

# Top Ten Examples of Legislation that Exacerbate Racial & Class Disparities by Rev. William J. Barber

June 21, 2012

1) They want less people to vote. They passed one of the most restrictive voter suppression laws in the country which was vetoed by Gov. Perdue, though lawmakers are still threatening another try at overriding her veto. In a baffling and audacious move of regression, this legislature has frozen \$4 million dollars from the federal Help America Vote Act, also known as HAVA, that would be used to help our elections run smoothly by training poll workers, upgrading voting equipment and increasing accessibility for people with disabilities. Republican leaders refused to include \$660,000 for the State Board of Elections that would trigger the release the funds. The \$4 million remains in a North Carolina bank unable to be used! They also passed the most race-based redistricting maps since the 19th Century, which we are challenging in court right now.

2) Ultra-Conservative lawmakers aggressively advanced the far right's cherished objective of marginalizing and privatizing public education. They slashed essential funding, which will further demoralize and lower confidence in the public schools. Right wing conservatives pushed through specific bills to introduce school vouchers. This gives corporations the ability to send their tax dollars to other corporations and private schools, thereby reducing funds available to struggling public schools. They dramatically expand the state's unproven experiment with charter schools, including for-profit virtual charters. This is part of their efforts to transfer schools from centers of learning for children to centers of profit for corporations. They also pounced on an opportunity to override a veto when certain Democratic members of the House were absent, ensuring they had enough votes. The legislation denies affordable loans to needy community college students and slashes need-based scholarships to public universities, including HBCUs.

3) Maybe most disturbing of all, they passed punitive budgets that fire teachers and teacher assistants, lock at-risk kids out of Pre-K and Smart Start, slash services to people with mental illness. etc., all while giving that tax break to the wealthiest lawyers and doctors in the state.

4) They are punishing workers. This includes the month-and-half long "hostage crisis" that legislators instigated last spring in which deserving unemployed workers were denied essential benefits for weeks in order to abet the Republicans' budget negotiating strategy and the current push to slash worker benefits to repay a federal loan while ignoring the cuts in the unemployment taxes businesses pay that caused the problem.

5) Instead of getting North Carolinians back to work and addressing the fact that 1.6 million people live in stark poverty in our state, they are pushing regressive tax policies that help the wealthy and corporations at the expense of the majority. At the heart of much of the damage inflicted during the session was the majority's rigid and nonsensical push to cut state taxes at a time of severe budget shortfalls and in which a large majority of the public opposed the idea. Not only that, they then voted to give millionaires a tax cut that was supposed to be targeted at small businesses, even defeating an amendment on the Senate floor that would have limited the tax cut and used the savings to prevent teacher layoffs and to fund compensation for eugenics victims.

6) The final budget tragically removed a provision to address the utter violation of human dignity and human bodies through forcible sterilization by the North Carolina Eugenics Board of mostly poor and disproportionately African American women. This was passed with bi-partisan support in the House and was not even allowed to go before the Senate for a full discussion with a trick legislative move that removed it from the agenda. This is unconscionable and a slap in the face to victims and their families.

7) They voted to repeal the Racial Justice Act, not once but twice. The most recent bill that was shamefully passed this

week goes beyond just repealing the Racial Justice Act. The right wing bill writers snuck other provisions into the bill to make it easier to kill people. They took power from the Council of State to control the method of killing defendants. They made sure a jury and judge cannot consider the race of the victim in a capital trial, which every study has proven is a significant factor in whether someone is given the death penalty. If we do use the death penalty, we demand that race has nothing to do with it. They don't care if race has anything to do with someone's death. If we do use the death penalty, we demand it is as humane as possible. They don't care how the State murders the convicts. If we do use the death penalty, we demand we are absolutely sure they are guilty. In North Carolina alone, seven men have been exonerated from death row, five of them African American and one of them Latino. They would be dead if the system worked faster and protections like the ones the right wing is trying to destroy were not in place.

8) They voted to prevent Planned Parenthood from using state funds to provide health screenings and family planning services to low-income women and families.

9) They expanded the spread and use of guns. Anxious to kowtow to the powerful gun lobby, conservative lawmakers pushed through a bill that includes twelve pages of new changes to liberalize state firearm laws. Among the most notable provisions: changes to state law that would encourage home and vehicle owners to shoot those who they believe to be intruders and an expansion of the places to which gun owners with "concealed carry" permits may take firearms - including public parks. A bill to allow guns in bars and restaurants is still pending.

10) They are poisoning our rivers and our land. Lawmakers passed a bevy of bills at the request of polluters and other corporate special interests, including slashing regulations that protect local communities and voting to legalize fracking. They did so after admitting that the oil and gas industry may fund the people who will be charged with regulating the environment and safety protections put in place for fracking companies.