



NC Justice Center

Opportunity and Prosperity for All

Agenda 2009:

Responding to Crisis and Building a More Resilient North Carolina

Like most of the rest of the United States, North Carolina is confronting what could be the deepest and most difficult economic crisis since the Great Depression. Working and middle class families whose incomes and living standards never really recovered from the downturn of 2001-'02 are now facing a new round of fear, uncertainty and pain. In such times, North Carolinians have a right to expect that their government will act with urgency to alleviate pain and suffering and to chart a new and healthier course - both for public institutions

and the state's overall economy. It is essential that state leaders be guided by the following principles as they craft their 2009 state policy agenda:

1) Do no harm. Before anything else, state leaders must do no additional harm to vulnerable populations. This means preserving and, if possible, supplementing the existing social safety net and putting people to work.

2) Reform for the future. Current budget shortfalls are primarily the result of the state's antiquated and regressive revenue system - not overspending. Now is

the time to enact structural reforms that will enhance revenues in a way that reduces volatility and promotes greater fairness and equity.

3) Invest in people. Aside from addressing immediate needs to prevent suffering, the top longer term investment priority for state leaders must be those programs that support and develop North Carolina's human infrastructure: affordable health care and housing, K-12 and higher education, job training, child care and consumer protections that assure a fair and vibrant marketplace for all.

■ Strengthen Budget Priorities and Modernize State Finances

- Address the current budget shortfall through carefully setting priorities for federal and state funds, improving efficiency, and implementing reform-minded revenue increases
- Prevent a repeat of the current crisis in years to come by modernizing state and local taxes to improve long-term stability and fairness
- Increase the state Earned Income Tax Credit
- Require multi-state corporations to pay their fair share of income taxes by mandating "Combined Reporting"

■ Improve Access to Health Coverage

- Cover every child and make prevention a priority
- Expand public coverage for lower-income parents and pregnant women

- Make health insurance less expensive for small businesses and their employees with a subsidized private health plan
- Establish a North Carolina Institute for Health Quality, Effectiveness, and Cost
- Increase funding for Home and Community Block Grant to \$7 million

■ Increase Access to Safe, Decent and Affordable Housing

- Provide annual funding of \$50 million to the NC Housing Trust Fund
- Improve landlord-tenant laws to protect tenants from abuses and discrimination
- Ensure fair and adequate access to utility services and energy efficiency programs

(over)

■ Protect Consumers and Homeowners

- Provide funding for legal service providers and housing counselors to protect homeowners from unfair foreclosures
- Ensure adequate funding for the Home Protection Program to help laid off workers avoid foreclosure
- Protect homeowners from foreclosure “rescue scams”
- Improve protections for tenants in foreclosed properties
- Regulate real estate installment sales contracts
- Increase exemption levels for owner occupied homes

■ Support and Protect Workers

- Raise NC’s minimum wage and index it to inflation
- Ensure adequate funding for the workforce development system, including the unemployment insurance trust fund, employment services, ESC operations, Worker Training Trust Fund and the NC Community College System
- Guarantee workers a minimum number of paid sick days to care for themselves, sick children and parents
- Increase access to child care for low-wage workers
- Protect agricultural workers from dangerous pesticide exposure
- Repeal the prohibition on collective bargaining for public employees
- Stop misclassification of workers as independent contractors
- Ensure that jobs created by federal economic stimulus funds pay a living wage and provide benefits and can be accessed by NC’s most vulnerable workers

■ Ensure a Sound Basic Education for All Children

- Maintain and expand services and programs that promote the academic growth of at-risk students and ensure those programs and services are adequately funded
- Establish a comprehensive plan to address NC’s suspension and dropout rates
- Reform the financing of public education to ensure efficient and equitable allocation of resources

■ Improve Civil Rights and Access to (and Fairness in) the Courts

- Increase funding for civil legal services

- Raise the presumptive age for adult criminal prosecution to 18
- Fairly compensate victims of eugenics sterilization
- Require standards, accountability and transparency for the implementation of the 287(g) program
- Establish a procedure by which a death sentence can be overturned if it is based on race

■ Improve NC’s Transportation System

- Dramatically increase funding for public transportation in order to combat sprawl and support the needs of seniors, the disabled and low-income persons
- Require coordination of transportation spending with land use planning, including ensuring affordable housing options near transit
- Ensure revenue sources for transportation funding are fair, equitable and sustainable

■ Address the Barriers to Re-entry for People with Criminal Convictions

- Make successful re-entry and the reduction of the recidivism rate a priority by establishing a comprehensive plan that addresses the need of ex-offenders for housing, medical treatment, training and jobs

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