

U.S. Senate

Open seat (Thom Tillis retiring).

Roy Cooper

DEMOCRAT · OPEN SEAT

Former two-term North Carolina governor (2017–2025) and state attorney general.

Michael Whatley

REPUBLICAN · OPEN SEAT

Former chair of the Republican National Committee and the North Carolina Republican Party.

Where the candidates stand on the issues Pope Leo XIV has raised, in their own words and votes. Bracketed numbers link to sources. We do not rate, score, or endorse candidates.

WAR & PEACE

POPE LEO XIV *Leo invited citizens of every country involved in the war with Iran to contact their leaders and members of Congress “to work for peace and to reject war and violence.”* [Remarks at Castel Gandolfo, Apr. 7, 2026](#) (Vatican News via [The Good Newsroom](#))

ROY COOPER

As governor, said in 2023 that “North Carolina stands with the people of Ukraine.” Listed as supporting pressing Israel toward a two-state solution.

[1] [OnTheIssues: Roy Cooper](#)

MICHAEL WHATLEY

No public position found.

AI & THE DIGNITY OF WORK

POPE LEO XIV *“No one can be reduced to productivity, to cognitive performance, or to mere data.”* [Magnifica Humanitas presentation, May 25, 2026](#)

ROY COOPER

Says data centers should pay the full cost of their electricity and local communities should be “fully involved” in siting decisions. Has called a \$15 minimum wage an “admirable goal.”

[1] [Cooper campaign: Energy](#)

[2] [OnTheIssues: Roy Cooper](#)

MICHAEL WHATLEY

No public position found.

THE POOR & THE SAFETY NET

POPE LEO XIV *The preferential choice for the poor is “a source of extraordinary renewal both for the Church and for society.”* [Dilexi Te, Oct. 4, 2025](#)

ROY COOPER

Pledges to “reinstate the ACA tax credits and reverse Medicaid cuts,” and to cap annual out-of-pocket prescription drug costs.

[1] [Cooper campaign: Health care](#)

RECORD IN OFFICE

Signed HB 76 (2023), Access to Healthcare Options, expanding Medicaid eligibility

MICHAEL WHATLEY

Praises the 2025 reconciliation law, which Republicans call the “Working Families Tax Cuts,” and its Rural Health Transformation Program for rural hospitals.

[1] [Whatley campaign: midterm convention remarks](#)

[2] [Whatley campaign: tax law anniversary](#)

LIFE OF THE UNBORN

POPE LEO XIV *Abortion “cuts short a growing life and refuses to welcome the gift of life.”* [Address to the Diplomatic Corps, Jan. 9, 2026](#)

ROY COOPER

As governor, vetoed the 2023 bill banning most abortions after 12 weeks; has said politicians should not be in the exam room “telling doctor what to say.”

[\[1\] OnTheIssues: Roy Cooper](#)

RECORD IN OFFICE

VetoedSB 20 (2023), Care for Women, Children, and Families Act, restricting most abortions after 12 weeks

VetoedSB 359 (2019), Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act

MICHAEL WHATLEY

Lists “protecting life” among the conservative values he will fight for; has not detailed specific abortion policy.

[\[1\] Whatley campaign: Issues](#)

THE DEATH PENALTY

POPE LEO XIV *Someone who opposes abortion but favors the death penalty “is not really pro-life.”* [AP via PBS NewsHour, Sept. 30, 2025](#)

ROY COOPER

On his last day as governor in December 2024, commuted the death sentences of 15 people to life without parole.

[\[1\] NC Governor: capital clemency actions](#)

MICHAEL WHATLEY

No public position found.

IMMIGRANTS & REFUGEES

POPE LEO XIV *“Defending human life also includes welcoming, protecting and assisting immigrants.”* [Letter on the 250th Anniversary of the United States, June 25, 2026](#)

ROY COOPER

As governor, vetoed bills requiring sheriffs to cooperate with ICE detainer requests, including 2024’s HB 10. Has opposed deporting DREAMers.

[\[1\] Carolina Journal: Cooper vetoes HB 10](#)

[\[2\] OnTheIssues: Roy Cooper](#)

RECORD IN OFFICE

VetoedHB 370 (2019), requiring sheriffs to cooperate with ICE detainees

VetoedHB 10 (2024), requiring ICE cooperation by sheriffs, with budget adjustments including Opportunity Scholarship funds

MICHAEL WHATLEY

Says, “I am 100% supportive of President Trump securing the border and deporting the millions of criminal illegal aliens” that he says entered under Joe Biden and Roy Cooper.

[\[1\] Whatley campaign: Issues](#)

[\[2\] Whatley campaign: Fayetteville event](#)

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY & EDUCATION

POPE LEO XIV *Religious freedom is “the right of every person to worship according to conscience.”* [Letter on the 250th Anniversary of the United States, June 25, 2026](#)

ROY COOPER

Opposed expanding Opportunity Scholarship vouchers, saying they “come with no accountability” and drain public school funds, while saying he does not oppose private schools; vetoed 2024’s HB 10, which funded the expansion.

[\[1\] Carolina Journal: Cooper vetoes HB 10](#)

RECORD IN OFFICE

Allowed to become lawHB 259 (2023), state budget, including expanded Opportunity Scholarship eligibility for private schools

MICHAEL WHATLEY

No public position found.

CARE FOR CREATION

POPE LEO XIV *“We cannot love God, whom we cannot see, while despising his creatures.”* [AP, Oct. 1, 2025](#)

ROY COOPER

As governor, set goals of cutting greenhouse gas emissions 70% by 2030. His campaign pledges to modernize the grid to lower bills and ban utility shutoffs during extreme weather.

[\[1\] OnTheIssues: Roy Cooper](#)

[\[2\] Cooper campaign: Energy](#)

RECORD IN OFFICE

Signed HB 951 (2021), Energy Solutions for North Carolina, setting carbon-reduction targets for electric utilities

MICHAEL WHATLEY

Says “America’s economic strength depends on reliable, affordable energy.” His campaign blames Cooper’s “Green New Deal policies” for higher electric rates.

[\[1\] Whatley campaign: Issues](#)

[\[2\] Whatley campaign: EV deal release](#)

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