

2020 North Carolina Council of State Candidate Summary

North Carolina established its Council of State in the Constitution it drew up in 1776, the year that the State and the United States itself declared its independence from Great Britain. The Council is headed by the Governor and meets periodically to allow for coordination and exchange of information across executive branch agencies and to vote on certain decisions, especially regarding the sale of government property or the borrowing of money.

In its current form, the Council consists of the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, Auditor, Treasurer, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Attorney General, Commissioner of Agriculture, Commissioner of Labor and Commissioner of Insurance.

All of these offices are up for re-election in November. Here are the candidates and the races they're involved in:

Governor

Incumbent Roy Cooper, a Democrat, is being challenged by the current two-term Lieutenant Governor, Republican Dan Forest. Forest retained his position four years ago even though the sitting GOP Governor was unseated by Cooper, and is now trying to retake the Governor's Mansion for his party.

Lt. Governor

With Forest stepping away from the position after eight years, the No. 2 spot in the Executive Branch is up for grabs between Greensboro Republican Mark Robinson, a day care operator, and current NC House District 38 Representative Yvonne Lewis Holley of Raleigh. Robinson pulled off a surprise victory in the GOP primary after rising to prominence two years ago when he gave an impassioned speech in favor of Second Amendment rights in front of the Greensboro City Council. Whoever wins the election will become North Carolina's first African-American Lt. Governor.

Secretary of State

Democrat Elaine Marshall has held this position since 1996, having won re-election five times since upsetting NASCAR legend Richard Petty to win the office. She's not ready to give up her spot, and this year, her GOP challenger is E.C. Sykes, a Durham businessman who is unapologetically conservative. Marshall won by just 4.5 percentage points in her 2016 re-election, so Sykes has to feel he has a chance.

Auditor

Democratic incumbent Beth Wood is seeking her fourth term in office, after prevailing by just over 2,000 votes four years ago. Her opponent in that election, Chuck Stuber, chose not to run again in 2020. Anthony "Tony" Wayne Street, a farmer and businessman from Brunswick County, defeated one other primary foe to win the nomination. Wood also had a challenger in the primaries, but won easily.

Treasurer

Republican incumbent Dale Folwell is seeking his second term after knocking off influential Democrat lawmaker Dan Blue four years ago. This office draws a lot of attention because it oversees the state's pension and health insurance plans that serve hundreds of thousands of people. Folwell's challenger this year is Ronnie Chatterji, a Duke University professor.

Superintendent of Public Instruction

After winning the office in a barnburner of a 2016 race, Mark Johnson chose not to seek re-election, instead choosing to run in the GOP primary for Lt. Governor. This means that the office is up for grabs in 2020, and likely to be very close again. Jen Mangrum, an associate professor at UNC-Greensboro and former classroom teacher, emerged from a five-person field to win the Democratic nomination. Her opponent, Catherine Truitt, had to defeat just one other Republican candidate. She is a former classroom teacher who served as Senior Advisor on Education to then-Governor Pat McCrory.

Attorney General

This office has usually been controlled by the Democrats and has recently been a stepping-stone to the Governor's Mansion for them. Incumbent Josh Stein would no doubt like to someday follow in the footsteps of Mike Easley and Roy Cooper, but he won the office by just over 20,000 votes out of 4.5 million cast in 2016. To hold onto the office, Stein will have to hold off a challenge from Republican Jim O'Neill, the Forsyth County DA for the last 11 years.

Commissioner of Agriculture

Incumbent Steve Troxler has held this office for more than 15 years and won re-election three times, winning by a larger margin every time. Troxler, a Republican, is a Guilford County farmer. He faces a new opponent in 2020, Wake County Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor Jennifer "Jenna" Wadsworth. Wadsworth, who is just 31, actually knocked off 2012 and 2016 Democratic nominee Walter Smith in the March primary to advance.

Commissioner of Labor

Longtime Commissioner Cherie Berry, who achieved a measure of celebrity during her 20-year tenure as the "Elevator Queen," will retire at the end of her term. She will be succeeded by either Josh Dobson, the current Representative in District 85 of the NC House; or Wake County Commissioner Jessica Holmes. Dobson beat three challengers to win the Republican nomination, while Holmes ran unopposed and didn't even face a primary.

Commissioner of Insurance

Republican incumbent Mike Causey and Democratic rival Wayne Goodwin will have a rubber match of their 2012 and 2016 showdowns. Causey first challenged then-incumbent Goodwin in 2012, losing by just 3.8 percentage points. Encouraged by his showing, he tried again four years ago and unseated Goodwin by just over 39,000 votes, or 0.88 percent of the vote. Now Goodwin, the Chairman of the North Carolina Democratic Party, wants his old job back.