



**NORTH CAROLINA CENTER FOR
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**PUBLIC POLICY CENTER RELEASES NEW LEGISLATIVE EFFECTIVENESS RANKINGS,
ADDS ATTENDANCE AND VOTING PARTICIPATION RANKINGS**

In a 2001 legislature dominated by redistricting and budget shortfalls, three House members in the middle of these controversies made the largest jumps in effectiveness in the latest legislative effectiveness rankings released today by the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research. The biennial rankings also show considerable strength for the Republicans as the minority party in the House and a possible shift in leadership among African American legislators in both the House and Senate. And, the Center unveiled new rankings of legislators based on their attendance records and on the number of votes in which they participated.

The three members of the 120-member N.C. House of Representatives who made the biggest gains in effectiveness are Representative Toby Fitch (D-Wilson), up 66 places to 14th; Gregg Thompson (R-Mitchell), up 60 places to 29th; and Monroe Buchanan (R-Mitchell), up 57 places to 21st. "These are jumps worthy of Michael Jordan," says Ran Coble, executive director of the Center, "and they came from legislators wearing both Democratic and Republican shoes."

During the 2001 session, Fitch was the leader of a group of Democrats referred to as the "Gang of Eight" who forced the House leadership to make eleventh-hour changes to the legislative budget and revenue package and to the drawing of legislative districts. After the session, Fitch was appointed to be a Superior Court Judge by Governor Mike Easley. Thompson serves as one of four co-chairs of the powerful House Appropriations Committee. Buchanan is one of four co-chairs of the House Finance Committee and provided key votes in getting a Democrat-favored redistricting plan out of the House Redistricting Committee, which has equal numbers of Democrats and Republicans. Buchanan, who has been elected to eight terms as a Republican House member, was expelled from the GOP caucus.

The highest-ranked Senator in effectiveness for the fifth session in a row is President Pro Tempore Marc Basnight (D-Dare). The highest-ranked member of the House is Speaker Jim Black (D-Mecklenburg) for the second consecutive session.

Center Unveils New Rankings of Attendance and Roll Call Voting Participation

Using official records from the General Assembly, the Center also unveiled new rankings of legislators based on their attendance and participation in legislative floor votes. In the state Senate, which met 173 days last year, the three best attendance records were earned by Senators Virginia Foxx (R-Watauga), Jeanne Lucas (D-Durham), and Albin B. (A.B.) Swindell IV (D-Nash), who each missed only one day of the session. In the House, which met for 179 days, eight members garnered perfect attendance records. They are Representatives

John Blust (R-Guilford), Mitch Gillespie (R-McDowell), Robert Grady (R-Onslow), Jim Gulley (R-Mecklenburg), Bob Hensley (D-Wake), Frank Mitchell (R-Iredell), Bill Owens Jr. (D-Pasquotank), and Gene Wilson (R-Watauga). Senator Lucas and Representative Gillespie are the only members of the 170-member General Assembly who participated in all the electronically recorded roll call votes in their chambers – 1,216 votes by Lucas in the Senate and 1,495 votes by Gillespie in the House.

The Center praised the dedication of most legislators in attending the lengthiest session in history last year. More than 70 percent of the Senate and more than three-fourths of the House attended more than 90 percent of the days in session. The legislators with the worst attendance records both contended with illness throughout the 2001 session. They are Senator Robert L. Martin (D-Pitt, with 48.6 percent of days present) and Rep. William Hiatt (R-Surry, with 58.7 percent of days present).

In odd-numbered years, the Center publishes two additional evaluations of legislative performance. *Article II*, the Center's guide to the legislature, includes data on how many bills each legislator got passed out of the total he or she introduced. The guide also includes all members' votes on what legislators said were the 15 most important bills of the session.

Center director Ran Coble notes this year's addition of rankings of attendance and voting participation, saying, "The rankings of attendance and voting participation tell citizens and voters how often their legislator was there to represent them. The other set of rankings tell citizens how effective their legislator was when he or she was there. We hope both are helpful to citizens in evaluating the performance of their legislators."

Members of Minority Political Party Fare Better in House Than Senate

The minority political party in the legislature has gained in effectiveness over the last four sessions. The Democrats were the minority party in the House in 1995-98, while the Republicans have been in the minority since 1999 in both the House and Senate. This session, Democrats outnumber Republicans 62-58 in the House. Still, Republicans hold five of the top 25 places in effectiveness in the House, with Rep. Ed McMahan (R-Mecklenburg) highest at 9th. McMahan is one of the Republicans who hold 14 committee chairmanships in the House. The highest-ranked Republican in the Senate, where Republicans are outnumbered 35-15 and hold no committee chairmanships, is Minority Leader Senator Patrick Ballantine (R-New Hanover) at 17th.

"In recent years, the minority party has increased its influence in the state House," says the Center's Coble. "In each of the last four sessions, the minority party claimed at least one-fifth of the 25 legislators ranked highest in effectiveness – whether it was the Democrats in the minority in 1995 and 1997 or the Republicans in the minority in 1999 and 2001. As long as the House remains closely divided, the members of both the majority and the minority party each will have opportunities to be effective."

A Possible Future Shift in Leadership Among African American Lawmakers

The two most effective African Americans in the Senate were Howard Lee (D-Orange), who placed 7th in the rankings, and Frank Ballance Jr. (D-Warren), who placed 8th. Senator Lee is co-chair of the Appropriations Base Budget Committee and Senator Ballance is Deputy Senate President Pro Tem and co-chair of the Redistricting Committee. This marks the first time since the Center began surveying in 1978 that two African Americans have made it into the top 10 in the Senate.

In the House, the highest-ranked African American is Rep. Thomas Wright (D-New Hanover). Wright, a key ally of Speaker Black, chairs or co-chairs three committees – Congressional Redistricting, the Appropriations Subcommittee on Capital, and the Health Committee.

With long-time African American leaders such as Representatives Dan Blue (D-Wake), Toby Fitch, and Pete Oldham (D-Forsyth) leaving the House, and Senators Frank Ballance and William Martin (D-Guilford) leaving the Senate, the Center says there will probably be a shift in leadership among African American lawmakers in 2003.

Most Effective Woman in House Is Retiring

For the second consecutive session, the most effective woman in the House is Representative Ruth Easterling (D-Mecklenburg). Easterling's 6th-place finish sets a record for the highest effectiveness ranking ever achieved by a woman in the House. The 91-year-old Easterling has announced that she will not seek re-election to the General Assembly.

The woman ranked most effective in the Senate is Kay Hagan (D-Guilford), who is in her second term in the legislature and now holds the 20th spot in the Center's rankings. The two highest-ranked women in the 1999 Senate rankings, Beverly Perdue (D-Craven) and Betsy Cochrane (R-Davie), both left the legislature and ran for Lieutenant Governor in 2000, with Perdue winning the office.

How the Rankings Are Done

The Center's rankings are based on surveys completed by the legislators themselves, by registered lobbyists who are based in North Carolina and who regularly work in the General Assembly, and by capital news reporters. These three groups were asked to rate each legislator's effectiveness on the basis of participation in committee work, skill at guiding bills through committees and in floor debates, and general knowledge or expertise in special fields. The respondents also were asked to consider the respect legislators command from their peers, the political power they hold (by virtue of office, longevity, or personal skills), their ability to sway the opinions of fellow legislators, and their aptitude for the overall legislative process.

This year's rankings make the thirteenth time the Center has undertaken this comprehensive survey. The first edition in 1978 evaluated the performance of the 1977-78 General Assembly. The response rate to the survey continues to be very high. Seventy-two of the 120 House members (60 percent) responded to the Center's survey, as did 27 of the 50 Senators (54 percent), 146 of 321 registered lobbyists who regularly work in the legislature and who are based in North Carolina (45 percent), and 15 of 28 capital news correspondents (54 percent). The overall rate of response was 50 percent, which is well above accepted standards of statistical validity.

GOP Threat of Boycott Had Little or No Impact on the Results

In late 2001, the GOP caucus threatened to boycott the effectiveness survey. The Center's analysis of the responses looked for statistical variations between the three groups surveyed – legislators, lobbyists, and capital news correspondents – and found little or no impact from the threatened boycott on the results. The overall response rate for the survey remained within its historical norms, and the statistical differences between the responses of legislators, lobbyists, and capital news correspondents are not significant. This year, the lobbyists and capital news media both increased their rates of response. In addition, the percentage of members of the minority party within the top tiers of the rankings did not change from their previous levels. Though the Republicans are in a minority, they still earned five of the top 25 spots in the House effectiveness results. Finally, the legislative score is only one-third of the total, with lobbyists and media making up the other two-thirds, which means a boycott by one group is unlikely to affect the outcome. The Center concluded that the threat of the GOP boycott had no appreciable impact on the survey's response rate, the statistical variation between the respondent groups, or the outcome. Finally, the Center notes that it now publishes four different legislative performance measures – effectiveness, attendance, voting participation, and success in getting bills passed – as well as votes on what legislators said were the 15 most significant bills.

National Praise for the Center's Rankings

Several states – including North Carolina, Arkansas, California, Texas, Washington, and Florida – rank the effectiveness of their legislators using different methods. California ranks legislators in terms of effectiveness, integrity, energy, and intelligence. "It is hard to deny that the ratings, when done responsibly, serve a legitimate public purpose," says a report about state legislative rankings in *Governing* magazine, published by Congressional Quarterly, Inc. "The ratings issued by the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research are perhaps the most straightforward and most widely respected."

Another independent review of state rankings reached the same conclusion. "Most attempts at reputational rankings of state legislators don't deserve much credibility because of three problems: (1) no precise definition of who is being polled, (2) a low response rate among those polled because legislators and lobbyists don't want to risk getting caught making statements suggesting people they work with are ineffective, or (3) definitions of effectiveness that equate effectiveness with helping to enact an interest group's agenda," said *State Policy Reports*. "Over the years, *Reports* has seen many of these ... that fail one or another of these tests. The exception is the rankings that have been done since 1978 by the North Carolina Center."

The effectiveness, attendance, and voting participation rankings are published as a supplement to *Article II: A Guide to the 2001-2002 N.C. Legislature*, which was released in 2001. The Center's legislative guidebook profiles each member of the General Assembly and includes the following biographical and voting information:

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| — occupation and education; | — number of terms served; |
| — business and home addresses; | — committee assignments; |
| — telephone and fax numbers; | — the number of bills sponsored and enacted into law in the 1999-2000 session; |
| — room number, phone number, and e-mail address at the legislature; | — individual votes on 15 of the most important bills in the 1999-2000 session; and |
| — party affiliation, district number, and counties represented; | — past effectiveness rankings (1981-1999). |

The N.C. Center for Public Policy Research is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization created to study public policy issues facing North Carolina and to evaluate state government programs. The Center does not endorse candidates. The Center receives general operating support from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation in Winston-Salem, with additional funding from 11 other foundations, 190 corporate contributors, and nearly 1,000 individuals and organizational members across the state. The Center publishes a magazine, *North Carolina Insight*, and book-length research reports, including a citizens' guide to the legislature, and textbooks for teachers who teach courses on state and local government. The Center recently has conducted studies on the pros and cons of state lotteries, North Carolina's record in sustaining school reforms, challenges and opportunities facing Eastern North Carolina, and trends and changes in North Carolina's citizen legislature. The Center currently is studying governance of public universities, the charter schools movement in North Carolina, use of cell phones while driving, and ways to improve elections and increase voter participation.

The new effectiveness rankings are available from the Center for \$10. A set of publications including *Article II: A Guide to the 2001-2002 N.C. Legislature* (\$25), the effectiveness rankings (\$10), and rankings of the most influential lobbyists (\$10, to be released later this summer) is available for \$35. To order, write the Center at P.O. Box 430, Raleigh, NC 27602, call (919) 832-2839, fax (919) 832-2847, or order through the Center's Website at www.nccppr.org.

For more information about the legislative effectiveness rankings, call Ran Coble at the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research at (919) 832-2839.