

SPAM Latest Updates from the NCGA



From Sen. Natasha Marcus <natasha.marcus@ncleg.gov>
To <sjohnston@tuesdayforumcharlotte.org>
Reply-To <natasha.marcus@ncleg.gov>
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Natasha
MARCUS
NC Senate District 41



NC Senate District 41 Newsletter

January 21, 2022

Redistricting Updates



My Interview with WSOC-TV's Joe Bruno



Speaking at Senate Redistricting and Elections Committee
(I only remove my mask when speaking)

This week the Senate Redistricting Committee debated [House Bill 605, 2022 Primary Date](#). NCGA leaders **moved the bill quickly** - introducing it (by gutting an existing bill passed by the House), speeding it through two Senate committees, and adding it to the calendar for votes, all on the same day. They then rushed it over to the House chamber, where that body voted on it the same afternoon, having never heard it in any House committees.

The bill seeks to delay the 2022 Primary and municipal elections yet again, from May 17th to June 7th, presumably to give the legislature additional time to redraw district maps. However, the NC Supreme Court is scheduled to hear oral arguments in the redistricting cases on February 2nd and will make its ruling promptly. During committee, **I noted that the bill seeks to interfere with what the NC Supreme Court will ultimately decide**. In addition, I know many voters are eager to avoid any more delays in the already-delayed municipal elections. Finally, the bill was so rushed that it failed to consider how disruptive it would be to the final week of school to have elections happening on June 7. (Many polling locations are located at schools.)

So, **the bill was sloppy, unnecessary and could create further delay and confusion**. It is better to allow the Court to make its ruling, including any changes in the election calendar that may be necessitated by the ruling. I voted no, as did all other Democrats in both chambers, but the bill passed. We expect Governor Cooper to veto the bill. You can read more about HB605 and my public comments about it [here](#) and [here](#). I had a brief interview with Spanish-language media Enlace Latino NC immediately after the vote on HB605, which you can watch [here](#).

I also did an interview with WSOC-TV's Joe Bruno earlier this week about how Mecklenburg voters are impacted by the enacted Congressional maps, which you can watch [here](#).

Celebrating Dolly Parton's Imagination Library: Mecklenburg Kids from Birth to 5 Eligible for Free Books

JOIN US IN CELEBRATION!
Dolly Parton's Imagination Library Turns 5 in Mecklenburg County

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library has inspired the love of reading across Mecklenburg County for five years!

Children ages birth to 5 receive a FREE, age-appropriate book, delivered to their home each month.

Visit MeckDPIL.org to learn more or enroll.



Smart Start of Mecklenburg County is celebrating the 5th anniversary of their organization's partnership with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. Entertainment legend Dolly Parton developed the program so that every preschool child in her hometown would have their own library of books, and now the program is available to children in

over 2,000 communities across the world, including Mecklenburg County.

The program began in Charlotte by distributing books to newborns within zip code 28205. It has since expanded, with Smart Start focusing on families residing in "the crescent," Charlotte's 12 most vulnerable zip codes. Over the next few years, additional zip codes bolstered their service area as funding allowed, focusing on book deserts in Charlotte. **In 2017, state legislation provided funding to expand the program countywide. Now every child from birth to age five in Mecklenburg County has the opportunity to participate in the program.**

The Dolly Parton Imagination Library is a voluntary program. Parents can [sign up](#) to receive a new book each month through the Imagination Library at no cost. You can read more about the program [here](#).

Interview with Queen City News on Snow Day Policy



This week I spoke with Queen City News about the [Save Spring Break Act](#) (Senate Bill 242), a bill I introduced that sought to allow Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools to **use remote learning during severe weather in order to avoid adding in-person make-up days during Spring Break**. My bill's language was included in [SB654](#) which was signed into law last year and applies statewide. The bill does not eliminate snow days (as CMS had one just last week), but provides the option to have a remote day so that students and staff do not have to give up part of their Spring Break for a make-up day (as happened today). You can watch the full interview [here](#).

Rally for Democracy: Remembering the Capitol Insurrection





Earlier this month community members gathered in Davidson to **reflect on the violent insurrection of January 6, 2021**. During my remarks, I noted the unsettling truth that violence frequently follows progress. The events of 1/6/21 were an extreme example, but part of a pattern of backlash. We should not let it discourage us from working for progress. I also quoted Rep. Alma Adams and President Biden and ended my remarks by asking audience members to raise their hand if they were **committed to protecting our voting rights, equal rights, fair maps and ultimately our democracy**. The crowd was clearly committed.

Smithville CommUNITY Coalition Meeting

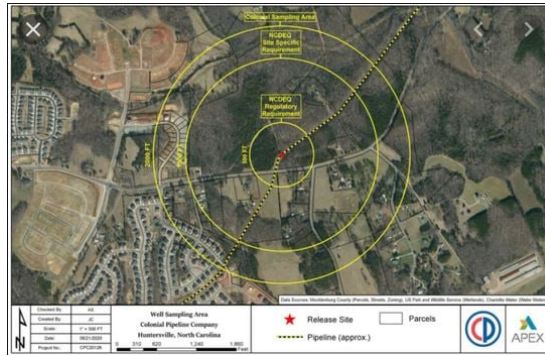


Last week I joined local leaders and Cornelius residents to see [Smithville CommUNITY Coalition](#)'s presentation of its plan to revitalize and save Smithville. The group has worked hard to preserve this historic neighborhood and the affordable housing located there. SCC is hopeful that the town and the county will help fund their plan.

I applaud SCC's work and have supported various affordable housing initiatives at the General Assembly, including:

- [Senate Bill 252](#), Cornelius Affordable Housing Funds
- [Senate Bill 386](#), Expand Workforce Housing
- [Senate Bill 588](#), Low-Income Housing Tax Credits

Colonial Pipeline Updates



Last week I spoke with Wayne Randolph, Trust Fund Branch Head, Division of Waste Management, at NC Department of Environmental Quality to get an **update about the clean-up of the Colonial Pipeline gasoline spill in Huntersville**. I get weekly written updates from NC DEQ, but I wanted to dig a little deeper to ensure that progress was being made and that I was aware of any concerns or problems, so that I could bring that information to my constituents' attention, particularly those living near the site.

The top line news is that there have been **no surprises in recent months and the clean-up, although slow and time consuming, is progressing**. However, there are disagreements between NC DEQ and Colonial about how to assess the total volume of the plume and about when and how extraction of the deeper area should begin. They are discussing how to resolve those disagreements, while the lawsuit looms in the background.

Here are some specifics about activities at the site that I thought you would want to know:

Surface water

Testing of surface water (like nearby creeks/streams) has been happening since the spill was first discovered. **They have never detected gasoline (also called free product) in the surface water and still have not**. For the past several weeks, NCDEQ's Division of Water Resources (DWR) has been requiring, per their usual process, that Colonial Pipeline test surface water in additional locations. This is all good news.

- Caveat: There is one location where one reading rose above the "non-detect" level for one chemical. Toluene is used in paint, gasoline and other fuels. Toluene was detected at 4ppb in April on 2021 and at 6.7ppb in May of 2021. It has been at less than 1ppb (non-detect) ever since. The sample was collected southeast of the site, in a farm field, where groundwater was naturally trickling up from the soil (called a seep). Since the tests showed only one chemical (not a family of chemicals you'd expect to see in gasoline), at levels that remained below surface water sample standards, and did not persist, it is unlikely there is a problem. Nevertheless, just to be sure, DEQ is requiring Colonial to continue to sample this location. It is unknown whether the toluene was present due to the Colonial spill or farming activity on the property. It never rose above allowed levels and did not reach the stream.

Drinking Well Water is Safe

Colonial continues to monitor drinking well water on a regular basis. As residents know, some wells were capped since the spill. **No contaminants have been detected in operating water supply wells**. This is good news and the most important factor in protecting human health.

Wastewater

Since the clean-up began, Colonial has been trucking all the wastewater it produces (after

separating it from the free product) to regulated disposal facility offsite. Recently, Colonial has sought **alternatives to this costly and cumbersome practice**. They have looked into two possibilities:

1. Connecting to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg sewage wastewater system, so that the wastewater from the site would flow directly to treatment plants. This would require a Publicly Owned Treatment Works (POTW) permit.
2. Getting a permit to release the wastewater into nearby streams/surface water. This would require a NPDES permit from NC DWR and will be considered carefully to make sure no contaminants are re-introduced to the area.

Due to the large volume of water Colonial needs to discharge, it is expected that option one will be limited and that they will continue to pursue option two. Thus, for the time being, Colonial will have to continue to truck water off-site.

Tank Alarm Systems

Colonial is in the process of **installing alarms on its frac tanks**, where it stores the water and gasoline extracted from underground. The alarms will notify the company if the level in the tank gets too high and, if so, automatically shut off the pump. Until now, Colonial has been relying on workers to monitor those levels (and no overflows have occurred) but will soon have the alarms to provide an added layer of protection.

Air Monitoring

There have been occasional readings above 0 on the on-site air monitors required by Mecklenburg County. Recently, the most recent report showed 1 VOC concentration detected above 1 ppm and the previous report showed 3 VOC concentrations detected above 1ppm. This is typical and not a concern since air monitoring is happening constantly and these readings were short-term and dissipated quickly. They can be explained by the operation of machinery (such as vacuum truck and frac activities) in the upwind vicinity of the monitors and do not pose a threat to human health. Benzene monitoring at all frac tank and site-wide locations did not detect any airborne concentrations.

1.3 million+ Gallons Extracted

As of January 18, 2022, 1,317,602 gallons of product and 6,775,471 gallons of Petroleum Contaminated Water have been extracted at the site. There are currently 107 Recovery Wells and 117 total Monitoring Wells (97 shallow and 20 deep/bedrock), which is more than there were at the beginning of this process. New wells are drilled when the older ones hit more rock/soil than water and free product, which slows the extraction process in those older wells.

We still do not have an updated estimate of how many gallons of gasoline remain underground. We know that there is free product deeper in the ground than where Colonial's extraction wells are currently operating.

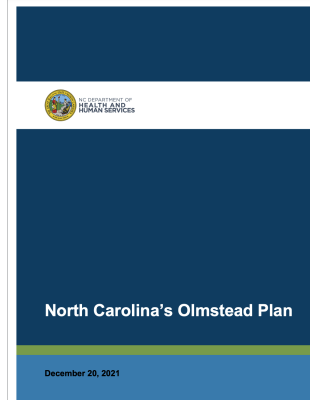
The daily rate of extraction varies depending on which wells are operating, how efficiently they are working, and when new wells are drilled. It's dynamic day to day. But overall, DEQ does not believe we are near the end. Instead, it is my understanding that it's likely that significant gasoline is underneath the currently identified plume. DEQ relies on Colonial to test and collect the data necessary to know more, and so far, that data has not been provided to DEQ. DEQ has filed a lawsuit and is in negotiations with Colonial about how to proceed to both assess and then begin to extract that additional/deeper gasoline in a way that neither slows the extraction process nor makes the spill migrate deeper or harder to clean-up.

It's important to know that the **plume's location and width has been delineated with**

certainty. If it expands/migrates, DEQ will know. It has migrated very slightly since the original spill, in line with what geologists expect and within the network of monitoring wells already in place. The big questions that remain are a) how deep is the spill and b) how many gallons are still underground.

I will keep you updated as new information is available.

NC DHHS Announces State's System of Community-Based Services and Supports for People with Disabilities



For families interested in services for persons with disabilities, NC DHHS has released the Olmstead Plan for 2022-2023. The plan is designed **to assist people with disabilities who receive or are eligible for publicly-funded services** to reside in and experience the full benefit of being part of day-to-day life in communities alongside those without disabilities. Developed with stakeholders from across the state, the plan's goal is to divert people from entering institutions and to support those wishing to leave. You can read more about the Olmstead Plan [here](#).

Eagle Scout Award Ceremony



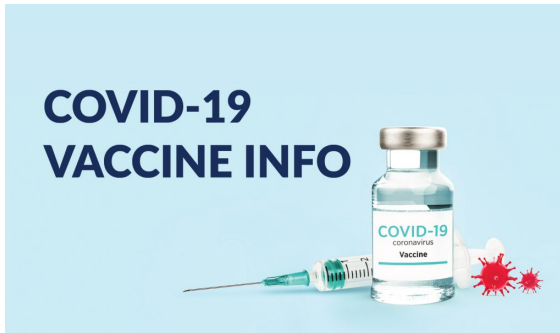
Congratulations to Troop 58's newest Eagle Scouts! Earlier this month, I was honored to award Joshua, Noah, Alex, and Ryan their flags during the ceremony held at the Davidson College Presbyterian Church Congregation House. The Eagle Scout is the highest advancement rank in Boy Scouting, with an emphasis on community involvement.

Updates on the Proposed Piedmont Lithium Mine Project in Gaston County



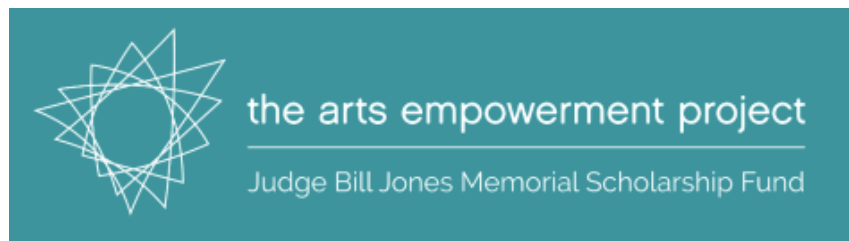
Residents of Gaston County have expressed **skepticism and concern over a recent economic output study of the proposed Piedmont Lithium mine**. The study stated that the operation will create over 1,000 jobs and \$3.9 billion over six years. However, the report **did not include the potential environmental costs** of the project, including groundwater disruption and the impacts on nearby businesses or lost property value. You can read more about these updates [here](#). I wrote to the DEQ Secretary last month to express my concerns about this proposed project, which you can read [here](#).

COVID-19 Vaccine & Testing Information



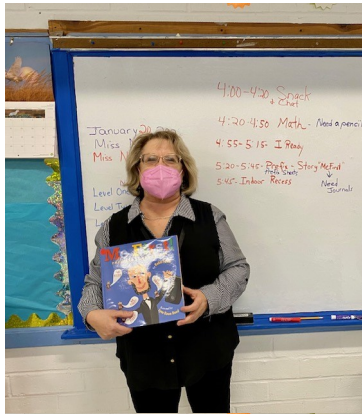
Do you have questions about who is eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine or booster, or where you can get a vaccine? Please go to the DHHS website [here](#) for more information on all things related to the COVID-19 vaccine. Additionally, **the Biden administration recently launched a website offering free COVID-19 at-home tests (4 per household)**. You can place your order [here](#).

The Arts Empowerment Project Scholarship Opportunity

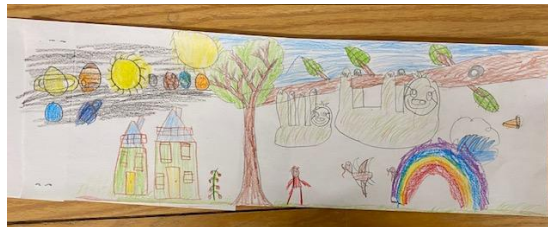


The Arts Empowerment Project is accepting applications for the Judge Bill Jones Memorial Scholarship Fund. **The scholarship, named for a judge who advocated for at-risk youth, gives students up to \$1,500 in funding for visual and performing arts workshops, classes, camps, productions, research opportunities, and more.** Read more about the scholarship [here](#). **Applications are due by March 31, 2022.**

Volunteer Opportunities at Ada Jenkins Center



Ms. Marlene teaches the third graders. It's been challenging during the pandemic, but she enjoys the work.



The student who drew this told me he wants to be a chef when he grows up, like his dad. His classmates suggested that he consider becoming an artist since he's so talented.

I answered the call for volunteers needed at the Ada Jenkins Center this week. I helped out in Ms. Marlene's LEARN Works After-School program, where I got to meet some great third graders, help them learn multiplication and pre-fixes, see the online assessment program they use, make paper snowflakes with the kids, and admire the work of one student, who drew the excellent piece pictured above. I'm looking forward to returning to assist in two other classrooms next week.

The Ada Jenkins Center serves residents in North Mecklenburg and is looking for volunteers in the following programs:

- The LEARN Works After-school Academic Program needs classroom volunteers — for a few weeks, or for the entire spring semester. Click [here](#) to learn about Ada Jenkins Center Education Services and our volunteer opportunities, and to complete a New Volunteer Application.
- During Tax Season 2022, they will host two program sites for Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE). Through April 15, 2022, VITA volunteers will help neighbors with incomes of \$57,000 or less prepare their taxes for free! They need volunteers in several positions – some with tax

knowledge, some without. Click [here](#) for details.

Take a Virtual Tour of the NC Zoo!



The North Carolina Zoo has launched a virtual tour of their facilities, which you can watch [here](#). They also have a variety of ["virtual visit" experiences](#), from additional tours to art projects to at-home science activities. This is a great activity as everyone stays warm from the winter weather this weekend!

Business Recovery Grant Program



The [North Carolina Department of Revenue](#) has launched the Business Recovery Grant Program, which will provide assistance to businesses that suffered economic losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. **The application period closes January 31, 2022.** Two types of grants are available to an eligible business that suffered an economic loss of at least 20% during the pandemic:

- A **hospitality grant** is available to an eligible arts, entertainment, and recreation business, as well as eligible accommodation and food service business such as a hotel, restaurant, and bar (NAICS codes 71 and 72).
- A **reimbursement grant** is available to an eligible business not classified in NAICS Code 71 and 72 that did not receive funding from other relief programs including Paycheck Protection Program, COVID-19 Job Retention Grant, and EIDL Advance.

You can read more about the application and apply [here](#).

50th Annual Youth Legislative Assembly



Applications are live for the 50th Annual Youth Legislative Assembly (YLA). The YLA offers students a **unique opportunity to learn first-hand about the legislative process**. The Legislative Services Office, under the North Carolina General Assembly, is now accepting applications for the conference to be held April 8 – 10, 2022, in Raleigh. **Applications will be accepted through February 1, 2022.**

The YLA teaches high school students about the laws governing North Carolina's citizens as well as the lawmaking process. Students draft, debate and vote on mock legislative bills while developing skills in research, interviewing, group facilitation and policy writing. As the bills are debated, the students get a chance to practice communicating their ideas, opinions and experiences in a team-building environment. At the conclusion of the three-day program, the participants have a better understanding of the lawmaking process as well as enhanced written and oral communication skills. The YLA program is open to students in North Carolina who are in good standing at a public, private, charter or home school. For more information please email YLA Coordinator, Erica Gallion, at erica.gallion@ncleg.gov or call 919-301-1372.

Apply Here

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Contact Our Office

Phone: (919) 715-3050

Email:

Natasha.Marcus@ncleg.gov

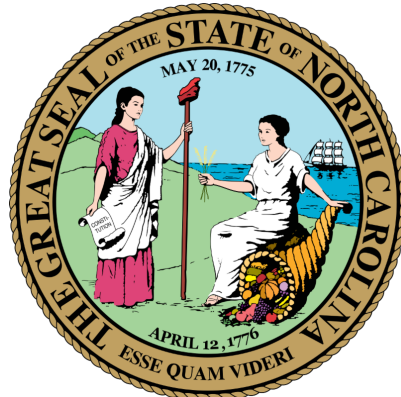
Jessica.Bolin@ncleg.gov

Mailing Address:

300 N. Salisbury Street,

Rm. 519

Raleigh, NC 27603



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Senator Natasha Marcus | [Website](#)



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