an episode of this a year ago we're talking to one of the uh one of the organizers with conserving Carolina and they jumped the guy a little bit I'll put it there I mean there are the ones that came up with the idea well we've been talking about a passenger car for years ever since the old railroad shuttle yeah in fact when I moved here 20 years ago I was very interested in the notion of a resurrecting past your service but the truth is Norfolk Southern abandoned the rail long time before they were legally allowed to they stopped well that's why they stopped maintaining the rail even though that was part of the the condition of them getting the right of way and it's no longer possible that most most of the the the route just is way beyond the point of resurrecting with a reasonable sum of money right now you say the solidity of tuxedo maybe we could do that that's more of the route work okay so you are willing to say hey let's take this money out of the budget if we don't include uh the possibility of of a car surface is that is that but no it was just a feasibility study so so so yes that was that was a huge priority for me yes absolutely that was I mean it was a very easy ask I mean that was that was one of those things that it could have been solved with a phone call type of thing and we were just want to get it back in the member project realm as opposed to handing it to a department and saying y'all are controlling this now and

so what we wanted to do is make sure that locals had input on it it was not sent to a department and saying this is what we're doing the money's already there we have no more control over it well we wanted was a local steering committee made up of local elected officials um folks that have expertise in all these different realms we're talking about uh that that was that was a lot of the the issue was there was going to be no oversight locally yeah but we can was in like a day uh right it was very close to the deadline for forgetting those those member appropriations and where you basically had it pulled until some issues were worked out to your satisfaction um that's a big gamble isn't it because even if you didn't get to pass your real concept feasibility study included this is a lot of money that can benefit Pope County oh absolutely and you've got to look at um yeah we we wanted this money here I mean that was that was absolutely but we wanted the locals that control of it we wanted a local we wanted input on this thing we didn't want it to get shipped off to some c4 that was going to run away with it we wanted our local officials and our local delegation have some input on this and we were scared the way it was put in there um I said I'd rather I'd rather do this thing a little slower and right as opposed to do it fast and wrong and that was that was kind of our stipulation from the beginning and and putting a feasibility study in should not have been a breaking point for anyone well feasibility says perfectly about passenger service because uh I mean a feasibility study for the whole thing was on the books right from day I mean I'll be the I'll be I'll be I'll be just be on it is happening right now yeah believe that was uh it was a 200,000 in 2019 maybe yeah I mean the first thing that happened once it was clear that it's going to hold is they started on the feasibility study which is going to be included in a few months uh and uh again when I when I did an episode on this it was clear that was the first step um I guess it just surprised me because I don't think anybody that I know was talking about resurrecting rail service in any form the whole the plan was to convert this to rails to trails because the rails most of the rail was beyond repair if you knew how many angry calls I got about putting a trail in of it hey if you knew how I just really upset people call me about that and and when I say listen you know I'm not I'm not willy I'm not going to be extreme on either side I'm willing to hear everybody and and look at what gives us the best economic return what fits the uh characteristics of the areas that it's going through in the county I want to look at all these factors animal locals to have input on it uh so when we start having those conversations all this started to take form of okay there's there's probably a compromise in here we could probably do both now if you didn't want the rail trails and it's it's on the part I mean there's still going to be people not happy uh I mean there's always going to be people not happy I mean I tell you whenever these projects go in we get a lot of mad phone calls we do not want people going through our backyard there's going to be a I I anticipate there'll be a lot of legal disputes on uh uh deeds dating back early 1900s which I mean still are legally enforceable I mean this just because they're old doesn't mean they're not well there's no doubt that the first benefit beneficiaries of the rail to trail program or lawyers yeah yes okay so we can agree on that that uh yes there there's going to be based on conversations I've had I would expect a lot of property rights lawsuits and you know that's not unusual for one of these projects again just because of deeds old but I mean it's not enforceable so you're gonna see a lot of those probably gonna have to be uh you know I'm yet not a lawyer but you know I don't know how that ends up getting settled in court when when a deed says you know there's a sketch saying it goes to the middle of the line if it ever is not a railroad

and then you've got one that says it goes here and you're in French in 10 feet on here uh so yeah there there's going to be some disputes and there are people who are Adam Illey against any kind of trail going behind their house that touches their property and frankly a lot of those folks I don't blame like how and all people run through my back yard either so I don't really blame a lot of the folks that are upset about that what we were trying to do is work out some kind of compromise where we can um potentially work out both but I guess what what surprised me is because I have a fairly good grasp of the timeline here it would

you came down to the wire and you basically said hey I'm worried about this and then some folks talk to you and you came to the agreement okay right at the last minute basically okay and I just saw that was an odd thing to do given given the um the amount of money at stake well I was born and raised this alluded it is it is uh we go back there generations my great great great great alimony back grandfather started coondog day uh we we've been there forever and you know what I have members of my whole family calling me going this thing's about to get out of hand and and and I can tell you it's it's kind of split um you know even my friends and family are kind of split on it and so you know I I hear it all the time but I really think we've got a really good possibility of being able to have the best of both worlds um and I was willing to say we're going to pump the brakes on this thing and we're going to do it the right way the first time instead of letting it get out of control you know people so like their voices aren't being heard in this um because I I can tell you it was it a lot of the people against it were people with Polk County addresses a lot of the people calling me for it uh they don't live anywhere around me well I guess my take was in that opposite I mean I went to a lot of the meeting oh I like a lot of the people I mean when you first hear about it of course people are like well you know what's what does that mean for me and my property that abuts the right way but you know I've been a lot of these these public sessions and uh the inclusivity the willing to listen rather I mean some of these meetings weren't people saying here's what's going to happen it was tell us what you were concerned about so we can work that into our plans I've been very impressed at how inclusive and open the organizer yes and I've actually attended those meetings as well and I've went and kind of said my vision for for whatever it's worth what I really didn't appreciate and I think we're past that now we we've had this conversation with those folks um using using the media to try to guide the narrative uh in in conversations with state holders that that really bothered me putting out headlines saying this thing's been funded when it had not um and saying okay one yes we're pretty confident we can get this in here and get what everybody wants but you're not going to go blatantly mislead folks in the media into thinking this thing's already funded in a done deal because I have people calling me absolutely furious saying you would refer you said you would represent us and try to keep this uh you know a saluti characteristic try to you know do something to promote the railroad and now you're just folding I said we haven't even had the meeting yet I said I have no idea why they put that press release out all right what media we're talking about we don't really have uh much of media do we uh think moons and blurage times one was WLOS one was um uh I think the Bolton did a really good job of of covering everything to my knowledge but there was some of those that people were seeing uh and on the not just pulpit on the Henderson County stuff too um and we're we're we're living and I said this is this is this is just falsely being reported I said this is these conversations haven't even took place yet much less for a done deal I said we're still kind of working on what this project is gonna look like and you know they're reporting it is already it's a done deal done and I think that was intentionally done so we had a conversation with with some of these groups and you know they've we we we sorted it out since then but that just kind of got us off on the wrong foot um say you know trying to shove it down people's throats maybe this is an argument that we need better media that's a great I mean you won't be I you know I'm not going to defend you general well yeah I mean that's just why I kind of why I do the podcast but um I paid as much attention as I could to what little media coverage there were and then basically boiled down to reprinting a press release conserving Carolina that didn't say everything's decided all it said was well Polk County Committee Foundation's given us quarter of a million dollars to get things rolling uh and the pointed out the South Carolina is already committed 15 million dollars but there's still tons of work to be done I don't know I guess if for me because I was reading carefully I don't think I got the wrong impression with the handy on I'll put maybe we'll maybe we'll back it up and say the headlines led to some very angry fall cost but um maybe people should repast a headlion yeah and uh uh when it says state funds uh real project uh you know things like that I I get in your phone like South Carolina funded theirs we're

considering funding it but it's going to have a feasibility study about a potential pastor car for half of it potential this uh maybe they can go exist side by side if there's enough room I said all these are possibilities we're not ruling anything out till we get these studies back then you know they were like okay that makes all right well you and I could agree on the need for better media better coverage better yeah okay all right well look that's all the questions I had for you tell me what you're working on that people might not know about well I'll tell you we uh we're we're chair and oversight committee and frankly it's it's the most in my opinion the most like a congressional committee that we have in the state of North Carolina and you know a lot of it is complaint driven people bring things to us or the auditor brings something out uh and a lot of us are just issues that we're passionate about and want to want to take a deeper dive into and what the reason it's fascinating to be is we meet during the interim so I'll actually be up there next week um talking to the uh department of insurance we were there a couple weeks ago talking to the auditor um about all the money spent during covid and where it went I mean what what they were talking about hundreds of millions of dollars and you know when I'm talking to business owners when I'm talking to you know they're like you know what happened all that money and it and I want okay people deserve to know that so we brought employment of security and the auditor in who were very willing to come talk about it and we're having these conversations um it's very enlightening uh there there were I want to say a few hundred million dollars of uh improper payments made that uh and that's hundreds of millions that that were made that now people are getting bills and the mail saying you owe us this much money we accidentally paid you and if you were going on unemployment you're still maybe in a recovery process it's very hard to come up with a few thousand dollars that you didn't have to begin with so you know trying to get the word out on how people can correctly pay this back without getting the penalties and the fines and things making sure that if this ever happens again hopefully it doesn't but if a scenario like this ever happens again that we don't repeat the same mistakes and these are these are often I mean obviously the auditor's these democrat the ES is a democrat agency and we're trying to work with them it's not you know I got you it's it's okay all this money went missing we can't recover it how do we prevent this from happening in the future what better ways anybody tried to call in and get unemployment you you didn't have an easy time doing it they acknowledged that they said you know the the customer service had a lot to be desired which I think everyone who interacted with it would agree with how do we fix these things and then how do we be more accountable for taxpayer dollars and how do we track that money down a fair where it went talking about loss of learning in schools the auditor did a great thing pretty much saying we we don't know how to gauge how much learning loss was really lost in schools and how many days people were missing it what there was no system in place to track it that's that's that's frustrating when when we're sitting up there asking these questions and there's and there's so many question marks still out there and then we've we've got another issue kind of pending with the SBI probably the one that made the most headlines in Raleigh and Charlotte it was covered out here a little bit which is you know it bettered affects the whole state was there was a kind of a we'll call it a whistleblower instance where the current SBI director state bureau and festator of investigations correct as a FB off of the state pretty much they they're ever see the big capital crimes the you know big high important high level crimes there was some allegations that the governor staff was actually trying to threaten him into her signing which is we do not need either side Democrat or Republican you do not need political people influencing the highest level of law enforcement agency and you know there was there was emails directly contradicting testimony and of the governor's folks and people like that so that's kind of ongoing and the reason that's important is he really the term is up for the SBI

director and there should be a new one appointed the problem is we've got an ongoing investigation into an administration there was trying to influence and threaten the other one into resigning and so it's making it really hard for us to do that appointment with any confidence right now and so we're that we're kind of

in a holdover period there to where he's still serving as SBI director until we can get everything straight out but when you're doing with document requests you're doing with scheduling testimony and things like that it takes it takes a really long time so that's what I chair and Raleigh so when people ask why are you still having to go back and forth is a lot of my work is actually during the interim when everybody else is back in their districts we're having to go up there and do those types of things and it's just a lot of coordinating on the back end it's a lot of you know the the but not necessarily subpoena but we do have the authority to issue a subpoena if we need to and that you know if it was appealed it would go to a court but we've we've actually that's been the most intriguing committee I've been on so far Raleigh. All right we're mind we have another issue I did an episode you might have heard it a few once ago about the Talia Patoya case you know and I mean we don't have time to go into all the details but you know a young man murdered a young woman and very different whether it was intentional unintentional is is go to the court is going to decide one of the reasons this case is dragging on and on and on is because the autopsy is like at the bottom of the priority list okay North Carolina's got a lot of money we've got a bunch of surplus plenty of money to roll around why is the the state medical examiner's office overbooked yes and and she was a very close family friend and then where we're paid we were obviously probably tuned more into this and probably opened our eyes to more of that backlog I mean frankly it just hadn't been on I don't think anyone around here's radar until that until that happened and I believe I want to say is it Winston Salem that is the closest examiner we have so I'm sitting here thinking go if we're in Polk County and the closest one we have is Winston Salem how much is being funneled through this one I mean you think about two and a half hour radius three hour radius to be the closest one and I don't know if I'm assuming there's not one out further west if we're having to go to Winston Salem well I don't know if it's a matter of we've got to open up more I don't know if it's staffing issue or what but that's something that this next time around having open our eyes to how absolutely backlogged this is we've got to look at because it's just something that personally wasn't on my radar until unfortunately this happened but a year I know then you've got to push that case obviously until you get those results back because that's evidence that's going to be presented that is just but it doesn't sound like a difficult question to a difficult problem to solve it's money you just going to hire more mes right it do you know off top of your head who oversees that because that would be the agency that would make the request it would part of the and you know sometimes weird things fall under apartments you wouldn't think they would fall under but in that department request we need to make a big push for whoever the head of the department is to make that part of the request could you make that a campaign promise right now yes yes that we will do everything we can to try to get rid of that backlog because really at the end of the day you you don't want to go to court not having all the pieces there I mean I know everybody wants things to move faster but if you go and things are not done the right way on the front end it may lead to something negative on the back end so you want to make sure you don't want to hurry up and do these things at a time so you know we get that down to I mean a year is ridiculous I mean we should have these things back in 30 days I guess I'm just I'm disappointed that our government allowed it to get to this situation and I sometimes I think that you know we're taking our eyes off the ball we're worried about all kinds of culture wars and things when we should be worried about managing the the infrastructure and the governance services that the people deserve I mean you look at the the the backlog and the AG's office with the with the testing rate kits and things like that I mean you're talking years of backlog I mean these are things that should be so much more high priority and I know there's a lot of legal mechanisms that that are probably over my head with the reality as people deserve results faster than they're getting all right well once again we agree yes there we go and and it's a money issue just and sometimes it comes down to we we don't know the needs there unless it's requested I mean we we've got to have these in the form of a form requests from these departments and so that that becomes coordinating with agency heads their legislative ways on saying hey if

there's this much backlog like you got to tell you got to tell us you need the money and how you're going to spend it because we need to know those things when we're making a pitch in the budget room so all right well this has been maybe the longest episode yet so thank you so much you're pretty good you can head over now and file for your papers for an election that that's it we're headed over right now and for any for any bills we talk about I always just want to remind people that we have a it's North Carolina General Assembly website out of Google NCGA and it pops up NCGA North Carolina that'll pop up and you can search the bills we're talking about and if you don't want to read through you know hundreds of pages of of legal jargon you can go to bill summaries and our staff central staff and not partisan central staff in a rally do a very good job of putting together bills summaries of things we're talking about so SB 749 which is the change I know we're talking about election stuff earlier I just use this as an example talks about the changing the makeup of the board of elections which isn't a little bit of lawsuit right now but we're talking about the these bills you can go in there and look at these bills summaries and it will tell you pretty concisely what the bill actually does kind of cuts out some of the legal jargon so that's always very helpful to folks and if you can't if you ever can't find something please reach out to me at my office is Jake dot jocs at NC ledge dot gov please reach out to us we will help you track down if you're looking for a bill how we voted on something all that is public information and you know we just want to be as transparent as possible with people explain if we voted on something while we did it would you know what what our counties got in the budget you know frankly being able to get a budget done this year was a big deal and I believe governor let it become law without a signature this time which is a huge step from having to override what that means is if the governor doesn't sign the budget within a certain amount of days it becomes law without his signature so he let it go 10 days budget becomes law really good tax cuts in there I thought we did some really good really really good reforms to the tax code especially going forward hopefully phasing out corporate tax in the state for you know really benefiting small business owners who were at I want to redo that whole franchise tax system next time I want to be way more involved in that and then the income tax to getting it down and really that we want to stay competitive creating jobs with other states around us we do not want to be losing jobs to neighboring states we've seen that in the past we do not want that to happen we want employers here where you're not having to commute an hour to get to work people loves living here they want to live here and we want to make sure that's possible so a lot of good things in the budget I encourage people to go doff through it is really good for our area in Western North Carolina we got a lot of really good things in there and I'm really excited and hopefully next time we can come back and talk about the the future why I'm seeing things that we can get pushed through there and fortunately didn't quite I think it didn't it something got lost in translation this time and it didn't quite get funded I don't know if it was competing with maybe the rail money and some other projects but it didn't quite get funded for both this time but we're going to come back and make a huge play for it and I believe it's about a \$12 million price tag the lands already been donated it's more like 25 okay so we're we're gonna maybe okay maybe 12 a year was the request 12 a year with the land already be donated so we're we're gonna go in there and do the best we can on the short session getting some preliminary money set aside and then come back hopefully during next long session if things go well November come back there next long session in make a play for whatever funding wasn't raised it off privately all right well assuming that you make it through the primaries we will do it again absolutely well that sounds great well thank you so much James I appreciate it thank you that's it for this episode which will be I hope the first of many that will help let the voters of Pope County get to know the people running for office next year and tend to interview as many of them as possible so if you're one of those hopefuls let me know by emailing Jamesh at poclor.com the very least I think we can all agree that the 2024 campaign is going to be a lot more interesting than usual thanks for listening I hope you found that informative and I just want to quickly look

at my coverage that I've been doing with not only weather for county but neighboring counties including Pope County because really logistically you know weather for county is that I'm closer to Pope County than I am to other counties I'm in green hill is I can actually in theory walk to the edge of Pope County and about four miles to to the line so it's really important to have these the regional discussions and just quickly when to look at one of my past articles that you may have seen and if not please take a look talking about the budget so that was a few weeks back and \$94 million is coming to weather for county with the passing of the budget and the jail is getting more money including and you can read more about it on my website anydance.subsec.com thanks for watching and please let me know if you have any tips or story ideas or anything else you want to discuss I'm always open to anything about the lake or area you can reach me at on any dance.subsec.com cops in congressgmail.com on facebook facebook.com slash any m dance I'm also on LinkedIn and Twitter at any m dance. Thanks have a great day