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Introduction

“Now neither party had ever, ever helped Dare County or northeastern North Carolina, as I saw it. Ehringhaus in Elizabeth City a little, but no connecting roads anywhere, north or south or west, no educational opportunities much, not much, no economy except for that that was self generated.” –Marc Basnight

On August 24th, 2013, I drove eastward from the University of North Carolina in order to watch my alma mater, Currituck County High School, open the football season against Manteo. Leaving Chapel Hill in the mid afternoon, I arrived on the campus of the small Roanoke Island school in a touch under three and a half hours. In the 1970s, this trip would have lasted no less than five and possibly up to six hours. Whereas today drivers enjoy the continuous use of a divided US 64 East, in the past two lanes and the need to transverse through every little Eastern town plagued the ride. In fact, on a hot Friday in the middle of the summer, it is now often easier and faster to reach Manteo from downtown Raleigh than Atlantic Beach, despite the latter being some thirty miles closer. What has changed? Inevitably the force behind the incredible modernization of Northeast North Carolina boils down to Marc Basnight.

For over thirty years, Marc Basnight stood in Raleigh as the voice of the Northeast. During this period, Basnight, first as the region’s representative on the North Carolina Board of Transportation and later as a state senator, worked tirelessly to win better conditions for his home area. Elected as the Senate President Pro Tem in 1993, Basnight continued in that role until the 2010 Republican electoral wave installed a new party in power in Raleigh. In those eighteen years, Basnight used the power vested in him by his colleagues, and a “servant’s heart,” to drive forward numerous projects that built a better North Carolina for all North Carolinians.
Even as the Basnight period now recedes into the history books, the impact of the Man from Manteo remains. Above all else, Basnight brought to the forefront one prevailing principle: all of North Carolina deserves access to the modern economy and no region of the Tar Heel State should ever be left forgotten in obscurity. From decades of neglect, the Northeast saw a brief respite with a powerful figure fighting for its equalization. As Jim Hunt described it, Basnight was from the category of “great leaders who came from the soil, maybe came up kind of hard, who worked for a living” and “who understood what is like not to have it, what it takes to get it, how hard we have to work for it and the fact we can do it.”

None of this success was pre-ordained. Rather, the journey was both surprising and inspiring. The career of Marc Basnight, if it did not occur, could not have been invented. How did a young coastal native, without polish or formal education, from a forgotten region of the state, rise to become one of the central power brokers in the state of North Carolina? How did a man, who mainly learned about the issues in the world by staying up deep into the night after a day’s Senate session reading, “Abe Lincoln style,” become such a “special jewel” for North Carolina? Just how did Marc Basnight use his power for the extraordinary benefit of the Northeast, a region so fraught with isolation that for many it was easier to attend the State Fair not in Raleigh but in Richmond? And last, but not least, how did Basnight build an operation which managed to win the North Carolina State Senate in election after election, even as Republicans increasingly made gains throughout the North Carolina political landscape? Herein, the story of Marc Basnight must be and will be told, for the life of Marc Basnight is a monumental one.
Chapter One: “Marc the Man”

If ever there existed a scion of the Outer Banks, Marc Basnight would be the perfect candidate. Born on the 13th day of May in 1947 on Roanoke Island, Basnight was a descendent of the region. His father, Andrew Saint Clair Basnight, commonly known as Saint, was a native of Gum Neck in Tyrrell County, but had grown up in the mainland Dare County community of East Lake. Later, Saint followed his father Manliff “Mann” Holmes Basnight to the Outer Banks portion of Dare in the 1920s. Both Mann and Saint were men of their hands. The elder Basnight worked in such professions as boat building, house building and carpentry, whereas the younger Basnight took those skills and found a niche mid-century pouring concrete for the cottages, foundations and driveways of the slowly developing areas of Nags Head and Kitty Hawk.  

On his mother’s side, however, Basnight was a son of Roanoke Island. Basnight’s mother, Cora Mae was a Daniels. Family lore among the Daniels clan claims descent on the island from the 1730s, when two brothers who had first journeyed from England to Massachusetts decided to continue south after a lone winter in the cold. Eventually, these brothers bought the land that today constitutes Wanchese, on the southern end of Roanoke Island. In addition to his Daniels legacy, Basnight’s mother’s maternal side of the family also had quite a bit of history at the beach, as Basnight’s grandmother was a Midgett from Rodanthe, another family that appeared in the New World at an early stage. Closer in time, Basnight’s great-grandfather, Thomas P. Midgett, was a captain in the United States Lighthouse Service. 

In addition to generations of life lived at the coast, the Basnight heritage included a strong public service component. Cora Mae Daniels’ father Moncie was a Dare County Commissioner and served for period as that entity’s chair, while Basnight’s great-uncle Melvin Daniels, Sr., was the county’s register of deeds for almost half a century. Like the vast majority
of residents at the time, the Daniels family were ardent adherents of the Democratic Party, and Moncie Daniels was on occasion the party’s county leader. Of course, it did not hurt that the most famous Daniels of them all, distant cousin Josephus, publisher and editor of the mighty Raleigh News & Observer, was one of the state’s most prominent figures and spent eight years as the United States Secretary of the Navy in the administration of President Wilson. That said, there was Republicanism within Basnight’s family, for his great-grandfather Captain Midgett was a member of that party. Indeed, Basnight’s grandmother Belva Midgett Daniels derived her first name from a Republican suffragette and female presidential candidate Belva Lockwood. However, the Captain’s attempts to sway his daughter failed, for Belva Daniels turned out to be “a hot Democrat!”

When Marc Basnight was born in 1947, the Outer Banks remained a mostly undiscovered place, and Manteo itself was the definition of small-town. Yet, in the previous two decades, the area had been the center of tremendous change. Prior to the 1920s, Roanoke Island was only accessible to the rest of Dare County via ferry. But, late in that decade, after years of clamoring, a permanent crossing was constructed over the Roanoke Sound, connecting Manteo to the rest of the barrier islands. The bridge’s opening enabled greater accessibility for the island, a feature that was highlighted in the new decade when Paul Green’s famous play, The Lost Colony, debuted. Opening in July 1937, in advance of the 350th anniversary of the birth of Virginia Dare, the play’s notability grew after an August 18th visit by a delegation from Washington headed by the President of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. As a result of the attention, and the rave reviews, cultural tourism to Manteo was institutionalized as a key industry.

While the arrival of the President was celebrated, all was not positive for the residents of Manteo. At the end of the decade, in 1939, the town suffered a devastating fire, which clearly
exhibited the hitherto provincial nature of Manteo: it was helped along by the fact that the vast majority of the downtown was wooden structures. The fire’s precise cause has always been in question but what was never debated was its origin: the Standard Oil station and convenience store owned by Moncie Daniels. Quickly the fire gained strength, and by the end of the day, sixteen stores, or two-thirds of the commercial business district in the town, was charred. Indeed, the fire was so significant that over seventy years later, Bobby Owens, than a child of Manteo, vividly recalls watching, with a group of other Manteo youngsters, the fire progress from a nearby attic to which he was removed by his parents for safety purposes. Despite the damage, Manteo did its best to rebuild. Outsiders continued to visit the area in droves, and many like the President before them came to view The Lost Colony. In doing so, they would come face to face with Marc Basnight’s mother.

On November 5th, 1938 Cora Mae Daniels married Saint in Currituck County. Despite being wed outside of Manteo, the couple returned to the island, and ultimately produced three children, with Marc being the youngest. In addition to Marc and his siblings Della and Saint Clair, Junior, four children from Cora Mae’s first marriage, E.J., Dottie, Sally and Sarah also lived at home. For lodgings, the family settled in a tiny green and brown house at 319 Agona Street. This location was ideal, for it was right behind the Daniels family home on Sir Walter Raleigh Street, and both homes still stand today. Conditions were not easy for the Basnights, especially given the eventually tumultuous relationship between Saint and Cora Mae. As Basnight recalled, “Mama cooked on a kerosene stove. We had a kerosene heater that only heated the living room. At night we all cuddled in bed together to keep warm.” Regardless of the challenging conditions, the family worked to get ahead, with Saint throwing his time into his business while Cora Mae delved into the Lost Colony.
Although Cora Mae’s acting career would be most notable, she was not the first of the Basnight clan to appear in the town’s famous production. Rather, it was Dottie, Sally and Sarah who were first involved: Dottie and Sally as natives and Sarah as a milkmaid dancer. Even young Marc preceded his mother as a member. In 1954, Cora Mae dragged the child along with her to the Dare County Courthouse for play tryouts. Although the future politician was adamant in his disinterest in the production, when he saw his friends heading to the stage Marc suddenly gained interest. Naturally, Basnight won the role, as “there was nothing shy about him” and he “spoke right up,” attributes he maintained in his eventual career choice.9

In the long run, though, it would be Cora Mae who became associated with the play, for in 1957 she was cast in the part of Agona, a “giggling Native American woman who, along with the reformed English beggar Old Tom, provides much of the comic relief in Green’s *The Lost Colony* through their budding love affair.” Cora Mae soon was entwined with Agona, and she would go on to reprise the character for twenty-five years, making her the longest known holder of one role in American acting history.10 Thus, it was very much from his mother that Marc Basnight inherited his love for Manteo and its environment, for the vast historical holdings his native town held, and of course for the art of performance.

From his father, Marc would learn a very different skill-set. While Cora Mae was fun loving, Saint was serious. A hard worker, the elder Basnight taught young Marc the art of labor. By Marc’s youth, Saint had graduated to ownership of his own construction company, called Basnight Construction. The company was small, employing at maximum four people, yet it enabled Saint to make a modest living. Despite being the youngest child, Marc was apt to join his father on the job, and by middle childhood, the younger Basnight was hard at work in a
number of tasks, including the operation of machinery, most notably a bulldozer. The most striking feature of his work soon came to be his trademark look: bare chested and bare footed.11

In addition to working with his father, Marc found interest in another trade: politics. As a thirteen year old, Basnight engaged in his first ever line of political work when he painted signs with the slogan, “Move over Mamie, the Kennedy’s are coming,” then climbed into his uncle’s car and drove around town, hawking for the Democratic ticket. In small town 1960, such an infraction as illegally driving was routinely ignored, and thus, the thirteen year old was inducted into politics. However, any idealism that was perhaps present was dashed when a request to the new President to visit the Lost Colony was turned down.12 President Roosevelt might have visited Manteo, but John F. Kennedy would wind up in a different part of the state: Chapel Hill and the University of North Carolina.

While Basnight found a taste for both labor and politics, one area in which he was supremely disinterested was school. Even though Basnight was fortunate enough to attend high school in a newer facility, as Manteo had opened a “modern” building in 1958, he had no use for formal education.13 Academically, one of the most powerful men in North Carolina was nothing more than an average student, and rather than focusing on schoolwork, he engaged in pranks. Within school life, he did participate in football, but only because that was where his friends were, not for love of the game or glory. Thus, by the time Basnight was ready to graduate from Manteo in 1966, it was evident that he would not be pursuing further education, unlike his siblings, as five of six went off to study at what was then known as East Carolina College in Greenville. Instead, Marc Basnight would have a much more normal, eastern style life: he was going to work.
Yet, all of high school was not a complete loss. Back in 1964, Basnight followed up on his “help” of the Kennedy campaign with an eager interest in another round of campaigning. Thus, he turned to Bobby Owens. Bobby, who had married Marc’s sister Sarah in 1956, was the local campaign chair for Judge Dan Moore’s gubernatorial campaign. Skeptical of the ability of young Marc to contribute, Owens asked him what role he could play. “Well, I can put up posters, I can put out these hand-bills,” responded the eager participant. Owens accepted his brother-in-law’s help, and thus the interest of the high school student was continued.

Four years later marked another major election, one that was quite helpful in the political development of Marc Basnight. But first, 1968 would also mark the beginning of a different sort of bond for Basnight, for it was in that year that he married another Dare native, Sandy Tillett. Several months older than Basnight, Tillett was the daughter of a Wanchese commercial fisherman, and had been named “Most Athletic” at the conclusion of high school. After their March marriage, Marc turned back to politics. At the time, governors were limited to only one term in North Carolina, and thus the spring marked an open Democratic primary. Three candidates filed, two of whom, Bob Scott and Mel Broughton, were sons of former Governors. The third was an African American, Reginald Hawkins. Although Hawkins finished with a decent showing in the primary, the race for the nomination was clearly between Scott and Broughton. Scott was viewed as the more progressive candidate, while Broughton was the conservative choice of the last remnants of the “Old Guard,” descendents of North Carolina’s pre-World War Two political tradition. In truth, both were relatively similar on the issue of the day, law and order, but Scott was more effective at positioning himself in the middle, and therefore captured the nomination.
Back East, Basnight once again got his position through Bobby Owens. Broughton’s men had approached Owens about replicating the job he had done four years prior for Judge Moore. Burned out by the fact that Governor Moore had, in his opinion, done little for the region, Owens sat out the race but recommended a youthful twenty year old: Marc Basnight. Basnight, who was working for his father at the construction company, accepted and proceeded to engage in the regularities of campaign work. Despite Marc’s best efforts, Broughton failed to carry Dare, although he did outperform his statewide average, polling 45.75 percent in the county to 33.37 percent throughout North Carolina. Though defeated, this first major foray into the political scene wetted Basnight’s appetite for retail politics.

As the 1970s dawned, new opportunities were in the works for Marc Basnight. He helped his father in the construction business; however, public service continued to present opportunities. In December of 1973, Basnight was appointed by the Dare County Board of Commissioners to serve as the head of a new committee dedicated to celebrating and marking the forthcoming bicentennial of the nation. America’s 200th was over two years removed but given his sense of history and the fact that Dare was the birthplace of English settlement in the New World, Basnight without hesitation flung himself in the planning process for the county’s honoring of the milestone. Initially, he began promoting the aims of the group, and drove the organization efforts for this vast project. In the end, the committee planned a number of events, but the most notable was a two-day celebration titled, “Dare Days.” Held on June 5-6, 1976, Dare Days was a testament to national and local history with folklore exhibits, cultural arts and crafts demonstrations, a fish fry, water sports, a parade and a street dance. Just as unique was the center location of the event: a new waterfront park made out of materials recycled from the remains of the demolished Manteo Elementary school. Although created for the special event,
Dare Days evolved and today remains a signature event known as the Dare Day Festival whose occurrence in early June serves as sort of an unofficial mark of the start of the summer season.

Aside from his multi-year service as a member of the Bicentennial Committee, Basnight also served a stint as Chair of the Board of Directors of the Dare County Tourism Bureau, and was a stout member in a number of local civic clubs. In 1976 alone, Basnight was honored as the January 1976 Lions Club Member of the Month and won the Jaycees yearly Distinguished Service Award. But while Basnight won accolades in Dare County, events were gathering that would propel him into higher, and greater areas of public life.

Two years before, in 1974, Marc’s cousin Mel Daniels, the son of his great-uncle, had been elected to the North Carolina Senate from the First District. In Raleigh, Senator Daniels quickly became allied with one of the state’s youthful but aspiring politicians, Lieutenant Governor Jim Hunt. By 1976, while Basnight was hard at work at the coast, Hunt was in the midst of winning the governorship of North Carolina, wresting back control of that office for the Democrats after four years of Republican command. For Eastern Carolina, Hunt’s victory was monumental, for Jim Hunt was a native son of the region, the first person from the heart or northern portions of the East to become governor since John Ehringhaus in the 1930s. Hunt also presented a new style, vigor, and energy to North Carolina, a “balance of old and new politics,” a brand that Marc Basnight would also later practice.

But, in 1977, northeasterners were ecstatic at the elevation of Hunt to the Governorship not because of his style, but because of the dismal state of the region’s roads. Under the formula then in place, the Albemarle region had received the smallest amount of funding of any district in the state, while being home to hundreds of miles of unpaved roads. Indeed, to illustrate this lack, in Pasquotank alone it was projected to take 75 years to fully pave the county’s 61 miles of dirt
roads. Yet, despite this fact, the outgoing Secretary of Transportation had the audacity to claim that each region had received its fair share of funding. Hunt recognized this inequity. As a child, one of Hunt’s signature memories was the paving of the small dirt road in front of his family’s Wilson County farm. In due time, Hunt would vocalize his concern, saying with respect to roads in 1978, “This progress is important to all North Carolinians, but it is particularly significant here in the East. As I have said before, a first-rate highway system is absolutely essential in this section of the state if we are to achieve the statewide balanced economic growth that is our goal.” But as the Hunt administration began, others were not content to hope and wait. In May, the Albemarle Area Development Association, a local group dedicated to economic growth, opted to form a roads committee. Each of the ten counties within the area was entitled to a representative, and Dare’s proved to be none other than Marc Basnight. Basnight’s time lobbying would be short-lived. After Hunt’s inauguration, the new Governor began to make his appointments to a number of critical state wide positions, and in late July, Hunt formalized his selections for the Board of Transportation, the body that governed the Transportation Department.

At the time, as is the case now, appointment to the Board of Transportation was eminently political. Spots frequently were awarded to key endorsers of the recent gubernatorial victor. As Hunt’s de facto patronage chief and legislative liaison Joe Pell once said, “The mule that pulls the plow gets the corn. No plow, no corn.” Given the strong support of figures such as Melvin Daniels, the new Governor was apt to reward a member of his circle with the position. He did so by turning to an unspectacular “stalwart,” Marc Basnight. Thus, Basnight was now in a position to directly impact the neglected Northeast.
Once appointed, Basnight began to cast his vision wider than his previous focus. Shortly after his selection, Basnight traveled to Raleigh in order to sit in on the first meeting of the Board. This initial trip was in many ways an eye opening experience for the young appointee. To begin with, his drive extenuated a growing feeling of isolation. As Basnight later said, “we were stuck out here alone and no roads, none.” In fact, there were roads, just of poor quality. Throughout the drive, nary a four-lane highway existed until crossing into Wake County. Meanwhile, the assembled group that young Basnight met quickly showcased his different origins. In a story that is apocryphal, Marc Basnight walked into the conference room of that first meeting sockless, or perhaps even fitted with sandals. Though untrue, the story serves to depict just how unworldly Marc Basnight was during his initial foray into statewide affairs. That said, any who doubted Basnight’s persistence and dedication, or even talent, would be sadly mistaken.

Soon after returning from his initial Raleigh meeting, Basnight quickly made clear to the district his version of the Hunt notions of service. Heading over to Elizabeth City, Basnight walked into the office of the district’s chief highway engineer. A professional, the engineer began to explain to Basnight how the office operated by the book. Finally after some time, Basnight simply stated, “Where are all these books?” The engineer pointed them out, whereby the new director hurried over to their location, swept up a handful and dumped them into the trashcan. Basnight said, “I respect you, but I’m going to do it my way. I don’t give a damn about the rules and regulations. You figure that out. We are gonna help people and we are gonna get the job done”.

On the board, Basnight went to work for the region. Among the priorities the Department pushed was a new, monumental $300 million bond issue dedicated to roads. Doing his part, Basnight toured the region he was tasked with representing (Dare, Currituck, Camden,
Pasquotank, Perquimans, Chowan, Gates) selling the plan. In addition to plugging for the bond, which ended up passing, Basnight had to pick projects to support. Essentially, every month, on the second Friday at 10 AM, the board would convene, normally for two hours, in Raleigh at the Highway Building Board Room (although roughly twice a year the gatherings would be held elsewhere within the state, except in 1980 when the ratio was flipped).\textsuperscript{30} During the meeting, the Board would discuss proposals from the professionals to approve and let contracts. However, just because a project was on the list did not equate to automatic approval. Instead, each representative had to fight for their area, in order to secure a positive outcome from the board at large.\textsuperscript{31} Given the funding situation, and the long-range nature of projects, Basnight could not get every one of the region’s immense needs served right away. But, for those he committed to, progress was made due to Basnight’s tenacious attitude. During his initial year, the most prominent projects were placed in the state’s revised highway improvement program including a bypass in Ahoskie, limited work on US 64 in Tyrrell and Dare and the four-laning of US 17 from Elizabeth City to the Virginia State Line.\textsuperscript{32}

Basnight was most passionate about the last of those projects. At the time, US 17 was the primary connector from Elizabeth City to Virginia, and was a gateway to Hampton Roads. Back in the 1970s, the road was narrow, two-lanes and ran through the Dismal Swamp. Despite the pitfalls, the road was well traveled as a number of residents of Pasquotank and the surrounding counties worked in Hampton Roads, at Norfolk Naval Base, the various shipyards dotting the area and the Ford Motor Plant in Norfolk. In addition, proponents of the road advocated its construction in order to drive economic development in the region, for a connection to a major and growing urban center would help stir growth south of the border. In Marc Basnight, road advocates found an ally. In the waning days of the term of outgoing Governor Jim Holshouser,
initial approval had been granted for the project, estimated to take seven years. Basnight was not content to wait. Instead, he vowed to push forward the dates so that construction would begin in 1979, as opposed to the early ‘80s timeframe contained in the approval from the Holshouser administration. In this endeavor, Basnight proved successful, as bids for the portion from Virginia to South Mills, in Camden County, were completed in ’79.  

Similarly, NC 158 was a link between Tidewater and Northeast North Carolina. Running through Currituck, and into Dare, 158 doubled as a way for residents to reach jobs and facilities such as hospitals as well as the path for the summer tourist crowd. Of particular need was a new bridge over the Intercoastal Waterway at Coinjock. The existing bridge was a decades-old swing bridge that was rapidly deteriorating. At the same time, its outdated condition caused immense summer traffic buildup. Battling for the needs of the citizens of the area, Basnight did his due diligence to secure approval of the project. Yet, while he was able to win appropriation for a replacement bridge, road widening was a longer-term quest. Despite his best efforts, Basnight left the board with the project unfinished, although contracts were let for a Barco to Coinjock widening in 1984, and a subsequent Coinjock to Grandy extension the year thereafter. As for the whole project, Basnight ended his tenure doubtful that such an expansion would be completed through the next decade.

While both of those projects took energy, NC 12 was the most arduous campaign. As is the case today, 12 was an immensely controversial road due to the funds it consumed when compared to road’s relatively low traffic flows. Moreover, the road was not impervious to storms, and required constant repair. At the time of Basnight’s tenure, NC 12 was in a wretched state. On Hatteras Island, the road was only sixteen feet wide, with deep potholes that prevented most movement during any rain conditions, especially for low to the ground vehicles. The notion
that a primary road would be in such despair grated natives, especially Basnight who on one rainy day proclaimed, “instead of a center lane on NC 12, we needed a buoy tonight.”

It was thus for 12 that Basnight put forward as much weight as he could. Initially, Basnight was content to go through the normal channels. However, this avenue proved unreceptive, as many non-northeasterners could not contemplate why a tiny road needed substantial funding. And despite charges of hypocrisy that Hatteras symbols were frequently used in North Carolina advertisements, yet the roads to get there were in poor shape, still no action was taken.

Meanwhile, every year travel grew and by 1978 the road averaged over 6,000 cars a day in the summer, far exceeding the hundreds projected when it was designed. Moreover, given the location of the road along a national seashore, the state needed federal consent to gain land to expand the road. Finally, Basnight demanded the Governor himself take action. This personal plea came to be the answer, for Hunt had the state negotiate with the federal government, and he personally overrode the officials in the Transportation Department who opposed expansion of NC 12. As part of the project, the road was expanded to thirty feet in width, was elevated to eight inches at all points, twenty-four inches in low points, and a resurfacing was included which took care of the potholes. Within two years, the state spent over $6 million on Hatteras Island, and another $5.5 million on repairs to the Herbert C. Bonner Bridge, which carried 12 over the Oregon Inlet, and thus served as the only road connection between Hatteras and the rest of Dare County. Marc Basnight had won, but in doing so had learned a valuable lesson: being on the Board of Transportation was not enough to secure the services that were desperately needed in Northeast North Carolina.
Chapter Two: The Senate

In late 1983, Melvin Daniels, by then a five-time incumbent in the North Carolina Senate, called the political elite of Northeast North Carolina together for a meeting. Held at Tuck’s Restaurant, a barbeque establishment in Daniels’ home of Elizabeth City, the purpose of the gathering was unstated. Nevertheless, people throughout the region flowed to Tuck’s on the appointed night. Upon arrival, these delegates would be in for a shock, for Daniels used the function to announce his intent to retire from the Senate. At the same time, Daniels offered a second declaration to the attendees: he endorsed Marc Basnight as his replacement.

Such a proclamation came a surprise to all, including the very person who was endorsed for the position. Prior to that night, Marc Basnight had zero intention of running for any position in 1984. He had recently left the DOT Board after six years of service, and was not seeking a return to Raleigh. Daniels, however, had now thrust him into the spotlight, again. Though unprepared, Basnight was not unwilling, and accepted the endorsement, and his candidacy, filing for the seat on January 4th.

Despite his entry, ongoing redistricting woes caused some question as to the boundaries of the seat Basnight was seeking. Issues with single member districts and minority representation caused a handful of districts to be caught up in legal challenges, and Senate District One was amongst them. Ultimately, the legal wrangling was resolved but the proceedings caused a substantial delay in the electoral calendar, pushing the scheduled primary into the summer and forcing the office seekers to re-file their candidacies. The final map saw District One contain the whole of Chowan, Currituck, Dare, Hyde, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Tyrrell and Washington Counties, and parts of Beaufort, Bertie and Gates Counties. As for those running for the seat, at
the end of the day Basnight proved to be the only Democratic candidate to publicly declare for the vacant seat, and therefore was the nominee by default.

After winning the nomination, Basnight was faced with a stiff challenge in the General Election. Historically, the Republican Party in Northeast North Carolina was weak, and in fact most area counties had never before elected a Republican county commissioner, much less to the state senate. Yet, a robust two-party climate was emerging in the region, and on the forefront of this new wave rode the GOP nominee Dr. Barry McCarty. Dr. McCarty was a young professor of Public Speaking and Debate at Roanoke Bible College in Elizabeth City. Not only was McCarty a skilled speaker but he also was North Carolina’s only certified professional parliamentarian, and would chair the 1984 Republican state convention.\(^3\) Despite his talent, and his dominating victories in the candidate debates, McCarty lacked several of Basnight’s advantages, namely Basnight’s native status, his access to far more ground support, and his endorsement by the many officials throughout the region. However, 1984 as a whole was shaping up to be a bitter year for the ruling North Carolina Democrats, and McCarty looked to take advantage of the forthcoming Ronald Reagan-Jim Martin landslides. Late in the race, however, polling confirmed that Northeast North Carolina remained a Democratic stronghold locally, for Basnight ran out to a 45-29\% lead, even as President Reagan was up by a 52-23 margin.\(^4\)

Marc Basnight went into the final days of the campaign with a lead. But, he also went in with crisis brewing. By 1984, Basnight was the Vice President and one-third owner of Basnight Construction Company. With his father having passed four years earlier, it was Basnight’s generation who were now in charge. During the previous few years, the company had accrued significant liabilities, to the tune of $124,790. Most of that was owed to one entity, Albemarle Asphalt, and they sued the Basnights. Although the vast majority of the debt had been settled by
late 1984, $34,482 remained outstanding. The local paper, the *Daily Advance*, picked up this deficit and the court filings in the closing moments of the campaign, and this new narrative had the potential to change the outcome of the election. Basnight strongly countered, addressing the issue head on at a last minute event, saying, “I’m sorry for what you saw in the paper. It hurt very much. But, I’ve paid my debts and it won’t happen again.”

On election night, the debt issue and the Republican victories at the top of the ticket failed to daunt the Basnight momentum. Sweeping the region, Basnight rolled to a victory by more than ten thousand votes. With the win, Basnight declared he would “focus on development in the northeastern section of the state.” On the other hand, McCarty warned that the Republican Party had a future, an omen that would come to fruition, but one that Marc Basnight would do much to prevent for a considerable length of time.

In January of 1985, Marc Basnight once again ventured to Raleigh. This time, he remembered his socks and shoes. In addition, he came much more prepared intellectually. On the campaign trail the previous year, Basnight had won over a new supporter, one who would go on to become one of the key players in the Marc Basnight story: Walter Royal Davis. Davis had first met Basnight years before, when he had employed Basnight Construction to build his beach house in Southern Shores. But Davis was no ordinary beachgoer. A billionaire who derived most of his fortune from the Texas oil fields, Davis had considerable resources to throw around. In addition, he was a native of Northeast North Carolina, having grown up in the Weeksville area of Pasquotank County. Davis had a substantial love and interest in the region, and in his native state as a whole. In ’84, Davis had asked Basnight why he was running for office. When the answer proved insufficient to the oilman, Davis decided to start sending Basnight the *Economist* and other higher-order reading pieces. Initially, Basnight scoffed at these materials. Here he was,
a son of the beach, working in construction, and running for a seat in the North Carolina state Senate. Why did he need to know what some intellectual in London had to say? But one day, Davis picked up Basnight, and began to quiz the young man on the scope of some recent commentary. Struggling to respond, it was clear that Basnight had not done much with the magazine. Davis promptly exploded, calling Basnight a variant of dumb, backwards dumb, or stupid. Whatever the precise phrase of choice, the point was clear. Angered, Basnight got out of the car and threatened to walk back to Manteo. Yet, the message sunk home. He may have known the affairs of Dare, but he was utterly unprepared for the next stage. Never again, Marc Basnight decided, would he be unprepared. Thereafter, Marc Basnight became a regular reader of the *Economist* and dozens of other works of intellectual renown. Indeed, consuming vast quantities of information became a Marc Basnight trademark, and in time it would be a regular occurrence for Senate members to see the light on in Basnight’s room in Raleigh late into the night, as the Senator read, read and read, long after everyone else went to sleep.

As he arrived in the state legislature, it was far from clear how far Marc Basnight would progress within the body. Though incredibly personable, as a freshman, Basnight was often unheard from, and in fact little of substance was produced from the newly minted Senator in the 1985-86 session. The few times Basnight did in fact address an issue, it mostly had to do with regional affairs. For example, he clearly complained to his fellow Democrats about the neglect that Northeast North Carolina received, and he introduced several bills whose focus was on district issues. For instance, the first piece of legislation that Senator Basnight sponsored had to do with a land transfer tax in Dare County, while the first bill of his to become law enabled Washington County to use the power of condemnation in order to secure road access to sites of economic development. Speaking on the floor was a quite rare event, though he did memorably
lash out at that state of Connecticut for the Nutmeg State’s attempts to claim that the first flight was not conducted by the Wright Brothers, but by a Connecticut resident named Gustave Whitehead.9

Basnight spent most of his time attempting to harness the power of relationships, and he was able to take the pulse of the Senate. As a young man who came out of the Hunt years, Basnight clearly was angled on the side of the modern reformers. Yet, Basnight was different from most of the reformers in that he was quite conservative on the issues, a byproduct of his origins. Thus, he had the ability to connect to nearly any person he talked to, and he genuinely enjoyed the art of conversation. In 1984, for example, shortly after his election, Bob Jordan had called upon the class of 1985 to come to Raleigh for an introductory session. After the conclusion of the session, most of the eight new freshmen dispersed. Two, however, remained deep in conversation: Basnight and a black Durham man named Ralph Hunt. In background, the two could not have been further apart. Yet, in a few moments, Basnight had connected with Hunt, and the two would go on to have a productive and lengthy relationship.10

For Basnight, the engagement continued even on the backbenches of the Senate, where he was apt to crack jokes and win friends. At the same time, despite his late-night reading, he was also quite content to wake up early and join the older members of the caucus for breakfast.11 He was also game to join in on other extra-circular activities such as trips to Senate President Pro Tem J.J. “Monk” Harrington’s Bertie hunting lodge.12 Through his ability to relate to both sides of the caucus, Basnight placed himself in a key position within the Senate.

The moment when Marc Basnight transitioned from backbencher and began his ascent in the legislature is a moment that has long since been forgotten in the annals of North Carolina politics. In December of 1986, after that year’s elections, the Democratic Caucus in the Senate
was faced with a division. At the time, the most powerful person in the Senate was the Lieutenant Governor. In this case, Democrat Bob Jordan held that position. Because Jordan was, after the 1984 onslaught, the leading figure in the state Democratic Party, he actively worked to run the Senate. As a result, the body’s ceremonial head, the aforementioned “Monk” Harrington did not have much in the way of presiding power, but was vested with chairmanship of the influential Rules Committee. Jordan and Harrington had a decent relationship, yet were quite different in style leaving Harrington often absent from meetings regarding items such as the state budget. Still, Harrington was a respected, long serving member of the Senate, and traditionally such a member was who became the President Pro Tem. In 1986, however, Henson Barnes challenged Harrington for the post. Barnes was a young attorney who was viewed as a moderate reformer. This contrasted with the veteran Harrington, who was a farm machinery dealer, and was very much part of the old conservative elite of the legislature. The biggest difference between the reformers and the elites was outlook and style. The elites, often veterans of World War Two or Korea, were tied to North Carolina’s traditional industries like agriculture or furniture, and ran the Senate in a heavy-handed exclusive manner. Reformers on the other hand generally were younger, more educated, employed as professionals or in businesses associated with finance or real estate and deeply believed in a more equitable system for governing the Senate. Being an internal struggle, and a tight one at that, emotions on both sides ran high, and every vote mattered. One vote that was accounted for, though, was Marc Basnight’s. Basnight backed Harrington in the race for Pro Tem. While Basnight generally was an ideological fit with both candidates, he was a loyal person and was friendly with Harrington, as both were men of the Albemarle. At the same time, while many Harrington supporters amongst the old elite were rankled at the challenge, Basnight maintained a good rapport with Barnes. As a result, when
Harrington proved victorious, Basnight had the best of both worlds, for he had supported the
winner, while also leaving a positive image in the head of the now frontrunner for the post the
next cycle. This was evident when Basnight was selected as an escort for Senator Harrington on
the first day of the new session, while also delivering a seconding speech for the Majority Leader
nominee, and reformer, Tony Rand.17

In the aftermath of the Harrington-Barnes race, Basnight was given the chairmanship of
the Natural and Economic Resources and Wildlife Subcommittee of the Appropriations
Committee. Given his background, the appointment fit Basnight well. More importantly, it
presented Basnight with a first hand look at the importance of the Appropriation Committee
within the institution of the legislature. While many members viewed debating on the floor or
sponsoring hot button legislation as the best method for success, Basnight learned that through
controlling the purse strings came the real ability to make changes and assert power within the
state. And indeed, Basnight made several budget requests that found their way into the 1987
budget; for instance, he won an allocation of $550,000 to the Albemarle Commission-Region R
Council of Governments for “community and economic development in northeastern North
Carolina.”18 More notably, given his chairmanship, Basnight helped direct the distribution of
funds that the state received from Exxon, Amoco and Diamond Shamrock as a result of the oil
companies’ settlement of violations of petroleum pricing and regulations with the US
government.19

That was not to say that Basnight did not get involved in legislation that drew the media’s
attention. In the 1987 session, Basnight’s signature legislation, at least according to press
accounts, was an attempt to designate the Shad Boat at the official boat of the state of North
Carolina. That Basnight would back the shad boat should come as no surprise: the boat was a Roanoke Island creation, and was the “‘pick-up truck’” of watercraft on the Albemarle Sound.20

Basnight’s service on Natural Resources also presented him with a new view on issues affecting the environment. By the late 1980s, environmental issues, once ignored, had leapt to the consciousness of Americans. In few places in North Carolina was this as paramount as in District One. With so many jobs based on environmental well being, the coast was in position to notice the degradation of the environment. Some residents began to notice pollution in local waterways, while others grew increasingly restless with the potential of negative runoff from booming industries, particularly in construction, and especially in the building of golf courses.21

In touring his home, Basnight began to hear these complaints, and soon he came to grasp the correlation between clean, healthy water and a robust local economy. At the same time, it became clear that North Carolina was not doing enough to service this growing problem. More and more, people were offering to sell land to the state while others clamored for North Carolina to own parcels of sensitive areas. The major agency tasked with evaluating such purchases, the Wildlife Commission, rapidly became inadequate to handle the demand; therefore the need for a funding source of magnitude emerged.22 In Raleigh, Basnight lent his name as a sponsor to a piece of legislation that would create a Natural Heritage Trust Fund in the state of North Carolina. Joining forces with fellow Senator Lura Tulley, the two envisioned a permanent source of funding so that the state could adequately purchase, preserve and protect key places of natural and historical value. The theory behind the operation was that the legislation would appropriate money to this new fund. Then state agencies such as Environment and Natural Resources, the Wildlife Resources Commission, the Department of Cultural Resources, and the Department of Agriculture would apply to the fund for grants. The fund would then choose
proposals that had the best chance of coming to fruition and award them support, hopefully in conjunction with other grant makers. After working its way through the legislative process, the proposed bill was ratified in August of 1987. In its first twenty years, the fund would be a force for the public good, aiding more than five hundred projects statewide with over three hundred million dollars.23

Basnight won one more important victory out of the 1987 session when he was appointed by Lieutenant Governor Bob Jordan to be a member of the Highway Study Commission. For years, road funding had been a preeminent source of debate amongst North Carolinians, with serious fault lines being drawn amongst citizens from the different regions. As Republican Governor Jim Martin, who hailed from the Charlotte metro area, came to power, the road funding issue became a source of deep division between the Governor and the legislature. Both sides recognized that North Carolina desperately needed more money, and that the state faced great road needs. For his part, Martin sought a significant bond issue, much like the one Basnight had campaigned for as a member of the Transportation board a decade earlier. The legislature led by Jordan was hesitant because of the worry that once the bond was spent, the issue would arise again. After much struggle to provide an adequate formula, the two sides opted to empanel a commission charged with the task of offering a remedy to the 1989 session of the legislature.24 This commission was made up of fifteen members, five appointed by Governor Martin, five by Jordan and five by the Speaker of the House Liston Ramsey. Given his background on the DOT, his status as Vice Chair of the Transportation Committee, and his stated interest in the status of the highway system within the state, Basnight was eager to be a part of reform efforts. In the end, only four Senators merited appointment and Marc Basnight was amongst the four. Importantly, Basnight was one of only three picks on the entire commission to hail from east of Raleigh, with
one from Craven and the other from Wilmington. Once again, it was up to Basnight to be the lone spokesperson for the road woes of the Northeast.25

In 1988, Basnight began to exert himself more forcefully within state politics. No longer viewed as a nobody from the coast, Basnight’s voice within Democratic circles grew. The timing could not have proved better, for a wholesale set of changes was coming to the Democrats in the Senate. Two races in 1988 especially stood out, the Democratic Presidential Primary and the race for Lieutenant Governor. With respect to the former, 1988 showed that Marc Basnight was comfortable standing nearly alone for someone in the midst of a race. That year, the Democratic field was wide open, but in North Carolina one candidate, Al Gore, had a distinct advantage, with the vast majority of the state politicos including Jim Hunt and Terry Sanford in favor of Senator from neighboring Tennessee. Basnight, however, threw his support behind another candidate: Dick Gephardt. In fact, not only did Basnight quickly back the Missourian, but he also sponsored a Gephardt trip to Raleigh a year before the election.26 Despite being out on a limb, as Gephardt finished fourth in the state---though his highest percentage did come in Dare---Basnight had garnered a legitimate experience with a race with implications larger than North Carolina.

Within North Carolina, it would be the Lieutenant Governor’s race that mattered for Basnight’s career. In a wider extension of the Harrington-Barnes race, the two candidates for the number two spot in the state hailed from dramatically opposite sides of the Senate. In one corner was Harold Hardison, while in the other was Tony Rand. From Lenoir County, Hardison was a deeply conservative veteran Senator, and was the favorite of bankers and business. Rand was a youthful modernizer, backed by higher education advocates as well as voters from the growing urban bloc. In the Senate, despite being only a three termer, Rand had quickly risen through the
ranks, and was the majority leader at the time he mounted his bid. Statewide, the race was bitter, as the increasing use of television advertising took its toll. Yet, nowhere was the divide deeper than amongst the members of the Senate caucus. Older members, sensing their power waning were quick to throw their weight behind Hardison, hoping to secure one last reign at the top. Rand on the other hand was a favorite of the younger generation of Democrats, outnumbered at the time, but gaining influence with every session. As Senator Charlie Hipps put it, “It would be less of a House of Lords and more of a House of Commons under Tony.” This new generation extended to Marc Basnight. Freed from having geography influence his ballot, Basnight heavily backed Rand. By moving behind Rand, Basnight clearly signaled where his position lay within the caucus. Though he may have been one of the more conservative of the new generation, Marc Basnight was affirming that he was a member of this era. In May, Rand beat Hardison, confirming where the majority of the Democratic Party voters stood. They wanted to go forward, and thus forward would the Democrats move, even as conservative Jim Gardner defeated Rand in November. Gardner’s victory would alter the course of history.

On the opening day of the 1989 session, Henson Barnes was elected as the next President Pro Tem of the Senate, as Basnight gave the first seconding speech. That same day, the Democratic majority instituted a dramatic restructuring of power within the state. Seeking to retain control, the majority changed the Senate’s operating rules, re-writing Rule 31 to read that the President Pro Tem “shall have exclusive right and authority to appoint the majority party’s membership of all committees….and to appoint committee chairman and vice-chairman.” The ramification of this language stripped the Lieutenant Governor of all his non-ceremonial powers and transferred them to the office of the President Pro Tem. In doing so, the President Pro Tem
became the body’s most important figure. The next day, Barnes exercised his new power in presenting the 1989 committees to the body.

It was expected that Barnes would grant the powerful Kenneth Royall the Appropriations Committee. Royall was a long-standing budget expert, having served in a number of capacities related to state spending since the 1960s. After having spent the past two sessions in leadership, first as majority leader then as the first ever Deputy President Pro Tem, Royall was returning to normal Senate membership and committee work. But while Barnes named Royall as the chair, he sprung a surprise when he opted to pair a younger Senator with the mighty Royall. Instead of retaining all of the budget power in the hands of the veteran, Barnes named Marc Basnight as a co-chair of Appropriations, in charge of the Base Budget. Barnes’ decision surprised Basnight himself, as well as others in Raleigh, who found it hard to believe that a third term Senator from the middle of nowhere could be in such a paramount position. But by tapping Basnight, Barnes was able to install a new guard Senator, and one of his supporters in a prominent role, thereby hoping to shift influence away from Royall and other long-standing older figures. Naturally, Royall was displeased. Used to being in charge, Royall continued to run the show. For his part, Basnight acquiesced to the elder Senator taking charge. Although Basnight had opposed Royall on several issues in the past, and especially had bristled at the disservice he thought Royall and others brought upon the Senate by tightly controlling decision making in small internal group within the body, he saw no need to antagonize one of the leaders of the caucus. Instead, Basnight opted to learn the budget from the veteran, knowing his turn in charge was probable in the near future. Much like his late night reading, or his continuing relationship with Walter Davis, Basnight saw the educational value in a term as a junior co-chair, especially on the base budget side, a slot in which Basnight got to learn the basic funding needs of every operation within
North Carolina’s state government. The faith Barnes showed in Basnight highlighted his emerging rise within the Democratic Caucus.

The 1989 session also saw the return of the roads issue to Raleigh. Over the past year, the legislative study commission had engaged in public hearings and private debates about potential avenues for highway improvement. That said, most of the commission’s efforts were mere formalities until the 1988 elections concluded. Once it became clear that Jim Martin was going to be Governor for another term, the commission began meeting in earnest, both amongst themselves and with the Governor and his Transportation Secretary James Harrington. A number of issues faced the commission including the total amount of spending, the distribution of projects, and the method for raising funds. For his part, Basnight was firm in his convictions over these issues, saying, “While we are willing to contribute in any way we can, we will oppose the package if it does not address the needs of Eastern North Carolina.” December meetings failed to resolve the issues, and the roads debate dragged into the new year.

Eventually, the issue came before the legislature as a whole, and the plan included the use of a trust fund to provide highway dollars, financed by sources such as a gas tax, vehicle use taxes, and title fees. Introduced and passed, after a number of starts and stops, as House Bill 399 (Basnight was a co-sponsor of the Senate version which ultimately took a back seat the House’s) the legislation proposed a new Transportation Improvement Program, with a major initial focus on those roads designated as the “intrastate system.” As Governor Martin described them, “highways were selected…for their primary importance to a region and for their significance to the entire state. They are routes that combine high traffic volumes and great economic potential.”
Within the text of the bill, a number of road improvements which northeasterners had long lobbied for were listed as qualifying for “intrastate” status including four laning US 64 from Raleigh to the Coast, completing the US 17 project, widening US 158 all the way through Whalebone Junction, and muti-laning NC 168 in Currituck. North Carolina had its new source of road modernization, and Marc Basnight was able to make sure that the Northeast’s major needs were codified and therefore could not be ignored. In addition to the biggest projects, the legislation also included a clause for secondary road projects, which continued to be a dire need for the Northeast, just as it had been a decade prior. In fact, the Secondary Roads provision was so ambitious that it demanded that all unpaved roads that generated usage by at least 50 vehicles a day should be paved by the end of the century. Immediately, this proved to be a windfall for several more open and rural parts of District One, as in 1989 alone, Hyde County saw its allocation jump $110,755 to $373,039, while Currituck picked up $72,777.

As the 1991 session opened, Basnight’s patience with respect to Appropriations paid off. More secure in his spot as President Pro Tem, Barnes decided to move Royall off the committee altogether and named Basnight as the full appropriations chair. While certainly an honor, the appointment also proved to be an enormous challenge. As the legislature returned for the session, the budget climate was dismal, in large part due to a national recession. North Carolina faced a deficit of $1.2 billion, its highest figure ever. Options to remedy the situation were not ideal. Given the arduous battles in the previous decade for better funding for road construction and educational spending, cuts were a worrisome proposition. On the other hand, no politician can ever confidently push for a rise in taxes, especially during a period when the people of the state were struggling as well. Basnight, joined by Barnes, Finance Chair George Daniel, and their House counterparts, decided to stake a middle position. Rather than place the entire burden on
cuts or taxes, they strategically opted for a plan that spilt the difference. Known as the 50/50 plan, the idea was to raise $600 million in revenue through a penny increase in the sales tax, a quarter cent increase in the income tax for high earners, a slight rise, with a sunset clause, in the corporate income tax and a three cent boost in the tax on tobacco products. At the same time, Appropriations would find $600 million in cuts to the state government. Through hard work, tough choices, and extraordinary diligence—at one point Basnight and Joe Hackney in the House sat down and traded numbers back forth until an acceptable compromise could be reached—Basnight and company found nearly $587 million in cuts. This enabled North Carolina to balance the budget for the session, as well as keep its high bond rating. In addition, in order to prevent future budget problems, the parties decided to implement a budget reform study commission, and launched the creation of a rainy day fund. By the short session of 1992, the recession had yielded to a point where the committee could institute a pay raise for state employees, and soon enough North Carolina was running a surplus and parking millions in the back up account.36 Through his work on Appropriations, Marc Basnight learned a number of tough lessons about North Carolina’s spending, yet he also came to know how it useful it was to have a mastery of the state’s financial situation.
Chapter Three: A President Pro Tem for the Northeast

A month after the 1992 elections, the Senate Democrats of North Carolina gathered for their biannual organizational caucus. Normally held in Raleigh, this time the December meeting took place far removed from the Triangle, at the Sanderling Resort in Duck. In addition to the change in location, the faces at the caucus were also quite different. In the previous two years a dramatic restructuring among the membership of the upper echelon of the Senate Democrats had occurred. Following recent tradition, Henson Barnes had stepped down after two terms as President Pro Tem. At the same, potential old guard claimants for the spot also left the body: Marshall Rauch, the long serving Finance Chair, was upset in the 1990 general election while in 1992 the bear himself, Kenneth Royall, opted to retire in lieu of seeking another term. As a result, when the Democrats convened their foremost priority settled on electing a leader for the future.

For this leader, the Senators did not have to look far. Indeed, the very reason they were in Duck was because Marc Basnight, sensing his newfound prominence, decided to host his colleagues on his home turf. Between the drive through the Northeast, and the experience at the coast, however brief, Basnight hoped to showcase the many needs he had clamored about for years. Further, Basnight saw the event as a means of excluding the Senators away from the distractions of Raleigh, enabling them to focus on getting to know their fellow Democrats. Moreover, as always, Marc Basnight knew how to work the crowd. As the Virginian-Pilot had noted with respect to Basnight’s time as Appropriations Chair, “he gained a reputation as an engaging and energetic leader with a quick wit, hard nose and a will to fight for his district.” At the Sanderling, these abilities were on full display.
Marc Basnight was the frontrunner for President Pro Tem. As far back as 1990, when it was speculated that Barnes was going to run for statewide office and it was clear that Rauch was no longer going to be a Senator, Basnight had contemplated making a bid. After Barnes did in fact announce his intentions, and as 1992 progressed, the media grew increasingly comfortable with labeling Basnight as the prohibitive favorite for the spot. In many ways the characteristics listed above helped propel Basnight’s candidacy. However, others were also interested, most notably veteran Senator R.C. Soles. After some internal politicking, it became evident to Soles that he did not have the votes to win, for Basnight had corralled the vast majority of the caucus. Thus, by the time the Democrats arrived at Sanderling, Basnight’s election was a fait accompli. When the time for nominations came, Basnight was a unanimous selection, and when the Senate convened in January, he was elected as President Pro Tem.

With the victory, his responsibilities increased dramatically. As the most powerful man in the Senate, and one of the most influential in the state, it would have been easy for Basnight to move on from the Albemarle region and turn his gaze elsewhere. But that sort of attitude never fit Marc Basnight. Instead, he saw the position of President Pro Tem not as a means of transcending his home, but as a means of enhancing the service he felt he could provide to the region. As fellow Senator George Daniel explained in his nominating speech: “Marc is a true and faithful product of this unique region, the Outer Banks, that area of our state that has a heritage of consistently rising to meet the clarion call for leadership. Those are his roots, with history at every turn. This is his heritage—a heritage inspired by the sets of daring and pride brought to us from our mother country as the first settlers reached this shore and strived to call it home.”

Marc Basnight hit the ground running in support of the Northeast. At the same time, he was careful not to overextend himself so early on. In his first session at the helm of the Senate,
Basnight focused on a series of smaller initiatives designed to promote and benefit those back home. For starters, Basnight turned to his aforementioned heritage. 1993 was the 90th anniversary of the First Flight, and with the 100th looming in the future, planning for the event needed to begin in earnest. In order to make sure the affair was as notable as possible, Basnight decided to push for the creation of a commission dedicated to this task. Originally intended for 1993, the draft of the legislation was not completed until the short session of the following year. That did not stop Basnight, though, from securing the support of Senators Jesse Helms and Lauch Faircloth to join the committee. Nor did the delay imperil the commission. Instead, as his previous Senate experience taught him, Basnight eventually found that the best method for advancing the idea was not as a stand-alone item, but as one included within a budget. As a result, the enabling text was found in the “1994-95 Special Provisions” bill. That was not to say its ride through the legislative building was swift; rather, House Democrats initially protested the $75,000 appropriation from the Department of Cultural Resources to the new commission. Nevertheless, the conference report retained the funding, and over the next decade, the commission was deeply involved in the work to mark one of the most important events ever conducted within the state. As a later executive director of the commission said, “The FFCC’s fundamental task is to remind the world what a magnificent achievement the first flight was, to help us all understand what flight has meant to the world and to commemorate that achievement in North Carolina, the United States, and throughout the world.”

Yet as important as historical memory was, looking forward to a better future for Northeast North Carolina was just as critical to Marc Basnight’s conception of heritage. The previous two years, Basnight had watched as Governor Martin had announced North Carolina’s plans for a regional airport and economic complex and as Senator Barnes had spent much effort
into getting said authority located in Kinston. The project, eventually known as the Global Transpark, promised thousands of jobs for the Kinston area. Just as important conceptually, the project was to be implemented by a non-profit economic development corporation with support from the state. This model, of a semi-public agency tasked solely with a focus on a specific area appealed to Basnight, who was always looking for plans that might be of benefit to the people back home. As a result, one of the first items Basnight pushed for after his return to Raleigh as President Pro Tem was a similar entity for the Northeast. Although the specificity of a Global Transpark was a one time only affair, the concept of having a broader advocacy agency was the desire for Basnight and others, especially given the common complaints of neglect from the Albemarle. Working through Senator Bob Martin of Pitt County, with whom Basnight was especially close, the Northeastern North Carolina Regional Economic Development Commission was birthed. As usual, the commission found its origins in a side bill that was eventually merged into larger budget legislation. Moreover, the Northeast was not the only region to draw inspiration for this new concept, for a Western and a Southeastern Regional Commission also emerged out of the 1993 session. Included in their respective creations was a $600,000 initial appropriation for 1993-94, and $1.25 million for the subsequent fiscal year. Although the Northeastern Commission initially struggled with finding a head, and a location, eventually the commission evolved into an organization today known as North Carolina’s Northeast. Since 1993, as intended, the group has worked tirelessly to promote Northeast North Carolina and serve as an effective voice in talks with companies about locating to the region.

The third major initiative that Basnight pushed in his first term was, to the surprise of no one, completely budgetary. Working within the framework of his knowledge base, Basnight sought to continue his enhancement of the services his home received. As he said in an interview
at the time, “There's equity and fairness now, whereas there wasn't any fairness before. In the past we just took whatever they gave us, and we just weren't treated fairly. That doesn't happen any longer.” Instead, 1993-1994 proved to be one of the biggest breakthroughs in funding for projects in the Northeast. In fact, the region received nearly 8% of the money appropriated in the capital budget, a sum of $17.5 million. Although some was spent outside of the explicit boundaries of District One, such the building of an agricultural center in Martin County, a number of items within the more immediate area received help. Among these included funding to complete design work for the fledgling Museum of the Albemarle, money for eco-tourism, contributions to help endow The Lost Colony, and an expansion of the aquarium on Roanoke Island. Later, the transportation budget also included a line item to increase the operating funding for the visitor center on Highway 17 in Camden County, money that enabled the center to remain open on Sundays and Mondays. Each of these items had tangible benefits for the region, and they showed that in the words of the Coastland Times, “this area now has a ‘champion’ in the General Assembly.”

In the ensuing sessions of the Legislature, Marc Basnight continued to work for Northeast North Carolina in a similar manner. As he settled into his role as leader and continued to win re-elections, he grew more and more able to push for greater visions that benefited the state at large as well as the Northeast. Whereas he once had been critical of North Carolina, and had taken the view that the Outer Banks should look to Virginia, and not Raleigh for support, now he saw it has his duty to permanently link the far East back to the Tar Heel State. By the 1996 session, Basnight was re-elected for a third term, breaking the recent precedent. Meanwhile, it was in 1996 that Basnight first began promoting one of his signature pieces of legislation. In the 1980s, Basnight had seen the changes in the environment and had worked to stem them through land
purchases. However, despite efforts at the time, North Carolina still had serious environmental challenges. This was especially evident with respect to rivers where nitrogen overload had begun to seriously diminish animal life, and posed a massive threat to the quality of the water. While the issue had been discussed in the state during the 1990s, no action had been taken. But in the lead up to the 1996 short session, supporters of the environment found they had a powerful ally: Marc Basnight.

In early May, completely unexpectedly, Basnight took the issue head-on and offered a proposal for a Clean Water Management Trust Fund. According to his plan, 6.5% of the yearly money that the state earmarked but did not spend would automatically get re-allocated to the new fund. In 1996, this was projected to equate to $47.1 million, and in the future the estimate ran to at least $30 million per year. Although far short of the state’s needs in terms of environmental protection, the fund was essential to beginning to combat the problems, and most critically it offered a solution that was politically possible. By dispersing money that was otherwise committed, Basnight was able to support the environment without having to raise taxes. At the same time, the fund could get to work right away, and would replenish every year. According to Basnight, “The Clean Water Trust Fund will work to reduce pollution in our rivers, streams, lakes and sounds, and it will also build a network of riparian, vegetative buffers and greenways for environmental educational and recreational benefits.”15 In addition, $21 million beyond the Trust Fund was also promised to clean up the Neuse River and to restore wetlands. While securing creation of the fund was popular, actually funding it was a challenge, albeit for reasons beyond the program itself. In the 1996 session, Democrats in the Senate and Republicans in the House faced off over the budget, mainly over what to do with the state’s surplus. After hitting the bottom in late June, a period in which the Republicans adjourned the House without passing
a final budget, the sides returned in July and finally reached a deal in early August. As part of the agreement, in the final budget $55 million was appropriated for the environment, including the 6.5% figure for the Fund.\textsuperscript{16}

When the legislature reconvened for the 1997 session, Marc Basnight touched on the environment in his opening address. With a passionate plea for his home Basnight called for North Carolinians to mend their ways: “The Neuse, as many other rivers in North Carolina, flows to the ocean. Today we find great stress on our coast. It’s so quick and easy to condemn a fisherman who casts his nets upon the waters of the seas and say he is at blame, that he is the person who is so wrong. We have to change our habits and our ways or our ocean will become as polluted as the Neuse and many other waterways.”\textsuperscript{17} Later in the session, Basnight even returned to the floor to speak, a rare moment, in favor of an environmentally friendly piece of legislation known as the Clean Water Responsibility Act. The bill most notably included a moratorium on hog farming, as hog waste was a key contributor to the growing pollution problem.\textsuperscript{18} Over time, Basnight saw to it that the Clean Water Trust Fund received its share of funding from the state, and by the mid-2000s, the fund was receiving standard appropriations of $100 million a year. In District One, the Trust Fund has over time funded from its own coffers the following sums: In Currituck, five projects at $1,311,610; Camden, five at $6,090,460; Pasquotank, three with a cost of $4,128,600; Perquimans, three for $749,000; Dare, eighteen at $21,893,068; Tyrrell, twelve to the tune of $15,790,662; Hyde, nine at $10,257,544; Washington, five for $3,012,000 and Beaufort, twelve at $8,370,700.\textsuperscript{19} Thus, for the commonly associated counties of District One, this one fund’s impact has been immense, helping to preserve or rehabilitate a number of tracts of land and better handle storm and wastewater. Without the drive of Marc Basnight, neither these projects, nor $1 billion spent statewide would have materialized in the fashion that it did.
Despite having a background in construction, Marc Basnight was at the forefront of environmental advocacy in North Carolina. He did so because he was eager to protect the waters he had cherished as a child and as an adult, and because he wanted his children and grandchildren, and his constituent’s children and grandchildren the same chance to enjoy and live off the beautiful Scuppernong Bay, the Albemarle Sound, and myriad other waterways that dot Northeast North Carolina.

Even as Marc Basnight pushed for greater environmental measures in North Carolina, he still staunchly believed in efforts to enhance the state’s business climate, particularly with respect to rural areas. In 1998, Basnight’s efforts to provide equitable services to Northeast North Carolina took a new turn: natural gas. Unlike roads, which had at least existed in the region prior to Basnight’s work, natural gas lines were completely absent from the Northeast. Increasingly, however, natural gas was one of the key components that companies looked for when selecting sites for new facilities. Concerned citizens had recognized this problem, and District One Representative Bill Owens had backed provisions to construct natural gas pipelines to the region in his first two terms in Raleigh. Despite his efforts, Owens at the time lacked the clout needed to ensure passage of state mandated service. North Carolina Natural Gas owned the exclusive rights to the region, but refused to extend lines, citing cost. Thus, officials began to petition Basnight in earnest to back a natural gas project. In December of 1997, he announced, out of the blue, that North Carolina would fully subsidize the cost of a line from Ahoskie to Elizabeth City, via Edenton. But while personally supportive, he also recognized the challenges a push might face. In January, Basnight warned locals in Elizabeth City that the pipeline’s approval might come at the expense of the Museum of the Albemarle’s final finishing touches. Though he was powerful, Basnight was still mindful of the conditions of the state, and he was worried North Carolina
might not be able to fund both. Owens, however, viewed the dilemma slightly differently saying, “Basnight has been so successful in getting money to our area, I’ll be honest, there is resentment and jealousy out there.” Nevertheless, Marc Basnight did not give up on either project. At the same time, his commitment in favor of pipelines caused a flurry of activity among local leaders in the Northeast, and in a February meeting these individuals endorsed the Basnight plan of a regional authority for distribution. By the time the 1998 short session began, the Senator had an alternative funding scheme: a bond issue. Already the Senate was planning a massive issue on water and sewer needs, designed to further enhance the clean water projects of the previous session. Now, Basnight proposed adding $100 million of gas as a component of the overall referendum. In addition, the provision applied to only twenty-two designated counties classified as “unserved,” and that were “not likely to get service anytime in the near future.” Among those named included the Northeastern counties of Camden, Chowan, Currituck, Dare, Gates, Hyde, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Tyrrell and Washington. Eventually, that sum doubled to $200 million, and was dedicated fully to fourteen counties in Eastern Carolina. After winning approval from the legislature to appear on the ballot, the referendum was passed in November. Soon thereafter, a multi-phased plan was designed for completion of the project, with Phase I starting from Ahoskie and running east to Gates, and then south to Edenton. From Edenton, the line went east to Hertford and then to Elizabeth City. In Elizabeth City, the project spilt with one line running across the north side of the city and into Camden, and then Currituck. The second line entered Elizabeth City, with plans to service the Coast Guard Base. In Currituck, the line also spilt, with a portion dedicated towards servicing the growing area of Moyock, while the other, in phase VII of the project, ran down county to the Wright Brothers Bridge and into Dare. In all, the plans for the District One portions projected a three-year construction process, and by October of 2001,
lines were already laid in Elizabeth City. Today, natural gas lines run throughout Northeast North Carolina, providing the Albemarle with the same services that came as a byproduct of population and economic growth in the rest of the state.

Beyond physical infrastructure, human capital also comprised a key component of Marc Basnight’s dreams for a better North Carolina in general, and for the Northeast in particular. Although Basnight lacked an extensive education, he readily bought into the notion that the way forward for the Tar Heel State was through an educated workforce. Therefore, at the same time as he pushed for natural gas, Basnight also endorsed a number of educational enhancements, both in K-12 education and at the university level.

In the early 1990s, after his election as Governor, Jim Hunt pushed for the establishment of Smart Start. Smart Start was designed as a program to ensure that children received better fundamentals for their future education through early learning and health programs. Furthermore, Smart Start was intended to help parents find a stable structure for their children while they worked. By 1998, Smart Start existed through slightly more than half of the counties in North Carolina. In District One, however, the program was in place only in Bertie, Dare, Pasquotank and Washington Counties. Because of its limited reach, Governor Hunt thought the time was at hand for Smart Start to expanded statewide. To do so, Hunt needed the legislature to provide adequate funds. In Marc Basnight, the Governor found a willing friend. Basnight had supported Smart Start since its inception, and his avid reading of research showed him that such programs were the best method for helping kids achieve. As a result, Basnight was eager to extend funding statewide, all the while believing in July of 1998 that “now is the time for us to bring Smart Start home.” Because of the support of Basnight and other leaders in the Senate, Smart Start received the funding it needed to operate. The House, however, proved to be stingier, for they
sought to pass tax cuts prior to committing to funding new programs. The impasse over the
budget continued throughout the summer and deep into the fall, as the short session of 1998
continued. Even as late as October, with the elections looming, the sides lacked an agreement.
Finally, near month’s end, the parties reached a final accord. Included within the various sections
of the compromise was a concurrence on funding Smart Start to the tune of $42.5 million.
Though less than the money Governor Hunt had initially hoped for, it was still enough to expand
the program to every section of the state.\textsuperscript{24}

The next budget year, Marc Basnight once again displayed how his role as President Pro
Tem helped the people of the Northeast. For years, North Carolina had special provisions within
its education budget for school districts that were classified as “Small Schools” as well as those
that were designated as “Low-Wealth.” In 1999, Basnight focused on efforts to increase the
amount allocated to these two funds. Throughout the district, a number of schools fell into both
categories, and therefore Basnight was well versed in the struggle for funding. 1999 also
presented a new and unique challenge. For many years, Currituck County had been one of the
smallest in the state. However, in the last two decades of the twentieth century, the population of
Currituck exploded as Virginians crossed the border and settled the bedroom community of
Moyock. This expansion in population threatened to remove Currituck from receiving funding
from the small school fund, from which it had been getting a yearly provision of $883,410.
Going over the limit would have caused Currituck to lose money the second time it exceeded the
cap, and then lose all of its allotment the third year. To make up for the gap, Currituck would
have to raise its property taxes by four cents. Such a sudden change would have stung for
residents of the county. Basnight recognized this harm, and went to work to prevent the loss.
First, he maneuvered to have the grace period extended from one year to five years. Then, when
the House decided to shift small school funds into the low wealth budget, Basnight had the Senate send the funds back, in order to enable Currituck primarily, but also several other counties including Hyde, Tyrrell, Camden and Chowan, from losing significant revenue. In the aftermath of the switch, the Currituck School Board passed a resolution of thanks to the Senator, and Superintendent Bill Dobney was quoted as saying, “We’re very glad to have Marc looking after our needs.” Meanwhile, with respect to Hyde, the 1999 incident was not the first time a Basnight backed project had helped that school system. In 1997, $30 million of a bond proceeds had been diverted to small and poor schools, however, Hyde had not been eligible due to inflated income from tourism. Knowing the difference between numbers on a piece of paper and reality on the ground, Basnight had thus been on the forefront of writing language so that a system with property tax rates higher than the state average could also qualify for the funds. This alteration had enabled Hyde to gain $5.2 million from the state at the time, a massive influx of aid.

Basnight was also a champion of the University of North Carolina system. While his efforts for all the campuses across the state, and especially Chapel Hill and State, were robust, that did not mean he ignored the needs of his local university, Elizabeth City State. On the contrary, Basnight helped secure funds and programs for ECSU with regularity. One of the first projects that Basnight took a shining to was a Fine Arts Complex. In 1993, during Basnight’s first term as President Pro Tem, he had ardently pushed a bond issue, which lavishly spent on the university system. From the bond, Elizabeth City State secured several million towards the new building. Later in the decade, as the university required funding for other elements of the project, Basnight was always happy and eager to lend a hand. Over time, he was influential in helping to steer several million more to the project. In all, Basnight’s support for ECSU was rooted in the fact that the university was the school for the people of Northeast North Carolina, and that ECSU
students ought to receive similar experiences and opportunities as their counterparts elsewhere in the state. A commitment to the arts would help provide the school with wide range offerings beyond what had existed prior, and was a major step forward for ECSU in expressing the school’s ability to furnish quality programs throughout the institution.  

More help was soon on the way for ECSU, and universities across North Carolina. In 2000, after a decade of sagging funding and rankings at the system’s campuses, North Carolina’s leaders became convinced that drastic changes were necessary. A report commissioned by the UNC Board of Governors listed billions in needs. North Carolina was not in a position to appropriate the money out of the general fund, so legislators, namely Senator Basnight, turned to the tried and true formula: a bond issue. Particulars of the fight to get the bond are detailed, but are not pertinent here. What is critical is that the legislature passed a record breaking $3.1 billion provision that was endorsed by the voters in November. Included within the $3.1 billion were funds for needs on all campuses throughout the state, including at Elizabeth City State. In fact, ECSU projects came in at just short of $50 million, including complete renovations of four classroom buildings, a partial renovation of a fifth, a total overhaul of the Graduate Center, a Lab building and three residence halls. In addition, the campus also derived funds for the building of an entirely new residence hall, a new student center, and a number of utility improvements such as in electrical distribution, heating and air. Essentially, in one step, the bond issue enabled ECSU to modernize its facilities and totally change its exterior presentation.  

A few years later, Basnight once again went to work for ECSU. In 2004, legislative leaders decided to put together another substantial package for the a number of health care facilities in North Carolina, centered around a state of the art cancer center at UNC. While Basnight was an ardent supporter of the UNC project, he also saw that other potential items were
likely going to be attached to the overall bill in order to secure passage from his fellow legislators. As such, he decided to take the opportunity to re-express his support for a project at ECSU. Like in other areas, Northeast North Carolina suffered from a lack of medical practitioners, with one of the most severe shortages in the pharmaceutical field. The region’s population was too spread out to support robust pharmacies and only a handful existed. This posed a major burden for residents who needed medicine and trained distributors. Meanwhile, the only public institution that offered a program in North Carolina was located at UNC. But, after graduation many UNC students were hesitant to move to rural North Carolina. As a result, Senator Basnight decided to advocate for the creation of a pharmacy school at ECSU. The thinking of Basnight and people at ECSU was that if a school existed in Elizabeth City, then students would be more apt to stay in the area. Recognizing the challenges of creating an institution from scratch, the proposal had a limited number of students enroll in Carolina’s program but take classes via satellite at ECSU’s campus. Although a number of Carolina alumni were opposed to the idea, and the UNC system Board of Governors had yet to weigh in on the proposal, funding for a program at Elizabeth City State still made it into the package. Several years later, a massive new building dedicated to the program opened in Elizabeth City. Unfortunately, applications never kept up with construction, and as of this time new admissions to the ECSU portion of the pharmacy program are not being accepted. Despite the program’s struggles, the dream of service for the region fell fully in line with the vision displayed throughout Basnight’s long career in public service.

Regardless of the many issues he dealt with, the Marc Basnight story always returns to pavement. For a man who made his mark in highways, the Senate leadership provided yet another opportunity to influence the manner in which the coast was connected to the rest of
North Carolina. During his eighteen-year run as President Pro Tem, Marc Basnight worked as a fierce advocate on a number of highway projects. Because the General Assembly funds the construction allotment for Department of Transportation based on an established formula and not on a session-by-session basis, his actual legislative power was limited. Restraints never held back Basnight and in lieu of running bills through the General Assembly, he turned to other means of showing support, namely intense lobbying of transportation officials to hurry up projects. Indeed, Senator Basnight never picked projects on a whim and had those implemented. Rather, he endorsed proposals based on the needs of those in his district, often in concert with local officials. Moreover, all were listed in some level in the state’s Transportation Improvement Plan, although more often than not they were planned for longer than Basnight found ideal. For that reason, he would often strive to begin projects, even with the simple stages of right of way acquisitions and permitting, with the belief that if the project had tangible on the ground evidence of progress, it would be hard to prevent its continuance.

The first example of his drive occurred in the summer of 1995, when Hurricane Felix threatened the Outer Banks. Officials opted to press for an evacuation, but this decision turned into a logistical nightmare. In order to remove the estimated 200,000 residents and tourists of the northern beaches, traffic flow was funneled west through Manteo and over the two-lane Umstead Bridge, or north over the two-lane Wright Brothers Bridge and through mainland Currituck. In total, the entire operation lasted ten hours. Although Felix never hit, the challenge of evacuation vividly caught the attention of North Carolina officials. But one leader was unsurprised. Marc Basnight, who had been an advocate for years of remedying the situation warned, “You could have a tragedy before this project is completed.” Soon thereafter, following a meeting with Basnight and the Transportation Secretary, Governor Hunt formally announced the acceleration
of a bypass of Manteo, which included a new four-lane bridge to the mainland. By 1998, the bridge project was underway, and four years later on August 16th, 2002, a magnificent 5.2-mile stretch, the longest in the state, was opened. That day, nearly 4,000 people turned out for inaugural ceremonies, featuring actor and Manteo resident Andy Griffith driving Governor Mike Easley on the first voyage across the span. Despite the presence of a number of dignitaries the man who won the most acclaim was Senator Basnight. Not only did Basnight obtain the loudest applause from the crowd, but he also garnered toasts from the other keynote speakers. Easley, doing more than just riding, highlighted Basnight’s contribution saying, “As soon as I was elected governor, Marc said, ‘I want a bridge.’” Of course, the project was well on its way prior to his election; nevertheless, as Representative Bill Culpepper noted, “The bridge probably would have come about in time, but it came about 10 years earlier because of Marc Basnight.”

Meanwhile, at the same time as Hunt first announced the acceleration of the Dare bypass, a nearly $100 million project was in the works to finally expand all of U.S. 64. Even at this late stage of North Carolina development, 64 remained two-lanes through most of Washington and Tyrrell Counties. In Washington, for example, 64 ran through such small areas as Skinnersville and Scuppernong, and frequently tractors cut off the flow of traffic. On the flip side, residents struggled to move about on summer weekends, and often the beach traffic was not keen on following the established speed limits. Moreover, it was Basnight’s belief that the lack of timely roads inhibited industry from locating to the region. Many residents though were not fond of the DOT’s initial plans to widen the road, which would have uprooted a number of homes and businesses. Thus, Basnight put his President Pro Tem’s weight behind efforts for a new path for 64 that would avoid small areas, disrupt fewer existing homes, and allow high speed, nearly uninterrupted access to the coast several minutes faster than had previously
existed. For his efforts, Basnight endured substantial flack, some from those in Washington County fearful of the high speed, but also from figures elsewhere such as the *News & Observer*, whose editorial board lambasted Basnight’s “heavy-handed approach.” Such criticism did not inhibit Basnight’s vision for easy access between the capital and the coast, and in time the project developed much along the lines Basnight had advocated. By 2001, construction started on a number of the portions of the route on the south side of the Albemarle Sound, and by 2005, 64 was a four-lane road from Plymouth to Columbia, with a new bridge over the Scuppernong River. Yet, not all of Basnight’s hopes came to fruition. By the time he left the Senate in early 2011, the Columbia to Manns Harbor section of the project, particularly through the tiny community of East Lake, was still waiting a final environmental impact study. Despite this exception, Basnight’s forty-year fight for a modern 64 proved a resounding success.

Basnight also was a prominent supporter of making improvements to US 17. Much like 64, 17 continued to run through a number of towns, impeding its flow. Plans to bypass communities like Washington had been in envisioned since Basnight’s days on the DOT Board in the 1970s yet had been classified as long range, without an actual attached date of action. By the turn of the century, Washington and Beaufort County leaders reasoned the wait had gone on long enough. They soon began expressing their frustration in earnest, and if ever there was a means of getting Senator Basnight to help, it was complaints from constituents that some element of state government was not working in their favor. Thus, Beaufort County officials were ecstatic in December of 2003 when the Senator visited with a message of hope: right of way purchases for the bypass was on the list of items to be conducted the very next year. Similarly, in Elizabeth City, Basnight was a staunch advocate of constructing a bypass, a project that was completed in 2002. Later, Basnight also engaged in lobbying for a connector road
between the town and the Bypass, a road that was on no one’s radar in Raleigh before Basnight’s enthusiastic support. Today, Halsted Boulevard Extension, as the connector road is known, has seen tremendous economic growth, fueled by construction of a Wal-Mart Supercenter in the mid-2000s as well as the building of several other shopping and business complexes.

That was not to say that all of Marc Basnight’s projects have been successful. In fact, two prominent bridges, a Bonner replacement and the Mid-Currituck, failed to make it to construction. The most striking of these failures was Currituck, where plans for a bridge across the Currituck Sound to connect the mainland portion of the county with Corolla had been suggested for decades. For many in the area, the bridge was viewed as vital for unity, services and traffic. Statewide, however, the span was often seen as nothing more than a waste of resources. In the Senate, Basnight was an ally of the bridge. In the mid 1990s, shortly after becoming President Pro Tem, Basnight articulated a vision to build the bridge by the turn of the millennium. In a break from his usual actions, he was even willing to back legislation, and a toll, in its favor. In 1994 and 1995 bills were passed which authorized both toll roads in North Carolina and a specific authority for the Currituck project. Yet, as session after session of the General Assembly concluded, no bridge was built. Although Marc Basnight had significant clout, and despite the support over time of multiple governors and even more secretaries of transportation, the bridge was delayed by a group far beyond the reach of Raleigh: the federal government. Various government agencies, notably the Corps of Engineers, consistently deferred approval of the critical environmental impact statements, mainly due to worries over the impact the bridge would have on further growth and development in the northern Outer Banks and the lack of consensus among regulatory agencies.
Even as the process stalled, Basnight continued to look for means of securing funding for the bridge, should it win approval. In 2002, House and Senate leaders decided to cobble together a handful of projects from across the state that were lacking funding in hopes of building a coalition in support of the improvements. In order to further win votes, projects in Mecklenburg and Wake County were placed first on the priority level. In 2002, the merger of these projects overwhelmingly passed the Senate, and subsequently won approval in the House. Yet, despite the package, the Mid-Currituck Bridge continued to hit roadblocks. In 2003, an initial purpose and need statement was finally signed, but at the same time, DOT announced it would then need to undertake a formal transportation study. And despite the bill authorizing the use of a toll to generate revenue, the state’s Turnpike Authority Board first had to be reconstituted and then had to give final approval before any toll could be implemented. Further legislation on tolls in 2005 once again specifically addressed the project stating, “One of the Turnpike Projects shall be a bridge of more than two miles in length going from the mainland to a peninsula bordering the State of Virginia.” Despite consistent pushes, as time wore on, not even the best efforts of Marc Basnight could bring the bridge to fruition. Each study and alternative route was contested and due to inflation costs ballooned as the years passed. By the time of Basnight’s departure, the bridge was tantalizingly close, and in 2012 the final Environmental Impact Statement was realized. Yet, as of this writing, it appears that the movement from the planning board to existence has indefinitely stalled.

Thus through three distinct methods: a mastery of the budget, tremendous lobbying and a vision for big commitments that North Carolina ought to undertake, Marc Basnight did much to alter his native region. While he endured great criticism outside of the Albemarle for his propensity in this respect, Basnight’s efforts were based not on personal gain, but on his deep
sense of heritage and a desire to see the Northeast be restored, not excluded, as a region within North Carolina. In addition, Basnight never forgot the common person, always making time to talk to his constituents, regardless of party affiliation or profession, both at home and in Raleigh. Perhaps the greatest critic of Marc Basnight was Basnight himself. In 2011, he reflected on his tenure in a dismissive way saying, “I guess my shortcoming were, number one, I did not build up northeastern North Carolina. I built up Chapel Hill, Raleigh, Charlotte, Greensboro, Winston, Greenville, but not my district; didn’t do it.” Despite his view, it is clear that in eighteen years as President Pro Tem, Marc Basnight still found a way to make a tremendous difference in the infrastructure and quality of life in Northeast North Carolina.
Chapter Four: The Great Senate Organization

For the Democrats of North Carolina, the 1994 elections were a complete and total debacle. As Tony Rand, who was attempting to return to the Senate after a six-year hiatus recalled, “Election day was strange. People didn’t want to talk, didn’t want to look at you. I mean the body politic was not happy.”¹ This discontent manifested itself throughout the state, as Democrats lost the majority in the House for the first time in the twentieth century, and nearly lost control of the Senate as well. In fact, had Republicans fielded a candidate in all fifty districts, there is a decent likelihood they would have captured the upper chamber. Among challenged Democrats, no incumbent was immune. Leaders, like Appropriations co-chair George Daniel went down to defeat, as did bright newcomers such as Elaine Marshall. In the latter case, the electoral back and forth was bitter, for Marshall lost the 15th Senate District by a mere eight votes. Subsequent re-counts evened the contest, and forced a rare special election in the spring of 1995. In a further litmus test on the recent results, the Republican wave was confirmed, as their nominee Dan Page crushed Marshall, winning a resounding 57% of the vote.² With a bare-bones 26-24 majority, an ascendant Republican Party and a looming Presidential race (a national Democrat had not won the state since Jimmy Carter in 1976), Senate leaders knew they needed a new recipe for managing elections.

In year’s prior, legislative elections had been individualistic and low budget affairs. Generally speaking, they were won and lost on retail operations or name recognition, and the best use of a candidate’s time was to attend big drawing local events, festivals and celebrations. Advertising usually meant billboards and newspapers, with a radio spot mixed in here and there. Although television had penetrated North Carolina’s elections in the 1980s, the spots were almost always reserved for US Senatorial or North Carolina executive campaigns, therefore state
legislative races often cost only in the low tens of thousands of dollars. Indeed, this status quo held into the early 1990s. Take the case of Elaine Marshall’s first Senate bid in 1992: in her pre-election finance form, dated October 27th, Marshall reported no cash on hand to start, $18,696.61 in contributions, an $8,300 loan and expenses of $21,019.18. Her year-end data meanwhile showed that from the 27th through Election Day, the Marshall campaign raised an additional $7,526.20 while spending $13,953.77. The single biggest expenditure was for signs.

But after the results of 1994, it was clear that a budget of some $35,000 was no longer going to be sufficient for a tightly contested race. In addition, Democratic leaders, led by Marc Basnight, realized that they could not, and should not rely on the individual candidates alone to hold the Senate blue. In 1994, Republicans had used a cohesive message to appeal to voters. Why, then, could the Democrats not use a cohesive, broad-based strategy to do the same? As a result of these ponderings, the answer to the Senate leaders became a centralized election system whereby Democrats in Raleigh gained a more effective say in how Democratic candidates, who hopefully would be their future colleagues, competed in every section of North Carolina.

Essentially, the workings of this system, called the Democratic Senate Caucus, were quite simple, and yet wholly effective. After establishing the caucus the Senators hired a director. From there, the director hired professional staffers and consultants whose sole responsibility was to build a winning electoral outfit. Without emotion, these political specialists relied on polling, numbers and hard data to inform strategies and messaging, both in terms of a unified state presentation as well as a more locally tailored platform and to direct the distribution of funds. In order to gain support, candidates themselves had to demonstrate an ability to raise money. More importantly, they had to be competitive. Not every Democrat received support. Incumbents and challengers alike only gained access if they had a chance to prevail, while those in high
Democratic performance areas were excluded. Given the stakes, maximization of resources was essential, and therefore the caucus could only afford to make bets on individuals who had legitimate credentials. If a candidate’s polling numbers took a hit, the caucus could and did cut off their support. By having a central hub in Raleigh, choices were more informed, and Democratic Senate leaders always had access to the most up to date data. Marc Basnight, for example, while driving home to the coast, could find out the latest on-goings from a race in the mountains through a simple phone call to caucus staffers. Later, as technology advanced, Basnight knew the numbers and news from throughout the state instantaneously. The caucus also had one further rule: it only operated in general election situations, steadfastly refusing to interfere within the Democratic primary if multiple contenders emerged. Thanks to this system, Democratic candidates throughout the state were more prepared, could target prospective voters in a far more substantial manner, and had access to advice that was unparalleled in North Carolina legislative electoral history.⁵

As for people like Basnight, or Tony Rand, or David Hoyle, they too played a critical role beyond working with the professionals to direct support in the most effective manner. The new caucus system would only work if it had access to adequate capital. Thus, the incumbent Senators would have to raise vast sums.⁶ This was especially true of Marc Basnight. As the leader of the Senate Democrats, Basnight was in prime position to solicit funds. At the same time, his generally uncontested seat enabled him to move nearly every dollar he brought in to the new operation. Lastly, the same qualities that enabled him to win support amongst his fellow Senators translated well in the art of fundraising. In fact, Basnight was able to draw money from people of all walks of life, from business PACs to individual donors. Indeed, perhaps the most notable of Basnight’s efforts were the latter affairs. Throughout his time in leadership, Basnight
held lavish events throughout District One, capped with a biannual oyster roast in Wanchese. Routinely frequented by thousands of locals, these events soon became among the highlights of the year, all the while drawing substantial contributions to the Democratic cause from ordinary citizens. In appreciation of their support, Basnight would also bring other North Carolina notables to the coast in order to interact with the attendees.7

As a result, Basnight was one of the Democrats’ prime fundraisers. In 1995, after realizing the need for a more substantial operation, he channeled serious efforts in the money department. That year, an off year electorally, Basnight pulled in a quarter million, and ended with over $300,000 cash on hand.8 Meanwhile, the newly founded caucus created its own political action committee, the North Carolina Senate Leadership Committee, in order to better coordinate revenue. In 1995, the PAC raised an amount similar to Basnight’s haul.9 The next year, Basnight continued to raise money through his own personal committee but distributed significant amounts to the leadership fund. Indeed, in the final days of October, Basnight forwarded $257,000 to the PAC, and on November 1st, he added another $10,000.10 As for the PAC, it then sent most of its money to the Senate Committee of the North Carolina Democratic Party, the official financial distribution arm of the caucus.11 Within the NCDP, the caucus underwent several account changes over time. Through 1998, it filed separately under the aforementioned name. Eventually, however, the account was subsumed into the greater Democratic Party statements. Yet, regardless of its incarnation in financial forms, the principle remained the same: leaders raised money, then distributed it to the central fund which forwarded it either through direct contributions or, as was more commonly the case, though direct ad buys. And unlike the signs and billboards of the individual campaigns of the recent past, television now became the staple of electoral efforts.12 As time went on, the moneys involved increased. In
2006, for example, Basnight raised over $1.5 million during the electoral cycle, with most of the money coming from four sources: business PACs such as Wachovia or Dominion Power, groups like the North Carolina Pork Council or the SEIU Committee on Political Education, wealthy individuals, usually with business interests throughout the state, and donors in District One. From this amount, $1,161,000 went to the North Carolina Democratic Party for the Senate efforts, all of which was transferred in the month of October.\textsuperscript{13} Considering that this sum itself was nearly three times what the entire North Carolina Republican Party spent on contributions to Senate candidates in 2006, these funds were certainly essential to the efforts of the Democratic Caucus.\textsuperscript{14} Over time, the caucus’ success proved evident as the Democrats maintained the Senate cycle after cycle.

Of course as important as money is to modern elections, the candidates themselves still deeply mattered. In this effort, Marc Basnight and the Democratic Caucus attempted to field the strongest people possible. As mentioned prior, the Caucus did not interfere within primaries. They did, however, try their best to convince individuals to run for office. In doing so, the Democrats looked for “good people who had solid recognition in their community, who had proved their worth where they lived.”\textsuperscript{15} In a reverse of the electoral set up of the caucus, when recruiting candidates, Marc Basnight would go to the prospective individual rather than having them come to Raleigh. Over time, Basnight convinced a number of prominent leaders to make bids for office. Perhaps the most notable of these were Kay Hagan and Walton Dalton.

Prior to entering electoral politics, Dalton was a community-oriented lawyer in Rutherford County. Twice, he turned down efforts seeking his candidacy for the North Carolina House of Representatives due to a desire to remain close to his family. In 1996, however, a new figure approached Dalton. One day, Marc Basnight, joined by Richard Conder, the Senate
Majority Leader, and David Hoyle, the Senate Finance Chair, whose district was just a few counties east of Dalton, arrived in Rutherfordton. Their aim was to get Dalton to run, but this time for the Senate, against a member of the wave of 1994, Dennis Davis. Davis had succeeded the legendary Democrat Ollie Harris, who had stepped down after twenty years in office at the age of eighty. In fact, this seat was the very sort that Democrats needed to win in order to preserve their majority. Thus, it was imperative that Basnight and his allies were successful in fielding a credible challenger to Senator Davis. Arriving out west, the Senators presented their best pitch, and soon thereafter Dalton decided in favor of a bid. When Dalton became the nominee, the seat soon became a test of the caucus creation. Although he fundraised well enough to not need a substantial caucus contribution, and in fact sent money the other way, Dalton benefited greatly from the polling and consulting efforts of the professionals in Raleigh. In November, Dalton proved victorious, and in holding onto his seat for several elections to come, added to the long lasting Senate majority.

In many ways, Kay Hagan proved to be a similar story. A prominent figure in Greensboro civic circles, Hagan fit Marc Basnight’s criteria perfectly. In addition, Hagan had a political background, as she was the niece of Florida Governor Lawton Chiles. Prior to the 1998 filing season, Basnight called Hagan and requested a meeting in Greensboro. Although Hagan expressed disinterest in a candidacy, she agreed to sit down with the Senator in her husband’s law office. During the meeting, Hagan re-affirmed her stance, but Basnight pressed on saying, “You are the one person, I’m told, in Guilford County that could make a major contribution to the welfare of North Carolina.” After more consideration, Hagan decided to take the plunge and run against appointed Senator John Blust. As a prodigious fundraiser, Hagan did not directly
need the caucus cash, yet her victory in the general election greatly helped to increase the
security of the Democratic majority, and to fend off a potential Republican takeover.

It was through these efforts that Marc Basnight revolutionized legislative elections in
North Carolina. Through centralizing efforts, Basnight transformed campaigns, and he reshuffled
how the puzzle pieces were put together in the process of making up the North Carolina State
Senate. What was once a very local effort now became a statewide consideration with Marc
Basnight squarely in the middle of the entire operation. He worked to recruit candidates, raise
boatloads of money, hire the best staff possible, and most importantly, win. Within one electoral
cycle, Democrats gained four competitive seats to increase Senate majority to 30 to 20, even as
the House remained in Republican hands. Soon thereafter the Basnight organization was in full
stride, and by the first legislative session of the new century, Democrats held a commanding 35-15
lead.

But the Basnight organization also went beyond just electoral victories. Basnight used the
support garnered on Election Day to pursue substantial policy efforts within the General
Assembly. In addition, he saw to it that the same qualities that had convinced him to support the
candidates initially were exposed in the daily works of the Senate. If a Senator had talent, then
Marc Basnight wanted that talent to be used in a manner that best benefited the state of North
Carolina. At the end of the day, winning did not motivate Basnight as much as building a better
North Carolina; therefore, he never worried that other members of the caucus might upstage him.
Moreover, as one who had quickly risen through the Senate ranks, Basnight had little interest in
factoring a wait your turn mentality while making appointments. Basnight also placed little
attachment to traditional gender roles. While women historically struggled to win powerful
appointments in North Carolina, the Basnight Senate was noted for having females in key
positions. The bottom line was that if Marc Basnight saw potential in a Senator, then that person was going to get every chance to live up to Basnight’s expectations.

As a result, promotion through the ranks of the Senate can be found in the resumes of a number of prominent North Carolina Democrats over the last two decades. The first of these was Beverley Perdue. In 1995, the chairmanship of the powerful Appropriations Committee opened after George Daniel’s defeat the previous November. Perdue had only just been re-elected to her third term, but that did not bother Basnight. Although a number of Senate leaders were leery of Perdue’s promotion, Basnight rejected these concerns out of hand, instead “trusting that she would be good” and defending her continued loyalty to the caucus. For the next few years, Perdue was in the middle of intense negotiations over the budget, all the while receiving substantial knowledge in the affairs of the state. The post also helped to solidify Perdue’s voice on educational matters, an area that had long been a concern for the Senator. Beyond displaying her leadership through the committee process, Perdue was also recruited by Basnight to be the lead sponsor of the Clean Water Trust Fund Bill. By placing Perdue’s name on the bill, Basnight enabled her to gain significant credibility on environmental matters, which became a major focus of state activity in the mid-1990s. Later, in the early 2000s, Basnight once again overlooked service time when he appointed both Walter Dalton and then Kay Hagan as appropriations co-chairs. These examples are but three of the multitude of crucial appointments Basnight made during his time in Raleigh.

But just how much did Marc Basnight’s influence impact these Senators’ later statewide victories? On one hand, decisions to run were made by the people themselves. While candidates did have conversations with Basnight about their intentions, announcements and campaigns were independent of Basnight’s positive or negative electoral support. Moreover, any belief that
Basnight personally picked people to run for each individual office was, according to Perdue, the result of “fantasy not fact.” Ultimately, the Governor has a valid point. Candidates themselves had to possess an electability factor in order to be successful. Yet, it is also abundantly clear that if Marc Basnight had never President Pro Tem, then the starting points for these future officials would have been different. Each and every candidate from the Senate certainly had a more impactful resume, better connections and more enhancing experiences due to their association with Senator Basnight. As Walter Dalton noted, his time as Appropriations co-chair marked “a tremendous advantage” when he later traveled throughout North Carolina, and this “foundation” undoubtedly better helped him relate in campaign stops during his winning bid for Lieutenant Governor.

In November 2008, the Democrats hit the high water mark of the Basnight era, as six Democratic nominees with varying experience, but experience nonetheless, in the Basnight led Senate won statewide elective positions. Perdue won the Governorship, while Dalton became Lieutenant Governor. In the Council of State races three candidates, incumbents Elaine Marshall and Roy Cooper and newcomer Janet Cowell proved victorious. Most surprisingly, Kay Hagan won a US Senate seat. But even as good fortunate shined on these candidates, the end of the Marc Basnight era loomed. Basnight’s close allies slowly disappeared from the caucus: Tony Rand resigned in 2009, while David Hoyle and RC Soles joined in announcing that 2009-10 was their end of the line. In winning elections, Basnight had focused on the best possible candidates, now he found the caucus to be quite different in background and political beliefs than in the early nineties. Meanwhile, in the legislative building a new power was emerging. In the aftermath of widespread defeat in 2004, Senate Republicans vested their leadership in Phil Berger. Berger soon began the slow process of institution building, creating a Republican equivalent of the
Democratic Senate Caucus.\textsuperscript{24} As the Democratic leaders either aged or departed for other opportunities, Berger saw an opening for the long awaited Republican takeover. Aided by souring national and state attitudes towards Democratic rule and an influx of cash from a combination of ideological big donors and moderate business interests who had long supported Democrats like Jim Hunt and Marc Basnight, the Republicans rode to crushing landslide victories in 2010. Shortly after the election, in face of declining health, Marc Basnight left the Senate. Following the scare of 1994, Basnight built the state’s last powerful Democratic organization, one that kept the Senate blue for sixteen more years and provided outlets for advance to a number of prominent North Carolina officials. In the end, despite a deep and broad legacy, not even the great Basnight organization could win every election.
After Marc

In the session following his departure from the General Assembly, a number of Marc Basnight’s priorities came under challenge. In the first budget that lacked Basnight’s touch in decades, Northeast North Carolina faced a hostile audience. In the initial spending proposal offered by Basnight’s successors in the Senate, the entire operating budget for the Museum of the Albemarle as well as gap funding for the Mid-Currituck bridge was slashed entirely. Meanwhile, the Senate also moved forward with a proposal to toll all state’s ferries including those that serviced Knotts Island in Currituck, Hatteras-Ocracoke and Hatteras-Swan Quarter in Dare and Hyde and Auroa-Bayview in Beaufort. Fortunately for the region, its House members, Bill Owens and Tim Spear, were needed to pass an override of the Governor’s budget veto. As part of the compromise to win their votes, the two legislators were able to save the Museum and remove tolls intended for Knotts Island and Ocracoke. Unfortunately, Owens and Spear’s clout was only temporary as both retired from the General Assembly after the 2012 elections. Their departure left the Northeast vulnerable in Raleigh.

Owens and Spear were not the only Basnight allies to leave office. In early 2012, Governor Perdue, beset by low approval numbers and facing a tenuous path to re-election, opted against running for a second term. With her decision, the Democratic field became wide open. Three contenders decided to seek the nomination, former US Representative Bob Etheridge, state representative Bill Faison, and a product of the Basnight organization, Lieutenant Governor Walter Dalton. In a break from his traditional silence on public endorsements, Basnight, now freed from the constraints of leadership, quickly backed Dalton. Just weeks before the primary, in late April of 2012, Basnight even went as far as to send a letter to his former supporters throughout the District One with a ringing pro-Dalton message, saying, “I hope you will join me
in voting for Walton Dalton for Governor. He can help make North Carolina a better place for all of us.”

In May, Dalton captured the Democratic nomination, and for the most part won the counties of the Northeast. In winning, Dalton again showcased how useful time in the senate during the Basnight era was for future statewide office seekers. But 2012 also highlighted that conditions in North Carolina were already much different. Although Dalton was the nominee, in November he badly lost to Pat McCrory in an election so good for the North Carolina Republican Party that Basnight’s own former senate seat fell into Republican hands, albeit by a mere twenty-one votes.

Within a few short years, the Senate Democrats became a far cry from the powerful organization Marc Basnight had built. Always known during the Basnight era for their prodigious money advantage, by the beginning of the 2014 electoral cycle they had fallen behind the Senate Republicans in cash on hand by a rate of four to one. Meanwhile, the caucus was reduced to just seventeen members as redistricting, retirement and electoral defeat took their toll. Although the financial disadvantage was deep, all was not lost. Despite the rapid demise of the Basnight era, officials with roots in the Senate organization remained throughout North Carolina. In late 2013, Roy Cooper, the state’s Attorney General, made it clear that he was interested in running for Governor in 2016. Widely viewed by Democrats statewide as the party’s great hope, Cooper had a long tenure in the General Assembly prior to his 2000 election as Attorney General. Starting in the House, Cooper was appointed to the Senate in the early 1990s, during which time, he befriended Basnight. By decade’s end, Cooper had risen all the way to the post of Senate Majority Leader, intimately working with Basnight on a daily basis. Thus, nearly half a decade after the end of Marc Basnight’s Senate career, his influence continues to have a deep part within the politics of North Carolina.
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Notes

Introduction:
1Marc Basnight, interview by Ferrel Guillory, August 24, 2011, transcript, 6-7.
2Clark Jenkins, interview by author, September 4, 2013.

Chapter One:
5George Daniel, interview by author, August 5, 2013.
1Marc Basnight, interview by Ferrel Guillory, August 24, 2011, transcript, 2; Bobby Owens, interview by author, July 26, 2013.
2Basnight, interview, 2; Catherine Kozak, “Family ties bind Daniels kin, N.C. history,” Virginian-Pilot, August 16, 2009.
3Suzanne Tate, Memories of Manteo, 18.
4Ibid., 19.
5Sarah Downing, Hidden History of the Outer Banks, 43.
6Ibid., 69-71.
7Bobby Owens interview.
9Tate, Memories of Manteo, 29-30.
11Bobby Owens interview; Hall and Christensen, “Power-Part Two.”
12Basnight interview, 3-4.
14Bobby Owens interview.
17Bobby Owens interview.
21Bobby Owens interview; Gary Pearce, interview by author, August 23, 2013; Rob Christensen, interview by author, October 14, 2013.
22Gary Pearce, Jim Hunt, 82.
24Pearce, Jim Hunt, 18.

Bobby Owens interview; Pearce interview; Tom Taft, interview by author, September 18, 2013; Christensen interview. The term “stalwart” was used by Owens.

Bobby Owens interview. Owens witnessed this event.

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Chapter Two:

1. Basnight interview, 9; Bill Owens interview.
8. Tales of this story and Davis’ influence abound. For the best information I used: Basnight interview, 9-11; Bobby Owens interview; Jan DeBileu, “Coastal Sketch: Marc Basnight, the Squire of Manteo,” *Coastal Review Online*, February 14, 2012; Cline, 231.
12. Christensen, interview.
14. A similar division can be found in the writings of Paul Luebke who labels North Carolina politics into “modernizers” and “traditionalists.” While useful, his version of “traditionalists”
encompasses Jesse Helms and the religious wing of the Republican Party, a poor comparison point for the older Democrats of the 1980s Senate.


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Basnight, interview, 22.

As a testament to this learning, Basnight produced a sixty-three page base budget, labeled as Senate Bill 996, in the 1989 Session.


Henson Barnes, Work In Progress, 367-68, 371; Daniel, interview; Joe Hackney, interview by author, October 2, 2013.

Chapter Three:


4Journal of the Senate, 1993 Session, 12.
Lauch Faircloth to Norma Ware, January 31, 1994, Marc Basnight Personal Collection; Jesse Helms to Marc Basnight, January 31, 1994, Marc Basnight Personal Collection.

Gann Watson to Norma Ware, May 16, 1994, Marc Basnight Personal Collection.

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Randy Keaton, interview by author, July 17, 2013; Bill Owens, interview.


Jack Betts, “Rattling cages and yanking chains,” Charlotte Observer, June 18, 1995. Basnight’s exact quote was “When I first came to Raleigh, I took the view that my area should be a part of Virginia.” His rational was distance and a similar environment.


28 “Statement from Senate President Pro Tempore Marc Basnight regarding the grand opening of the Fine Arts Complex at Elizabeth City State,” Marc Basnight press release, April 18, 2000, Marc Basnight Personal Collection.

29 “Capital Facilities Project Descriptions,” The University of North Carolina, August 2000, 8-10, Marc Basnight Personal Collection; Basnight, interview, 33-37; Keaton, interview; Bill Owens, interview.

30 Basnight had actually backed the pharmacy school idea two years prior, however full approval and construction funding was not included until the 2004 package.


41 Keaton, interview.

42 Bill Owens, interview.


44 Jenkins, interview; Hoyle, interview.


46 O’Neal, interview; Etheridge, interview.
Chapter Four:

1Tony Rand, interview by author, February 5, 2014.
3Daniel, interview.
5Daniel, interview; Jenkins, interview; Walter Dalton, interview by author, September 24, 2013; Christensen, interview; Hoyle, interview; Rand interview.
6Hoyle, interview.
12Rand, interview.
15Basnight, interview, 52.
16Dalton, interview.
17Basnight, interview, 51.
18Christensen, interview.
19Perdue, interview; Bobby Owens, interview. The quote comes from Bev Perdue while Basnight’s defense of her loyalty comes from Owens.
20Perdue, interview.
21Dalton, interview.
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