

Maurice Atwood: What McCrory has done for North Carolina

By Maurice Atwood Guest columnist | Posted: Friday, October 21, 2016 8:30 pm

Winston Churchill said: “Truth is incontrovertible. Malice may attack it; ignorance may deride it; but in the end, there it is.”

Those remarks are in stark contrast to the words coming from Democrats regarding the progress made in education in North Carolina. The comments from Democrats are grounded in anger, fear and resentment and have nothing to do with the facts.

The fact is that in 2011, North Carolina overspent by \$3 billion. Taxes on income, corporate income and gasoline were the highest in the Southeast. North Carolina could not borrow money. North Carolina owed the federal government billions of dollars primarily because of the unemployment benefits situation. In other words — North Carolina’s credit card was over the limit.

During the past four years, Gov. Pat McCrory and the General Assembly rolled up their sleeves and went to work exactly as we all would have done if we overspent at home. The governor and the General Assembly tightened the belt, and the results demonstrate that they have been effective:

North Carolina has paid-in-full its debt to the federal government;

North Carolina has reduced personal and corporate income taxes, which now are among the low-est in the Southeast;

North Carolina has reduced and put a limit on the gasoline tax; and,

After getting its financial house in order, North Carolina has added more than \$1 billion to education funding.

Gov. McCrory met with teachers and superintendents from across the state. They told him their no. 1 priority was to raise the pay of teachers — starting with the newest teachers. So, Gov. McCrory and the General Assembly did just that. Working together, Gov. McCrory and the General Assembly accomplished the following:

Implemented the largest pay increase for teachers in the entire nation;

Firmed up the benefit package for teachers so that it is now worth approximately \$16,000 a year for every teacher in the state;

Created additional income opportunities for our teachers so they do not have to leave the classroom to enhance their income or further their careers; and,

Stabilized tuition of a 4- or 5-year college degree, including fees at all campuses of the University of North Carolina system.

In addition, North Carolina’s graduation rate is at an all-time high and its drop-out rate at an all-time low. Education Next magazine now ranks North Carolina schools among the top K-12 schools in the nation for

“rigor.” The online, personal finance blog, “WalletHub,” has moved North Carolina into the top 20 in the nation for education and security.

North Carolina’s 58 community colleges are moving to an outcome-based educational model. North Carolina’s independent colleges and universities are helping fill the void for its many needs-based scholarship students.

But Gov. McCrory and the General Assembly are not finished. They have proposed the following: Ensure that teachers are prepared, supported and rewarded for their efforts and for improved student outcomes;

Complete the transition to the digital education environment that helps to prepare every student for the demands of the 21st Century job market;

Continue to increase pay for all teachers as well as expand opportunities for teachers to grow in their profession; and,

Involve parents in the education of their children so that parents support hard-working teachers and demand better outcomes for their children.

As our state’s population continues to grow, more teachers will be needed in the classroom, and it is imperative that we retain our experienced teachers. Their guidance is critical not only to our student’s future success but also as mentors and support to our new teachers. Experienced teachers deserve higher pay. The fact that the governor and General Assembly have addressed teacher pay almost every year the past four years, and continue to propose and support additional teacher pay raises in the future, is both supportive and encouraging for all teachers presently and in the future.

Let’s choose facts. Truth is incontrovertible. Let’s have a spirit of understanding and respect to move to new heights and signal North Carolina’s leadership in education. Suggesting anything other than these truths is being intellectually dishonest.