

# VIEWPOINT

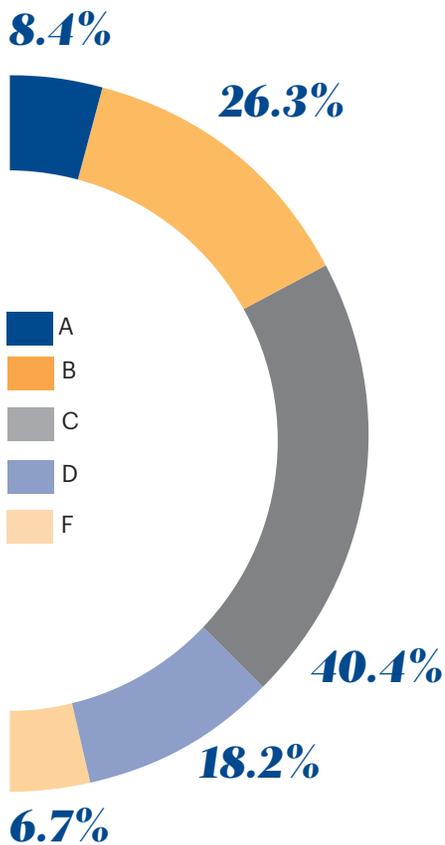
Triad Business Journal welcomes letters to the editor

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100 S. Elm St. Suite 400, Greensboro, NC 27401  
msutter@bizjournals.com

## ► BUSINESS PULSE SURVEY

### WE ASKED

HOW WOULD YOU GRADE NORTH CAROLINA'S ECONOMY?



### THIS WEEK'S QUESTION

HOW FAR IS TOO FAR FOR YOU TO CONSIDER TAKING A GOOD JOB IF YOU HAVE TO COMMUTE TO?

## POINT OF VIEW

# Feathers in the wind: HB2 and N.C.'s reputation

In an old rabbinic tale, a man goes to a wise rabbi to atone for the sin of spreading gossip. The rabbi considers his appeal, and then asks him to bring a feather pillow. The man is confused by the request, but he complies. The rabbi has the man go outside and rip the pillow apart. The day is very windy and the feathers all blow away.

The rabbi then asks the man to gather the feathers and fix the pillow. The man protests that this is impossible, as the feathers are gone for good. "Precisely," says the rabbi. "So it is with gossip. Once a piece of gossip leaves your mouth, it's as if it's carried away on the wind, and you can never get it back."

What reminded me of this story was the deteriorating reputation of North Carolina in the national consciousness and especially the business world. It's running out of our control, much like feathers on the wind.

As everyone knows, the cause of all this is HB2, the state law that reversed a Charlotte ordinance granting rights to transgender people, though it also prevents local anti-discrimination ordinances, bans victims of workplace discrimination from suing in state courts, and restricts cities' ability to dictate wages and employment conditions to private employers.

(It's been said the law bans municipal minimum-wage laws, but such laws were already banned. There's a reason that no North Carolina city



Andrew Brod is a senior research fellow in UNCG's Center for Business and Economic Research. Reach him at 336-707-6439 or AndrewBrod@uncg.edu. An archive of his columns is available at <http://cber.uncg.edu>.

had a higher minimum wage than the state's \$7.25.)

In the month since the law was passed, corporations such as PayPal and Deutsche Bank have canceled plans to locate or expand in North Carolina, costing us hundreds of jobs. Entertainers ranging from Bruce Springsteen to Cirque du Soleil have canceled concerts and shows. Renowned Broadway composer Stephen Schwartz has revoked performance rights to his musicals (including "Godspell" and "Children of Eden") in North Carolina.

Conventions and meetings from Wilmington to Asheville have been moved to other states. The 2017 NBA All-Star game will be moved out of Charlotte if the law isn't changed. And the federal government is reportedly assessing whether the law disqualifies North Carolina from receiving \$4.5 billion a year

in education funding.

Some have started tallying the economic loss from HB2, but such calculations are likely to understate the economic impact. Because it's not just about numbers. It's also about reputation.

To be sure, it's not clear how long HB2 will last as a law. The Fourth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals (which has jurisdiction over North Carolina) just ruled in a Virginia case that restrictions on how transgender people use bathrooms are discriminatory.

But even if HB2 is repealed or overturned, will our reputation be restored? After all, the national media are talking about us, and comparing laws in other states to North Carolina's HB2. If we don't watch it, we'll become a touchpoint – a catchphrase – for discrimination. States like that tend not to thrive economically.

The danger was driven home to me when I saw a national article about a North Carolina judge who threw a breast-feeding woman out of his courtroom. It wasn't as outrageous as the headline made it seem, and it's the sort of thing that happens all over the country. But the editor saw "North Carolina" and ran it. My guess is that it wouldn't have run before HB2.

Once a narrative is fixed in the public's mind, it's hard to undo it. Will North Carolina be able to put the feathers back into the pillow?

## ► GAINERS & LOSERS



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### ↓ IPHONES

Wall Street freaks as sales of Apple's signature product fell for the first time ever in the first quarter 2016. Of course, that's compared to the first quarter 2015 - when it released the iPhone in a small market known as China.



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### ↓ THE OTHER SHOE

ITG Brands will cut 375 more jobs at the former Lorillard plant in Greensboro due to loss of the powerhouse Newport menthol brand as part of the Reynolds American/Lorillard merger. What is "regrettable" today could have been described as "inevitable" when the deal was proposed.



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### ↑ GOOD FORTUNE

Assistant manager of convenience store in Randleman wins \$4 million in N.C. Education Lottery. That will buy a lot of Slim Jims and slushies.



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### ↑ PUBLIX

It's been a long time coming but the supermarket chain finally sets an opening date for its new store - its first in the Triad - at 34 Miller St. in Winston-Salem: May 11.