



NORTH CAROLINA CENTER FOR
PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH INC.

NEWS RELEASE

For Release on Tuesday, March 13, 1990

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CENTER SAYS N.C. GOVERNORSHIP IS NATION'S THIRD WEAKEST

The governorship in North Carolina is the third weakest in the nation, the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research says in the latest issue of its quarterly magazine, North Carolina Insight. The Center says the office of the Tar Heel governor ranks ahead of only Texas, which ranked 49th, and Rhode Island, the country's weakest governor. The new study rates the relative strength of each of the 50 governors with Maryland's governor ranking as the strongest in the United States.

The study, by UNC-CH Political Scientist Thad L. Beyle, compares the 50 governors on the basis of seven institutional powers common to the office. In a similar study published in Insight in 1981, North Carolina's governor was ranked fifth weakest in the land. Since then, the office of the N.C. governor has gained in some categories of power, but overall the N.C. office has lost ground among its peers in other states.

"To those who sit in the legislature, the North Carolina governor may appear to be among the most powerful," says Beyle, former chairman of the board at the Center and a national expert on the office of the governor. "But the plain fact is that North Carolina's governor has not kept up with the nation's other governors in terms of formal institutional powers, and that keeps the office a relatively weak one." Beyle says the two biggest factors making the N.C. governor less powerful than governors of most other states are the lack of veto power and the large number of key state officials (nine) who are elected statewide -- and independently of the governor -- in North Carolina.

"These new rankings will put added pressure on the N.C. General Assembly to consider a constitutional amendment giving veto power to the N.C. governor -- the only one who does not have the veto," says Beyle, who has coordinated other studies on the powers of the governor for the National Governors' Association. "And that also may add pressure for the legislature to balance this proposed increase in the governor's power by adopting longer terms for legislators." Both measures are alive for consideration in the short legislative session beginning May 21, 1990.

The gubernatorial rankings article is part of a package of articles in Insight on the balance of power between the legislative and executive branches of government. Among the articles are the arguments in favor of the veto by Center Executive Director Ran Coble; arguments against the veto by Raleigh lawyer and former legislator Al Adams and N.C. State University Political Science Professor Abraham Holtzman; arguments for four-year terms for legislators by Senate President Pro Tempore Henson Barnes; and arguments against four-year legislative terms by Charlotte attorney and former legislator Parks Helms.

Beyle's study compares the governors' powers in seven categories. Five of them are formal, institutional powers: (1) length of tenure and succession potential; (2) the power to appoint key officials to major offices; (3) the power to remove officials from office; (4) preparation and control over the budget; (5) and veto power. Two other types of powers also were examined: (6) the extent to which the legislature can alter the governor's budget and its administration; and (7) whether the governor and a majority of the legislature are of the same political party. Each governor was ranked in each of these categories on one of five levels: very strong, strong, moderate, weak, or very weak.

FORMAL POWERS

Here's how the N.C. governor ranks on each of those powers:

1. Length of Tenure and Succession: Until 1977, the N.C. governor could not succeed to a second full term in office, but thanks to a constitutional amendment that year, the governor's tenure and succession power grew. Now that both Govs. Jim Hunt and Jim Martin have been able to run for and win a second term, the N.C. governor ranks as strong in tenure and succession. Only if the N.C. governor could run for an indefinite number of successive terms -- as is the case in 18 states -- would the office merit a very strong rating. Gov. James Thompson of Illinois, for example, has been governor for four successive terms -- a two-year term (1977-78) and three four-year terms (1979-present) after Illinois switched from two-year to four-year terms for governors.

2. The Power to Appoint Officials to Major Offices: In the power of appointment, the N.C. governor also ranks as strong. The measure of appointive power is the extent to which a governor can name the heads of the state agencies administering the six functions common to almost all states -- corrections, education, health, highways, public utility regulation, and public welfare.

The N.C. governor can appoint a large number of state officials, but the governor's power is tempered in several ways. First, the N.C. governor shares executive powers with the nine other officials elected statewide, called the Council of State. North Carolina elects more officials statewide than all but four other states. In other states, the governor appoints some or all of these officials. This is important in the arena of education in North Carolina, where most decisions are made by the State Board of Education or by the superintendent of public instruction, who is elected statewide.

Second, some of the governor's appointment powers are diluted because one or more houses of the General Assembly must confirm nominees. The governor's nominees to the N.C. Utilities Commission, for example, must be confirmed by the legislature. And the governor doesn't have any power to appoint the 32-member UNC Board of Governors. That rests entirely with the legislature.

3. The Power to Remove Officials: Unlike appointment power, the N.C. governor is rated as very weak in terms of the ability to remove officials from office. While this has not been a big problem for North Carolina governors in the past, the study shows that the N.C. governor does not have formal constitutional powers to fire key state officials, as many governors do. By contrast, the power of governors in Indiana, Montana, New Mexico, and South Dakota to remove officials from their posts originates in their state constitutions rather than in a mix of statutes and court decisions, as is the case in North Carolina.

4. Governor's Control over the Budget: Like most other governors (44), North Carolina's governor ranks as very strong in ability to propose and control the state budget. Since a 1982 Supreme Court decision that resulted in limitations on the power of the Advisory Budget Commission -- which had shared budget responsibility with the chief executive -- the N.C. governor has moved up from strong to very strong in budget power.

5. Veto Power: Veto power is among the most powerful tools a governor can have, because even the threat of veto use can affect policy. There are many types of vetoes, including simple vetoes that allow a legislature to override it with a simple majority, item vetoes allowing a governor to kill specific portions of laws or specific appropriations, and vetoes with hard-to-attain majorities for overrides. But alone among the 50 states, North Carolina does not have a gubernatorial veto of any sort, and the state ranks as weakest in the nation in this category.

6. Ability of the Legislature to Change the Governor's Budget: A sort of negative power of the governor also affects overall strength. The ability of the legislature to change the governor's budget proposal limits the power of the governor in most states, Beyle's study found. While 45 of the nation's governors were very weak in this category, North Carolina's governor rated as weak. The N.C. General Assembly can alter the governor's budget considerably, though it still must meet a constitutional requirement to match spending to revenues.

7. Whether the Governor and the Legislature Are of the Same Political Party: When the governor and a majority of the legislature are of the same party, the governor's power is enhanced. When the two are of opposing parties, as has been the case in North Carolina since 1984, the governor's power is diminished. In this category, North Carolina ranks as weak because the governor's party -- the Republican Party -- has a minority in each house of the legislature. There are 12 Republicans in the 50-member N.C. Senate and 46 Republicans in the 120-member N.C. House of Representatives.

Beyle's study concludes that based on all seven formal powers, North Carolina's governor ranks third from the bottom among all 50 governors. It also places North Carolina with seven other governors rated as weak. Those governors given a weak rating were New Hampshire, Nevada, North Carolina, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas and Vermont.

By contrast, the strongest governor in the country, and the only one rated as very strong, was Maryland. In that state, the legislature may not increase the executive budget, and the governor has a line-item veto with a three-fifths majority required to override it. Rated as strong were the governors of Massachusetts, New York, South Dakota, and West Virginia. All 38 other governors fell within the moderate category.

INFORMAL POWERS

Beyle points out that these measurements tell only part of the story of gubernatorial powers. While they emphasize the number of formal institutional controls a governor may wield in running a state, they do not pretend to gauge every power available. They do not measure sources of informal power or an individual's ability to cash in on good looks, charisma, or overall political popularity. "A media-wise governor can dominate a state's political and policy agenda if he or she is adept at handling the media and public appearances," notes Beyle. "By the same token, a governor's powers can wane if that governor is inept in controlling the public policy agenda or in attracting the television cameras to public appearances."

And finally, Beyle goes on, the North Carolina governor has a distinct advantage. "Because no large urban area dominates the state's politics, there are no highly visible mayors with which the governor has to compete. By contrast, the mayors of New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Atlanta, and other large cities have a political base which can vault them into a position to vie with the governor for leadership," says Beyle.

The N.C. Center for Public Policy Research is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit corporation created to examine state government policies and practices. 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 114 corporate contributors and more than 600 individual and organizational members. In addition to publishing North Carolina Insight, the Center has conducted studies on campaign finance disclosure, on disparities in funding among rich and poor school districts in North Carolina, and the possibility of a State Environmental Index evaluating progress or decline in the state's air, water, and other natural resources. The Center also publishes a biennial guide to the N.C. General Assembly and rankings of the effectiveness of all legislators.

Copies of the issue of North Carolina Insight containing the study on the powers of the governor and the arguments for and against veto power and longer legislative terms are available for \$6.30 (plus \$1.00 postage and handling) from the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research, P.O. Box 430, Raleigh, N.C. 27602, or call (919) 832-2839.

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Figure 1. Relative Power of the Offices of the Governor

Very Weak	Weak (7)	Moderate (38)		Strong (4)	Very Strong (1)
None	NC	AK	MI	MA	MD
	NH	AL	MN	NY	
	NV	AR	MO	SD	
	RI	AZ	MS	WV	
	SC	CA	MT		
	TX	CO	NB		
	VT	CT	ND		
		DE	NJ		
		FL	NM		
		GA	OH		
		HI	OK		
		IA	OR		
		ID	PA		
		IL	TN		
		IN	UT		
		KS	VA		
		KY	WA		
		LA	WI		
		ME	WY		