



**From:** Jim Williams, Public Policy Polling  
**To:** Interested Parties  
**Subject:** New Hanover County Voters Express Serious Concern Over Budget Impacts on Local Teachers, Hospitals, and Medicaid  
**Date:** March 31, 2026

A new Public Policy Polling survey of voters in North Carolina's 7th Senate District finds that the nearly three-year failure to pass a state budget is generating significant constituent backlash against State Senator Michael Lee, who chairs the Senate Appropriations Committee on Base Budget. Voters in the district express serious concern about the impact of the budget stalemate on local teachers, hospitals, and Medicaid recipients, and those concerns appear to be translating into electoral vulnerability for Lee.

The survey finds Trump underwater in the district at 41% approve / 55% disapprove, and Democrats hold a 7-point lead on the generic legislative ballot (49-42). Lee himself posts a negative job approval rating, with just 31% approving of his performance and 37% disapproving.

When voters learn that Lee chairs a Senate budget committee and North Carolina families have still gone nearly three years without a budget, 62% express serious concern about his role. And when voters are presented with specific, local consequences of the budget failure, they register serious concern at high levels:

- 59% of voters express serious concern that Lee's inaction has left nearly 1,700 teachers in New Hanover County waiting nearly three years for a pay raise that depends on a state budget.
- 58% express serious concern that more than 48,000 people in New Hanover County who depend on Medicaid for their health coverage are at risk without a state budget.
- 57% express serious concern that hospitals in New Hanover County depend on state budget funding to keep their doors open and serve local patients.

These concerns are showing up on the ballot. In an initial test, the race between Lee and Democratic candidate Jessica Bichler starts tied at 41-41. After voters hear information about the budget's impact on their community, Bichler opens a 7-point lead, 48-41. That represents a significant shift driven almost entirely by budget accountability, and it suggests that as voters learn more about the real cost of legislative inaction, Lee's position could continue to weaken.

Public Policy Polling surveyed 588 voters in NC Senate District 7 on March 25-26, 2026. The margin of error is +/- 4.0%. 87% of interviews were conducted by text message and 13% by telephone.

