

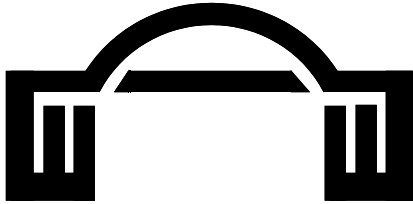


# From The Center Out

The Newsletter of the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research ... A voice for good government  
June-July-August 2002

2001

*Effectiveness, Attendance, and Roll Call  
Voting Participation Rankings of the  
2001 North Carolina General Assembly*



A report by

The North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research

May 2002

## **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. 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.

The three members of the 120-member N.C. House of Representatives who made the biggest gains in effectiveness are Representatives Toby Fitch (D-Wilson), up 66 places to 14<sup>th</sup>; Gregg Thompson (R-Mitchell), up 60 places to 29<sup>th</sup>; and Monroe Buchanan (R-Mitchell), up 57 places to 21<sup>st</sup>. "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."

The highest-ranked Senator 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.

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 9<sup>th</sup>. McMahan is one of the 113 Republicans who hold a total of 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 17<sup>th</sup>. "In recent years, the minority party has increased its influence in the state House," says 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 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 7<sup>th</sup> in the rankings, and Frank Ballance Jr. (D-Warren), who placed 8<sup>th</sup>. 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 ranked in 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.

## **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.

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](http://www.nccppr.org).

## **PREVIEW OF NEXT ISSUE OF *NORTH CAROLINA INSIGHT***

The Center revisits the debate about public schools and education reform with its July edition of *North Carolina Insight*. The issue features an evaluation of charter schools in North Carolina, plus an analysis of whether support for public education is eroding with the growth of secular and religious private schools, home schools, and charter schools. A third article explores whether the practice of driving while talking on the phone needs to be regulated.

North Carolina began its experiment with charter schools in 1997, when the first schools were opened. Freed from many state rules and regulations and operating under independent charters, these schools are intended to offer classroom innovation and competition for the traditional public schools. Five years later, how are these schools faring? The Center finds the picture to be mixed. Two charter schools are among the 10 highest performing schools in the state, but six of the 10 worst performing schools also are charter schools. In addition, some schools have had financial and organizational difficulties. Since the state began its experiment, a total of 23 schools have closed or withdrawn their application for a charter without opening. Meanwhile, the statutory cap of 100 charter schools has been reached, and there is political pressure to raise or eliminate the cap. The Center's recommendation? The legislature should not increase the number of charter schools until charters have proven themselves by performing at least at the level of traditional public schools.

The July *Insight* also looks at enrollment trends, polling data, and passage of school bond referenda in exploring whether public support for public schools is eroding. Our conclusion: despite rapidly rising enrollment in alternatives such as private schools, home schools, and charter schools, public support for the public schools is steady. Public school enrollment also continues to increase about as fast as the state population the percentage of North Carolinians who award their local school an A or a B in opinion polls is on the upswing over the last decade, and the voters approved 74% of the bond referenda for public schools over the last decade.

As for driving while talking on the telephone, the Center finds a number of studies in other states indicating the practice is not a wise one in that it impairs one's ability to operate a motor vehicle. Yet the missing link is data implicating cell phone use in any increase in accidents in North Carolina. The Center recommends that the N.C. Division of Motor Vehicles alter traffic accident reporting forms to include an entry indicating whether the driver was talking on the telephone at the time of a car crash. If future trends then show an increase in accidents attributed to cell phone use, the Center believes the legislature should consider regulating driving while talking on the phone.

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### Coming Soon from the Center!

<b>Just Out –</b>	<b>Rankings of legislators' effectiveness, attendance, and roll call voting participation</b>
<b>July –</b>	<b><i>North Carolina Insight</i>, featuring evaluations of charter schools and whether public support for public schools is eroding</b>
<b>August –</b>	<b>Rankings of the most influential lobbyists in the N.C. General Assembly</b>
<b>September –</b>	<b><i>The University of North Carolina Board of Governors: Selection, Powers, and the Board's Relationship to Campus Boards of Trustees</i></b>
<b>October –</b>	<b><i>North Carolina Insight</i>, featuring analysis of election laws and ways to increase voter participation</b>

## Become A New Individual Donor to the Center

As we celebrate our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year, we need 50 Center members to step forward and become Charter Donors in our new Major Donors Program. Thirty-two members already have done so. To become a Charter Donor, you would pledge to give \$500 a year for 3 years, beginning in 2002. Additionally, please consider putting us in your will or making a bequest. Call Ran Coble or Laurita Ray at (919) 832-2839 to discuss becoming a Charter Donor.

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