



September 3, 2026

Mr. William Moss
Editor
Hendersonville Lightning
P.O. Box 1276, Hendersonville, NC 28793

Dear Mr. Moss:

As a journalist who has published in the [Lightning](#), I'm increasingly disturbed by your paper's repeated and seemingly overwrought front-page coverage of local GOP candidates. The last few issues, in particular, have saturated readers with details of Congressman Chuck Edwards' ethical demise and now, a hyperbolic announcement loaded with praise for Edwards' anointed replacement, Jennifer Capps Balkcom (NC House of Representatives, District 117).

Ms. Balkcom has been touted by NCGOP executive director Zach Almond as an "excellent candidate...[who] "embodies Western NC values...a fantastic candidate" and "prolific fundraiser" with "a proven track record fighting for Western NC values."

But what, exactly, has Balkcom fought for, and why has the *Lightning* neglected to report the important details of her voting record?

Let's start with public education. Lockstep, she has voted with GOP state colleagues for private school vouchers at the expense of public schools. North Carolina is now ranked 50th in the nation in public per-student spending and 46th in average teacher pay—a disgrace for a once excellent state education system.

Public school students in our county number 93% to 94% of the total (more than 12,600 students), while private school students constitute 6% to 8 %, around 1265 students. Private school families receive vouchers whether they need them or not. In fact, 90% of families statewide receiving voucher money already have their kids in private schools; the voucher program lessens the cost but doesn't make private schools available to more students.

Between the defunct Leandro decision, incessant public school defunding, and the fact that 15 to 17% of our county and state kids live under the federal poverty line, Balkcom's allegiance is clearly with the wealthy and well-heeled. In 2023 she voted *against* Medicaid expansion for as many as 690,000 uninsured North Carolinians, 230,000 of them rural. She argued that working able-bodied people

without kids shouldn't get Medicaid, even if coverage gaps and low family incomes preclude private insurance coverage.

Balkcom has also voted with the GOP-dominated NC General Assembly to strip local zoning control from Carolina counties, including Henderson. Our commissioners want to retain zoning control because they understand development needs, downzoning, and environmental preservation issues here firsthand.

Balkcom supports legislation to deny open discussions in schools about racism and gender identity. She recklessly co-sponsored a bill allowing NC residents to carry concealed handguns without permits.

Perhaps worse, she mismanaged an expected \$12+ million NCGA budget item to build a water/sewage line out to Edneyville whose elementary school was being targeted for closure due to a failing sewage system. Raleigh legislators moved the promised funds to the Etowah water/sewage project (also a failing system). Meanwhile, Henderson County Commissioners were furious because Balkcom neither protected the Edneyville funding nor informed anyone about the transfer. Our Commissioners had to read about it in a state budget.

In short, Balkcom displays little ability to analyze situations independently, or make decisions in the best interests of her constituents. Out of thousands of votes cast, she has departed from her Party only two times. Prior to that, she flip-flopped between Libertarian and Democratic Party affiliations.

Sadly, I don't see much objective reporting in the *Hendersonville Lightning* these days. Our nation is in crisis mode, and a spineless Republican Congress composed of amateurs like Edwards and Balkcom has done nothing but ape Trump's worst instincts about the economy and prices, the environment, natural disasters, vaccines and public health, women's rights, immigrants, the working class, and Iran (another senseless forever war).

Our WNC county is no longer "solid red," as your quoted expert Chris Cooper declares. The constituent population here is changing rapidly.

Readers deserve the truth.

Sincerely,

Arielle Emmett, Ph.D.

Member, American Society of Journalists & Authors