

People's Alliance PAC 2008 Questionnaire

Pat Smathers – NC Lieutenant Governor

1a. I am opposed to the measure. This bill is another unfortunate example of legislators subordinating the interests of the people and the protection of our environment to the wishes of wealthy landowners. The statewide ban on hardened structures has served North Carolina well. We should not allow well-connected lobbyists to determine the fate of our state's coastline: We must continue to strengthen regulations to prevent erosion everywhere, not just in the front yards of the rich.

1b. I support allowing employees in the public sector to exercise the same collective bargaining rights available to employees in the private sector, but we must ensure their negotiations do not impede government functioning. As a mayor, my first priority is protecting and serving the residents of my town: While I am open-minded on this issue, I hope to find a solution that will work for employees and their fellow citizens.

1c. I support this bill. The availability of paid sick leave significantly improves working conditions and provides workers of all wage levels with a sense of job stability. We should not require hard-working North Carolinians to choose between their jobs and their health. People who work when sick are less productive, pose a risk to their co-workers and stand to become sicker, adding to their health care costs. We need a sensible system geared toward overall workplace wellness that acknowledges people and their loved ones get sick, and deserve the opportunity to get better.

1d. I support this bill. Pesticide exposure is a serious hazard that we should not tolerate in North Carolina. While most of our farmers do a good job of complying with existing regulations, this bill will make it much harder for scofflaw farms to endanger the health and safety of our state's workers.

2. We should revisit utility rates, and explore ways of restructuring the fees to award both providers and consumers for conserving energy.

But we cannot ignore the role cities and towns could potentially play in creating a cleaner North Carolina. Supporting these local efforts should be among the state's top priorities pertaining to energy production, use and conservation.

Communities can significantly reduce their carbon footprint by systematically greening all the services they're tasked to provide. Cities might consider swapping out the light bulbs in their traffic signals and municipal offices for LEDs, or replacing their current police cars, school buses and cargo vans with fuel-efficient vehicles. As the city of San Francisco last year proved, something as seemingly simple as prohibiting the use of city funds to purchase single-serving water bottles can prevent the release of thousands of pounds of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Cities and towns can also take the lead in strengthening building codes to encourage green building and adopting tougher energy-efficient standards for municipal facilities.

It is incumbent upon the state to fund such forward-looking local initiatives and to provide more money for local governments to comply with existing environmental regulations. State and local governments must cooperate to create a more sustainable future.

3. My campaign slogan is "local leadership, statewide." That phrase doesn't refer to a mayor running for state office: It's about returning decision-making power to North Carolina's cities and towns. I believe we must entrust and empower local leaders -- who best understand their communities' unique strengths and

challenges -- to tackle the issues facing their hometowns.

Our current tax structure calls for most monies to be routed through Raleigh. This is an outdated system, based on our state's 1930s economy. We don't wear 1930s clothes, we don't drive 1930s cars and we don't need a 1930s tax system. If we're serious about funding solutions to the state's problems, we must eliminate the redundancies and injustice inherent to our tax structure.

Local leaders statewide have some terrific ideas for strengthening their communities. But all too often, their initiatives are undermined by the concentration of power in Raleigh. Right now, folks in Raleigh and Durham want a rail line connecting their cities. Improved mass transit would lessen traffic congestion, create job opportunities for area residents and reduce pollution. But federal regulators have criticized the \$810 million plan for deriving too little of its funding from local sources.

The proposed solution is a half-cent sales tax – a solution which state legislators are sure to oppose. Durham activists, business leaders and elected officials want a tax, but they can't have it without the state government's OK. Sales taxes may or be may not be right for Durham, but that's a decision the people of Durham should be allowed to make. We must give communities the full range of tax options to ensure adequate and stable financing for programs statewide.

4. I commend state legislators for addressing this important issue, and look forward to supporting future bills to protect consumers in North Carolina. Perhaps the most significant item absent from the newly passed legislation is financial literacy: I believe we can avert future loan crises by giving our citizens the opportunity to learn more about money management. While the new requirement mandating five days of personal finance instruction in our high schools is a good step, we must also emphasize financial literacy for adults by fully funding cooperative extension and community college programs, and offering incentives for North Carolinians to successfully complete them.

I also think we should explore state legislation to close loopholes left by federal lending laws. Although most mortgage brokers conduct their businesses with honesty and integrity, we should institute further safeguards to protect borrowers from those who don't. Currently, lenders are required by RESPA to provide borrowers with a good faith estimate, but aren't required to honor it. This allows unscrupulous lenders to engage in bait-and-switch tactics at closing, demanding buyers sign on to higher rates. By holding lenders accountable for estimates issued within a reasonable number of days prior to closing, we could better protect prospective homeowners statewide.

5. I strongly support the NC Housing Trust Fund and efforts to increase its funding to \$50 million. A safe, stable home is the foundation for a better, stronger state. North Carolinians cannot succeed in school or in the workplace without adequate housing.

While citizens of all backgrounds are affected by the high cost of housing, as a veteran, I am especially concerned about the distressingly high number of veterans living on our streets: We must make affordable, decent housing available to all North Carolinians. Properly funded, the Housing Trust Fund is an important step in that direction.

6. Politics, not policy, fueled the passage of DOMA. We still have not adequately addressed the issue of guaranteeing gay and lesbian couples the same rights as their heterosexual counterparts. While I am wary of amending the constitution, I support legislation establishing civil unions. We should not abide discrimination against our fellow North Carolinians for any reason, including sexual orientation.

7. Yes. I do not think a constitutionally protected right should be made available only to the wealthy. Lower income women deserve an equally meaningful right to choose.

