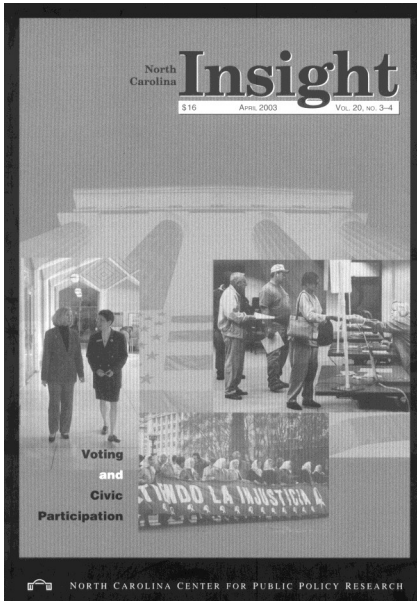




From The Center Out

The Newsletter of the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research ... A voice for good government
March-April-May 2003



CENTER SAYS NORTH CAROLINA MUST IMPROVE VOTER PARTICIPATION AND ENSURE ACCURACY

North Carolina ranks among the nation's laggards in an area where it should be a leader – in turning out voters on election day, said the Center in a new study published in *North Carolina Insight*. The state ranks 34th in turnout of the voting age population. The Center examined the state's voter turnout record since 1960, compared North Carolina's election laws with 49 other states, and documented the voting methods used in all 100 N.C. counties. The Center also outlined a series of reforms to boost turnout and to make sure state elections officials can produce an accurate count once ballots are cast.

"North Carolina is not the worst, but we're far from first in voter turnout," said Mike McLaughlin, editor of *Insight*. "Our first challenge is getting more people out to the polls on election day. Our second challenge is assuring that once ballots are cast, every vote counts."

The Center offers eight recommendations to encourage voter participation, including an education campaign to stimulate interest in registering *and* voting. The campaign would have dual goals of *registering* 90 percent of North Carolina's voting age population and increasing *turnout* among the voting age population to at least 65 percent by 2008. The aim is to place the state in the top 10 in voter turnout.

In addition, the Center recommends gradually moving the deadline for voter registration closer to election day and then allowing election-day registration in 2006. The Center also endorses legislation to guarantee employees time off to vote. Of the top 10 states in voter turnout, seven offer some time off for state employees, private sector employees, or both without penalty of losing their pay or job. And, the Center recommends more aggressive experimentation with voting by mail and via the Internet.

N.C. Voter Participation Better, But Still Has Room To Improve

The new study follows up on the Center's previous study of voter participation published in 1991. At that time, the state ranked 47th in turnout. The Center then made nine recommendations to improve turnout, five of which were adopted in whole or in part, and the state now has moved up to rank 34th in voter turnout.

Of the top 11 voter participation states in the 2000 election, five have election-day voter registration – Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. One state, North Dakota, does not require voters to register at all. In North Carolina, would-be voters must register at least 25 days, or more than three weeks before the election. In addition, two of the top four voter participation states (Alaska and Minnesota) offer *state* employees time off to vote, and three of the four (Alaska, Minnesota, and Wisconsin) offer *private* sector employees time off to vote. North Carolina offers neither. Some of the states with high voter participation also experiment more with ways to help people become informed and vote, allowing such innovations as voting by mail (Oregon) and experiments with Internet voting (Alaska).

North Carolina uses five different voting systems. These include hand-counted paper ballots (two counties), mechanical lever devices (four counties), punch card devices (eight counties), direct recording electronic devices (35 counties), and optical scan systems that read the ballots (51 counties). Lever machines are no longer manufactured, forcing counties to use Q-tips, toothpicks, and garbage bag twist ties to hold them together. State Board of Elections director Gary Bartlett said the Board considers voting machines in 18 of the state's 100 counties to be in need of replacement and facing immediate risk of failure.

The Center also recommends that the North Carolina General Assembly move all of North Carolina's 100 counties toward a uniform system of direct recording electronic devices by 2008. The cost could be spread by providing full funding in 2005 to the two counties using paper ballots, four counties using mechanical lever devices, and eight counties using punch card systems. By 2007, the Center says the state should provide full funding to pay for direct recording electronic voting equipment in the remaining 51 counties currently relying on optical scanning to count ballots.

For the past 11 state legislative sessions, the Center has been surveying legislators, lobbyists, and the capital news media to determine who are the most influential players in Raleigh's legislative advocacy corps. This year, after tabulating the survey that identified the most influential lobbyists, the Center decided to conduct a follow-up survey to study tactics,

GUIDE TO THE LEGISLATURE HIGHLIGHTS CO-SPEAKERS AND ROLE OF FRESHMEN

North Carolina's experiment with Co-Speakers in the state House of Representatives and the large number of freshman lawmakers are the key developments in the legislature so far this year, said the Center in a news release accompanying our new citizens' guide to the state legislature.

Effects of the Co-Speaker Arrangement on the Legislature

Despite reducing the number of House committees this year, the Co-Speakers increased the number of committee chairmanships. The Co-Speakers gave out 79 gavels, one more than last session's total of 78, which was the most of any legislature in the country. Nineteen House committees have two co-chairs, two House committees have four co-chairs, the Finance Committee has six co-chairs, and the Appropriations Committee has eight co-chairs. This year, as in previous Center surveys of legislators, lobbyists, and capital news media, the Appropriations and Finance Committees were named as the most powerful committees.

The coalition which supported the Co-Speaker arrangement held together through its first big test, adoption of the House version of the budget. Thirteen Republicans voted for both the Co-Speaker deal in January and for the House budget in April. All House Democrats except Rep. Mickey Michaux (D-Durham) voted for both the Co-Speaker arrangement and the budget.

The parity between the parties in House committee chairmanships also is reflected in the membership within each committee. All 41 House committees have equal numbers of Re-

publicans and Democrats, which makes attendance at committee meetings crucial on legislation where party platforms differ.

"The Co-Speaker arrangement has worked well so far to build a new spirit of bipartisanship to solve problems," said the Center's director, Ran Coble. He added, "Co-Speakers Jim Black and Richard Morgan trust each other and have shared the limelight and the tough decisions equally. But passage of the House budget is only the first of several tests." Coble said future votes on the budget when it comes back from the Senate and possible votes on redistricting, the cigarette tax, and video-poker also may be tough tests ahead for the Co-Speakers.

The Surprisingly Important Role of Freshmen This Year

Over the last 20 years, turnover in the legislature has averaged about a fourth of the House and a fifth of the Senate in each two-year election cycle. This year, however, 30 percent, or 51 of the 170 legislators are new.

The Center notes three additional ways in which the new legislators are exercising influence in the legislature: First, five freshman lawmakers are serving as committee chairs or co-chairs, which is highly unusual. Second, the freshmen meet regularly with the Speakers. This access to the House leadership contributes to the unusual amount of clout for freshmen this year. Third, the freshman also were key parts of the coalition that put the Co-Speakers in power and passed the House budget. Of the 29 Republicans who voted for the Co-Speaker arrangement, 10 were freshmen, and of the 17 Republicans who voted for the House budget package, eight were freshmen.

Other Trends in the Legislature

- The number of women in the General Assembly this year (35) is an all-time high.
- More than one-fourth (44) of the 170 legislators are retirees.
- Occupationally, the largest number (53) of legislators come from business or sales backgrounds, followed by lawyers (32) and educators (25), though many of the latter are retired from teaching or administration.

These and other legislative trends can be found in *Article II: A Guide to the 2003-2004 North Carolina Legislature*. Authored by Center policy analyst Sam Watts, this citizens' guide contains profiles on each of the 170 members of the General Assembly, including photos; business and home addresses; telephone and fax numbers; counties in the districts they serve; number of terms served in the legislature; and each legislator's educational and occupational background. For members who served in the previous session, the guide for the 2001-2002 session lists five bills they introduced, their votes on 12 bills of statewide interest, and rankings of attendance and roll call voting participation, as well as a history of rankings of each legislator's effectiveness since 1981. These rankings are based on surveys of all legislators, registered lobbyists based in North Carolina, and the capital news media. Also included are demographic and occupational trends for the General Assembly since 1983 and a list of the 48 most influential lobbyists.

A pocket-sized *Supplement to Article II* contains important information for citizens, lobbyists, and reporters, including all committee assignments and each legislator's political party affiliation, home county, legislative office address and telephone number, e-mail address at the General Assembly, and legislative seat number. The supplement also contains seating charts, committee meeting schedules, and deadlines for introducing various kinds of bills and resolutions.

Copies of *Article II: A Guide to the 2003-2004 N.C. Legislature* and the *Supplement* with committee assignments are available for \$25 a set. 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 web site at <http://www.nccppr.org>.

ARTICLE II

A Guide to the
2003-2004
North Carolina
Legislature

by Sam Watts
NORTH CAROLINA CENTER
FOR PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH



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Article II of the N.C. Constitution

Section 1. Legislative Power

The legislative power of the State shall be vested in the General Assembly, which shall consist of a Senate and a House of Representatives.

Section 2. Number of Senators

The Senate shall be composed of 50 Senators, biennially chosen by ballot.

Section 4. Number of Representatives

The House of Representatives shall be composed of 120 Representatives, biennially chosen by ballot.

Section 24.4. General Laws

The General Assembly may enact general laws regulating the matters set out in this Section.

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Coming Soon from the Center!

Just Out: *North Carolina Insight*, featuring ways to improve voter turnout in N.C.
Article II: A Guide to the 2003-2004 N.C. Legislature

August: *The University of North Carolina Board of Governors: Selection, Powers, and the Board's Relationship to Campus Boards of Trustees*

October: *North Carolina Insight* theme issue on areas where race, ethnicity, & state government intersect

Become A New Charter Donor to the Center

As we celebrate our 26th Anniversary year, we need 50 Center members to step forward and become Charter Donors in our new Major Donors Program. Forty-four members already have done so. To become a Charter Donor, make a three-year pledge, preferably at \$500 a year, if that's possible for you. We are grateful for all multi-year pledges. And, 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 or complete below:

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Please bill me in this month: _____ or make your check payable to N.C. Center for Public Policy Research.

- I/we will make provisions in my will for a deferred gift to the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research.
- I plan to donate stock to the Center's account. (Please call Nancy Rose at (919) 832-2839 for Center account information.)
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