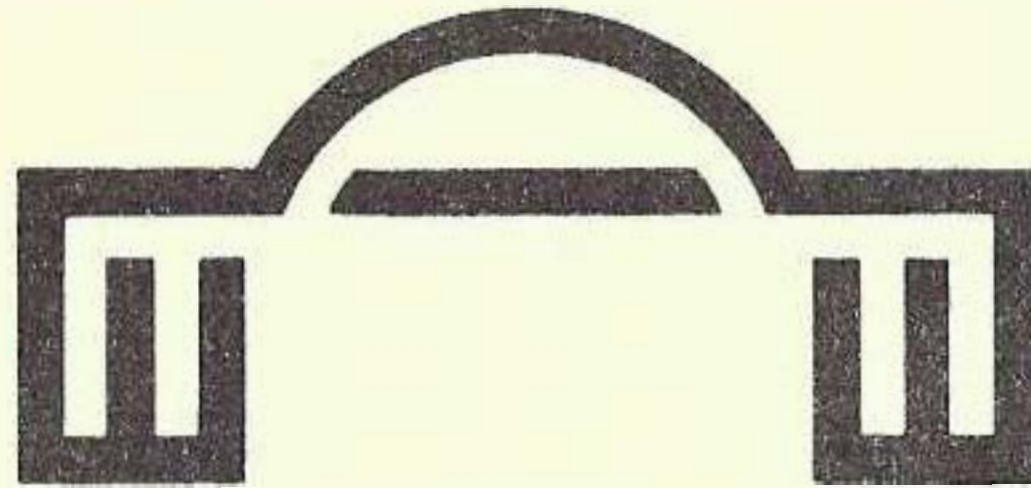




NORTH CAROLINA CENTER FOR
PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH INC.

News Release

For Release: April 12, 1985

N. C. CENTER ASKS LEGISLATURE TO PUBLISH VOTING RECORDS

The N.C. Center for Public Policy Research announced today that it will no longer publish votes by the legislature and urged that the General Assembly begin to do so itself. The Center has published all votes taken by all 170 legislators on all public bills in the sessions since the fall of 1981.

"We as citizens need to be able to find out how our legislators voted on bills that affect us," says Thad L. Beyle, Chairman of the Center's Board of Directors. "As it stands now, there are only three copies of a vote sheet available for over 5 million North Carolinians. That's not enough to go around," he adds.

Beyle has asked Lieutenant Governor Robert B. Jordan III, who serves as President of the Senate, and House Speaker Liston B. Ramsey to take leadership roles in making the record of how legislators vote available to the public. Beyle says the legislature is upgrading its computer system and that this is the ideal time to plan how to make voting records more accessible. Beyle urges North Carolina's citizens to write the Lieutenant Governor and Speaker in support of having the legislature publish its votes.

All legislators' votes on public bills are electronically recorded on voting machines in the House and Senate chambers. However, there are only three computer printouts of the votes; the copy in the Legislative Library is the only one available to the public. Moreover, says the Center, these vote sheets do not describe in any way what the vote concerned.

"That one vote sheet lists only the bill and amendment numbers, the names of the legislators, and 'Y's' or 'N's'. It takes a very persistent and knowledgeable citizen or reporter to know where to go, how to find the vote sheet, and most importantly, how to interpret it," explains Beyle.

The Center's 1981-84 reporting service was entitled How The Legislators Voted. During that period, the Center published how the 50 members of the state Senate and 120 members of the House voted on more than 4000 bills, amendments, and motions. Beyle said the Center received praise for the accuracy of its reporting. The vote reporting service was used in at least four ways:

- ° Some newspapers (e.g. the Washington Daily News) subscribed and then re-published the votes of their local legislative delegation on key votes.
- ° Lobbyists, associations, and corporations used the service to track who was voting for bills they supported, and who was opposed.

- ° The Democratic and Republican parties and individual candidates used the report to identify votes that could become important in political campaigns.
- ° Public libraries said that citizens used the report to read about actions taken in the legislature or to identify legislators who would support their causes.

The Daily Bulletin published by the UNC-CH Institute of Government describes the status of a bill but does not tell how legislators voted. The House and Senate Journals are published about a year after the session ends, and they do not include all electronically recorded votes.*

Beyle said the Center had begun to publish the votes of legislators because "this is an essential service for government accountability." The Center was experimenting to see if such a publication was possible. He said the Center's Board decided to end the project because the Center had demonstrated its feasibility and because it is proper for citizens to expect state government to take responsibility for making this information publicly available.

The N. C. Center for Public Policy Research is a private non-profit research and educational organization based in Raleigh. It was formed in 1977 to study state government programs and important public policy questions in North Carolina. The Center receives general operating support from the Mary Reynolds Babcock and Z. Smith Reynolds Foundations, 44 corporate contributors, and 600 individual members. Past research efforts by the Center include studies of all boards and commissions in state government, the disparity in funding among local school districts, and regulation of auto insurance in North Carolina.

For more information, call Thad Beyle at (919) 962-3041 or Ran Coble at (919) 832-2839.

* Senate Rule 25(f) reads: "One copy of the machine print-out of the vote record shall be filed in the office of the Principal Clerk, and one copy shall be filed in the Legislative Library where it shall be open to public inspection."

House Rule 20(f) reads: "One copy of the machine printout of the vote record of all votes taken on the electronic system shall be filed in the office of the Principal Clerk, and one copy shall be filed in the Legislative Library where it shall be open to public inspection."

Carolina

CLIPPING SERVICE
1115 HILLSBORO
RALEIGH, NC 27603
TEL. (919) 833-2079

NEWS
CHARLOTTE, N.C.

DEC-04-84

No more published voting records

320
When the General Assembly appropriated \$210,000 in 1982 for a spouse abuse program, only two representatives — S.B. Lacey from Avery and Reed Poovey from Catawba — voted no. How do we know? Why, the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research told us so.

Next year, there won't be anyone to tell us, or you, who voted for what. Except when newspapers print roll-call votes on particularly newsworthy bills, political accountability in this detail will go the way of the buggy whip and the Corfam shoe. And that's too bad.

The center produced, beginning in the fall of 1981, a list that was

unlike any other because it not only recorded who voted which way on every major piece of legislation, but explained in some detail what the vote meant. The list was valuable to all who followed the work of the legislators in any detail.

The center has discontinued its experiment, but not before urging on legislative leaders the value of having the legislature itself publish the votes, as some state legislatures already do. A decision to do so would be an expensive act, but one that would be a mark of openness from a body that could benefit from a bit of same.

FEB 10 82

320-

94

On the record at last

In the tight and clubby little world of North Carolina's legislature, accountability to the home folks is hard to come by. Many a telling fact about what legislators do in Raleigh gets lost in transit between Capitol Square and their hometowns.

On matters crucial to a district, local media and the honorables themselves make sure word gets back. On major statewide issues, bigger newspapers and other media try with varying energy and success to keep score.

But information is scarce and chancy on other specifics. Few outside their own circles know which lawmakers spend time in which lobbyists' pockets. Few know how the hometown representative votes when the home folks aren't looking.

Getting answers has been hard and time-consuming. With exceptions like the League of Women Voters, groups who take the trouble to do it usually have some strong, special stake. And they keep vote scores only on a few chosen issues.

Now, for the first time ever, a record of all roll-call votes has been published. The non-profit watchdog N.C. Center for Public Policy Research wisely started on a small scale, with votes from last October's special sessions. But listing, name by name, all the votes

just from those two short sessions took 66 legal-size pages.

As an accountability device, this record is still difficult to use. Without knowing a bill's number you're out of luck. And the initial format has no index, either by bill number or by subject matter, though the Center hopes to add one in later editions.

The record also can only show electronically recorded votes, usually taken on second reading. Sometimes an important bill meets death before that, on a non-recorded committee vote, or gets major changes later, on a voice vote—while big bills like Appropriations, with their many amendments and rewrites, may have 20 or more recorded votes to trace.

When the Center compiles votes for a long session, it may have to exclude the hundreds of local bills if the record's size is to be kept manageable. And timely publication is essential. Such records won't be worth their printing paper unless they can be issued very soon after a session ends.

But the Center deserves a statewide round of applause for starting the Voting Report Service, which it wants to make available via subscriptions at perhaps \$30 per long session.

We hope public interest will make this venture in accountability succeed.