

Statement to The Assembly, attributable to Dan Bishop

Democratic politicians have treated the office of attorney general as a rung on the ladder to higher office for decades. Meanwhile, the number of North Carolinians murdered or raped has nearly doubled in the past 10 years, and the attorney general refuses to defend or enforce some laws that don't align with the Democratic Party's policy agenda.

Atrophy has now taken hold of the office after Democrats have won consecutive elections for more than a century. I intend to change that.

The attorney general is supposed to be the top law enforcement officer in the state. His [duties](#) (a woman has never held the role) include supporting district attorneys and sheriffs upon request, and defending state laws – *all* state laws – when they're challenged in court.

Let's take each in turn.

Law and Order

It's true that the attorney general does not himself prosecute crimes in North Carolina, and I do not suggest that individual criminal case outcomes, on their own, are attributable directly to the attorney general.

It's also true that the attorney general, more than any other elected officer in this state, establishes the culture in which sheriffs and district attorneys operate. I *do* mean to suggest a state's crime and enforcement trends are attributable to the attorney general. This is in part a bully pulpit argument, but the attorney general also has formal levers to effect policy changes (I'm happy to go down that rabbit hole if desired).

Over 75 sheriffs and district attorneys have endorsed me for attorney general. Many of them tell me the current attorney general has had little to no communication with them over the past eight years. That is unacceptable, especially given the atrocious murder and rape figures reported in this state over the past decade.

The last year for which State Bureau of Investigation crime data is available is 2022. Here's what that [report](#) shows.

The number of murders has increased 46% in the last five years, and 75% in the last decade.

The number of rapes has increased 33% in the last five years, and 79% in the last decade.

There were more rapes in the last recorded year than in eight of the 10 years prior. There were more murders in the last recorded year than in nine of the 10 years prior.

Sure, news outlets and Democratic politicians can focus on the one or two years that saw declines – but the trend is as undeniable as it is awful.

(As an aside, I'll note that legacy media outlets like McClatchy agreed to have activist organizations quite literally fund their crime coverage. Contemporaneous with that arrangement came bizarre statements like [this one](#) from a McClatchy editor: "The News & Observer is taking a new approach covering law enforcement, one less focused on crimes and arrests. . .")

I am not the sitting attorney general, so I cannot point you to an official examination into practices that may contribute to the shameful murder and rape statistics. I am not sure one even exists, which is itself a travesty.

But I can tell you what I suspect, and what as attorney general I will begin calling out on Day One. I suspect policies that fall under the general "soft-on-crime" umbrella are part of the problem – including deferred prosecutions, misguided plea deals, and frustration between the officers doing the arresting and prosecutors who are supposed to do the prosecuting.

The attorney general ought to spend his time and resources on this, which I consider the most serious law-and-order issue facing our state right now. But my opponent has made clear he will continue the status quo. As one example of many, he [voted](#) to *lower* criminal penalties for violent crimes.

Selective Defense of State Laws Based on Campaign Calculations

[State law](#) obligates the attorney general to "defend[] any State or federal action challenging the validity or constitutionality of an act of the General Assembly or a provision of the North Carolina Constitution."

But Democratic attorneys general increasingly ignore this legal requirement when they calculate defending the General Assembly might anger Democratic partisans. Putting aside the irony of the state's top law enforcement officer ignoring the law, this practice cracks the very foundation of our legal order.

Here are just one (brief) example, and I'm happy to go into detail on others. When the General Assembly enacted a photo voter identification law, Democratic activist organizations sued to overturn it on constitutional grounds. The case went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, where it died without a hearing. Why? Newly elected Attorney General Josh Stein [suddenly dismissed the State's petition for review](#) without legal authority and over the objections of legislative leadership. Chief Justice John Roberts [cited](#) "the blizzard of filings over who is and who is not authorized to seek review in the court under North Carolina law" in a short statement explaining the court's rationale for not taking up the case. In other words, the State's lawyer sabotaged the State's own case.

People can have their own opinions about whether they agree or disagree with the General Assembly's policy choices. But those viewpoints should have no bearing on whether the attorney general upholds his legal duty to defend those policy choices.

Those who quietly excuse such behavior now, perhaps because they oppose voter ID or support felon voting, will come to regret that precedent *when* it cuts the other way. In politics, like physics, every action has an equal and opposite reaction.

I hope we don't get there. If elected attorney general, I for one commit to restoring the time-honored practice. I will not selectively defend or enforce particular laws. My political opinion will not take priority over my duty to enforce and defend the law in court.

Tying it All Together

I suspect a motivating force behind these two issues is what I stated at the top: Democratic politicians consider the office of attorney general as a waystation on the road to governor or U.S. Senate.

Because of that dynamic, attorneys general in recent decades have put their future aspirations ahead of their duty. It's the politically astute move to sabotage the state's voter ID law and avoid the ire of Democratic primary voters, for example.

Unfortunately, my ladder-climbing opponent vows to continue the trend. He's been running for higher office for his [entire career](#). In an interview just a few weeks ago, he was asked directly whether he plans to run for higher office, like governor, if he's elected attorney general. He refused to answer the question.

I will not treat the office of attorney general as a steppingstone. I will not seek higher office. I'm running to vigorously defend the laws of our state and restore a culture of law and order across North Carolina.