



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

November 7, 2023

2023-2024 Board Members

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Past Pres William Bradley

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David Head

Joel Ford

Membership Terri DeBoo

Foundation Joe Morris

Programs Andy Dinkin



N.C. State Auditor Beth A. Wood, CPA

by **Elly Clary**

North Carolina government operates on \$50 billion a year, state auditor Beth Wood told Rotarians, and her agency reviews how that tax money is spent – and whether it's being wasted.

Democrat Wood is a certified public accountant who's been state auditor for a decade. She grew up in coastal Craven County and is a member of the Atlantic Beach Shaggers Hall of Fame, which recognizes proficiency in that dance style.

Wood detailed audits that turned up evidence of poor performance at the state Division of Employment Security (DES) and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI).

During Covid, Wood said, thousands of Tar Heel workers lost their jobs overnight, then suffered financially because of late-arriving unemployment money.

Her agency's audit found this: During 12 months at Covid's height, the state issued \$1.2 billion in first-time jobless checks. Federal guidelines stipulate 87 percent of such payments must be sent within 14-21 days. Wood's agency learned that checks worth \$438 million – a third of the money – were anywhere from two months to a year late. DES had not met the federal performance threshold in 10 years.

The auditor's report led to a recent General Assembly hearing where the DES was ordered to fix tardy jobless payments.

At DPI, "I'm nobody's favorite," she said, after her agency's attendance and grade promotion findings "opened a big ol' can of worms."

The General Assembly was skeptical of a DPI report that only 1 percent of public school students were "lost" during Covid. It requested the auditor's office take a look.

Wood's agency researched school systems in six counties. For Henderson County, the audit showed that of 13,044 students, 1,647 were chronically absent, having missed 19 or more classroom days. Yet 87 percent of them were promoted.

"It's the principal's responsibility to ensure that every child promoted should be going to the next grade," Wood said. "There was not one ounce of documentation" for the chronically absent who were promoted in Henderson County.

The state's public schools receive money from the General Assembly based on attendance. Yet no one at DPI could provide attendance numbers for the other five school districts the audit office surveyed, Wood added.

"We are doing more audits that directly affect the citizens of North Carolina," she said. Among them, she mentioned checking up on nursing home performance and on services aiding the mentally and physically challenged.

"People ask me if I'm a Republican or Democrat," said Wood, who confirmed that she will not run for re-election in 2024. "I say 'I'm a CPA and we audit red dollars and blue dollars.'"

Answering a whimsical question, Wood said she likes to shag in Myrtle Beach and Raleigh. A favorite spot is Courtney's in Atlantic Beach.

A recording of the meeting can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/882958536>
The speaker's introduction begins at approximately 29:32 minutes.