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Women Gain, Blacks Lose Power in Legislature, Center Says

Women have more power in the 1995 General Assembly, while African Americans have less, says the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research. The power of women legislators increased this year when they were given the plum committee chairs in both the House and Senate for the first time.

"Even though women lost three seats in the November elections, they have increased their clout by securing leadership positions heading the money committees in the General Assembly," says Mebane Rash Whitman, the Center's policy analyst and author of *Article II: A Guide to the 1995-96 N.C. Legislature*. "In the House, African-American legislators lost the speakership and powerful committee chairs, so their influence has declined."

Article II, the Center's legislative handbook, contains profiles of each member of the legislature, including photos, business and home addresses, telephone/fax numbers, district served, counties in that district, number of terms served, and educational and occupational backgrounds. For members who served last session, the guide lists votes on 14 of the most significant bills in 1993-94, effectiveness rankings since 1983, and five selected bills they introduced. Also included are demographics for the General Assembly since 1975, a list of the 50 most influential lobbyists, and a supplement that contains committee assignments by member and by committee.

Women Increase Power

There were only two women legislators in 1971; this session, there are 28. Although this is a drop from last session's record of 31, women now chair some of the most powerful committees. For example, Democrats selected Sen. Beverly Perdue (D-Craven) to co-chair the Senate Appropriations Committee, while Republicans chose Rep. Theresa Esposito (R-Forsyth) to co-chair the House Appropriations Committee. In addition, Connie Wilson (R-Mecklenburg) co-chairs the House Finance Committee, through which all major tax cut legislation must pass this session. In the Center's latest biennial survey of legislators, the Appropriations and Finance Committees again were named the most powerful in each house. Overall, women chair 15 committees and subcommittees this session.

Women also have secured other important leadership posts. Rep. Carolyn Russell (R-Wayne) is the Speaker Pro Tempore of the House, while Sen. Betsy Cochrane (R-Davie) is Minority Leader in the Senate. "The next step up for women could be the Speaker's Office and President Pro Tem of the Senate. Or, you may see them choosing to pursue elected positions in the executive branch -- Lieutenant Governor and Governor, for example" says Whitman. "The first woman to step into one of these positions is very likely to come from this group of women legislators."

Sen. Perdue says, "Women have more clout this session than in 1993-94, but it is not just because they are women. It's all about hard work. With the tough policy issues and the incredible amount of fiscal responsibility facing legislators, positions are awarded based on individual accomplishments and commitment. Women have to be as good as or better than their counterparts."

Power of African Americans Declines

The Center's analysis of committee assignments shows that while women's power has increased, the influence of African-American legislators has declined. Because of the Republican takeover of the House by a 68-52 Republican margin, Rep. Dan Blue (D-Wake) lost his position as Speaker of the House. With him went the Democratic chairs of 11 House committees and subcommittees. This session, the only African American chairing a House committee or subcommittee is Rep. Frances Cummings (R* --Robeson), who chairs the Education Subcommittee on Preschool, Elementary, and Secondary Education. Cummings is the first female, African-American Republican ever to serve in the N.C. General Assembly.

The number of African Americans elected to the General Assembly has significantly increased over the past 25 years -- from 2 seats in 1971 to 24 seats in 1995. "Even though we only lost one seat in the November elections, blacks have less clout this session than they had in 1993-94 because of the Republican sweep," says Rep. H.M. "Mickey" Michaux (D-Durham). "In the environment that exists in the House -- blacks control 17 seats, Republicans control 68 seats -- we have found it very difficult to garner the influence we once had, and losing key leadership positions hasn't helped."

The Senate, however, is a different story. Sen. Frank Ballance has the potential to become the most powerful African American in the legislature as Majority Whip. A slim 26-23** Democratic majority exists in the Senate, making blacks powerful as a group. If the seven black Senators choose to abstain from a vote, the Democrats could lose a critical bill.

Lots of Newcomers -- But Not a Record Number

There are 53 newcomers in the 1995 General Assembly. Nine of these, however, have previously served in the N.C. legislature -- Senators Hamilton Horton, Tony Rand, and Thomas Sawyer and Representatives Cary Allred, Monroe Buchanan, Jim Crawford, Bill Hiatt, Bill Hurley, and Gene Wilson. Of the 53 newcomers, at least 32 -- or 60 percent -- have no prior elected experience. Whitman says, "One of the things you notice most about the 1995 legislature is its inexperience -- 78 of the 170 legislators are in their first or second terms. In effect, North Carolina has turnover without term limits."

The conventional wisdom is that turnover in the 1994 elections was the highest ever. But Whitman says this is not true. "In 1975, 70 new members were elected; in 1985, 57 new members were elected; and this time there are 53 new members. Over the last 20 years, the average turnover rate in the House has been 27 percent, while in the Senate it's been 20 percent."

Republican Party Seeks Permanent Shift

The Center reports that Tar Heel Republicans gained more Senate seats (+12 seats) than in any other state Senate in the country, and they secured the third largest gains in any state House (+26 seats). In the House, Republicans hold 68 seats, which was enough to secure control for the first time since 1897. In the Senate, the Democrats hold 26 seats -- only a slight majority. Overall, Republicans hold 91 of the 170 seats in the General Assembly.

* Rep. Cummings ran as a Democrat. She switched parties after the election.

** The 15th district Senate race is unresolved pending a new election March 28, 1995 between incumbent Elaine F. Marshall, a Democrat, and Daniel E. Page, a Republican.

Tres Glenn, political director for the Republican Party in North Carolina, predicts that this surge of Republican legislators may not have peaked. "In the districts where Senator Helms, Governor Martin, and President Bush have run well, the Republican party captured all but a handful of seats in 1994. By and large, in those districts, if we didn't get the seat, it was because we didn't contest the election. In the future, we will definitely contest those 10 seats."

Trends in Legislators' Occupations

The Center's guide to the General Assembly also tracks the occupations of legislators. This session, the number of retirees in the legislature is up while the number of lawyers is down. The number of retired persons serving in the General Assembly has increased markedly in the past 20 years: in 1975, 1993, and 1995, retired persons held 7, 32, and 37 seats respectively. The number of lawyers, on the other hand, has steadily declined from 68 in 1971 to 32 in 1995.

Rep. Willis Brown (D-Harnett), a retired attorney, says these trends are interrelated. "The increase in the number of retired persons serving in the legislature doesn't surprise me, considering that retirement affords a person both time and flexibility. Employment responsibilities generally don't permit the extended absences that are required now that sessions have become so lengthy and time-consuming." The decreasing number of lawyers, he says, can be attributed to three factors: first, the demanding nature of the practice of law; second, the extended absences from their positions required because of the length of legislative sessions; and third, lawyers don't tend to retire as early as most businessmen, choosing to practice until later in life.

A supplement to *Article II* lists committee assignments for all 170 legislators. The Senate cut the number of its standing committees from 21 to 14, while the House reduced its number of committees from 24 to 21. For members who served in the 1993-94 General Assembly, *Article II* also shows the number of bills they introduced and, of those, the number that were adopted, ratified, and ratified as part of another bill. Sen. Bill Martin (D-Guilford) introduced the most bills, sponsoring 239. Rep. George Miller (D-Durham) introduced the most bills in the House, sponsoring 94. For the most part, the number of bills introduced during the 1993-94 session was inflated by the large number of bills recommended by the Government Performance Audit Committee (GPAC) -- an independent audit of state government conducted in 1992. This session, Speaker of the House Harold Brubaker has spearheaded an effort to limit the number of bills a representative can introduce in the 1995-96 session to 10 bills. This limit does not apply to local bills, bills recommended by study commissions, joint resolutions, or House resolutions and a member may assign his or her unused quota to another member. The Senate has no such limit.

Perhaps the most publicized feature in *Article II* is the Center's legislative effectiveness rankings, which were previously released in April 1994. The Center compiles the rankings from surveys sent to all legislators, lobbyists, and capital news correspondents. Rankings for the 1995-96 General Assembly will be released in the spring of 1996. Whitman says, "If you look at the Center's rankings of legislators' effectiveness in the 1993-94 General Assembly, nine of the 20 most effective Senators are gone, but only six of the 20 most effective Representatives are not back. So, although the House lost more incumbents and its leadership changed entirely, it retained some of its most effective members in both parties. The Senate, on the other hand, lost many of its committee leaders and most effective members."

The N.C. Center for Public Policy Research is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit corporation created to study public policy issues facing North Carolina and to evaluate state government programs. The Center is supported in part by grants from the Z. Smith Reynolds and Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundations, both in Winston-Salem. Additional funding comes from seven other private foundations, 156 corporate contributors, and more than 900 individual and organizational members. The Center publishes a magazine, *North Carolina Insight*, and

issues book-length research reports. The Center recently conducted studies on state regulation of pesticides and how North Carolina's public universities evaluate and reward teaching performance.

Article II is available for \$22.50 from the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research, P.O. Box 430, Raleigh, NC 27602 (919-832-2839 FAX-832-2847).

For more information, call Mebane Rash Whitman at 919-832-2839.

Demographics and Occupations of the N.C. Legislature, 1973-1995

Demographics	1973		1975		1993		1995	
	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent
African Americans	3	2%	6	4%	25	15%	24	14%
Native American	1	1%	1	1%	1	1%	1	1%
Women	9	5%	15	9%	31	18%	28	17%
Democrats	120	71%	160	94%	117	69%	78	46%
Republicans	50	29%	10	6%	53	31%	91	54%
Turnover Ratio	65	38%	70	41%	50	29%	53	31%

Occupation*	1973		1975		1993		1995	
	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent
Banking	3	2%	5	3%	6	4%	3	2%
Business/Sales	41	24%	49	29%	46	27%	46	27%
Construction/Contracting	0	0%	2	1%	4	2%	7	4%
Education	12	7%	19	11%	21	12%	19	11%
Farming	17	10%	22	13%	19	11%	16	9%
Health Care	3	2%	4	2%	13	8%	8	5%
Homemaker	3	2%	4	2%	3	2%	3	2%
Insurance	12	7%	17	10%	11	7%	12	7%
Law	56	33%	51	30%	39	23%	32	19%
Legislator	0	0%	0	0%	2	1%	4	2%
Manufacturing	6	4%	5	3%	0	0%	2	1%
Minister	4	2%	2	1%	3	2%	3	2%
Real Estate	7	4%	14	8%	21	12%	19	11%
Retired	6	4%	7	4%	32	19%	37	22%
Self-employed	0	0%	0	0%	3	2%	1	1%

*Because many legislators list more than one occupation, in the occupation table, numbers do not total the actual number of members (170) nor do percents add up to 100.