

Michael Wray: House District 27

Halifax and Northampton Counties

“I represent Halifax and Northampton counties, which are both Tier I counties and ranked by our Department of Commerce as the most economically distressed areas of our state.” – [Michael Wray](#)

In a series of Real Facts NC reports examining key North Carolina legislators, we look at Representative Michael Wray, who has represented Northeastern North Carolina since 2005. Wray has held several leadership positions within the House Democratic Caucus including Deputy Democratic Leader. As a legislator, Wray has touted his experience as a small business owner and as someone who fights for working families. In 2014, Wray said, “I have a record of leadership, accountability and responsibility to the people I serve and the people who elect me.” However, despite Wray’s assertions about his record, he has used his time in office to get ahead, while the people he represents have fallen further behind in a changing economy.

Summary

- While the people of House District 27 struggle in a changing economy, Michael Wray has used his office to get ahead.
- Wray handled his own campaign’s finances and was audited by the North Carolina State Board of Elections in 2014 after spending more than \$65,000 for fuel and mileage, \$40,000 for meals and \$5,700 for lodging since 2006.
- While getting his donors to reimburse his mileage, Wray voted for millions of dollars in new DMV fees on folks that pay for their gas out of their own pockets.
- Wray pushed legislation to spend millions in NC taxpayer money on a project that would boost his own property value.
- Wray said that education cuts were “short-changing our future,” yet he sponsored legislation that made it more difficult for school systems to receive funding.
- Wray, his family, and business associates have received \$491,000 in subsidies from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Wray voted to override Gov. Cooper’s veto of H467, which would limit the amount of money neighboring property owners could receive from lawsuits against agricultural operations like hog farms that cause clouds of flies and intense smells.

NC House District 27



Rep. Michael Wray



Halifax County Statistics

Poverty and Economic Hardship

- 27.9% of county residents (14,219 people) lived in poverty and struggled to make ends meet in 2015; the state poverty rate was 16.4%. (US Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, 2015, Budget and Tax Center, Retrieved [8/23/17](#))
- 39.1% of children in the county (4,400 children) lived in poverty in 2015, compared to 23.4% statewide. (US Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, 2015, Budget and Tax Center, Retrieved [8/23/17](#))

Educational Attainment

- The graduation rate for the Halifax County Schools LEA was 73.4% compared to the state rate of 85.6% in 2015-16. (NC Department of Public Instruction, 4-Year Cohort 2015-2016, Budget and Tax Center, Retrieved [8/23/17](#))
- The graduation rate for the Roanoke Rapids City Schools LEA was 82.3% in 2015- 16. (NC Department of Public Instruction, 4-Year Cohort 2015-2016, Budget and Tax Center, Retrieved [8/23/17](#))

Medicaid Expansion

- 16,630 people in the county were eligible for Medicaid in December 2016, an increase of 14.4% since December 2007 when the recession began. Estimates suggest that 2,622 North Carolinians in the county would benefit from Medicaid expansion, delivering \$43.6 million in economic benefits to the county. (NC Division of Medical Assistance, December 2007 and 2016; and Cone Health Foundation. "The Economic and Employment Costs of Not Expanding Medicaid in North Carolina: A County-Level Analysis." December 2014, Budget and Tax Center, Retrieved [8/23/17](#))

Northampton County Statistics

Poverty and Economic Hardship

- 26.8% of county residents (5,270 people) lived in poverty and struggled to make ends meet in 2015; the state poverty rate was 16.4%. (US Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, 2015, Budget and Tax Center, Retrieved [8/23/17](#))
- 45.3% of children in the county (1,714 children) lived in poverty in 2015, compared to 23.4% statewide. (US Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, 2015, Budget and Tax Center, Retrieved [8/23/17](#))

Educational Attainment

- The graduation rate for this county was 73.2% compared to the state rate of 85.6% in 2015-16. (NC Department of Public Instruction, 4-Year Cohort 2015-2016, Budget and Tax Center, Retrieved [8/23/17](#))

Medicaid Expansion

- 6,171 people in the county were eligible for Medicaid in December 2016, an increase of 15.1% since December 2007 when the recession began. Estimates suggest that 1,012 North Carolinians in the county would benefit from Medicaid expansion, delivering \$5.4 million in economic benefits to the county. (NC Division of Medical Assistance, December 2007 and 2016; and Cone Health Foundation. "The Economic and Employment Costs of Not Expanding Medicaid in North Carolina: A County-Level Analysis." December 2014, Budget and Tax Center, Retrieved [8/23/17](#))



Between July 2011 and June 2013, Michael Wray bought fuel 427 times, spending \$28,000, enough to travel over 100,000 miles.

Where could Michael Wray have gone?

- ⇒ Traveled around the equator 4 times.
- ⇒ Almost halfway to the moon.
- ⇒ Length of the United States 36 times.
- ⇒ Length of North Carolina 178 times.

Michael Wray was audited by the State Board of Elections in 2014 after spending “more than \$65,000 for fuel and mileage, \$40,000 for meals and \$5,700 for lodging since 2006.”

Michael Wray’s campaign finance reports since 2004 were audited by the State Board of Elections, who wanted spending details for meals, mileage, and lodging. “Auditors at the State Board of Elections have reviewed campaign finance reports filed by Rep. Michael Wray since 2004 and are awaiting more details from the Gaston Democrat on his campaign’s spending on meals, mileage and lodging, a board spokesman said this week.” (Charlotte Observer, [6/29/14](#))

According to Board of Elections Spokesman Josh Lawson, “Wray’s campaign reports show expenses of more than \$65,000 for fuel and mileage, \$40,000 for meals and \$5,700 for lodging since 2006.” “Spokesman Josh Lawson said Wray’s campaign reports show expenses of more than \$65,000 for fuel and mileage, \$40,000 for meals and \$5,700 for lodging since 2006. “We are seeking clarification regarding numerous line-items within each category,” Lawson wrote in an email. Wray, who serves as his own campaign treasurer and is the deputy Democratic leader in the House, has told the board that he would provide more details, Lawson wrote. “Communication on this matter is ongoing, with the most recent exchange occurring last week.” (Charlotte Observer, [6/29/14](#))

“Wray is a House member whose campaign reported buying fuel 427 times between July 2011 and June 2013, spending more than \$28,000 on his campaign debit card, enough to drive well over 100,000 miles. The campaign is being investigated by the State Board of Elections.” “State Rep. Michael Wray, D-Northampton, can be thankful for lower gas prices. Wray is a House member whose campaign reported buying fuel 427 times between July 2011 and June 2013, spending more than \$28,000 on his campaign debit card, enough to drive well over 100,000 miles. The campaign is being investigated by the State Board of Elections.” (News & Observer, Patrick Gannon, [11/28/14](#))

Wray described himself as a “full-time legislator” who “eats on the road during his travels and sometimes dines with constituents and picks up the tab.” “The Insider first reported in early September that Wray’s House campaign reported 427 fuel purchases between July 2011 and June 2013, or more than one every other day for two years, spending \$28,700 on fuel. The campaign reported buying enough gas in two years to travel well over 100,000 miles. Wray’s campaign committee also reported spending for meals and other food purchases at least 177 times in those two years, totaling nearly \$17,700, an average of about \$100 a meal. Wray said last year that he drove a large SUV and that he commuted between his home in Gaston in Raleigh each day during session and that he routinely drove around his large, two-county district. He described himself as a “full-time legislator.” The five-term lawmaker has also said he eats on the road during his travels and sometimes dines with constituents and picks up the tab.” (News & Observer, [6/26/14](#))

Wray defended his spending on fuel and said, “To represent the people, you have to go throughout the district and see them. It just takes time to do it. It takes gas to do it at the same time.” “To represent the people, you have to go throughout the district and see them,” he said. “It just takes time to do it. It takes gas to do it at the same time.” But Wray, who drives a Yukon XL sport-utility vehicle with 265,000 miles on it, added, “I need to get a more economical car.” (News & Observer, [9/9/13](#))

Wray also claimed he bought gas for campaign staff, although there was nothing in his reports to indicate that spending on fuel went towards that. “Wray also said he has bought gas for campaign workers, although there doesn’t appear to be any indication in his reports that any fuel spending went toward such reimbursements. “It wasn’t fair for them to have to pull it out of their pocket because they didn’t have the money to do it,” he said. He added that people sometimes go to events in his place and that he pays for their gas.” (News & Observer, [9/9/13](#))

Despite not being in session in the second half of 2011, Wray still spent “\$6,237 on 98 fuel purchases. That’s more than one purchase every other day.” “But the food and fuel purchases weren’t just made in and around elections or during legislative sessions when increased spending might be expected. In the second half of 2011, for example, with the legislature not in session and the primary election still months away, Wray’s campaign reported spending \$6,237 on 98 fuel purchases. That’s more than one purchase every other day.” (News & Observer, [9/9/13](#))

Michael Wray spent campaign money at three of his businesses

Michael Wray spent campaign money at three of his businesses including Frazier’s, Gaston Hardware, and Wray Development totaling \$1,378.39. (NC Board of Elections, Retrieved [8/10/17](#))

Name	Date	Amount	Purpose
Frazier's	2/24/14	\$162.62	Co-Sponsor Job Fair
Gaston Hardware	3/16/12	\$500.00	Sign Materials
Wray Development	1/24/11	\$715.77	Reimbursement for Telephone

Michael Wray served as his campaign treasurer starting in June of 2013

Michael Wray updated his candidate committee’s Statement of Organization on June 28, 2013 to make himself custodian of books, signing the document as the appointed treasurer of the committee. (NC Board of Elections, Retrieved [8/9/17](#))

After being investigated by the State Board of Elections, Wray filed a Certification of Treasurer document with the Board on February 4, 2015 that named Scott Falmlen as Treasurer. (NC Board of Elections, Retrieved [8/9/17](#))

Michel Wray voted for millions of dollars in new DMV fees

- **Michael Wray voted for the 2015 Budget, H97.** (H97, signed by Gov. [9/18/15](#))

2015 Budget increased fees on North Carolina families, with the state expected to bring in \$200M in extra revenue on DMV fee increases alone

North Carolinians will pay \$200 million in additional fees to the DMV. (WFAE, [9/15/15](#))



Increased fees for typical eight-year driver's license by 25 percent. (Asheboro Courier-Tribune, [9/26/15](#); H97, Section 29.30.(g); Signed [9/18/15](#))

Increased drivers license restoration fee. (Asheboro Courier-Tribune, [9/26/15](#); H97, Section 29.30.(a1); Signed [9/18/15](#))

Raised learner's permit fee by 30 percent. (Asheboro Courier-Tribune, [9/26/15](#); H97, Section 29.30.(a1); Signed [9/18/15](#))

Raised fee for obtaining a duplicate license by 30 percent. (H97, Section 29.30.(c); Signed [9/18/15](#))

Increased fee for driver improvement clinics by 30 percent. (H97, Section 29.30.(c); Signed [9/18/15](#))

Increased fees for obtaining copies of license records. (H97, Section 29.30.(e); Signed [9/18/15](#))

Increased fee for initial drivers license application. (H97, Section 29.30.(f); Signed [9/18/15](#))

Increased fees concerning "a certificate of title, a registration card, or a registration plate for a motor vehicle," but not for Stock Car Racing Theme plates. (H97, Section 29.30.(j); Signed [9/18/15](#))

Raised fee for one-day title service by 30 percent. (Asheboro Courier-Tribune, [9/26/15](#); H97, Section 29.30.(k); Signed [9/18/15](#))

Raised fees on passenger vehicles operated for compensation, ie- taxis, ubers, charter buses, etc. by 28 percent. (H97, Section 29.30.(l); Signed [9/18/15](#))

Raised taxes on "U-Drive-It Vehicles," or car and truck rentals. (Asheboro Courier-Tribune, [9/26/15](#); H97, Section 29.30.(l); Signed [9/18/15](#))

Raised fees for private passenger vehicles, including vehicles given by the federal government to disabled veterans. (H97, Section 29.30.(l); Signed [9/18/15](#))

Increased fee on private passenger motorcycles by 33 percent. (H97, Section 29.30.(l); Signed [9/18/15](#))

Increased fee on house trailers by 27 percent. (H97, Section 29.30.(l); Signed [9/18/15](#))

Increased amount farmers and others must pay for vehicles whose fees are based on weight. (Asheboro Courier-Tribune, [9/26/15](#); H97, Section 29.30.(o); Signed [9/18/15](#))

Increased fee for plug-in electric vehicles by 30 percent. (Asheboro Courier-Tribune, [9/26/15](#); H97, Section 29.30.(l); Signed [9/18/15](#))

Added new section to initiate fees for late vehicle registration, ranging from \$15 to \$25 on top of the cost of registration. (Asheboro Courier-Tribune, [9/26/15](#); H97, Section 29.30.(l); Signed [9/18/15](#))

Increased rates farmers and others must pay for "self-propelled property-hauling vehicles" whose fees are based on weight. (Asheboro Courier-Tribune, [9/26/15](#); H97, Section 29.30.(o); Signed [9/18/15](#))

Raised fees on "wreckers." (Asheboro Courier-Tribune, [9/26/15](#); H97, Section 29.30.(o); Signed [9/18/15](#))

Raised fees for semitrailers and trailers. (H97, Section 29.30.(o); Signed [9/18/15](#))

Raised license fee for motor vehicle dealers, distributors, distributor branches, wholesalers, manufacturers, factory branches, motor vehicle sales representatives, factory representatives, and distributor representatives. (H97, Section 29.30.(p); Signed [9/18/15](#))

Increased fees on motor carriers. (H97, Section 29.30.(q); Signed [9/18/15](#))

Michael Wray co-owned an 86-acre site adjacent to the Center for Automotive Research as he sought the release of \$7.5 million from the state Department of Commerce

Wray sought the release of \$7.5 million from the state Department of Commerce for the N.C. Center for Automotive Research because he said it would be a "magnet for automotive industries." "Rep. Michael Wray, a Northampton County Democrat, has helped corral state money for the N.C. Center for Automotive Research. A May 2006 memo at the state Department of Commerce shows that he sought release of the \$7.5 million so that he could persuade the state Senate to pony up more money. He said in an interview the center will be a "magnet for automotive industries." (News & Observer, [6/13/09](#))

As he sought the release of \$7.5 million from the state Department of Commerce and attached his name to legislation that would spend an additional \$18 million on the Center, Wray co-owned an 86-acre site adjacent to the Center for Automotive. "If so, that could help him sell an 86-acre site he co-owns adjacent to the center property. Wray said in the interview that he checked with then-Speaker Jim Black's office to determine whether it was a conflict of interest for him to be involved in the center project. He said Black's staff assured him it was not. Wray later sought advice from Black's successor, Speaker Joe Hackney, an Orange County Democrat. Hackney, who called Wray a "straight shooter," said he advised him to bow out to avoid a potential conflict of interest. Wray has since removed his name from legislation that would spend an additional \$18 million on the center." (News & Observer, [6/13/09](#))

Michael Wray sponsored House Bill 305 with 3 Republican Members to strip North Carolina school systems of the ability to take local boards of commissioners to court over education funding.

Michael Wray tried to strip North Carolina school systems of the ability to take local boards of commissioners to court over education funding. "Some state lawmakers are making another effort to strip North Carolina school systems of their ability to go to court to try get more money from their local boards of commissioners. House Bill 305, filed Thursday, would strike from state law the sections that allow school boards to sue county commissioners for more money to build and operate schools. Bills have repeatedly been filed over the years to try to remove the lawsuit threat that some school systems have used to get more education funding." (News & Observer, [3/9/17](#))

Michael Wray sponsored House Bill 305 with 3 Republican members of the General Assembly to make the decision by local boards of commissioners final. "Under HB 305, the decision of the commissioners would be declared final if mediation doesn't result in an agreement between both local boards. The primary sponsors of the measure are Reps. Debra Conrad of Winston-Salem, Larry Potts of Lexington, Carl Ford of China Grove and Michael Wray of Gaston. All the sponsors except Wray are Republicans." (News & Observer, [3/9/17](#))

Without taxing authority, North Carolina school districts request money from county boards of commissioners, and under state law schools can declare that they're not getting enough funding which would result in a meeting with a mediator. "North Carolina school districts don't have taxing

authority, so they request money from their county boards of commissioners for facility needs. School boards also ask commissioners to supplement amounts they get from the state and federal government for day-to-day needs in the operating budget. Under state law, school boards can officially declare to commissioners that they don't feel they're getting enough funding. This leads to a meeting with a mediator to try to resolve the argument." (News & Observer, [3/9/17](#))

H467 limited the amount of money neighboring property owners can receive from lawsuits against agricultural operations

➤ **Michael Wray voted for H467.** (H467, veto override [5/10/17](#))

H467 would limit the amount of money people could receive in lawsuits filed against agricultural operations for disturbances. "The bill would limit the amount of money people could collect in lawsuits filed against agricultural operations for disturbances such as odors and pollution. Under the bill, the person suing could be compensated only for the decrease in rental income the property could generate because of the smells and gases coming from hog farms, as opposed to being compensated more generously for the loss of quality of life as a jury sees fit." (News & Observer, [4/5/2017](#); H467, veto override [5/10/17](#))

H467 would limit the damages that could be awarded to a property owner to no more than the actual market value of the property. "Under House Bill 467, the damages that a court could award to a property owner who claims nuisance damage by a nearby agricultural or forestry operation to no more than the actual market value of that property." (WRAL, [5/5/2017](#); H467, veto override [5/10/17](#))

Michael Wray, his family and business associates have received over \$491,000 in subsidies from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

According to the Environmental Working Group's Farm Subsidy Database, Michael Wray, his family and business associates have received over \$491,000 in subsidies from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Michael Wray has received \$173,000 in subsidies, his wife Kay has received \$51,050, his father Harold has received \$94,095, his mother Shirley has received \$49,725. Wray's business associates David and Debra Dunlow have received \$70,279 and \$52,931, respectively. (Environmental Working Group Farm Subsidy Database, Retrieved [8/25/17](#))

Under H467, North Carolina property owners would receive significantly lower payouts in lawsuits than those in other states.

Under H467, North Carolina property owners would receive significantly lower payouts than those in other states. "The legislation would not affect those lawsuits, but would curtail financial payouts in any similar lawsuits filed in the future. In other states, jurors have awarded residents hundreds of thousands of dollars in similar cases. North Carolina's legislation would limit the financial payments to several thousand dollars per household, according to some estimates." (News & Observer, [5/5/2017](#); H467, veto override [5/10/17](#))

In other states, payouts in similar lawsuits have been hundreds of thousands of dollars, but House Bill 467 would limit the payout to several thousand dollars. "The legislation would not affect those lawsuits, but would curtail financial payouts in any similar lawsuits filed in the future. In other states, jurors have awarded residents hundreds of thousands of dollars in similar cases. North Carolina's legislation would limit the financial payments to several thousand dollars per household, according to some estimates." (News & Observer, [5/5/2017](#); H467, veto override [5/10/17](#))

The bill would cap financial damages, which would reduce the potential value of the law suits to several thousand dollars. "The bill caps financial damages to the loss of rental income over three

years, the legal limit on recovering damages, which reduces the potential value of the suits to several thousand dollars in most cases.” (News & Observer, [4/10/2017](#); H467, veto override [5/10/17](#))

Hog Farms are Ruining Neighboring Homeowners' Property

About 500 rural neighbors of massive hog farms say that clouds of flies and intense smells remain a problem, causing headaches and infusing households. “The 2014 lawsuits by about 500 rural neighbors of massive hog farms allege that clouds of flies and intense smells remain a problem nearly a quarter-century since industrial-scale hog farming took off. The smells can spark headaches and infuse households, they complain. Wind-driven spray has been known to coat a home's exterior in liquefied excrement, some said. The smell clings to clothes.” (WRAL, [4/9/2017](#); H467, veto override [5/10/17](#))

Former NC hog farmer Don Webb: “an American should not have to smell someone else's feces and urine. And that's what they want to force with this bill.” “Don Webb, a former hog farmer from eastern North Carolina, was livid as he addressed the room. “When I found out what I was doing to my neighbors, I got out of the hog industry,” he fumed. “It was a feces and urine factory, and not a waste factory. I'm a human being. I'm an *American*. And an American should not have to smell someone else's feces and urine. And that's what they want to force with this bill. You want to play with my constitutional rights to not be able to sue. You want to take away because I'm not a millionaire. You want to take that right away from me, and other people. You've got no right to do it, and you know it. I'm telling the truth! You know you're wrong.” (IndyWeek, [4/5/2017](#); H467, veto override [5/10/17](#))

“Notoriously toxic” hog farms cause residents to quarantine themselves, saying it's a “horrible and nauseating way to live.” “North Carolina's industrial hog farms are notoriously toxic, storing millions of gallons of feces and urine in open-air cesspools. When those pools fill up, the hog waste sprays into the air, activists say, and can even make its way into peoples' homes. The stench and fumes can be so repulsive that people living near the farms will quarantine themselves inside or only step outside briefly. In short, nearby residents say, it's a horrible and nauseating way to live. “I live in the middle of around twenty hog farms,” Nick Woodard, who drove several hours from eastern North Carolina to attend the hearing, told the *INDY*. “And they smell so bad you can hardly come outside most of the time. And we just want to try to stop the pollution. The hog farms are polluting our areas and we want to try to stop them.” (IndyWeek, [3/30/2017](#); H467, veto override [5/10/17](#))

- **Duplin county resident: “Little kids haven't had birthday parties outside forever.”** “The suits allege that 89 farms spray hog waste as irrigation and fertilizer, and the odor wafts across property lines, forcing neighbors to flee indoors, turn up air conditioners or burn incense. “It's pig poop and pee in the air blowing around,” said Allie Sheffield of Duplin County. “It corrodes paint on cars. It erodes screens in windows. It prevents going outside. Little kids haven't had birthday parties outside forever.” (News & Observer, [3/29/2017](#); H467, veto override [5/10/17](#))

Resident says hog lagoons and spray fields are located primarily near communities of color, “they should have a right to live without inundation by animal waste.” “Elsie Herring's family has owned land that's now near hog farms since the 1890s [...] Herring said she is attached to the family land and has no intention of moving. Instead, she wants the farmers to adopt more effective methods of controlling pig waste, which are available but would be more expensive. “These facilities are located primarily on people of color's communities,” Herring said. “They should have a right to live without inundation by animal waste.” (News & Observer, [3/29/2017](#); H467, veto override [5/10/17](#))

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