


FROM THE CENTER OUT

The Newsletter of the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research ■ August 1992

Nursing Home Study Prompts News

The news media responded quickly and positively to the Center's study of nursing home regulation published in the May edition of *North Carolina Insight*. At last count, the issue had prompted 40 articles in 26 newspapers, as well as coverage on television news shows and the 92-station North Carolina [Radio] News Network. All of the editorial comment supported the Center's recommendations. For example, *The Charlotte Observer* stated that the Center made a "convincing case" for stronger regulation of homes that consistently have problems. "The center's study calls for stronger controls on the problem homes and fewer fines on homes with infrequent and minor violations," the *Observer* said in an editorial reprinted in five other newspapers. "These are common-sense recommendations that may help those homes that strive to do a good job but have occasional minor lapses, while cracking down on those that keep having major difficulties. That means the General Assembly ought to resurrect legislation that would allow the courts to appoint an interim manager to take over temporary control of a home whose management failed to correct serious, chronic problems."

Other papers published similar accounts. The *Wilmington Morning Star* wrote, "An exhaustively researched report from the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research lays out the problem." The *Mount Airy News* said, "We're glad that finally some attention is being focused on the problem. Perhaps now we can get our priorities in order. ... We hope lawmakers will take the time to read the report." An editorial in the *Asheville Citizen Times* began, "Recommendations for improving the state's regulation of nursing homes should be given serious consideration by the General Assembly." Meanwhile, *The News & Observer* of Raleigh concluded, "If the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research hasn't found all the solutions for the woes of nursing home regulation, it has at least drawn state officials a pretty good map of where to look for them. ... The Center makes valuable recommendations to answer those problems."

Publications Laud Center

Ears were burning at the Center in May, when two publications noted the organization's reputation for high-quality research. A national journal, *State Policy Reports*, cited the Center's biennial effectiveness rankings of legislators as the only survey of its kind that avoids three common pitfalls: (1) imprecise definitions of who is being polled; (2) low response rates from those polled; and (3) definitions that equate effectiveness with help in enacting the agendas of interest groups. "Over the years, *Reports* has seen many of these, such as a recent one in California, that fail one or another of these tests," the journal states in a May issue. "The exception is the rankings that have been done since 1978 by the North Carolina Center. This year's version drew an 82% response from legislators themselves."

North Carolina magazine, published by the N.C. Citizens for Business and Industry, also reported favorably on the Center in a May article about the influence of public interest groups on state government. The article cited the Center as one of several groups that influence state policy by providing lawmakers with solid research. "When legislative leaders began grappling with the state's overflowing garbage crisis, their search for solutions led them to research on waste treatment and reduction published by the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research," the article states, while noting that most observers view such groups favorably. "First, [observers] say, it saves the state a lot of tax dollars when an outside group can produce high-quality, usable research on important public policy issues. Second, it prevents the development of a layer of bureaucracy between elected officials and those who can legitimately speak for the public at large."

Inside:

Legislature acts to increase voter turnout

Two foundations renew their support for Center

Legislature Enacts Laws to Increase Voter Participation

The General Assembly in July enacted legislation aimed at improving North Carolina's voter turnout, historically one of the worst in the United States. The Center played a key role in the legislative debate on the issue, setting the agenda in the June 1991 edition of *N.C. Insight*. The well-publicized *Insight* articles made 10 recommendations for improving voter registration and turnout, and Center director Ran Coble presented those findings in February 1992 to the Legislative Research Commission's Committee on Methods to Improve Voter Participation. The commission endorsed several of the recommendations, including:

- * Allowing registration by mail;
- * Improving the existing system for registering voters at motor vehicle offices;
- * Shortening the registration deadline before election days.

The *Insight* articles and Coble's testimony prompted two waves of news coverage and editorials -- totaling nearly 100 articles -- and more momentum for legislative action. In late July, the legislature enacted all of the recommendations above, as well as measures establishing satellite voting precincts for the elderly and disabled and requiring statewide voter registration drives in even-numbered years.

Public to Have Greater Access to House Votes

In other legislative action, N.C. House Speaker Dan Blue informed the Center that the 1993 session should open with a new electronic voting system that would enable citizens to know how their representatives voted. The Center has pushed for such public access since 1984. Between 1981 and 1984, the Center actually compiled voting records for both chambers of the General Assembly and printed them in its publication, *How the Legislators Voted*. The Center supports the House effort and hopes the state Senate will follow suit. As syndicated columnist Paul O'Connor wrote, "The combination of new technology and new leadership means that the public may soon be able to learn how its representatives have voted without having to cross the ice floes in the process."

Center Releases Lobbyist Rankings

Who's who among North Carolina's legislative lobbyists? Find out in the Center's rankings of the most influential lobbyists in the 1991-92 General Assembly. In the latest rankings, released August 11, the Center found that young professional lobbyists -- often representing a single client -- continue to gain influence. Nearly a fourth of those ranked in the top 35 are women, the highest number ever. This is the sixth time that the Center has produced its lobbyist rankings, which are based on surveys of all 170 legislators, capital news correspondents, and registered lobbyists based in North Carolina who regularly attend legislative sessions. The rankings list the top lobbyists, the clients they represent, and their previous rankings. Call Sharon Gibson at the Center [(919) 832-2839] to order copies, which are available for \$4.25, plus \$1 for postage and handling.

Foundations Award Grants to Center

The Center is pleased to announce recent grants from two major North Carolina foundations and two family foundations. The Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation of Winston-Salem renewed its commitment to the Center by granting \$150,000 a year for 1992 and 1993 -- representing 15 years of support. The Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, also of Winston-Salem, approved a grant of \$105,000 a year for 1993 and 1994. That makes 18 years of support from the Babcock Foundation, which has advanced the Center's work since its founding. We are extremely grateful to both foundations for their continuing support. They have done two things foundations don't usually do: They have given general operating support, and they have continued their support over a long time span. Both grants are essential to the Center's independence and ability to take on any topic.

The Center also welcomes first-time gifts from The Bolick Foundation in Conover and the Petro Kulynych Foundation in North Wilkesboro. We appreciate their generosity.

Recent Center Contributors -- People Who Help Keep the Center Working

A warm welcome to our new contributors:

AMP Inc.	\$1000
The Bolick Foundation	1000
Century Foundation on behalf of Century Furniture Industries and Shuford Mills, Inc.	1000
The Petro Kulynych Foundation	500
Asheboro Courier-Tribune	250

Corporations that renewed their support and to whom we give our special thanks:

Alcoa Foundation	\$2000	Nucor Corporation	\$500
IBM Corporation	\$2000	Wachovia Bank	500
R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company	2000	Chapel Hill Newspaper	400
General Electric Company	1000	K.R. Edwards Leaf Tobacco Company	300
Texasgulf Inc.	1000	United Transportation Union	250
First Citizens Bank	500	Trion Charitable Foundation	200
N.C. Farm Bureau Mutual Insurance Company	500	Carocon Corporation	100
N.C. Health Care Facilities Association	500		

Special thanks go to individual supporting members who renewed their Center memberships with special contributions:

John W. Davis, III	Elaine F. Marshall
Karen Gottovi	Robert and Cama Merritt
William Joslin	Cliff Oxford
	Fred Stanback

A warm welcome to these new Center members:

Bert Armstrong	Lisa Gerrard	Mebane Rash
David Brody	Peter Hans	Albert Sawyer
Robert Conn	Marvin K. Hoffman	Allen and Jessica Schorr Saxe
John T. Crawford	Mary Parks Macy	Harry J. Shane
John Eaker	Walker L. Oldham	Joan Sickmond
		Samuel M. Stone

A special welcome to these new organizational members:

Brent Barnes	Region A - Area Agency on Aging
Philip S. Brown	Penick Memorial Home
Bonnie M. Cramer	N.C. Division of Aging
Dan E. Dailey	The Evergreens, Inc.
Pamela B. Edwards	Fayetteville AHEC
Erika Fairchild	NCSU College of Humanities
Karolyn H. Kaye	Hospice of Wake County
Johnny Sutton	Richmond County Economic Development
W. Stuart Tucker, Jr.	Prucare of Charlotte
	The Brian Center Management Corporation
	Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond

Coming Up

Arriving just in time for the new school year is the Center's book-length report, *How the Public Universities in North Carolina Identify and Reward Excellent Teaching*. The study was the basis for the latest public affairs special jointly produced by the N.C. Center and the UNC Center for Public Television. The show, entitled "Rewarding Excellence," was first aired on June 24 and may be re-broadcast in October. Watch for more details.

The Center's educational efforts have been well-represented on the television screen lately. WUNC-TV also re-broadcast five of the two centers' jointly produced specials in the first half of 1992. Airing again were the specials on voting (April 12), state parks (June 4), mountain area management (June 4), landfills and recycling (June 11), and rural hospitals (June 18).

Also, check your mailboxes in September for the latest edition of *N.C. Insight*. The coming issue will have pro and con discussions of the state's proposed air-cargo/industrial park complex, as well as articles on professional sports as an economic development tool and a crystal-ball gaze at the General Assembly of the 21st Century.

Center Seeks Board Nominations

One of the Center's membership benefits is the opportunity to nominate yourself or other worthy people to our governing Board of Directors. So, once again we are asking members to submit names of people who would be willing to work hard, attend quarterly Board meetings, and assist us with fundraising. The Board sets the overall policy and direction of the Center's work and suggests ideas for topics in *Insight* and other research reports. Depending on their backgrounds and expertise, Board members also are asked to review drafts of articles and major reports for accuracy and clarity. The Board is balanced by race, gender, and geographic location in North Carolina, as well as by political party affiliation. If you would like to be considered, or if you want to nominate qualifying individuals who would be willing to serve a three-year (1993-95) term, please submit the name(s) and background information to Board Chair Bob Spearman or Center director Ran Coble, c/o N.C. Center for Public Policy Research, P.O. Box 430, Raleigh, NC 27602. Please submit nominations as soon as possible, but no later than Friday, October 2.

In a related matter, the Center invites its Triad members to a Friday evening reception in Greensboro prior to the Board of Directors' next meeting there on Saturday, September 26. The time and location of the reception have not yet been set, so please call Nancy Rose for details if you would like to attend. The Center's phone number is (919) 832-2839.

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