

# NC Council for Women & Youth Involvement Releases Full Report on Status of Women's Political Participation

## The Report Unveiling Honors the 100th Anniversary of the 19th Amendment

The NC Department of Administration's Council for Women and Youth Involvement today released the complete 2020 Status of Women in North Carolina: Political Participation Report in a virtual event. Event speakers included: Pitt County Sheriff Paula Dance; Jo Nicholas, President of the League of Women Voters of NC; Nyanna Sherrod, President of the Rocky Mount Area Youth Council; and 5th District Court Judge Robin Robinson. This report is the third of four to be released by the Council in partnership with the Institute for Women's Policy Research to bring awareness to key issues affecting the lives of women in North Carolina.

Moderated by Council Director Mary Williams-Stover, the event offered a review of data and policy recommendations from the 2020 Political Participation Report by Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) Study Director Elyse Shaw, and a call to action by Department of Administration (DOA) Secretary Machel Sanders.

The Council held a series of events in August to discuss the findings of the 2020 report – all leading up to Women's Equality Day, August 26th. Women's Equality Day commemorates the passage of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees and protects women's constitutional right to vote. The year 2020 marks the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment. Recordings of all three events in the series will be available on the Council's website:

[ncadmin.nc.gov/advocacy/women/status-women-north-carolina/status-women-north-carolina-political-participation](http://ncadmin.nc.gov/advocacy/women/status-women-north-carolina/status-women-north-carolina-political-participation)

During one event, in a video message, First Lady Kristin Cooper read the Women's Equality Day proclamation issued by Governor Roy Cooper.

The 2020 Political Participation report presents data on several aspects of women's involvement in the political process in North Carolina, including comparisons to other states and the nation. It includes data on voter registration and turnout, female state and federal elected and appointed representation, and state-based institutional resources for women. Data from the report shows that, while some progress has been made in women's political participation in North Carolina, obstacles persist at all levels.

"We still have a lot of work to do," said Secretary Machel Sanders, "and now is the time to do it. The Institute for Women's Policy Research gives us a "D" rating for women's political participation – we can do better than that. When more women are involved in civic life – from voting to community organizing, to running for office – the issues that matter most to women and their families get more action and traction."

Some key findings from the report include:

- While North Carolina women have been voting at slightly higher rates in recent years, their representation in elected office has declined.
- While women make up 51 percent of our state's population, the majority of North Carolina political office holders at the state and federal levels remain male.
- At the current rate of change, it will be the year 2084 before women reach parity in the Legislature.

The Political Participation Composite Index featured in this year's report combines four component indicators of women's political status: voter registration, voter turnout, representation in elected office, and women's institutional resources. North Carolina ranks 35th in the United States overall on the Political Participation Composite Index – earning the state a "D" grade on the index.

Recommendations from the report include:

- Preparing strategies to ensure the safety of voters during the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes increasing electronic voter registration, expanding use of absentee ballots and mail in voting, and making election day a paid holiday so those who are able to make it to the polls have the time off from work needed to wait in longer, socially distanced lines. Additional activities could also include increasing the number of polling locations to help cut down the number of people voting at one location.
- Ensuring that all women have equal access to a fair electoral process. This includes implementing a fair system of drawing the state's political maps – to combat gerrymandering – and eliminating unjust voter ID laws that disenfranchise vulnerable women.
- Recruiting more women to run for office and supporting women with mentoring, sponsorship, and education and training programs. Asking and encouraging women to run for political office is a vital part of increasing women's representation in office at all levels.

As follow up to the August launch events, leaders from the Council and DOA will hold meetings with elected officials at all levels to share the report findings, and will conduct regional virtual events this fall to hear local community input on the status of women.

To request a Council presentation on the report findings visit:

[ncadmin.nc.gov/advocacy/women/north-carolina-council-women-speakers-bureau-request-form](http://ncadmin.nc.gov/advocacy/women/north-carolina-council-women-speakers-bureau-request-form).

The Status of Women in NC report on Employment & Earnings was released in 2018. The report on Health and Wellness was released in 2019. The final Status of Women report in this series will cover Poverty and Opportunity.

More information is available on the NC Council for Women & Youth Involvement's Status of Women in NC web page: [ncadmin.nc.gov/advocacy/women/status-women-north-carolina](http://ncadmin.nc.gov/advocacy/women/status-women-north-carolina).

## You Decide: Recession, Recovery or Something Else?

By Dr. Mike Walden: When I speak to groups – virtually for the last six months – I perceive two concerns. One is fear about the virus, especially how long it will last and whether a vaccine will be effective. The second is confusion about what's happening with the economy. Is the economy still sliding in a recession, is a recovery underway or is something else occurring?

Since I'm certainly not a scientist who can address questions about the virus, I'll take a pass on the first concern. Instead, I'll focus on where we are and where we're going with the economy six months into the COVID-19 pandemic.

To an economist, the definition of a recession is fairly simple. The economy is in a recession when total economic activity is contracting for a significant period of time. While there are numerous measures of "economic activity", the major one is "gross domestic product" (GDP), which is the total amount of production by all workers and businesses. While GDP is the go-to measure, other important measures – like employment – tend to move with it. The "significant period of time" is usually set at six months (two quarters).

Applying this definition shows we've been in a recession for the first half of 2020.

But it appears the economy has turned around in recent months. Although we won't have the third quarter (July, August, September) GDP number until late October, there have been monthly job gains since May. So if we go by the textbook definition of a recession – that a recession only occurs when the economy collectively is retreating – then we're now out of the recession. Some forecasters think the gain in GDP in the third quarter will be almost as strong as GDP's drop in the second quarter.

Yet try telling this to the restaurant owner facing bankruptcy or the janitor furloughed from a cleaning service. To them the recession won't be over until they get their business or job back.

So rather than putting the economy into an either/or situation – meaning we're either in a recession or we're not – it may be better to describe today's economy in some other way. One option is to describe how today's economy is affecting different groups of people.

Economists have long used letters of the alphabet to describe the aftermath of an official recession. The most favored of these letters is the "V". The left side of the V describes the sharp, quick drop of the recession, which is very similar to what the numbers show we've had. The right, upward side of the V shows a quick recovery in the economy that lifts all boats and rapidly restores the jobs and incomes that were lost.

However, many economists are using a "K" to describe today's current conditions. While recognizing an economic recovery is occurring, the two right-side prongs of the K indicate the recovery isn't consistent for everyone. The prong pointing upward symbolizes those people improving during the recovery, while the prong pointing downward represents those still struggling.

Looking at the details of North Carolina's job market suggest the K-recovery may be a good description of what's recently been happening. Overall, by August North Carolina had regained nearly half of the jobs that were lost between February and April, but the job recovery was almost completely in professional, financial and government jobs, with jobs in each of these categories no more than three percent under their pre-pandemic levels.

In contrast, in August jobs in the leisure and hospitality sector were still almost 30 percent lower than in February. Also in August, continuing job losses in leisure and hospitality accounted for over 40 percent of all continuing job losses in the state.

Compounding this dichotomy, the two groups are very different in earnings. Earnings in the fast-recovery sectors of professional, financial and government jobs are two to three times higher than earnings in leisure and hospitality jobs.

The conclusion is we have a strong economic recovery for some and a weak economic recovery for others. Furthermore, those experiencing the strong recovery tend to have higher earnings than those facing a weak recovery.

It could be the slow-recovering sectors will eventually catch up. However, this may be wishful thinking. We're already seeing stories of hotels permanently reducing their staff by substituting machine check-in and robot cleaners for people performing those tasks, all in the name of minimizing personal contact. Restaurants may go in the same direction, especially if capacity restrictions stay in place.

The country has already been facing an issue with widening income inequality between those with more and those with less. It appears the post COVID-19 economy may compound this challenge.

The numbers tell us the recession is over and an economic recovery has begun. But the numbers also tell us the economic recovery is not the same for all businesses and all workers. Does this put us in the situation of neither a recession nor a recovery, but "something else"? You decide.



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