



From The Center Out

*The Newsletter of the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research ... A voice for good government
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DEMOCRAT-REPUBLICAN COALITION MEMBERS TOPS CENTER'S NEW EFFECTIVENESS RANKINGS

Members of the coalition of Democrats and Republicans that elected Co-Speakers of the N.C. House of Representatives top the rankings of the most effective legislators, recently released by the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research. The bipartisan power-sharing agreement led to equal numbers of Republicans and Democrats on almost all House committees, a budget enacted on time, a redistricting plan that passed court challenges, and earlier adjournment in July 2003, after previous sessions had lasted until December 2001 and October 2002.

These results helped four Republicans and six Democrats rank in the top 10 in the new effectiveness rankings. Co-Speakers Jim Black (D-Mecklenburg) and Richard Morgan (R-Moore) rank 1st and 2nd in effectiveness, respectively. The other high-ranking Republicans are Harold J. Brubaker (R-Randolph), ranking 5th, Wilma M. Sherrill (R-Buncombe) at 7th, and Daniel (Danny) F. McComas (R-New Hanover) at 9th. The other high-ranking Democrats are William (Bill) Culpepper III (D-Chowan) ranking 3rd, Joe Hackney (D-Orange) at 4th, James (Jim) W. Crawford Jr. (D-Granville) at 6th, William (Bill) C. Owens Jr. (D-Pasquotank) at 8th, and Gordon P. Allen (D-Person) at 10th.

"The Center's rankings help citizens understand the way the legislature works," says Ran Coble, director of the Center. "This time, the power-sharing agreement between Democrats and Republicans gave legislators in both parties opportunities to shine." Coble says that over the 26-year history of the rankings, there are at least three predictors of a high ranking in effectiveness – being a committee chair, longevity of service, and a legislator's personal skills, such as doing committee homework or skill in floor debate.

Senator Marc Basnight (D-Dare) maintained his ranking as the most effective Senator, a distinction he has held for all six sessions that he has served as President Pro Tempore of the Senate. Senators Tony Rand (D-Cumberland) and David Hoyle (D-Gaston) are rated as 2nd and 3rd most effective. Basnight chose a more limited power-sharing arrangement, giving one full committee chairmanship and five co-chairmanships to Republicans. The highest ranking Republican in effectiveness in the Senate is Fletcher L. Hartsell Jr. (R-Cabarrus) at 10th, who chairs the Judiciary II Committee. The second highest-ranked Republican is former Minority Leader Patrick Ballantine (R-New Hanover), who ranks 13th but resigned from the Senate in April to seek the Republican nomination for Governor.

Large Freshmen Class Does Unusually Well in Effectiveness Rankings

Six first-time legislators made the top half of the effectiveness rankings in the 120-member state House of Representatives. They are: Don Munford (R-Wake), ranked 37th; Deborah K. Ross (D-Wake), ranked 41st; Rick Glazier (D-Cumberland) at 44th; Karen B. Ray (R-Iredell) at 54th; Lucy T. Allen (D-Franklin) at 55th; and Margaret Highsmith Dickson (D-Cumberland) at 58th. These six represent the most first-term legislators in the top half of the House effectiveness rankings since 1995. The two highest-ranked freshmen in the Senate are Richard Y. Stevens (R-Wake), who ranks 25th, and Fred Smith (R-Johnston) at 30th. Stevens' showing is the highest for a freshman Republican in the Senate since the Center began ranking lawmakers in 1978.

"Usually, freshmen lawmakers are told it's best to be seen but not heard," says Coble. "We've seen a few freshmen fare well individually before, but it's unusual to have so many in a freshmen class viewed as effective," says Coble. Coble attributed the strong showing by freshmen to the sheer size of the freshman class, their participation in the power-sharing agreement in the House, and the previous experience of many of the freshmen in local government.

Seventy-six percent, or 25 of the 33 House freshmen, voted for the Co-Speaker arrangement, including nine freshman Republicans. Of the 18 Republicans who voted for the House budget in 2003, eight were freshmen.

New Attendance and Roll Call Voting Participation Rankings

This marks the second time the Center has tabulated attendance and roll calling voting participation rankings, using official records from the General Assembly. In the state Senate, which met for 109 days last year, perfect attendance records were earned by Senators William (Bill) R. Purcell (D-Scotland) and Albin B. (A.B.) Swindell IV (D-Nash). In the state House, which met for 107 days in 2003, 10 members attended 100 percent of the time. They are: Lorene T. Coates (D-Rowan), Billy J. Creech (R-Johnston), John D. Hall (D-Halifax), Howard J. Hunter Jr. (D-Hertford), Joe L. Kiser (R-Lincoln), Henry M. (Mickey) Michaux Jr. (D-Durham), Co-Speaker Richard T. Morgan (R-Moore), William (Bill) C. Owens Jr. (D-Pasquotank), Wilma M. Sherrill (R-Buncombe), and Paul (Skip) Stam Jr. (R-Wake). Rep. Owens also garnered a perfect attendance record in the 2001 legislative session. The Center praised the dedication of almost all legislators in attending the session last year. Thirty-five of the 50 members of the Senate and 105 of the 120 members of the House attended more than 90 percent of the days in session.

Center director Ran Coble notes, "This is the second time the Center has provided rankings of attendance and roll call voting participation. These tell citizens and voters how often their legislator was there to represent them. The effectiveness 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."

How the Effectiveness Rankings Are Done

The Center's effectiveness 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, our 14th set issued since 1978, are available from the Center for \$10. A set of publications including *Article II: A Guide to the 2003-2004 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 email tbromley@nccppr.org.

CENTER'S "EVENING WITH 4 POLITICAL CAMPAIGN CONSULTANTS" A BIG SUCCESS

On March 25th, the Center held its biennial event, "An Evening with Four Political Campaign Consultants." The panel discussion featured two Democratic and two Republican campaign consultants — two of whom work nationally and two of whom work mainly in North Carolina.

The Democratic campaign consultants were Gary Pearce of Raleigh and Diane Feldman of Washington, D.C. Pearce advises political candidates on issues, political strategy, and media. He directed Jim Hunt's 1992 and 1996 campaigns for Governor and John Edwards' campaign for the U.S. Senate in 1998. Feldman is one of the nation's top women pollsters and political strategists. She was the consultant for Dan Blue's campaign for the Democratic nomination for U.S. Senate in 2002, she handled nine states for the Clinton-Gore Presidential ticket in 1992, and she was the pollster for Sen. Bill Bradley and the late Sen. Paul Wellstone.

The Republican campaign consultants were Neal Rhoades of Winston-Salem and Whit Ayres of Alexandria, VA. Rhoades has worked for Richard Wirthlin's polling firm and was a consultant for Elizabeth Dole's campaign for the U.S. Senate in North Carolina in 2002. He also was southern political director for President George W. Bush in 2000. Ayres' firm's clients include U.S. Senator Bill Frist and Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, and Paul Coverdell of Georgia. His analysis appears periodically in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* and on CNN's "Inside Politics." Mack Lee of Time Warner's News 14 Carolina served as moderator.

Some of the interesting points made by the consultants:

(1) Both Democratic and Republican consultants agreed that there are fewer "undecideds" in this year's Presidential race than in any race in recent memory. Fewer than 10% of the likely voters are "undecided" this year. President George Bush, the Republican nominee, and Senator John Kerry, the Democratic nominee, are concentrating on 19 battleground states, and North Carolina is not one of those. North Carolina is assumed to be in the Bush column.

(2) If John Kerry adds N.C. Senator John Edwards to the ticket as his Vice Presidential nominee, this could change the political dynamic in North Carolina. Gary Pearce said this would tighten the presidential race in N.C., forcing President Bush to spend time in North Carolina defending his base. A poll conducted on May 14-17 after the March event supported Pearce's contention, showing that Bush leads Kerry 48% to 41% , with 3% for Ralph Nader and 8% undecided. But, if Edwards is on the ticket, Bush's lead narrows to 46% to 45%, a statistical dead heat.

(3) Consultants in both parties downplayed the idea that political consultants can mold candidates like clay. Whit Ayres described a heart surgeon whose study habits helped vault him to the U.S. Senate — Tennessee Sen. Bill Frist. Gary Pearce similarly described a trial lawyer whose legal skills prepared him for politics — John Edwards.

(4) All the consultants agreed that the war in Iraq and the U.S. economy will be the biggest issues in this year's campaigns, but several of the consultants warned that unexpected developments will affect the races. A few weeks after the Center's event, abuses of Iraqis at the Abu Ghraib prison came to light, possibly changing the campaign dynamics.

This is the fifth event the Center has co-sponsored with the N.C. Cable Telecommunications Association and Time Warner Cable, and about 250 people attended. The event also was videotaped and shown on cable TV stations across the state. The program aired 12 times in April in the Triangle on Time Warner's Channel 24 and will air again on June 16, 23, 30, and July 7 at 9:00 p.m., and June 17 and 24 and July 1 and 8 at 7:30 p.m..

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