

# MDC-led network will focus on economic mobility in South

Growing economic inequality is a nationwide problem, but nowhere is it more stubborn than in the South.

As Abigail Parlier, an intern at Durham-based MDC put it in the non-profit's blog this past summer, "Since the 1970s, those already at the top have reaped the benefits of productivity gains, while those lower on the distribution didn't, as worker wages didn't keep pace with increasing productivity."

And for all our Horatio Alger, rags-to-riches, up-by-their-bootstraps narratives, our perceived national tradition of economic mobility in contrast to more static nations of Europe, in recent years our economic strata have become much more frozen.

Again quoting Parlier's



BOB ASHLEY  
THE HERALD-SUN

blog, "those at the top often stay where they are, and so do those on the lower end."

An MDC report notes that more than half of Americans in high-poverty neighborhoods live in the South. "The picture for Southern youth and young adults is especially stark," it says. "It is harder here than anywhere else in the U.S. for young people in the poorest neighborhoods to move higher up the economic ladder as adults."

MDC, a think tank with roots in the 1960s and with a bent toward advocacy and action, has just launched the Network for Southern Economic Mobility. Its goal, according to a paper outlining the project, is "increasing upward economic mobility for youth and young adults in the lowest income brackets."

MDC will over the next two years work with community leaders in four southern cities — Athens, Georgia; Chattanooga, Tennessee; Greenville, South Carolina; and Jacksonville, Florida.

Next year, MDC will add another cohort of cities, so the entire effort will stretch for three years. The goal is to build a sustainable effort in all the pilot cities and develop a template that can help other cities tackle the inequality challenge.

The effort will be well worth watching in Durham, where multiple efforts are underway to address our high level of poverty. There's every reason to believe we'll be able to learn from the cities in the initial MDC network.

After all, the opening sentences of MDC's outline of the network sound starkly familiar to us here in Durham:

"The South boasts centers of fast growth, technological innovation, and educational excellence. However, set against this economic vitality are the nation's lowest mobility and highest poverty rates."

The network takes a broad-based approach to reassembling community resources and focus to create an "infrastructure of opportunity." It calls for "deliberate and collaborative work among 'supply-side' institutions (schools, community colleges, community-based organizations) and 'demand side' organizations (workforce and economic development agencies, business and trade associations, and employers and industry to build strong talent development pipelines that prepare and connect young and young adults to opportunity, particularly in places where there are

long-standing patterns of discrimination and underinvestment."

While the economic mobility challenge is regional and national, the focus on working with individual communities reflects a belief that's where dissecting its causes and creating a new conversation and new outcomes can happen. "The community level is where it starts," Anita Brown-Graham said while moderating a panel discussion at a convening of leaders from the four communities here last week. Brown-Graham is professor of public law and government at UNC's School of Government.

I look forward to following the unfolding of the network's work and results.

Bob Ashley is editor of The Herald-Sun. You can reach him at 919-419-6678 or bashley@heraldsun.com.

## LETTERS

FROM PAGE A12

### Biased reporting

Robert Medred's letter reflects many of my concerns with The Herald-Sun's biased reporting. Another story that has failed to reach the pages is that of the former Pennsylvania Attorney General being sentenced to jail for perjury, among other offenses. It wasn't all that long ago that they were trumpeting her as the first female governor in Pennsylvania. The fact that she is a former Bill Clinton campaign staffer obviously will be neglected also.

Unfortunately, American "journalism" as always been thus since the days of Jefferson vs. Adams. However, back then they did not mince words about their goals and drape themselves in the cloak of impartiality or self-proclaimed centrism.

Fenton McGonnell  
Durham

### Election process a joke

Oh my, few days left to vote. What a nightmare!

The right to vote has come into question, now the results are coming into question. What does this say about the United States? Outside looking in, I bet the folks beyond our borders are having a field day.

I have never been less secure about this country due to the behavior of officials that want to be elected. This election process has become a joke for the masses. I have found that the folks running for office are acting like children on a playground ready for a ruckus. Also, I believe the children would be ahead with at least having dignity and communication.

For God and country, bless America!

Angela Pope Alford  
Creedmoor

### Politicians sidestep undue market

In what appears to be a recent gaffe about healthcare costs, former President Bill Clinton describes what some Americans are up against:

"The people getting killed on this deal are small business people or individuals who make just a little too much to get any of these subsidies. Why? Because they're not organized and don't have enough bargaining power with the insurance companies, and they're getting whacked."

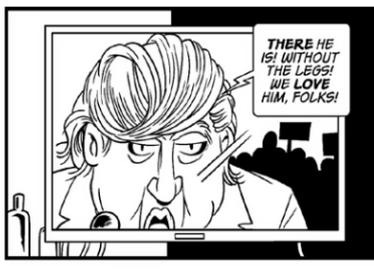
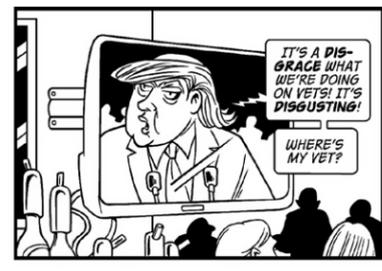
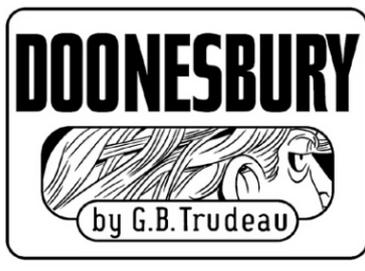
Whether it be the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) combined with any possible Hillary Clinton modifications or Donald Trump's "plan" to scuttle the ACA and allow the insurance industry to cross over state lines -- the latter, little more than expansion of the existing market (what Republicans like to present as the "free market regulating itself" without legally forcing Americans to buy insurance) — neither Trump's "plan" nor the ACA protects all Americans from those who exploit the sick with overpriced services.

Both fail in lowering prices, because both political parties maintain a public and private face in saying they're working to bring healthcare prices down, Trump included. Even before patients are hit with overpriced insurance, laws are written (go ahead, try not paying your hospital bill) to enable and protect a seller's market, allowing executives in this "free market" guaranteed payment with obscene profits and incomes.

And just as in the past, rather than address the real issue — why medical prices before insurance are so high — Republicans continue to squander any opportunity to present a meaningful alternative to the ACA.

John Rhodes Efland

## DOONESBURY | GARRY TRUDEAU



# Poll shows voters agree that early education vital to successful future

As an entrepreneur and business owner, I know the value of focus, resilience, creativity and communication. These are some of the most important skills I look for when hiring employees. And they explain why I strongly support healthy child development and early learning.

The foundation for these skills — which are the building blocks for school and life success — is built in the early years of a child's life.

I am not alone. A recent bipartisan poll of North Carolina voters from the N.C. Early Childhood Foundation (NCECF) and the First Five Years Fund shows that North Carolinians know that investments in our children's early care and learning yield short- and long-term benefits and are vital to building a strong workforce.

More than three out of four voters say that high-quality early learning programs help children achieve their third-grade reading goals, help set children up for success in middle and high school and help create a larger pool



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GUEST COLUMNIST

of highly skilled workers in the long term.

A strong majority of Republicans, Independents and Democrats want more investments in early learning — including providing greater access to affordable child care, pre-kindergarten, and programs that build parenting skills. Support for the state's signature programs — NC Pre-K and Smart Start, led locally by Durham's Partnership for Children — is overwhelming, with 70 percent of Republicans, 92 percent of Democrats and 87 percent of Independents wanting to expand access.

Lack of affordable, quality childcare is bad for families and bad for our economy. Across the country, businesses lose \$3 billion per year due to employee absenteeism stemming from childcare issues. Working families who don't have access to high-quality, affordable childcare lose \$8.3 billion in wages annually.

In a 2015 survey by The Washington Post, both mothers (70 percent) and fathers

(50 percent) in the United States say they have passed up work opportunities, switched jobs or quit their employment to tend to their kids. Perhaps that's why in the NCECF poll, 90 percent of voters say we need to make early education and child care more affordable for working families to give children a strong start. Again, this was supported across party lines, including 78 percent of Republican voters, 97 percent of Democrats and 93 percent of Independents.

Building a strong community demands that we act now. We know more than we ever have about how children's brains develop. Brain scientists have discovered that during children's earliest years, their experiences are built into their bodies — shaping the brain's architecture and impacting how biological systems develop. Positive early experiences build a strong foundation for learning, behavior and future health.

Research also tells us that all aspects of a child's development are important. When children have good health starting from

birth; high-quality education including early care, pre-kindergarten, and in the early grades; and strong and supportive families and communities, they have the best opportunity to be on track by third grade — a critical year that predicts future academic and career success.

There are few issues that enjoy the level of bipartisan support as early learning. Every candidate for public office should have an early learning strategy. We should ask candidates about their plans. Voters want elected leaders to do more to create a stronger North Carolina, both now and for the future. By supporting working parents and young children, we will be doing just that.

Our community has worked hard to rebuild its economy from tobacco and textiles to 21st century businesses such as information technology and life sciences. Let's keep moving forward by investing in our children in their earliest years.

Matt Williamson is CEO and co-founder of Windsor Circle. He is the father of two children in Durham Public Schools.