

Phil Berger: Senate District 26

Rockingham & Guilford Counties

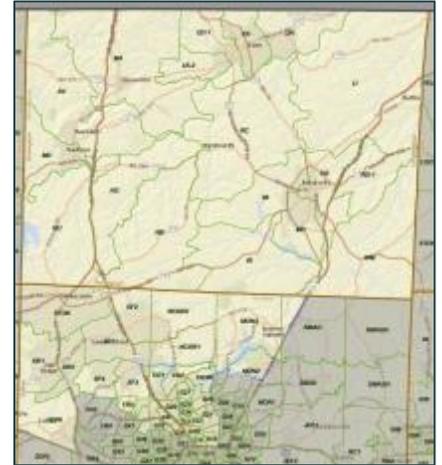
“When I moved to Eden back in the early 1980s, it’s a completely different place than it is now. Most folks at that time had a job and shopped in the community, now a lot of folks are working, but they commute to their jobs, and a lot of their shopping is done in other counties.” – [Phil Berger](#)

In the first of a series of reports, Real Facts NC examines key North Carolina legislators. We start with Senate President Pro Tempore Phil Berger. Berger has represented Rockingham County since 2001 and became minority leader in 2004 and Senate President Pro Tem, the leader of the Senate, in 2011. While Berger has succeeded in Raleigh enacting his conservative agenda, Rockingham county has seen more than its fair share of setbacks in recent years.

Summary

- *Phil Berger’s hometown hospital went bankrupt and “it is neither inaccurate nor unfair to point one finger squarely at the state’s most powerful legislator.”*
- *Phil Berger has led the charge to block federally-funded Medicaid expansion in North Carolina, costing more than a half-million people the opportunity to have health care.*
- *In 2016, the MillerCoors brewery, one of Rockingham County’s largest employers, closed in Senate Leader Phil Berger’s district putting 520 people out of work.*
- *While Berger has played politics with unemployment benefits, opposed the minimum wage, and supported reduced funding for education, 1 in 4 of his neighbors in Eden now live below the U.S. poverty line. People in Eden talk about the middle-class as a distant memory as families choose between paying their utility bill or eating, according to a [Financial Times](#) documentary on the town.*
- *“Republicans will continue to support policies to provide students with the resources needed to succeed in the classroom; our view is that policymakers should be graded based on the only criteria that matters – what our students achieve.” – [Phil Berger](#)*
- *“In every subject and almost every grade, Rockingham County students fall below the state average. According to [state test results](#), they are woefully underperforming in math, English and science.”*

Senate District 26



Sen. Phil Berger



District Statistics

Poverty and Economic Hardship:

- 18.4 percent of Rockingham county residents (16,699 people) lived in poverty and struggled to make ends meet in 2015; the state poverty rate was 16.4 percent. (US Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, 2015, Budget and Tax Center, Retrieved [7/18/17](#))
- 26.3 percent of children in the county (4,960 children) lived in poverty in 2015, compared to 23.4 percent statewide. (US Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, 2015, Budget and Tax Center, Retrieved [7/18/17](#))

Educational Attainment:

- The graduation rate for Rockingham county was 79.9 percent compared to the state rate of 85.6% in 2015-16. (NC Department of Public Instruction, 4-Year Cohort 2015-2016, Budget and Tax Center, Retrieved [7/18/17](#))
- 13.8 percent of adults in the county had a Bachelor's degree or higher compared to 28.4 percent statewide on average from 2011 to 2015. (US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011-2015, Budget and Tax Center, Retrieved [7/18/17](#))

Medicaid Expansion:

- 21,114 people in the county were eligible for Medicaid in December 2016, an increase of 31.9 percent since December 2007, when the recession began. Estimates suggest that 4,408 North Carolinians in the county would benefit from Medicaid expansion, delivering \$80.6 million in economic benefits to the county. (NC Division of Medical Assistance, December 2007 and 2016; and Cone Health Foundation. "The Economic and Employment Costs of Not Expanding Medicaid in North Carolina: A County-Level Analysis." December 2014, Budget and Tax Center, Retrieved [7/18/17](#))

Phil Berger's hometown hospital went bankrupt and "it is neither inaccurate nor unfair to point one finger squarely at the state's most powerful legislator."

Senate Leader Phil Berger's 93-year-old hometown hospital, Morehead Memorial filed for Chapter 11 federal bankruptcy protection. "Morehead Memorial, a 108-bed community hospital in Eden, N.C. – Senate leader Phil Berger's hometown hospital – is on life-support. Earlier this week the 93-year-old facility, which traces its legacy to a \$7,500 gift from Marshall Field and Company (more currently known as Fieldcrest Mills), [filed for Chapter 11 federal bankruptcy protection.](#)" (WRAL, Editorial, [7/14/17](#))

The fate of Morehead Memorial reflects a growing national crisis of access to health care for rural communities. "The move allows the hospital to keep serving the largely rural area north of Greensboro and keeps the 700 people who work for the hospital on the payroll as it undergoes a financial reorganization to better manage its debt. Still, the ultimate fate of Morehead Memorial is uncertain. It reflects a growing national crisis of access to health care services, particularly in rural areas." (WRAL, Editorial, [7/14/17](#))

In North Carolina, four rural hospitals have closed or dramatically reduced their services in the last seven years, and “it is neither inaccurate nor unfair to point one finger squarely at the state’s most powerful legislator.” “In the last seven years, four rural hospitals in the state have closed or dramatically changed their services: Blowing Rock Hospital became a rehabilitation facility; Yadkin Valley Community hospital closed, Franklin Hospital in Louisburg ended operations and Pungo Hospital in Belhaven closed. There are plenty of reasons why Morehead, like many rural hospitals across the state and nation, have fallen on hard financial times. But in North Carolina – and Rockingham County in particular – it is neither inaccurate nor unfair to point one finger squarely at the state’s most powerful legislator.” (WRAL, Editorial, [7/14/17](#))

Phil Berger has led the charge to block federally-funded Medicaid expansion in North Carolina, costing more than a half-million people the opportunity to have health care.

Phil Berger’s decision to block federally-funded Medicaid expansion in North Carolina has cost more than a half-million people the opportunity to have health care. “Berger has led the charge to block federally-funded expansion of Medicaid – that would provide health coverage to more than a half-million North Carolinians who don’t have it now. He’s even gone to court to block Gov. Roy Cooper’s efforts to accept the aid and expand health coverage. Don’t think for a second Berger’s opposition to Medicaid expansion doesn’t have a cost to his community.” (WRAL, Editorial, [7/14/17](#))

Phil Berger’s Medicaid rejection has cost Rockingham County and two other nearby rural counties 450 jobs, \$171 million in business activity, and 4,520 people the opportunity to have health care. “In Rockingham County, along with the two rural counties beside it, the Medicaid rejection has meant: 450 fewer jobs created; \$171 million less in business activity; and 4,520 people blocked from getting Medicaid. All that is according to the Cone Health Foundation and the Kate B. Reynold Charitable Trust’s [detailed examination of the financial impact of North Carolina’s failure to accept the federal funds to expand Medicaid eligibility.](#)” (WRAL, Editorial, [7/14/17](#))

Phil Berger has done everything in his power to block the expansion of health coverage in North Carolina, so “folks in Rockingham County concerned about the fate of their hospital and healthcare for themselves, their families and neighbors don’t need to look much further than one of their neighbors, Sen. Phil Berger.” “Berger and his cohorts in the legislature are doing all they can to block efforts to expand health coverage. What kind of responsible elected representatives would work so hard to deny access to health care for the North Carolinians who need it most? How many people have to die and declare personal bankruptcy before Berger cares? Folks in Rockingham County concerned about the fate of their hospital and healthcare for themselves, their families and neighbors don’t need to look much further than one of their neighbors, Sen. Phil Berger.” (WRAL, Editorial, [7/14/17](#))

When 70 percent of patients in a rural hospital in a non-expansion state are Medicaid, Medicare or uninsured, “where does Berger think hospitals get the money now to care for indigent patients – osmosis? Should hospitals turn these patients away?” said Julie Henry of the N.C. Hospital Association. “It’s a rural hospital, we’re a non-expansion state, we know that in an average rural hospital in North Carolina, 70 percent are Medicaid, Medicare or uninsured,” Julie Henry of the N.C. Hospital Association, [told N.C. Health News.](#) Who pays when a hospital has to treat a patient who doesn’t have insurance? Where does Berger think hospitals get the money now to care for indigent patients – osmosis? Should hospitals turn these patients away?” (WRAL, Editorial, [7/14/17](#))

In 2016, the MillerCoors Brewery closed in Senate Leader Phil Berger's district, putting 520 employees out of work.

MillerCoors, which had been one of Rockingham County's largest employers, closed its brewery in 2016, costing 520 workers their jobs. "MillerCoors will close its brewery in Eden — North Carolina's largest brewery — in September 2016, economic development officials confirmed Monday. "Today we made the difficult decision to close our brewery in Eden, N.C., in order to optimize our brewery footprint and streamline operations for greater efficiency across our remaining seven breweries," said Fernando Palacios, chief integrated supply chain officer for Chicago-based MillerCoors. The brewery's closure will affect 520 workers at the brewery, which opened in 1978 and is one of Rockingham County's largest employers." (Triad Business Journal, [9/14/15](#))

The MillerCoors closure dealt a financial blow to local government in terms of lost revenue as the brewery had a tax value of nearly \$33 million and contained \$133 million in business property. Along with the blow to MillerCoors workers in Eden, the brewery closure will impact local government coffers. Metzler noted that the brewery has a tax value of nearly \$33 million and contains about \$133 million in business property, with the company paying Rockingham County taxes of \$1.2 million so far this fiscal year. Maloney with MillerCoors said a decision has not yet been made about what to do with the brewery, which sits on 1,500 acres, once it closes next year. Metzler said the county's economic development team will work closely with state and local groups, including NC Works and Rockingham Community College, to assist displaced workers." (Triad Business Journal, [9/14/15](#))

Layoffs began in phases at the Eden, North Carolina MillerCoors brewery with production eventually shifting to other plants. "Production now housed at the Eden brewery will be shifted to the brewer's other plants during the next year, with layoffs coming in phases beginning after the first of the year, said MillerCoors spokesman Marty Maloney. The move to close the Eden brewery, one of eight nationwide, comes as large-scale domestic brewers face losses in demand for their top-selling brands as public taste for craft beers grow." (Triad Business Journal, [9/14/15](#))

Throughout his tenure in the Senate, Berger has opposed and targeted programs that help rural North Carolinians get ahead.

During the height of the recession, Berger played political games with unemployment benefits for nearly 42,000 unemployed North Carolinians. "The political game being played with some 42,000 unemployed North Carolinians is disgraceful and needs to end now. None of the players in this drama, except the unemployed, has the moral high ground, despite protests to the contrary. Because of the severity of the recession, North Carolina and about three-dozen states decided to extend benefits to long-term unemployed residents, but a faulty design in the formula halted these payments in April. Fourteen other states with similar problems quickly corrected them. Our legislature passed a bill to extend the benefits, but the measure contained a provision that would have forced Gov. Bev Perdue to make double-digit cuts in state spending, a calculated political move designed to position Perdue as the heavy in draconian state budget cuts or appear insensitive to the needs of the unemployed. Perdue accurately proclaimed this provision blackmail and vetoed the bill. House Speaker Thom Tillis and Senate President Pro Tem Phil Berger are asserting it is Perdue's fault our unemployed are not getting their extended benefits because she has been unwilling to compromise." (News & Record, Tom Campbell Op-Ed, [5/22/11](#))

The unemployment rate in Rockingham County in January of 2011 was 13.3 percent, which was higher than the state of North Carolina and the United States:

Area Name	Year	Month	Adjusted	Unemployment Rate(%)
North Carolina	2011	01	Unadjusted	10.9
Rockingham County	2011	01	Unadjusted	13.3
United States	2011	01	Unadjusted	9.8

(North Carolina Department of Commerce, Retrieved [7/27/17](#))

In his attempt to abolish the personal and corporate income tax in a 2013 plan, Berger would have increased the sales tax on groceries from the 2 percent to 8.05 percent. “The outline of a plan to overhaul the state’s tax system is raising so many big questions that it prompts another: Is it too much to tackle this session? Republican Gov. Pat McCrory and lawmakers promised to lower personal and corporate income taxes on the campaign trail but offered few details. And the only proposal so far, drafted by top Senate Republican lawmakers, is meeting a cool reception. Senate leader Phil Berger and Sen. Bob Rucho, the finance committee chairman, put forth a proposal to abolish personal and corporate income taxes and strike business franchise taxes. To fill the \$12 billion hole, the plan would eliminate all tax breaks, hike the sales tax and put a levy on services such as medical care, tax preparation and more than 100 others that are currently duty-free. The state sales tax would increase from 4.75 percent to 8.05 percent, and it would apply to groceries, which currently are taxed only at 2 percent by local governments.” (Charlotte Observer, [1/26/13](#))

Berger opposed increasing the state minimum wage and said there is a "direct relationship between increasing the minimum wage and reduced availability of jobs for people entering the workforce or earning a supplemental income." “Berger does not support increasing the state minimum wage. He said there are economists who say there is a "direct relationship between increasing the minimum wage and reduced availability of jobs for people entering the workforce or earning a supplemental income." (News & Record, [10/17/14](#))

While Berger supported cuts to early childhood education and “targets teachers for sport,” Rockingham County students were “woefully underperforming in math, English and science.”

“Republicans will continue to support policies to provide students with the resources needed to succeed in the classroom; our view is that policymakers should be graded based on the only criteria that matters – what our students achieve.” (Phil Berger, Republican Senate Caucus, Retrieved [7/31/17](#))

In 2011, Republican lawmakers cut the More at Four Pre-K program by 20 percent, inserted a provision to limit participation by poor children to 20 percent, and authorized co-payments for the first time. “Earlier this year, Republican lawmakers cut the pre-K program by 20 percent, authorized co-payments for the first time and included language in what they acknowledge was a clumsily written provision to limit participation by poor kids to 20 percent. GOP legislators say they didn’t mean to cut those kids out.” (News & Observer, Editorial, [9/8/11](#))

While Berger argued that reform must come before additional spending on education, “the state’s ranking in per-pupil spending, and the pleas of the superintendents, should make it clear to Republicans that schools are inadequately funded right now. Before he targets teachers for sport on one hand and touts reform on the other, the leader should force his colleagues on Jones Street to face financial reality.” “Berger continues to say that reform must come before additional spending on education. But the state’s ranking in per-pupil spending, and the pleas of the superintendents, should make it clear to Republicans that schools are inadequately funded right now. Before he targets teachers for sport on one hand and touts reform on the other, the leader should force his colleagues on Jones Street to face financial reality.” (News & Observer, Editorial, [4/25/12](#))

“In every subject and almost every grade, Rockingham County students fall below the state average. According to state test results, they are woefully underperforming in math, English and science.” “The data from the N.C. Department of Public Instruction is troubling. In every subject and almost every grade, Rockingham County students fall below the state average. According to state test results, they are woefully underperforming in math, English and science. Of particular concern is the county’s four middle schools, where many students aren’t ready to advance to the next grade.” (News & Record, [11/9/14](#))

###