



Good morning and welcome to the **Under the Dome** newsletter. I'm **Caitlyn Yaede**.

Republican members of the state House filed a bill labeled the N.C. Farmland and Military Protection Act on Wednesday, calling for limits on “hostile foreign governments” purchasing land in the state.

“As our state’s top two economic drivers,” Rep. **Jeff Zenger**, one of [House Bill 133](#)’s sponsors, said in a press release on Wednesday, “we must take a stand to protect our farmland and military bases from foreign threats.”

In particular, designated foreign countries would be prohibited from purchasing agricultural land, or land within a 75-mile radius of a military installation.

Zenger, writing alongside cosponsors Rep. **Jennifer Balkcom**, Rep. **Neal Jackson** and Rep. **John Bell**, named China and Russia as countries impacted by the ban. A draft of the bill says it would apply to “certain foreign governments designated as adversarial by the United States Department of State.”

A [similar bill](#) passed the House in 2023 but did not make it out of committee in the Senate. The current iteration of the bill has been referred to the House Homeland Security and Military and Veteran Affairs Committee.

COMMISSIONER CAUSEY HOSPITALIZED AFTER HEART SURGERY

North Carolina Insurance Commissioner **Mike Causey** was hospitalized following heart surgery earlier this month.

“Commissioner (Causey) is currently recovering and doing well,” Jason Tyson, communications director for the department, said in an email. “He has been in regular contact with the Department of Insurance almost

daily and has been briefed and directed work. The department has been operating as it normally does since that time.”

[The Greensboro News & Record](#) first reported the news of Causey’s hospitalization after members of the Greensboro City Council discussed it at a meeting on Tuesday.

The Republican commissioner’s surgery, which Tyson said was elective, was not previously announced.

He said the surgery was to correct a congenital heart defect that Causey discovered during a health screening.

Causey told the News & Record that he would likely be discharged from the hospital on Thursday.

— Kyle Ingram

STEIN, NC REPUBLICANS FEUD OVER TAX CUTS

When North Carolina’s consensus revenue forecast was released on Friday, Gov. **Josh Stein** cautioned of an upcoming “[fiscal cliff](#).” Now, Stein wants to freeze the state’s tax cuts — a move likely to face strong opposition from Republicans in the General Assembly, **Dawn Vaughan** and **Avi Bajpai** [report](#).

The state’s revenue forecast predicts slow growth, followed by a drop of roughly \$800 million in 2026-2027. Freezing tax cuts serves to address the predicted deficiency, Stein told reporters on Tuesday.

Senate leader **Phil Berger** was unconvinced, telling reporters that Stein’s fears echo those of past Democratic governors. Instead, Berger said the state “is in good shape” — while noting that Hurricane Helene relief remains a challenge facing Western North Carolina.

The Senate leader wants to phase out the corporate income tax — which stands at 2.5% — and anticipates increased individual income tax collection would help compensate.

The General Assembly’s budget process was set to begin this week, but winter weather prompted the cancellation of several committee meetings. The legislature is also slated to vote on a Helene recovery bill next week, one that is short of Stein’s proposed \$1 billion in immediate relief.

[Check out the full story.](#)

LAWMAKERS SEEK TO SEVER TIES WITH RESEARCH NONPROFIT

A new bill titled “Reclaim State Assets from NCInnovation” is aimed at taking back \$500 million in public funding previously awarded to the research nonprofit.

NCInnovation received two payments of \$250 million — in 2023 and in 2024 — to assist UNC System researchers in developing businesses. The money was used to establish an endowment, and interest revenue funds pilot projects. The nonprofit, founded in 2020, has so far established seven regional hubs across the UNC System and helps researchers commercialize ideas and attract future funding.

Some lawmakers, like Rep. **Harry Warren**, think the nonprofit’s projects should, instead, be privately funded. The proposed bill would require NCInnovation to return the money.

Pat Ryan, a spokesperson for NCInnovation, noted that the organization has awarded \$5.2 million for UNC System research so far.

Ryan said the nonprofit is committed to working with the General Assembly. **Brian Gordon** has [more](#).

Lynn Edmonds, a member of the Wake County school board since 2022, has attracted social media attention after taking on President **Donald Trump** in a speech on Tuesday.

Edmonds said the president was trying “to destroy democracy” and called on Trump’s opponents to “fight back.”

“To all those looking for ways to fight back,” she said at Tuesday’s board meeting, “I’ll just ask you to keep standing with us, stand up for the marginalized children and stand up for kindness and truth and justice.”

Her speech was posted on X by conservative commentary account Libs of Tiktok, where it garnered more than 450,000 views as of Wednesday.

“Woke @WCPSS board member Lynn Edmonds went on a rant against Trump at a board meeting after a parent called out the district’s DEI policies,” the account wrote of the video.

This is not the first time Wake County’s school board has been in the spotlight recently. On Feb. 4, board member **Sam Hershey** said in a speech that “[mediocre white men](#)” have been hired for 250 years due to their skin color. He added that “DEI hire” was a term used in place of racial slurs against Black people.

This quote went viral, even eliciting [a response from Elon Musk on X](#). Hershey issued an [apology](#) for his remarks on Tuesday. The combined attention to both Hershey and Edmond’s comments, however, has prompted some critics to call on the Department of Government Efficiency to come to Wake County.

T. Keung Hui has the [details](#).

WHAT ELSE WE’RE READING

- A new bill introduced in the Senate would allow public school students to attend off-campus Bible classes during the school day. The Released Time Education Act would allow one to five hours per week for “religious moral instruction,” **NC Newsline** [reports](#). This instruction would be provided by third-party organizations, like LifeWise Academy, which provides Bible education and plans to expand into the state. Programs like these, according to the bill, would require parental consent and would not be eligible for public funds.
- State elections director **Karen Brinson Bell** denied claims that her agency may be acting negligently in an [interview](#) with **WRAL News**. The elections board’s policies are at issue in the court fight over the state Supreme Court race. “The state board of elections and the county board of elections are adhering to state law and federal law,” Brinson Bell said.