

For generations, we North Carolina have distinguished ourselves from other southern states as a place of opportunity, and a place that understands the value of investing in our people.

Education has been our hallmark – the one area that set us apart from our neighbors and propelled our economic success.

From the high chair to the rocking chair, every North Carolinian has been given the opportunity for a quality education -- from early childhood, K-12, community colleges and through our colleges and universities. This is the commitment we have made to our people because, quite simply, it's what we believe in.

We have lived our values – until now.

Now, for the first time, we have a legislature that is turning its back on our schools, our children, our longstanding investments in education and our future economic prospects.

Under this budget:

- We will overlook many of our most at-risk pre-school children by slashing Smart Start and More at Four, leaving these kids behind before they've even started Kindergarten;
- Classrooms will be underfunded in K-12, forcing local school districts to lay off thousands of teachers and teaching assistants who will then be added to the unemployment rolls; and
- In our community colleges and universities, programs will be shut down, tuition may be raised, career training and college degrees will be further out of reach, there will be fewer class offerings and students will take longer to graduate.

This budget will result in generational damage. It tears at the very fibers that make North Carolina strong – not only our schools, but also our communities, our environment, our public safety system and our ability to care for those who need us most.

- Our most vulnerable and sick will see medical and mental health services cut or eliminated;
- Families will have fewer resources as they care for their elderly, their disabled or their mentally ill;
- The natural environmental treasures that we cherish and that draw so many visitors to North Carolina will be at risk of permanent damage or destruction;
- Historical sites that attract tourists and stimulate economic activity by commemorating our rich cultural heritage will be closed;
- Our ability to prepare for and recover from disasters such as tornados and hurricanes may be hampered; and
- These cuts would be devastating when we have a more than active hurricane season predicted.
- Fewer law enforcement officers will patrol our streets and supervise convicted felons, while victims will be forced to wait longer for justice.

In the days since the General Assembly's budget reached my desk, I've traveled the state listening to parents and grandparents, teachers and superintendents, business people, community leaders and law enforcement officials. I saw worry in their eyes;

I heard frustration in their voices. These are people who, like me, are proud to call North Carolina home because of what we believe in as a people; because of our legacy of smart choices and planning for the future. They spoke to me not as Democrats or Republicans, Tea Partiers or Independents. They came to me as North Carolinians, and they asked me to stand up for what is right for our children and grandchildren, for what moves North Carolina forward, not backward.

They know that much of damage that this budget seeks to do is simply unnecessary. By extending less than a penny of the sales tax, North Carolina can avoid severe cuts to our schools and other crucial programs.

These cuts were made by the legislature in this budget by choice. They chose to risk our children's futures -- for less than a penny.

For weeks I have cautioned legislative leaders of the damage this budget will cause. Yes, these difficult economic times demand that we tighten our belt, make cuts and face up to hard choices.

The budget I submitted to the General Assembly in February did just that -- but it also invested in our future. We cannot move North Carolina forward without both balance and reason. This budget provides neither.

As I've reviewed the General Assembly's plan for how North Carolina should run the next two years, I've found is ideologically driven budget that rips at our classrooms and campuses, our environment and quality of life, our services for the needy and ill, and the safety of our streets and communities. What message does that send to the people and businesses who are considering a move to North Carolina? The state's budget is more than just a roadmap for how state agencies operate. It is a reflection of the state's values, of what we believe in.

I will not put my name on a plan that so blatantly ignores the values of North Carolina's people. I cannot support a budget that sends the message that North Carolina is moving backwards, when we have always been a state that led the nation.

The General Assembly may be satisfied with a state in reverse, but I am not. Therefore, I veto this bill.