

The official publication of the NC Grange

March / April 2024

GRANGE NEWS



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ON THE COVER

Anna Keeter, Karly Denning & Kayla Laws at the NC Aquarium in Pine Knoll Shores

UPCOMING EVENTS

July 7-13	Grange Camp Eastern 4-H Center
September 19-22	State Convention Durham, NC
November 12-16	National Convention Bettendorf, IA

STATE OFFICERS

President	Jimmy Gentry
Vice President	David Allen
Program Director	Bobbie Dellinger
Steward	Mark Hood
Assistant Steward	Jason Davis
Lady Asst. Steward	Crystal Allen
Chaplain	LaRue Tart
Treasurer	Julia Stack
Secretary	Barden Culbreth
Greeter	Philip Duncan
Ceres	Dianne Hudson
Pomona	Sharon Ritchie
Flora	Wanda Crawford

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jimmy Martin
Tom Cash
Vinnie Duncan
Melanie Hudson
John Crawford
Raymond Hayes, II

President	Jimmy Gentry
Vice President	David Allen
Secretary	Barden Culbreth
Treasurer	Julia Stack
<i>Emeritus</i>	Carlton Barefoot Charles Forrester

DEPARTMENT HEADS

Insurance Programs Coordinator	Mark Davis
Legislative Director	Laurie Barnhart
Youth/Young Adult Director	Jennie Gentry
Admin /Junior Director	Emily Hartsell
Community Service Director	Anna Liles
Events/Publications Director	Jessica Horton
Agriculture Programs Coordinator	Dewitt Hardee

The Grange is a grassroots, community service, family organization with a special interest in agriculture and designed to help meet the needs of people, young and old, through a cooperative effort with government and other organizations that also seek the greatest good for the greatest number.

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FROM JIMMY

As part of this year’s budget, funds have been allocated to help Granges that have no Grange Hall to purchase liability insurance. In addition, funds are available to help all Granges purchase Officer and Director insurance. While we recognize the high cost of insurance, we also see the importance of being protected by liability insurance in case something goes wrong at one of your meetings or events. We are living in a time in which some people seek lawsuits if something goes wrong. Lawyer’s fees alone could devastate a Grange, and it can be made much worse if there is a ruling against your Grange. I encourage you to to either seek your own insurance, or contact Mark Davis who has an agent that is helping us.

All of our Granges are required to have Bonding insurance, but NC Grange takes care of this for you.

For those Granges that are not incorporated, I will remind you again of how important this is. If a lawsuit should occur toward your Grange and there is no corporation, individual officers and members can be sued. Being incorporated provides a layer of protection for individual members and officers. I can help you with this process, which is not very difficult.

At our annual convention in September, we celebrated a growth in membership for last year. I encouraged all of you to make

this year another year of growth for the State Grange. I believe that we have some good momentum going now with a number of Granges that are working hard in their communities, and they are growing. I hope that it is a goal of every Grange to grow during the year. There is unprecedented financial support being offered to our Granges from the State Grange through grants and fundraiser matches. These funds should help you to develop new programs, enhance community service, and create an environment that will attract new members.

In March, we had the annual Family Conference at Atlantic Beach. It was a great weekend! We learned a lot, we played, we worshiped, and the fellowship was amazing. During the weekend, I felt a strong spirit among the group. At one point I asked, “Are you glad to be a Grange member?” The response was loud and gratifying from a group that is happy with their involvement. We have a good thing going here! It is an opportunity so serve, to make new friends, to strengthen current friendships, and to care about what is happening in our state and local communities. It seems to me to be a good thing in which to devote some time!

VILLEWORTH GRANGE

by: Jessica Horton

VilleWorth Grange in Mecklenburg County has started their gardening season! This year, the group has planted 4 varieties of tomatoes (Cherokee Purple, Sweet 100s, Roma, San Marzano) okra, serrano and jalepeno peppers as well as many different varieties of flowers. We are working with the Mecklenburg County Extension office on weed control issues, and Chip Drop for free woodchips to mulch the pathways. We will transplant seedlings and directly sew seeds into the garden space very soon!



ST. JOHN'S GRANGE

by: Emily Hartsell

St. John's Grange held their annual Awards Banquet on April 9, 2024. Our awards recipients were:

- Church of the Year: St. James Church
- Law Enforcement Officer of the Year: Jason Crayton
- Fire Department of the Year: Mt. Pleasant Fire Department
- Educator of the Year: Kima Kluttz
- Military of the Year: Jase Yount (Pictured is his wife Emily Yount)
- Fire Fighter of the Year: Dylan Ennis
- Junior of the Year: Avery Furr



- Granger of the Year: Meredith Harrison
- Farm of the Year: Walker Farm, Carl & Pam Walker
- EMS of the Year: Jeff Penniger
- Grange Family of the Year: Janet and Brian Stencil
- Youth of the Year: Emma Harrison
- Community Service Award: Earl Bradshaw

FERGUSON GRANGE

by : Sharon Underwood

Members of Ferguson Grange met February 15 with an interesting program on the importance of “cover crops” presented by Horticulture Extension Agent, Matthew Clay. Matthew has been a big supporter of our Grange and our involvement in the Master Gardener Program in Wilkes County.

Our Grange was devastated with the sudden loss of one of our very active and beloved members, Susan Freeman Roberts, on February 8. Susan and her entire family have been very involved in the life of our Grange, and she was one of the best cheerleaders for our programs. When we reorganized our Grange years ago, Susan won state recognition for recruiting the most new members to join our organization. She tried to make the world a better place, and she will truly be missed. Our prayers and sympathy are with her family.

Our March program was led by members Clarkie and Mike Brown. They shared pictures of the restoration projects that they have completed on their property in Happy Valley. Their biggest project was the restoration of a late 1800s log cabin that the John and Nila Jones family lived in. They also completed the stabilization of a fireplace that was located at a former historic home called Gables Inn. It was the home of Colonel Catlett Jones and his wife, Nancy. Many members have family connections to the Joneses. A slideshow was presented with before and after pictures of these projects. Clarkie even wrote a small booklet describing the background of the cabin and shared old family letters that were found in the cabin.

A few days after the program, members were invited to tour the old cabin and actually saw for themselves all the hard work that had been done inside and out of the historic home. Many artifacts and old furniture found in the cabin were also on display. On the grounds, a small walking bridge was built close to the home to replace the foot log. Everyone enjoyed the tour which included delicious refreshments served on the beautiful front porch that overlooked a little stream. Their next project

will be to build an outhouse like the one the original cabin had on the property. When talking about these projects, Clarkie Brown stated, “It was a labor of love for the history of the valley and a great retirement project!” Grange members that assisted with the projects were Brian DeCann and Lloyd Howell.

Members of Ferguson Grange also took part in a service project in March by donating candy and stuffing it in plastic Easter eggs for the Whip-poorwill Academy’s annual Easter Egg Hunt. We promise we didn’t eat much of the candy!



Top: Susan Roberts; Bottom: Clarkie & Mike Brown, Matthew Cay, Ferguson Members

2024 Family Conference

Atlantic Beach, NC

by: Jessica Horton

The 2024 Family Conference was again held on the coast of North Carolina; however, it was elected to visit a different area of sand. This year took members to the Crystal Coast in Atlantic Beach at the DoubleTree Hotel. Most members arrived on Thursday for an evening of games led by NC Grange Program Director Bobbie Dellinger, and watching the NCSU men's basketball team defeat Duke in game 3 of the ACC Tournament.

Friday morning, Grangers gathered for breakfast before hearing from several speakers. First was Elizabeth Dougherty with the US Patent and Trademark Office in Washington DC. Dougherty had been a previous speaker at the National Grange Convention in Niagara Falls this past November. She spoke about patents, copyrights, trademarks, intellectual property and how it relates to our Granges. Anytime your Grange is making signage, flyers, or any promotional materials, be sure you are using photos or graphics that are able to be used for marketing purposes and/or you are paying for the rights to be able to use them. The US Patent and Trademark Office has a great relationship with the Grange and is always willing to work with our organization!

The next speaker was Donald Meadows, NC Forest Service Ranger. The Grange staff came to know Donald and his colleagues while working events at the NC State Fairgrounds. The Rangers help patrol NCDA events such as the NC



State Fair and the Southern Farm Show. Meadows spoke about the role of the Forest Service, how they function in North Carolina as well as the services they offer to the public. They assist with forestry management plans including controlled burnings and tree inspections. He encouraged Grangers to reach out to their county offices and make contact with their local agents.

Following Meadows, Dr. Randall Williams, M.D., spoke about healthcare in and around Carteret County. Dr. Williams practiced Obstetrics and Gynecology for thirty years in Raleigh. After retiring from private practice he was appointed by Gov. Pat McCrory as Deputy Secretary of Rural Health. After that position, Dr. Williams was appointed as the the Cabinet Director of the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services where he led the Covid-19 response team. Two years ago he was named the new Director of the Health and Human Services Department in Carteret County. The final speaker of the morning was Bobby Etheridge, Director of the USDA Farm Service Agency. He spoke about his time working in NC and supporting farm families and agriculture during his tenure in Congress.



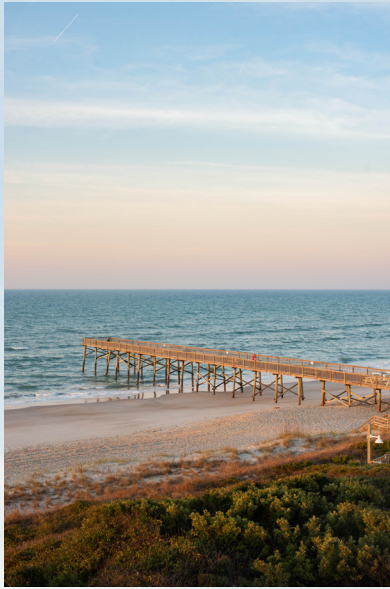


photo provided by Janice & Richard Wilcox



Grangers were free to spend time exploring the Crystal Coast on Friday and Saturday afternoons. They were also given the option of participating in a scavenger hunt! Quite a few members took part in exploring the different highlights found on the hunt. It took them as far north as the sleepy area of Harkers Island and many points in between. They stopped for ice cream in Beaufort, got shrimp in Atlantic Beach, purchased snacks in Morehead City and saw canons, anchors and the locally famous Big Rock Landing.

Everyone gathered Friday evening for the traditional bingo night. Grangers were busy marking their cards with chips while State Youth Director, Jennie Gentry, and State Community Service Director, Anna Liles, played hosts. Bingo winners were invited to pick from hidden prizes that ranged from silly items, gift cards, and items handmade though woodworking by Jimmy Gentry and Lyndon Bray.

Saturday morning, Grangers gathered for another round of speakers. First to present was Ginger Wade, General Manager of Martha's Mission, the recipient of the items donated for the weekend's community service project. Ginger has worked at the mission for many years with her sister serving as her right hand. They offer not only food products to those in need, but also basic home supplies like sheets and laundry soap. Thank you to all the members who were able to support this cause by donating items or financial gifts.

The last speaker of the weekend was Jessica Horton. Jessica was tasked with disseminating contest and program information from both the State and National Grange. National Grange has a very wide variety of programs being offered that Granges can use as programming. They also offer an array of contests in which members can partake and win cash as well as partnerships with other organizations. For information regarding these programs visit nationalgrange.org/our-values/programs.

The final activity of the morning was the annual Talent Show. This year, the National Grange has elected not to hold an Evening of Excellence talent show at the National Convention in Iowa; however, the NC Grange Board of Directors decided to send our winner anyway to enjoy the convention festivities. After the judges' deliberations, Encore, a singing group from Grantham and Brogden Granges led by Jimmy Martin, was selected as the winner.

After another afternoon of free time, members were invited to a special dinner on Saturday evening at the North Carolina Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores. Members were greeted with appetizers as they strolled through the exhibits to see the different aquatic life on display. Dinner was served in front of the large shark tank. Everyone was able to socialize and enjoy the final evening together before heading back to the hotel to catch the NCSU men's basketball team defeat UNC-Chapel Hill in the ACC Tournament.

The evening concluded with a Sunday morning worship service led by NC Grange Chaplain LaRue Tart from Grantham Grange. Thank you to everyone who attended this wonderful weekend of fellowship. We invite you to attend our State Convention which will be held September 19-22 at the Sheraton Imperial Hotel in Durham, NC.



REMEMBER

“Remember the wonders He has done, His miracles, and the judgements He pronounced.” Psalms 105:4.

At this writing, I just celebrated my birthday a few days ago, and I am remembering the years of my life and how blessed I have been, even through the rough times and the good times. My group *Canaanland* sings a song with the lyrics “If it had not been for the Lord on my side, tell me, where would I be?” Reflect on that for a moment. I remember the night at an old church revival, when I was just twelve years old, where I was reborn in Christ and made the Lord my Savior through His forgiving grace and mercy. He took my sins and threw them into the sea of forgetfulness. Praise the Lord!

I also pause to remember my childhood, the school years, the friends I made, the family I’ve been blessed with, and the example set for me by good Christian parents. I recall the times I failed Him, but He forgave me again and again. I remember with awe the times he healed me, the miracles He performed, the answered prayers, and the many, many blessings He gave me and continues to give me even today. As an old song goes, “Thank you Lord for Your Blessings on me.”

John and I recently watched “The Chosen” which I highly recommend. It really opened my eyes to see Christ in a different way and how it must have been to actually be in His presence and listen to His teachings and promises. I noted in one particular episode how Matthew and John sat down daily, and hand wrote on parchment paper the words, works, the miracles, and the traumas of what they remember happening while following Jesus. There are some similarities in these gospels they each wrote. Some had more details, others less. These words weren’t just for them in those days many years ago, but for our remembrance of the great magnitude of Jesus and His still saving grace and mercy for us. We, too, need to take time to read His words, to be in His presence, to pause and remember how true they are for us today.

Why should we take time to remember them? Because by nature, we will forget. When we remember what our Lord has done for us and what He can do for us, it removes anxiety, worry and fear, and gives hope. It also reveals the Lord’s love, provision, refuge, and strength for all our needs. So especially at this season, and as our communion table says, “Do this in remembrance of me.” Let us remember that the same Christ who miraculously raised the dead, healed the sick, died for our sins, and was raised again, is alive and still working today in our lives and preparing His church to be with Him for eternity.





- Russell Angell – Associate**
- Samantha Ledford – Associate**
- David Correll – Associate**
- Robert Jenkins – Associate**
- Scott Gurley – Brogden**
- Stephanie Stallings – Brogden**
- Barbara Britt - Associate**
- Alice Adams – Brogden**
- Frederick Small – Associate**
- Adam Ross – Associate**
- Brent Smathers – Associate**
- James Kelley – Associate**
- Anna Raper – Associate**
- Jane LaRue – Associate**
- Crystal Abee – Associate**
- Charles Deal – Associate**
- Patricia Deal – Associate**
- Albert Shaw – Associate**
- Arthur Bellamy – Associate**
- Marsha Benton – Associate**
- Milton Bellamy – Associate**
- Susan Hageman – Associate**
- Ronnie Cox – Associate**
- Wynette Shaw – Associate**
- Darlene Futral – Associate**
- Johsua Futral – Associate**
- Tara Edwards – Associate**
- Sara Futral – Associate**
- Nicole Helman – Associate**
- Tyler Forrest- Associate**
- Dwight Hedrick – Associate**
- Patricia Palmer – Associate**
- Elaine Moore – Associate**
- Charlie Dixon – Associate**
- Jean Dixon – Associate**
- Jack Walker – Associate**

COMMUNITY
by : Anna Liles



FAMILY CONFERENCE COMMUNITY SERVICE

Hello Grangers! All I can say is WOW! We collected over 1200 items and several monetary donations for Martha's Mission at our 2024 Family Conference! The staff at Martha's Mission was blown away by the number of items we collected and almost needed a bigger van! Thank you to everyone who donated items. They are going to a great cause.

Coming up next, we will be collecting items for the Ronald McDonald House in Durham at our 2024 State Convention in September. Some of the items that they need include individually wrapped bags of chips and cookies, pop tarts, easy mac-n-cheese cups, fruit cups, toiletry items, dish soap, dishwasher pods, 13-gallon trash bags, paper plates, bowls, and solo cups. This is a great opportunity to support families that are staying at the Ronald McDonald House as they go through a difficult time.

Thank you again for all the donations, and I can't wait to see everyone at the State Convention in September!



YOUTH by : Jennie Gentry



Winter Youth Conference has always been one of my favorite events that the State Grange holds. When I was a youth growing up in the Grange, I looked forward to the retreat every year, and still do today. While the conference does offer leadership and educational experiences, the special part is getting to reunite with your friends in a space where you can completely be yourself. That was huge for me when I was a teenager, and those meaningful relationships are just as important for students today.

This year's conference was held February 10-12 at the beautiful Camp Caraway near Asheboro. Youth participated in workshops and activities that focused on growing as leaders and how to be a better team member when working with groups. They learned about the positive and negative roles people take on in a group setting and how to recognize those within themselves. It was amazing to watch each group of youth work together to make decisions, overcome challenges, and encourage each other during teambuilding activities.

Taylor Rogers, member of our State Youth Leadership Team, led a workshop on Parliamentary Procedure. She introduced the basics and why it is important to learn these skills for running a meeting. Youth then put these skills into practice by conducting a meeting, which they participated in very enthusiastically. Taylor developed a passion for this when she served as Chair of her high school FFA chapter's ParliPro Team under the direction of her Ag teacher, Caroline Tart Warmack. Their team won first place in the state competition. Now a college freshman, Taylor enjoys teaching others these skills.

State Contests for youth were held on Saturday afternoon. Cade Howerton of Bushy Fork Grange won first place in the Public Speaking Contest and will advance to the national competition in November. Many youth competed in our Impromptu Speech Contest, which is always a fun event. We love how this contest boosts confidence by getting youth to speak in front of a group. No matter how they place in the contest, simply participating is a win. Taylor Rogers won first place this year with Carter Settle placing second and Asheton Medlin placing third. All participants did an incredible job.

Elections for State Youth Officers were also held during the afternoon's speech competition. Karly Denning of Grantham Grange was elected the 2024 State Grange Youth President, and Carter Settle of Little Mountain Grange was elected the State Youth Vice President. A full list of officers can be found in this edition of Grange News.

Joining us for the weekend were all three members of this year's National Grange Youth Team. This includes Asheton Medlin and Ashley Holloman of NC and Garrett Phelps from New York. Asheton and Garrett are serving as the National Youth Ambassadors

alongside Ashley, this year's National Young Adult Patron. During the conference, Asheton helped lead activities as our outgoing State Ambassador while Ashley served as a public speaking judge and helped chaperone the event. All three were a great representation for the National Grange, and we are excited to see them in action this year.

Each year at this conference, a special committee interviews youth who have applied to serve on the State Youth Leadership Team. This committee selects the team, which is always a difficult decision due to the amazing candidates that



try out. In a special ceremony on Saturday evening, the new Youth Leadership Team was announced. As their names were called, these young leaders accepted their positions with much enthusiasm, ready to serve the Grange. Those members are Caroline Barber, Camp Grange; Karly Denning, Grantham Grange; Kayla Laws, Bushy Fork Grange; and Jaiden McDougald, Camp Grange. Joining them are Taylor Rogers, Camp Grange, and Carter Settle, Little Mountain Grange, who will be serving as our State Youth Ambassadors.

Saturday evening's festivities included a Red, White and Blue Party to celebrate America. Youth kicked off the party by loudly singing "Party In The USA" as they paraded in festive outfits to show pride in our country. They enjoyed an evening of dancing and singing, and even won prizes unwrapping a large saran wrapped ball using oven mitts. Three of our young leaders gave a special vespers at the end of the evening. Jacob Roquet, Abby Gentry, and Asheton Medlin spoke about their time growing up in the Grange from Juniors to Youth. They gave uplifting messages and presented special gifts of love and encouragement to several of their younger peers. All three will be aging into the Young Adult Program this year.

The evening also brought a special activity to inspire our youth. Every person had a sheet of paper with their picture on it, all of which were set out among tables around the room. Everyone signed personal messages and positive affirmations on every sheet for youth to take home with them as a reminder of how amazing and loved they are. It was an incredible night to close an awesome weekend together.

Youth departed Sunday morning after an inspirational message by Karly Denning followed by our traditional friendship circle. It was a wonderful, uplifting weekend, and much appreciation is given to the adult chaperones that helped make the weekend possible. They volunteer their time to not only assist with the conference, but to encourage and mentor our youth, which is greatly appreciated. Our organization is proud to have such a wonderful, unique program for young people.



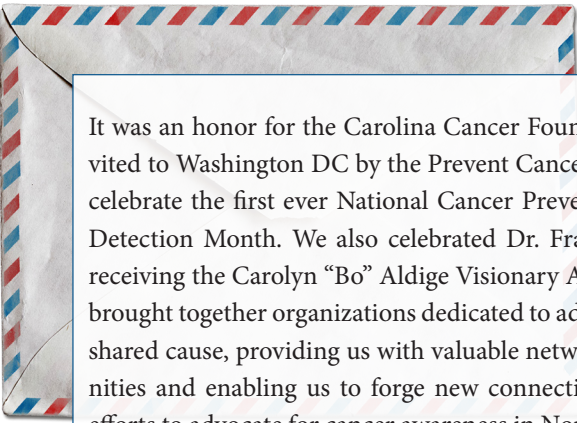
NC Grange Youth Officers

President:	Karly Denning	Grantham Grange
Vice President:	Carter Settle	Little Mountain Grange
Program Director:	Taylor Rogers	Camp Grange
Steward:	Caroline Barber	Bushy Fork Grange
Assistant Steward:	Nick Cameron	Juniper Grange
Lady Assistant Steward:	Kayla Laws	Bushy Fork Grange
Chaplain:	Brayden Eudy	St. John's Grange
Treasurer:	Lillie Spratling	St. John's Grange
Secretary:	Rylee Casey	Camp Grange
Gatekeeper:	Jaiden McDougald	Camp Grange
Ceres:	Anna Hahn	St. John's Grange
Pomona:	Peyton Musser	Cape Fear Grange
Flora:	Ryleigh Hartsell	St. John's Grange
Executive Committee:	Cade Howerton	Bushy Fork Grange
	Anna Keeter	Bushy Fork Grange
	Hannah Rogers	Camp Grange
	Makenna Seymour	St. John's Grange
	Michael Wilson	Camp Grange

2024 YOUTH LEADERSHIP TEAM

Caroline Barber	Bushy Fork Grange
Karly Denning	Grantham Grange
Kayla Laws	Bushy Fork Grange
Jaiden McDougald	Camp Grange
Taylor Rogers, Ambassador	Camp Grange
Carter Settle, Ambassador	Little Mountain Grange





It was an honor for the Carolina Cancer Foundation to be invited to Washington DC by the Prevent Cancer Foundation to celebrate the first ever National Cancer Prevention and Early Detection Month. We also celebrated Dr. Francis Collins on receiving the Carolyn “Bo” Aldige Visionary Award. The event brought together organizations dedicated to advocating for our shared cause, providing us with valuable networking opportunities and enabling us to forge new connections to help our efforts to advocate for cancer awareness in North Carolina. We would like to give a special thank you to NC Grange for their collaboration efforts by supporting this important cause for cancer prevention and control in our community.

Sharon Smith, President
 Shanese Spaulding, MBA- Vice President
 Carolina Cancer Foundation



NC GRANGE JOINS THE MODERN AG ALLIANCE

by: Jimmy Gentry

The Modern Ag Alliance is a group that has recently been formed to ensure that American farmers have access to the crop protection chemicals they need. Led by Bayer Crop Science, more than 60 agricultural groups are involved and working with policymakers in an effort to advocate for sound science when adopting regulations. Our country is faced with the challenge of producing food for a growing population. Safe crop protection tools are vital for meeting the demand while minimizing impacts to the environment.

According to Jimmy Gentry, President of NC Grange, “It is important that farmers have the pesticides available that are effective and safe. Legislation and regulation heavily determine the availability of crop protection tools. Through advocacy, the Modern Ag Alliance will be a key force toward ensuring the availability of effective pesticides to help produce food in this country. I am happy that NC Grange has become a part of this effort.”



Medicare questions?
 We’ve got answers.

Contact us for a Medicare plan that’s right for you.

 BlueCross BlueShield of North Carolina

MEDICARE



The General Assembly has been quiet for the last few months which is typical after a long legislative session. Study and interim committees continued to meet however. The short session officially began on April 24. With the impending election hovering in November, short session is likely to be relatively short this year, possibly running through July 31. It is also not expected to be a policy-heavy legislative session. The short session is designed to keep business to a bare minimum, focusing mainly on budget adjustments where they may be needed. If a bill did make crossover during long session, however, it is eligible to be taken up during short session, but not guaranteed. During long session, 250 bills made crossover. The issues that will more than likely be addressed this session are flood mitigation, North Carolina's Opportunity Scholarship Program, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) bill, the NC Compassionate Care Act, Medicaid Rebase, the childcare shortage problems that have resulted since the pandemic with the termination of federal funding, and healthcare provider rates.

2024 North Carolina Primary Results

North Carolina's primary election was held Tuesday, March 5. The night was a mixed bag full of some expected outcomes and upsets, including current legislators losing their primaries, a handful of others narrowly squeaking out victories,

and a shakeup in several Council of State races.

This year, 1,790,838 of North Carolina's 7,456,236 registered voters, or about one in four voters, cast their ballots for candidates competing in the primary contest. At the top of the ticket for both parties were the US Presidential primaries, although for both Democrats and Republicans, the results of this election for the most part were expected. The state's gubernatorial race was also on the election slate. Current Republican Lieutenant Governor Mark Robinson prevailed over State Treasurer Dale Folwell and trial attorney Bill Graham. On the Democratic side, current Attorney General Josh Stein closely won his party's nomination to replace current term-limited Governor Roy Cooper. The gubernatorial race in North Carolina is expected to be one of the most expensive and closely watched races in the country this November. A complete run down of the North Carolina election results can be found at this link <https://www.ncsbe.gov/results-data>.

excerpts courtesy of McGuire Woods

The NC Grange has been involved in advocating against a ruling of tremendous concern that was proposed earlier in the year by the NC Labor Department to once again instill mandatory wearing of masks in various working environments. This petition was filed by several interest groups to address a perceived lack of enforceable COVID-19 workplace

requirements. In their petition, these groups asked NCDOL to either adopt their proposed rules or initiate rulemaking on its own. On January 2, the Department of Labor opened a comment period that ran through March 4. This potential ruling posed a huge concern for various industry partners. A letter was initiated and drafted by the Raleigh Chamber of Commerce and was signed by 21 organizations (including the NC Grange) that voiced concern over this ruling that could potentially have tremendous implications and bring significant harm to the business community in North Carolina, especially the agricultural labor force as well as the construction industry. This ruling would also have meant a significant increase in the cost of doing business in North Carolina. On January 2, 2024, NCDOL published a Notice of Text of the same proposed rules in the North Carolina Register that had been proposed during the pandemic in 2020. A comment period was opened through March 4, 2024. Below is the letter that was submitted from the NC Chamber.

February 29, 2024

Ms. Jill Cramer

General Counsel and Rulemaking Coordinator

NC Department of Labor

1101 Mail Service Center

Raleigh, NC 27699-1101

Dear Ms. Cramer,

On October 13, 2020, the North Carolina Department of Labor ("NCDOL") provided notice of a petition for rulemaking filed by

various interest groups to address a perceived lack of enforceable COVID-19 workplace requirements. In their petition, these groups asked NCDOL to either adopt their proposed rules or initiate rulemaking on its own. On January 2, 2024 NCDOL published a Notice of Text of the same proposed rules in the North Carolina Register and opened a comment period through March 4, 2024.

The undersigned organizations write a second time to again express our strong disagreement with the fundamental premise of the petition and to urge NCDOL to not adopt both petitions, which would impose substantial regulatory burdens on our members and the state's private and public employers that have been on the front lines protecting their employees since day one of the pandemic.

From the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in North Carolina to the current day, our members have worked tirelessly to protect their employees, customers, and suppliers against and reduce exposure to airborne diseases. Using the best available science and guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, and other governmental agencies, our members have updated policies and procedures, installed and implemented safety measures, reconfigured workspaces, implemented telework options, purchased sanitizers and disinfectants, provided personal protective equipment (PPE), and made other operational changes to keep employees and the public safe from the transmission of airborne

diseases.

To be clear, the number one priority for North Carolina employers is to provide a safe working environment and protect the health and safety of their employees and the people with whom they interact.

Notwithstanding this reality, the petition would have a significant and costly impact on all employers across the state and could lead to serious disruptions in food and supply chains and other essential operations and exacerbate inflationary pressures. While not in the midst of a health emergency at this time, our country grapples with intense economic pressures stemming from severe inflation. These unnecessary proposals will increase costs for our communities and employers, jeopardizing access to safe food and shelter, essential supplies, lifesaving services, and the necessities required for daily life at a reasonable cost. The proposed rule, as written, could cause these essential operations to grind to a halt, thus creating a whole new set of public health, safety, environmental, and economic concerns.

The petition's proposed rule would impose significant costs on all employers in both the private and public sectors. Taxpayers would bear a substantial portion of these costs since the rule would impact city, county, public school, and state government employers. Our members can attest to the costs of implementing the safety measures called for in the proposed rule because many of them absorbed the COVID-19 related costs during the pandemic.

The proposed rule would also

mandate many safety requirements that were voluntary even during the height of the pandemic and duplicate many of the temporary requirements in the respective Executive Orders Governor Cooper issued in response to the pandemic. The Executive Orders were temporary measures intended to respond to and address the evolving public health emergency our state faced during the pandemic. Additionally, many employers, particularly in the agriculture, energy, and healthcare sectors, are already heavily regulated by state and federal agencies regarding employee safety measures. In contrast, the petition, if adopted as rules, would permanently establish unnecessary requirements that would provide little additional protection to employees at significant cost to the state's private and public employers. Finally, we observe that NCDOL lacks statutory authority to adopt many of the proposals contained in the petition. Most notably, NCDOL does not have the authority to establish a new private right of action against employers or to delegate and authorize other governmental and non-governmental agencies or local governments to take action to enforce NCDOL's rules. These enforcement mechanisms may only be imposed by the General Assembly.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the petition for rulemaking. We strongly urge you to disapprove. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have additional questions or need further information about this important matter.



Sincerely,
NC Grange
North Carolina Home Builders
Association
North Carolina Independent
Colleges and Universities
North Carolina REALTORS
North Carolina Retail Merchants
Association
North Carolina Sweetpotato
Commission
North Carolina Pork
North Carolina Poultry Federation
North Carolina Aggregates
Association
North Carolina Trucking
Association
North Carolina Petroleum and
Convenience Marketers
North Carolina Restaurant &
Lodging Association

View from the Hill

Below is an excellent March wrap-up from National Grange Legislative Director, Burton Hill.

USDA Issues Tighter “Product of the USA” Label

A new regulation by the Department of Agriculture requires any meat, poultry or egg packaging bearing “Product of the USA” or “Made in the USA” terminology must come from animals that are born, raised, processed and packaged in the United States.

USDA Bars Discriminatory Contracts

A new rule from USDA’s Packers and Stockyards division will prohibit contracting companies from taking regulatory or discriminatory action against producers. The rule bans false or misleading statements or omissions of material information when companies write or terminate contracts with producers or when

performance is being evaluated. The agriculture industry is split over the issue with some producer and processor groups concerned about the potential for additional litigation under the new rule governing contracts. However, in some segments of the ag industry, there have been cases of clear evidence of price-fixing and unfair practices. National Grange has policy supporting such a rule and has been working for several years for such action by USDA.

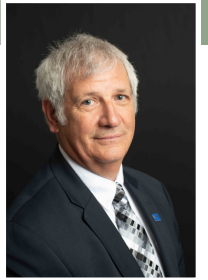
Bird Flu Found in Dairy Cows

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza or bird flu has been detected in some dairy cows in Kansas, New Mexico and Texas. The virus appears to have been introduced by wild birds. Dairy farmers first became concerned when milk production dropped sharply, the cows were lethargic, and their feed consumption fell. However, the cows appeared to recover in a week or so on their own and the affected cows did not appear to be transmitting the virus to other cows within the same herd. Initial testing by the National Veterinary Services Laboratories has not found changes to the virus that would make it more transmissible to humans which would indicate the current risk to humans is low. Pasteurization of milk also kills viruses and bacteria, and the process is required for milk sold through interstate commerce. In addition, the bird flu virus cannot be transmitted to humans by eating properly cooked meat and poultry products.

Why is Rural Health So Hard

Bill Frist is a physician, a heart transplant surgeon, a former U.S. Senator from Tennessee and a

vocal rural health care advocate. In an article in Forbes, he focuses on issues which must be addressed to improve the health of over 60 million people who are falling further behind in access and quality health care. Health systems simply put, he says, are designed for urban and suburban communities, not rural. While campaigning for his underdog Senate race in 1994, Frist visited all 95 Tennessee counties. It was then he discovered the remote communities he visited had severely limited primary and secondary health care access. For many he met with, it had been years since a physician set foot in their town or community. Thirty years later, the rural health care conundrum has only gotten worse. Dr. Frist points to a confluence of factors – increasing rural hospital closures, an aging population, a persistent opioid epidemic, and an explosion of lifestyle-driven diseases – have made rural communities even more vulnerable and more challenging to serve. Frist says rural health care solutions are complex and must begin with sensitivity to culture, with heavy emphasis on establishing personal trust and establishing convenient, affordable care closer the home. Solutions must start from the vantage point of the patient, not the provider, not the insurance company, not the urban policy maker. Solutions will require new, more innovative models of health care delivery, targeted federal and state government commitment and incentives, and a willingness to meet rural Americans where they are with the care they need.



SEIZE THE MOMENT

My wife, Kathryn, recently took a picture of our youngest grandchild sitting with our dogs in a patch of wildflowers. She took a similar picture three years ago of the same child, but a different dog. This time, she utilized an app on her phone to place the pictures side by side. As we compared the two pictures of that same child, you could see notable differences. The dog in the first picture has passed on, and the dogs in the second picture were not even born yet when the first one was taken but are now full grown. Our grandchild has also grown from a toddler to a young girl full of silliness, but with a very helpful and willing spirit. We were both in awe of just how much she has changed in such a short period of time, even though the grandkids are with us several times a week, often spending the night over at Lolli and Pop's, as they call us. This is just one example of how quickly time passes us by, and we can almost completely miss the changes occurring before our eyes.

It seems that just a few days ago we were getting ready for Open Enrollment for both the Under65 and Medicare Market Insurance segments. In fact, we will have completed both of these segments along with the Medicare Annual Enrollment by the time this article is published. If we look back, we can see that the first quarter of 2024 is already gone. Overall, our health insurance program did see good success during these enrollment periods. Our marketing allowance for the Under65 Market Segment was modified a bit for 2024 so that our payments are more spread out as we achieve our production goals. The expansion of Medicaid in North Carolina is also affecting the sales results of some of our agents as the income of some families falls between 100 and 133% of the Federal Poverty Level due to their family size.

While this did present a challenge, our January / February new membership numbers are only slightly below our 2023 membership numbers for the same period. So, we are expecting that overall, we will meet and possibly exceed our sales goals for 2024.

If you know of someone who needs individual health insurance due to moving to the area, loss of group coverage, marriage, or any other life event, your recommendation to introduce these folks to our NC Grange Agents is greatly appreciated. We can also use your assistance by referring individuals who are in a similar life situation or those getting ready to be eligible for Medicare to contact us. We can help them sort out the Medicare Alphabet Soup of letter plans for a specific plan that best suits their individual needs!

I recently attended the Cooperative Council of NC's annual meeting. One of the key points that was stressed is the importance of personal contact with individuals, creating relationships, and educating those individuals prior to a need arising where they could assist you. This is a common goal shared by everyone working together for the success of any organization. So, in your community, be a spokesperson not only for the great works of your local and State Grange, but also for the programs the State Grange offers. You are our best form of advertising and marketing!

Give us a call today and we will be delighted to assist you in every way possible, including assisting with a local Grange information program.

