

North Carolina US Senate 2026

THE ISSUES

ROY
COOPER

DEMOCRAT

MICHAEL
WHATLEY

REPUBLICAN

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ABORTION Ban or legal?	Legal. Would “ defend reproductive rights.” As governor, vetoed a 12-week ban , calling it “ dangerous for women.” In response to the Supreme Court’s overturning of Roe v. Wade, would fight “to keep politicians out of the doctor’s exam room.”	Ban. Was “ proud to be the most pro-life chair in the history of the Republican Party.” Called the veto of a 12-week ban “the radical abortion-on-demand position.” In response to the Supreme Court’s overturning of Roe v. Wade, would fight to “ensure that we have pro-life majorities.”
CLIMATE CHANGE Should climate change be a top priority?	Yes. “The urgency of the climate crisis is real.” Signed an executive order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50% over 2005 levels by 2030, and net-zero emissions by 2050. Signed an order for developing 2.8 gigawatts of offshore wind energy by 2030 and 8 gigawatts by 2040.	Mixed. Supports an “all of the above” approach to energy, including “carbon, nuclear, renewables.” In 2013, said Obama EPA’s carbon pollution rules would lead to a “troubling...uncertain future for coal.” Supported the goal to “double renewable electricity generation by 2020.”
CRIMINAL JUSTICE How to ensure effectiveness and fairness in law enforcement?	Signed bills providing mental health training , mandating reporting of officers’ excessive use of force, and requiring background checks in hiring police officers. Instituted North Carolina’s first Community Violence Prevention Strategic Plan .	“We need to back the blue.” Would “put more cops on the street” and “pay them better.” Would create “a federal version of Iryna’s Law ,” which limits pre-trial release options for defendants accused of “violent offenses.”
ECONOMY Cut or increase government investment in, and regulation of, the economy?	Increase. Supports stronger antitrust regulations, banning algorithm use that raises grocery prices, and providing employee child-care subsidies. “North Carolina succeeds by creating good-paying jobs that put more money in the pockets of hardworking North Carolinians.”	Likely decrease. Supports the Big Beautiful Bill, including the cuts to Medicaid and SNAP. “We do not need waste, fraud and abuse in these programs.”
EDUCATION Use public funding for private and/or for-profit schools?	No. Vetoed a bill to expand private school vouchers in North Carolina. Opposes “sending taxpayer dollars to private schools with no accountability.” Wants “a moratorium on destructive private school vouchers until we fully fund our public schools.”	Yes. Supports the Education Freedom Tax Credit , with public funding of private school scholarships. “ Dollars should follow students, whether it is to a public school, a private school, a charter school, or homeschooling.” Supports “Education Freedom.”
ENVIRONMENT Loosen or tighten environmental regulation?	Tighten. Supports “a whole-of-government approach to advance environmental justice efforts.” Re-established a state advisory board on environmental justice. Vetoed a bill limiting wetlands protections. “ Protecting forests, wetlands, and farmlands makes us more resilient to climate hazards . . . and supports local economies.” Wants large tech companies to build their own energy sources.	Loosen. Lobbied for oil and gas industry companies to limit air pollution regulations. Has opposed EPA provisions: “In the name of ‘flexibility,’ EPA is handing the states an unfunded mandate with instructions to eliminate coal-fired generation. We need to have all options on the table.” Has lobbied for offshore drilling off North Carolina’s Atlantic coast.

ISSUES	COOPER (D)	WHATLEY (R)
GUN LAWS Loosen or tighten gun laws?	Tighten. Vetoed a bill to loosen permit rules for purchasing a handgun. Supports “more comprehensive background checks, red flag laws.” Launched Secure All Firearms Effectively initiative to urge North Carolinians to safely store firearms. Said Congress should “ban assault weapons.”	Likely loosen. Is “ honored ” to be endorsed by the National Rifle Association. “I will unapologetically defend your constitutional right to keep and bear arms.” Was chairman of state GOP when it censured Sen. Thom Tillis for supporting a measure that provided funds for red flag laws.
HEALTHCARE Increase or decrease government support for health care?	Increase. Expanded Medicaid to provide coverage to over 600,000 people. Would reinstate ACA tax credits, reverse Medicaid cuts, and cap drug costs. “I’ll fight to keep health care affordable.”	Decrease. Defended One Big Beautiful Bill, which included significant Medicaid cuts. “We need to get the government out of the way and get back to market-driven solutions on health care.”
IMMIGRATION How to handle immigration?	In 2019 , 2022 and 2024 , vetoed bills requiring North Carolina sheriffs to cooperate with federal agents seeking immigration status of county jail inmates. Called for “immediate reforms” to ICE operations before any continued funding.	Welcomed ICE activity in Charlotte, saying it was “strong, decisive action” from the Trump administration to keep communities safe. Said he was thankful that the administration was “taking these violent criminal illegal aliens off the street.”
IRAN WAR Support the war in Iran?	No. “I’m deeply concerned about what are the reasons that we got in it, and what the exit strategies are to get out.” Is “grateful for our troops.” Raised questions about the costs of war: “I think we need to take back the constitutional authority, particularly on declaration of war.”	Yes. Given any negative US economic impact, “ absolutely ” supports the war in Iran. Said “we cannot allow Iran to have nuclear weapons” or “be exporting terrorism around the world.” “It’s very, very important from our national security perspective.”
LABOR Make it easier or harder for unions to organize workers?	Mixed. Praised unions for their support of workers. Said workers “need to be paid fairly.” Didn’t take sides in a UAW/Daimler dispute . In 2017 signed into law restrictions on farmworker union representation and union dues collection.	No position found.
LGBTQ RIGHTS Limit or expand LGBTQ rights?	Expand. In 2023 , vetoed bills that prohibit classroom instruction about gender identity and sexuality, limit transgender participation in sports, and ban gender transition care for minors, calling them “a triple threat of political culture wars.” As attorney general in 2016, refused to defend the “bathroom bill” in court.	Likely limit. Was chairman of state GOP when it censured Sen. Thom Tillis for his support for putting protections on same-sex and interracial marriages into federal law.
MINIMUM WAGE Raise the federal minimum from \$7.25 per hour?	Likely yes. In 2019 supported raising North Carolina’s minimum wage. Proposed a budget plan to provide school districts with money to ensure non-certified employees get at least \$15 an hour.	No position found.
TAXES Raise or lower taxes on corporations and wealthier individuals?	Likely raise. Opposed proposals to lower income tax rates for corporations and high-income individuals. Would make it hard “to give...tax breaks for the wealthiest and corporations.”	Lower. Supports the One Big Beautiful Bill, which extended the 2017 Trump tax cuts. These cuts included the largest corporate tax cut in U.S. history.
VOTING RULES Make voting harder or easier?	Easier. Vetoed a bill that would add restrictions to absentee voting and require “signature match” in some counties. “We need to make sure that our elections are secure and that just citizens are voting, but we don’t need to create more barriers.” In 2018, vetoed a voter ID bill .	Harder. As chairman of state GOP, “ led the charge to require voter ID.” As national GOP chairman, “ filed 170+ lawsuits to keep non-citizens from voting.” Supports the SAVE America Act. “If our voters don’t have confidence that our elections are safe and secure, nothing else matters.”

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