

SPRING 2017

The Story of North Carolina Counties
County QUARTERLY
MAGAZINE

NCACC OFFICES IMPACTED by FIVE-ALARM FIRE

A Photo Documentary of the Raleigh Fire
and the Firefighters that Risked it All | pg 22



Persistence Pays...

Senator Harry Brown's Path To and For Education

By Lacy Pate | NCACC Public Relations Manager



Senate Majority Leader Harry Brown's life experience is one many North Carolinians will no doubt relate to... it's a tale of two North Carolinas, and it personally touched Senator Brown, and played a prominent role in the formative years of his life. His passion for improving education and economic opportunity, particularly in North Carolina's smaller and less wealthy communities is inextricably linked to his past.

Brown's father was a painter with a seventh grade education. Money was tight, so Brown worked in tobacco fields and other jobs to help make ends meet. He grew up in Maysville, North Carolina and attended public school in Jones County, and he always aspired to become the first in his family to get a college education.

The Promise of Opportunity and Education

After his sophomore year in high school, Brown was offered an opportunity that would shape his perspective on education for years to come. He was recruited by a private school in Onslow County to play sports – football, basketball and golf. He accepted the offer and thrived at his new school. He described how gaining access to get a better education played a pivotal role in his life.

"It opened my eyes to the difference between Jones County and what was going on in Onslow County, because I had no clue until that point how big a difference it was. And by going to Onslow County those two years it really opened up some opportunities for me later on in life that I wouldn't have gotten, honestly, if had been in Jones County schools those last two years."

After high school, Brown began an electrical engineering program at NC State University, but had to go back home after a year and a half because he could no longer afford tuition. He described feeling like he let people down when he ran out of money for college.

"Because I was going to be the one to get the college degree, but I just didn't have the money to stay," said Brown.

Brown returned home and got his first sales job through his network at the Onslow County school. He worked 60-70 hours a week selling clothes and earning about \$150 week. As an



enterprising young man, he wanted to do better and quickly found a job with greater earning potential, selling cars at Moore Buick and Pontiac. The owner of the dealership, Mr. Moore, saw great potential in Brown and sent him to one of his stores –the Dodge store, which was suffering from declining sales. Mr. Moore gave him 3-6 months to turn things around, and he succeeded in saving the Dodge store.

Shortly after, Mr. Moore passed away from a brain tumor. Brown wanted to honor Mr. Moore’s legacy by continuing to build on the success they achieved together. Brown was determined to find a bank that would lend him the money to purchase the Dodge store, and after searching high and low, he had a breakthrough. With \$500,000 in hand, he bought the store, and at age 32, became the youngest Dodge/Chrysler dealer in his sales region.

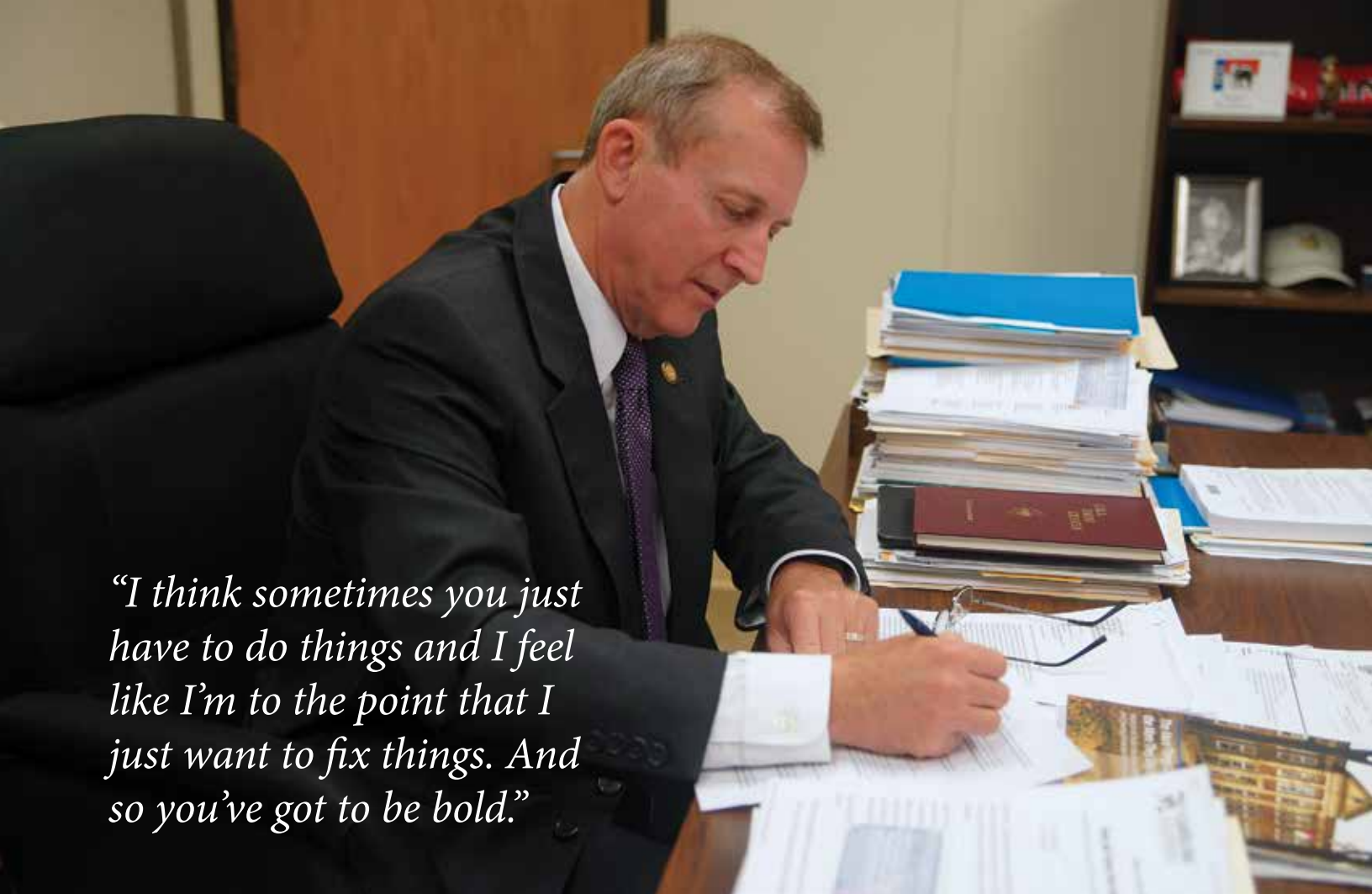
Despite his busy schedule as a car dealership owner, Brown was determined to pursue higher education, and willing to do whatever it took to get his degree. He attended Coastal Community College to finish his Associate’s degree and then transferred to Campbell University, which had extension campus nearby at the military base. Brown eventually earned a business degree at age 38 and an MBA at 42, both from Campbell University.

A Breakthrough for the Backlog of Public School Facility Funding Needs

Senator Brown’s commitment to education extends far beyond his personal life, and it is evident in his work at the General Assembly. He knows firsthand that education requires a reliable source of funding and wants to ensure that low income areas have the opportunities they need to thrive. He is a leading voice on education and is fighting to secure a recurring source of funding to address long-term public school construction needs.

This year, Senator Brown introduced new legislation that would increase lottery revenue and create a needs-based fund for low wealth counties for public school construction. His proposal was adopted as part of the Senate budget, which includes \$100 million for public school facility funding, consistent with recent budgets, along with an additional injection of \$75 million for Senator Brown’s new needs-based fund. His proposal represents a major breakthrough in meeting North Carolina’s staggering public school construction needs, estimated by the Department of Public Instruction to be about \$8.1 billion over a five-year period.

Senator Brown pointed out that when the lottery was created, 40% of



“I think sometimes you just have to do things and I feel like I’m to the point that I just want to fix things. And so you’ve got to be bold.”

the proceeds were designated for school construction, but now that number is down to around 15%. As lottery funds were reduced over time, school facility needs throughout the state kept multiplying. Now there is no way for counties like Jones County, which Senator Brown represents, to build schools with the portion of lottery funds they receive.

Senator Brown’s proposal for a needs-based fund is designed to provide recurring dollars that he hopes will grow over time. He believes the fund will eliminate school construction needs quickly for small counties that have limited means to raise revenue. He says these smaller counties don’t get a large enough cut of lottery dollars to build schools since the lottery money is distributed based on student enrollment. While the focus of the needs-based fund is on smaller, low-wealth counties, he said there are other ways to help larger

counties – such as additional increases in lottery funds and approving a ¼ cent sales tax measure to improve counties’ ability to generate sales tax revenue.

Innovations, Investments, and Incentives

Senator Brown shared some additional views on education and economic development and it is evident that his experiences living in Jones and Onslow Counties, both of which he represents, made a lasting impression on him.

“The key for me was really to see the difference between a rural poor county and a county like Onslow that was really starting to grow because of the base. And today, I think that divide has even grown bigger, so I can truly see the difference between these poorer rural counties and these growing healthy counties that have different revenue sources to do things that those poor counties don’t.”



Given the staggering public facility needs throughout the state, particularly for low wealth communities, Senator Brown suggested that counties think creatively about ways to pool resources and find efficiencies. He led efforts in the past to establish a regional school in the east and said it has helped the area. He also sees value in aligning public school curricula with the community college system. He described it as a way to reduce costs for students, while providing a jump start on higher education. Furthermore, he praised the community college system for doing a lot with a limited budget.

“They have done more with less in my opinion than you can hardly imagine. You look at their budget and what they’ve been able to do with it. I mean they’ve really done a great job.”

Senator Brown believes there is potential to build deeper job training partnerships between the community colleges and local industry to match prospective employees with jobs. He suggested that this type of partnership could help reverse the flight to urban areas by providing opportunities for young people to remain in their communities and contribute to the area’s economic health. He also endorsed the idea of creating strong incentives for industry to set up businesses in areas that need economic development.

Getting to Yes

With seven terms serving in the General Assembly under his belt, Senator Brown reflected on his experience and described how difficult it can be to reach consensus with other lawmakers. He said most people assume there are two or three sides to the story, but in reality there are 10 or 12 sides and you’ve got to be selling all the time. He said, as legislator, you have to have the courage to make mistakes.

“I think sometimes you just have to do things and I feel like I’m to the point that I just want to fix things. And so you’ve got to be bold. And you may mess up a few times trying to do it, but to me you’ve just got to find ways to fix some of these problems.”

As Senator Brown notes, “figuring out how to move something isn’t as easy as people think it is,” but when the status quo isn’t working, you have to push for change. And, as a seasoned legislator, Senator Brown is eager to do just that. ■





CountyQuarterly is distributed Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter to county commissioners, managers and clerks, legislators and public libraries, as well as others interested in the county story. The magazine seeks to bring the county story to life with a focus on the leaders that make county government tick, innovative programs that improve services to citizens, and county history.

For information on subscribing
and advertising, go to
www.ncacc.org/countyquarterly

Executive Director
Kevin Leonard

**Managing Editor &
Chief Communications Officer**
Sara Mogilski

**Photographer &
Digital Media Director**
Chris Baucom

**Writer, Editor &
Public Relations Manager**
Lacy Pate

**Creative Input & Creative
Communications Coordinator**
Ben Christoph

Contributing Writers this Issue:

Amy Bason, J.D.,
General Counsel & Deputy Director

Linda Millsaps, Ph.D.,
Research Director

Todd McGee,
Orange County Comm. Relations Dir.

Leslie Mozingo,
Strategics Consulting

Graphic Design by:
IngridBeckman.com

Send address changes and other updates
to communications@ncacc.org

**North Carolina Association
of County Commissioners**

353 East Six Forks Road
Raleigh, NC 27609
(919) 715-2893
www.ncacc.org



CountyQUARTERLY

The Story of North Carolina Counties
MAGAZINE

353 East Six Forks Road, Suite 300
Raleigh, NC 27609

NCACC Associate Members - Thanks for Your Support!



www.bobbitt.com

www.cecvision.com

www.cshlaw.com

www.econnectdirect.com

www.farragut.com/localgov



www.lgfcu.org

www.mbkahn.com

www.mcgillengineers.com

www.moseleyarchitects.com

www.nrsforu.com



www.psnenergy.com

www.republicservices.com

www.rbauction.com

www.tankcare.net

www.springsted.com

The NCACC's Associate Membership Program is designed to foster a positive relationship between North Carolina's 100 counties and the organizations that offer services needed in today's complex county governmental system. Visit www.ncacc.org/associatemembership to learn about the benefits of joining.