



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

February 17, 2026

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Ben Kinney *Publisher at Business North Carolina and SouthPark Magazine*

by Elly Clary

Economically, North Carolina is “in a really great spot compared to other places in the country,” the publisher of state’s premier business magazine assured Rotarians.

Business North Carolina’s Ben Kinney peppered his presentation with examples of why CNBC named the Tar Heel state tops for business for 2025. The business-friendly bent is well-known, he added, but reasons for it are changing.

Historically, industry relocated in North Carolina for cheap power, he said, but lately the lure includes quality health care, solid education, temperate climate and inviting atmosphere for raising a family.

Because he constantly travels the state talking to business and industry leaders, Kinney speaks with authority. Celebrating its 45th year, his Charlotte-based monthly has been recognized as the nation’s Best Regional Business Magazine. It’s owners also publish SouthPark Magazine.

Workforce is a major reason the state’s economy continues to expand, Kinney said, praising training capabilities of the community college system. “CPCC, are you kidding me? What a great community college,” he raved, generating spontaneous applause.

The state’s industrial history is enviable, he said, but added: “Today’s manufacturing is not your father’s manufacturing.” It’s going high tech.

He cited the electric vehicle and battery boom that includes almost \$21 billion in investments, led by Toyota's \$8 billion battery plant in Liberty. Playing on a license tag motto, Kinney said "We're first in flight **business** now" with JetZero's intention to bring 14,000 jobs to Greensboro.

"Pharmaceutical expansion is happening like crazy," he said, citing players such as Eli Lilly and Genentech creating a biomanufacturing corridor from Greensboro to Greenville in Eastern North Carolina.

"We're rapidly becoming a national leader in data and IT services," Kinney said. Though sometimes controversial, he added, data centers are mushrooming.

And while 2023 was a record year for tourism, the state equaled that performance in 2024 even though Hurricane Helene laid waste to much of Western North Carolina.

Kinney also issued cautions. Workforce is a major plus, but it qualifies as a challenge. Employers struggle to find qualified workers and "training is a big need."

Artificial Intelligence threatens to wipeout lower-level service jobs, he said, adding "I've got a feeling in five years our workforce is going to look totally different."

His other worries include business uncertainty because of national policy maneuvers and affordability concerns related to child care and housing.

Still, Kinney's view of North Carolina's fiscal picture is bright. "The (business expansion) announcements are still coming through."

A Charlotte native, he called the city's growth amazing. "Charlotte got cool because its citizens and its business leaders just let it happen," he said. "You're doing the right thing. Just keep on doing what you're doing."

Below are the recordings of the meeting:

With Slides: <https://vimeo.com/1166989487?fl=pl&fe=sh>

Without Slides: <https://vimeo.com/1166989751?fl=pl&fe=sh>

Introduction of the program begins at approximately 24 minutes.