



NORTH CAROLINA CENTER FOR
PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH INC.

NEWS RELEASE

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LEGISLATORS' EFFECTIVENESS EVALUATED

For the fourth consecutive session, both Senate Majority Leader Kenneth C. Royall Jr. and House Speaker Liston B. Ramsey were rated the most effective legislators in the latest evaluation compiled by the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research. Effectiveness rankings were released today for all 50 members of the N.C. Senate and 120 members of the House of Representatives for the current 1987-88 N.C. General Assembly.

"Since the Center's first effectiveness rankings in 1978, the survey has been a consistently fair measure of the effectiveness of legislators," says Ran Coble, executive director of the Center. "Those who assess effectiveness and who make the rankings are the best qualified people to make these judgments -- the legislators themselves, registered lobbyists who work with the General Assembly regularly, and capital news correspondents, who cover the legislature daily."

The 10 Senators rated most effective were: (1) Kenneth C. Royall Jr. (D-Durham); (2) Marshall A. Rauch (D-Gaston); (3) Anthony E. Rand (D-Cumberland); (4) Aaron W. Plyler (D-Union); (5) Henson P. Barnes (D-Wayne); (6) Harold W. Hardison (D-Lenoir); (7) Charles W. Hipps (D-Haywood); (8) Russell G. Walker (D-Randolph); (9) Joseph J. Harrington (D-Bertie); and (10) R. C. Soles Jr. (D-Columbus).

The 10 members of the N.C. House of Representatives rated most effective were: (1) Liston B. Ramsey (D-Madison); (2) William T. Watkins (D-Granville); (3) Bobby R. Etheridge (D-Harnett); (4) George W. Miller Jr. (D-Durham); (5) Martin L. Nesbitt Jr. (D-Buncombe); (6) Daniel T. Blue Jr. (D-Wake); (7) Joe Hackney (D-Orange); (8) John J. Hunt (D-Cleveland); (9) Dennis A. Wicker (D-Lee); (10) and Richard Wright (D-Columbus).

Senator Royall has been ranked first in effectiveness in the Senate six times since the Center began the project in 1978. Royall serves as Deputy President Pro Tempore. This is also the fourth consecutive session in which Rep. Liston Ramsey has been rated most effective in the House. In each year of the Center's effectiveness rankings, the Speaker of the House has topped the list in the House -- first Carl Stewart (1977-80), and then Ramsey (1981-87).

The effectiveness rankings are published as a supplement to a larger publication called Article II: A Guide to the 1987-88 N.C. Legislature, which is released every other year. This book contains biographical and voting information on each legislator. Also included are the following:

- business and home addresses;
- party affiliation, district number, counties represented, and number of terms;
- occupation and education;
- committee appointments;
- number of bills sponsored and number of these which were enacted into law;
- individual votes on important bills in the past session; and
- past effectiveness rankings.

The legislators, lobbyists, and capital correspondents were asked to rate each legislator's effectiveness on the basis of participation in committee work, skill at guiding bills through floor debate, and general knowledge or expertise in special fields. The respondents were also asked to consider the respect the legislators command from their peers, the political power they hold, and their ability to sway the opinions of fellow legislators. "Effectiveness is a neutral concept," says Coble. "You can be an effective conservative or an effective liberal."

The 1987-88 ratings mark the sixth time the Center has undertaken such an effort. The first edition in 1978 evaluated the performance of the 1977-78 General Assembly. The response rate to this most recent survey was the highest ever. Eighty-two of the 120 House members responded, as did 40 of the 50 Senators, 126 of 258 registered lobbyists based in North Carolina, and 23 of 46 capital news correspondents. Thus, the overall rate of response was 57%, which is far above standards of statistical reliability.

There's a high correlation between chairing a major money committee and being rated among the most effective legislators, the survey shows. "The two seem to march together in lock-step," notes Coble. "But it's more than a matter of the spoils belonging to the victor. The legislators who chair appropriations and finance committees usually get high effectiveness rankings -- but they get appointed to chair those committees because they already are effective members of the House or Senate."

The Center's release noted that first-term legislators and members of the minority party -- in this case Republicans -- usually have lower effectiveness rankings. First-timers usually are less experienced and move up in the rankings over time. For example, House members who had served one full previous term moved up an average of 13 notches this year, while second-term Senators moved up an average of 9 places in the rankings. Republicans are in a minority in both houses and thus receive no appointments to committee chairmanships. However, most Republicans with legislative service prior to the 1987 session moved up in this year's rankings.

Longevity of service was a key factor in obtaining a high ranking, whether Democrat or Republican. Of the legislators ranked in the bottom 40 in the 120-member House, only seven had served more than one prior term. In the Senate, only four of the 50 Senators ranked in the bottom 10 had served more than one prior term.

The legislators moving up the most in the rankings in the House were Representatives Alexander M. Hall (D-New Hanover), Albert S. Lineberry Sr. (D-Guilford), Ray C. Fletcher (D-Burke), and Coy C. Privette (R-Cabarrus). The Senators moving up the most in the rankings were William D. Goldston Jr. (D-Rockingham) and Marc Basnight (D-Dare).

The highest ranked freshmen legislators in the House were Roy A. Cooper III (D-Nash) and Sharon Thompson (D-Durham). The highest ranked freshmen in the Senate were George Daniel (D-Alamance) and Franklin Block (D-New Hanover).

Rep. Betsy L. Cochrane (R-Davie) was both the highest ranked (a tie for 16th) woman and top Republican in the House. She serves as House Minority Leader. Rep. Daniel T. Blue (D-Wake) was the highest ranked (6th) black. In the Senate, the highest ranking woman was Helen R. Marvin (D-Gaston) at 26th, while Sen. James C. Johnson Jr. (R-Cabarrus) was the top Republican at 30th. The highest ranking black Senator was William N. Martin (D-Guilford) at 27th.

The Center noted in its release that at least four Senators and 11 House members have chosen not to run for re-election to their same seats in the legislature this year, including several with high effectiveness rankings. This could lead to a shift in power bases in both the House and Senate. For example, in the Senate, Senators Rand and Hardison are both running for Lieutenant Governor and Sen. J. J. Harrington is retiring. All were in the top 10 in effectiveness. In the House, Rep. Bobby R. Etheridge is running for state Superintendent of Public Instruction, while Rep. Richard Wright is retiring. Both were in the top ten.

The N.C. Center for Public Policy Research is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit corporation created to examine state government policies and practices. It does not endorse candidates. The Center is supported in part by grants from the Z. Smith Reynolds and Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundations, both in Winston-Salem. Other funding comes from 109 corporate contributors and 700 individual and organizational members. The N.C. Center publishes a quarterly magazine called North Carolina Insight and issues book-length research reports. Past studies have been issued on boards and commissions in state government, for-profit hospitals, the legislative budget process, and state environmental policies.

Copies of Article II: A Guide to the 1987-88 N.C. Legislature and the supplement containing the new effectiveness rankings are available from the Center for \$16.80 a set, plus \$1.50 postage and handling if mailed. Write the Center at P.O. Box 430, Raleigh, NC 27602 or call (919) 832-2839.

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