

Speakers urge legislature: Invest in North Carolina's future

At Together NC's Tuesday press conference, speech therapists, environmental groups and faith leaders called on lawmakers to fund vital investments through reform-minded revenue

RALEIGH (Feb. 22, 2011) – The Together NC coalition has a message for legislators: investing in North Carolina's people is the only way to ensure a bright and successful future.

This message comes on the heels of the Governor's budget proposal, which, while far from perfect, is an example of the balanced approach that should be taken by the Legislature, according to the group.

At the press conference on Tuesday, speakers called on state lawmakers to fund North Carolina's public investments in education, health services and environmental protection. According to Together NC, North Carolina legislators must embrace these commitments to the public good in order to grow strong out of the recession, and that means raising revenue to fill in the nearly \$3 billion budget shortfall.

Press conference speakers represented a diverse set of interests, but each touched on the same theme – now is not the time to retreat from past investments in the health, education and safety of our communities.

“Whether it's early childhood education, clean air and water, or basic health services, the same point holds: these priorities are critical to North Carolina's success as a state and can't be accomplished if the legislature doesn't take a balanced approach – one that includes raising revenue – to the budget,” stated Louisa Warren, Together NC Coordinator.

Speech therapist Allison Crumpler, from Raleigh, told lawmakers that helping children communicate is a fundamental obligation that North Carolina must live up to – and that providing this service saves jobs and tax dollars.

“Without the power to communicate, these children will lead less healthy, less full lives – and many will become a burden on state government. We must pay for these vital services now or we will all pay for it later,” she said. “Furthermore, a reduction in speech therapy services would undermine thousands of jobs in North Carolina.” she said.

To invest in the future requires addressing North Carolina's revenue problem today. Speakers insisted that the legislature take reform-minded revenue steps, steps that would create a fairer and more stable system.

“We need to address inequity and injustice, not balance the budget on the backs of the poor,” said Rev. Dr. William Barber II, president of the NC NAACP. “Slashing the corporate income tax rate won't create the jobs we need; it will just put a heavier burden on those least able to afford it. The revenue we need for education and health care should come from those most able to pay.”

Protecting the investments that have created prosperity in North Carolina benefits everyone, said speakers.

“North Carolina needs clean air and water for so many reasons: for healthy communities, for future prosperity, and because protecting our forests and streams is the right thing to do,” said Dan Crawford of the NC League of Conservation Voters. “To live up to that obligation, we have to fully fund the investments we've made in conservation.”

For weeks, Together NC urged Gov. Beverly Perdue to craft a budget that took a balanced approach including revenue. Now, the coalition says, it's state legislators' turn to stand up for North Carolina by raising revenues and funding the basic systems and infrastructure that provide the opportunity for all North Carolinians to be successful.

Together NC is a coalition of more than 120 service providers, nonprofits and advocacy organizations from across North Carolina.

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