

NC S.A.F.E. Initiative Launched to Promote Safe Gun Storage

Recently Governor Roy Cooper announced the NC S.A.F.E. (Secure All Firearms Effectively) initiative to urge North Carolinians to take action to safely store their firearms and save lives. This call to action highlights firearm safety in response to mounting numbers of deaths of children and youth from firearm injury, along with a surge in firearm thefts across the state.

"For those of us who own guns, it's our responsibility to keep them safe and out of the wrong hands," said Governor Cooper. "Safe storage is an essential part of responsible gun ownership, and this initiative will encourage North Carolinians to safely secure their firearms in their homes and vehicles."

There is an urgent need for North Carolinians to safely secure their firearms in order to decrease childhood deaths, decrease firearm thefts, and increase the safety of homes and communities. The NC S.A.F.E. (Secure All Firearms Effectively) is a new statewide initiative that provides resources on best practices for firearm storage and safety. NC S.A.F.E. is not associated with any advocacy-based initiatives related to gun laws or regulations.

"Children are gaining access to firearms in their homes, and gun theft - especially from cars - is on the rise throughout North Carolina," said NC Department of Public Safety Deputy Secretary William Lassiter. "Today more than 20% of youth car break-ins involve guns. That's double what we've seen in recent years. We all have to work together to stop guns from getting into the wrong hands."

"Too many of our children are dying from gun violence, and it simply does not have to be this way," said Attorney General Josh Stein. "If you own a gun or are thinking of buying one, lock it up and keep it secured so it's not stolen or lost. Our children's lives may depend on it."

The NC S.A.F.E. initiative is part of Governor Cooper's ongoing commitment to reducing violence and strengthening public safety in North Carolina. In March 2023, the Governor announced the creation of a statewide Office of Violence Prevention focused on reducing violence and firearm misuse in North Carolina. In 2019, the Governor directed state agencies to close crime reporting gaps between state and federal agencies. The Governor's budget proposal includes investments in school and community safety, including the Office of Violence Prevention.

Firearms are the leading cause of injury-related death among children and youth in North Carolina. Last year, a Johnston County 2-year-old died from a single gunshot wound to the head after finding his father's loaded handgun in the front seat of the family's truck. In April, a 7-year-old in Robeson County died while visiting a family member after the child found a loaded gun inside the residence. Nationwide, an estimated 82% of adolescent suicides by firearm involve a gun belonging to a family member.

Gun thefts have increased across North Carolina. In Raleigh, 211 firearms were stolen from vehicles in 2020. In Durham, 62% of the approximately 185 gun thefts from cars in 2022 were from unlocked cars - meaning these were preventable crimes. According to a 2021 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System survey, more than half of the firearms that were stored loaded at home—already a safety risk—were also unlocked.

Gun owners in North Carolina can prevent firearm injuries and deaths as well as gun theft through safe storage. There are many ways to effectively secure a gun, including cable locks, trigger locks, gun safes, lockboxes, and gun cases. To secure guns in vehicles, NC S.A.F.E. urges gun owners to both lock their vehicle and safely secure the firearm with a locking device.

Governor Cooper has proclaimed June 4 - 10 as NC S.A.F.E. Week of Action to raise awareness about the importance of safe gun storage. As part of this week, representatives of the North Carolina Department of Public Safety will be traveling across the state to spread this message along with local law enforcement, juvenile justice and other partners in public safety. In addition, NC S.A.F.E. will be encouraging all North Carolinians to secure their firearms effectively and to insist others do in their communities to save lives.

Visit ncsafe.org to find a full list of firearm storage options and a checklist for the steps to effectively secure firearms.

On Thursday, June 22, 2023, Mr. Joseph Mauldin, 37, passed away due to a tragic accident on his job in Wadesboro.

Funeral services were held on Wednesday, June 28, 2023, in the Chapel of Leavitt Funeral Home with Rev. James Hodges officiating. Interment followed in Bethel Cemetery.

The family greeted friends on Tuesday, June 27, 2023, at the funeral home and other times at the home.

Joseph was born September 8, 1985, in Anson County, and was a son of William Calvin Mauldin and the late Carolyn Carpenter Mauldin. He was employed with Darling, Inc, formerly Valley Protein in Wadesboro,

He was a member of Mt. Zion Baptist Church. Those left to cherish his memory are his children, Brooke Carolyn Mauldin and Anthony Joseph Mauldin, both of Rockingham; his father William Mauldin of Wadesboro; his brother and sisters, Calvin Mauldin (Amanda) of Morven, Crystal Bowman (Mike) and Joy Brigman (Phillip Harward), all of Wadesboro; and his nephews and niece, Jakob Mauldin of Morven, Taylor Jackson (Kobe), Landon Brigman, Alex Bowman and Ian Bowman, all of Wadesboro.

In addition to his mother, he was preceded in death by his grandparents, William and Margaret Mauldin and Lonnie and Julia Mae Carpenter, and his niece and nephew, Carrie Downer and Nick Downer.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to Mt. Zion Baptist Church, 7080 Stanback Ferry Rd., Lilesville, NC 28091.

The arrangements were in care of Leavitt Funeral Home and online condolences may be made at www.leavittfh.com.

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You Decide: Are There Easy Answers to Hard Questions?

By Mike Walden: Each year, I do scores of presentations to a variety of groups. In the post-COVID world, these talks are now a combination of in-person and virtual. In my talks, I try to include topics people are concerned about. Recently that's been easy, as almost everyone is worried about inflation, a possible recession, finding jobs and hiring workers.

I always save time at the end of my presentations for a Q&A with the participants. I enjoy this time not only for the interaction with participants but because their questions give me an added indicator of what's important to them. In this column, I'll share some of my recent Q&A sessions. It will be interesting for you to decide if your top economic questions line up with those of your neighbors from across North Carolina.

Question 1: *I hear Social Security is having financial problems. Will Social Security still exist when I retire?* Answer: The latest report from the Social Security Administration says the system won't have enough funds in 2033 to pay what was promised to retirees. Retirees will still get checks, but they will only be 77% of what was initially stated. My expectation is a national commission will be established before this happens - maybe around 2030 - to create a solution. But there will be some unpopular parts to the solution - like higher taxes and delayed retirements - which is why it will be a "last minute" event.

Question 2: *Are we running out of workers?* Answer: The decline in birth rates is certainly causing a drop in people being added to the workforce. However, three alternatives could prevent a labor shortage. First, immigration. Almost two out of 10 workers today are foreign-born, the highest this century. Second, technology that replaces humans for some kinds of work. The latest version of this is AI or artificial intelligence. Third, increasing the productivity of the workforce, meaning workers are able to do more in a given period of time.

Question 3: *Why can't we make everything we need in the U.S.?* Answer: We are a country rich in resources and talent. Probably more than almost any other country, we could be self-sufficient. The motivation for buying from other countries is cost - other countries may be able to make a product with less cost and therefore sell it to us at a lower price. Hence, we may have to pay higher prices for some products if we become totally self-sufficient.

Question 4: *Should we believe the government's inflation numbers?* Answer: I think we should. The federal government has a large and sophisticated process of gathering price data for thousands of products and services and comparing changes over time. They do make adjustments for quality changes. For example, if vehicles have new technology that makes them safer and more efficient, the government will not count any price increase associated with the technology. Also, when aggregating the price changes to create the overall inflation rate, the individual price changes are first weighted by their relative importance in the average person's budget. One point of confusion is over the special inflation rate that excludes food and energy prices. This is not the official inflation rate; the official inflation rate includes all prices.

Question 5: *How can we prevent greed from raising prices?* Answer: In our economic system, with some exceptions, businesses are free to set the prices for their products and services. Holding their costs constant, a higher price gives a business a higher profit. But several factors restrain price hikes. One is customer relations. Since customers don't like higher prices unless they're getting better quality, they'll look for sellers with a lower price. Therefore, the second factor restraining price increases is competition. The ability of customers to "take their business elsewhere" is essential to keeping prices in line with costs. Of course, businesses could get together - collude - and agree to charge the same higher prices. But for over a century, this has been illegal in the US. Lastly, innovation has an important part in restraining greed. An inventive person watching consumers complain about high prices for a product will be motivated to develop an alternative product that's just as good, but cheaper.

Question 6: *Is the "American Dream" still alive?* Answer: This is a difficult question to answer because each person's definition of the American Dream can be different. However, recognizing that I'm skipping many details, numerous economists who have researched this topic suggest living standards have trended upward in the country. Poverty rates have dropped, and inflation-adjusted incomes have risen. Certainly, there can be bumps in the road, such as when we have recessions, but the trend has been upward. Still, recognize that not everyone's upward income trend has been the same. Especially in the 21st century, richer households have seen faster income gains than other households. But interestingly, in the last three years spanning the COVID emergency, inequality in income gains narrowed.

Question 7: *How can we control the national debt?* Answer: I'd start by reforming the federal budgetary system, making it more like the system used by states and businesses. There would be two budgets. One would be the "current account budget," which is for day-to-day spending. No borrowing would be allowed for this budget. The second budget would be the "capital account budget," which is for big-ticket, long-lasting spending, like infrastructure and equipment. Borrowing would be allowed for the capital budget.

This is just a sampling of many Q&As. Are they good questions? And have I given good answers? You decide.

Mike Walden is a William Neal Reynolds Distinguished Professor Emeritus at North Carolina State University.

Class of 1973 Reunion Meeting

The Bowman High School Class of 1973 will hold a 50th reunion planning meeting on Saturday, July 8 at 3 p.m. at Lady Bug Restaurant in Wadesboro. They invite all classmates to attend.

For information contact Brenda S. Rorie at 704-695-5196.

Denim & Pearls Fundraiser

Faith-Based Center of Hope & Playaz Elite Motorcycle Club will host their Christmas in July, "Denim & Pearls" Dance on Saturday, July 22, beginning at 6:00 p.m. at Lockhart-Taylor Center, located at 514 North Washington Street in Wadesboro. Advance tickets are available or you can pay at door. Everyone is invited!

For more information please contact Vancine Sturdivant at 704-294-0480, Patricia Robinson at 704-848-4995 or James Sturdivant at 704-294-8073.

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