



N.C. CENTER FOR  
PUBLIC POLICY  
RESEARCH

# From The Center Out

*The Newsletter of the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research ... A voice for good government  
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## RECORD NUMBER OF WOMEN AND AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THIS LEGISLATURE

As the 2005 General Assembly finalizes a state budget, it is important to think about how the legislature as an institution is changing. The numbers of women and African Americans serving in the N.C. General Assembly are at record highs in 2005. Meanwhile, rates of turnover among legislators remain high – averaging close to a fourth of the House and a fifth of the Senate every two years since 1984. And, the Center's survey of legislators, lobbyists, and capital news reporters finds that legislative committees dealing with state budgets, taxes, rules, and education continue to be viewed as the most powerful. These and other trends are detailed in the Center's citizens' guide to the 2005-2006 legislature.

### **The Rise of Women in N.C. Politics**

The first woman to serve in the N.C. General Assembly, Lillian Exum Clement of Buncombe County, took office in 1921, right after the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment to the U.S. Constitution gave women the right to vote in 1920. Women were a rarity in the legislature from then until 1973, when nine were elected. Since then, their numbers have increased at a relatively steady pace, reaching a record-high 39, or 23 percent, of all 170 legislators this year. This is nearly double the 12 percent of seats women held 20 years ago and now equals the average percentage of state legislative seats held by women across all 50 states. North Carolina also leads the South in the number of female legislators.

With more women in the General Assembly, issues such as curbing domestic violence, providing affordable child care, and achieving pay equity among state employees have a better chance to be heard and acted upon. At a recent forum in Chapel Hill on "The State of Women in the State," Sen. Ellie Kinnaird (D-Orange) said, "I think women's public policy is very different from men's public policy."

Women now hold the majority of chairs heading the most powerful committee, Appropriations, which puts together the state budget. In the Senate, two of three Appropriations Committee co-chairs are women – Senators Linda Garrou (D-Forsyth) and Kay Hagan (D-Guilford). In the House, three of six Appropriations Committee co-chairs are women – Representatives Debbie Clary (R-Cleveland), Beverly Earle (D-Mecklenburg), and Wilma Sherrill (R-Buncombe).

Women also now chair or co-chair two of the six most powerful committees in the Senate and four of the six most powerful committees in the House. In the Senate, women co-chair the Appropriations and Education/Higher Education committees. In the House, women chair or co-chair the Appropriations, Finance, Education, and Transportation committees. Jennifer Weiss (D-Wake) says, "In the General Assembly, everyone has a voice and everyone has a seat, but it makes a difference when more women get into positions of power within the legislature."

## ARTICLE II A Guide to the 2005–2006 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.

***Significant Milestones in the Rise of Women in N.C. Politics***

- \*1921: Lillian Exum Clement became the first woman to serve in the General Assembly.
- \*1996: Elaine Marshall was elected as N.C. Secretary of State, the first woman to be elected statewide to the Council of State.
- \*2000: Four of the 10 officials elected statewide to the Council of State were women, including Lieutenant Governor Beverly Perdue, Secretary of State Elaine Marshall, Labor Commissioner Cherie Berry, and Agriculture Commissioner Meg Scott Phipps.
- \*2002: Elizabeth Dole became the first woman to be elected as U.S. Senator from North Carolina.

**Most African Americans Ever in General Assembly Also in 2005**

The 2005 General Assembly also has a record number of African American members, with 26, or 15 percent of 170 legislators. The longest-serving African American in the 2005 General Assembly is Representative H.M. “Mickey” Michaux (D-Durham), who has served 14 terms, beginning in 1973. African Americans chair or co-chair one of the six most powerful committees in the Senate and three of the six most powerful committees in the House.

***Significant Milestones in the Rise of African Americans in N.C. Politics***

- \*1968: Henry Frye became the first African American elected to the General Assembly since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.
- \*1991: Dan Blue (D-Wake) became the first African American to serve as Speaker of the state House of Representatives.
- \*1992: Ralph Campbell elected as State Auditor, the first African American elected statewide to the Council of State.
- \*1999: Henry Frye became the first African American to be named Chief Justice of the state Supreme Court.

**High Turnover Among Legislators**

North Carolina also has high turnover among legislators. Since the 1984 elections, turnover has averaged 22.9% in the state House every election and 20.4% in the Senate. The 2005 General Assembly has 12 Senators and 21 Representatives who are new since the 2003 session, with three more who were appointed to seats in 2004 and are serving their first full terms in their chambers.

**Survey Results on the Most Powerful Committees**

The Center’s guide also provides rankings of the “most powerful” committees in each chamber to help citizens understand the inner workings of the legislature. Based on surveys of all legislators, registered lobbyists based in North Carolina, and capital news correspondents, the six most powerful Senate committees, in order, are: (1) Appropriations/Base Budget; (2) Finance; (3) Rules and Operations of the Senate; (4) Judiciary I; (5) Education/Higher Education; and (6) Commerce. The six most powerful House committees are: (1) Appropriations; (2) Finance; (3) Rules, Calendar, and Operations of the House; (4) Judiciary I; (5) Education; and (6) Transportation. The committees viewed as most powerful are very consistent from session to session.

These and other legislative trends are outlined in *Article II: A Guide to the 2005-2006 North Carolina Legislature*. Authored by Center policy analyst Sam Watts, this citizens’ guide contains profiles and photos of each of the 170 members of the General Assembly, including business and home addresses, phone and fax numbers, counties in their districts, the number of terms they have served, and their educational and occupational backgrounds. For members who served in the previous session, the guide lists five bills they introduced in the 2003-2004 session, their votes on 12 bills of statewide interest, and past rankings of their attendance, roll call voting participation, and effectiveness. The effectiveness rankings are based on surveys of all legislators, registered lobbyists based in North Carolina, and the capital news media. The guide also includes demographic and occupational trends for the General Assembly since 1985. A pocket-sized *Supplement to Article II* contains all committee assignments, committee meeting schedules, legislative office addresses and telephone numbers, e-mail addresses at the General Assembly, and seating charts. Copies of *Article II* and the *Supplement* are available for \$25 a set, which includes tax, postage, and handling. 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](mailto:tbromley@nccppr.org). We now accept credit card orders also.

## Coming Attractions: Key Issues Facing Eastern North Carolina, Part II

Coming soon to a mailbox near you: a follow-up study of **Key Issues for the Future of Eastern North Carolina**. This study – to be published in *North Carolina Insight* – will include at least three key elements: (1) *The Changing Face of Agriculture in the East*; (2) *Economic Engines in the East*: What drives the Eastern North Carolina economy? Who are the biggest employers in Eastern North Carolina's 41 counties, what industries are declining or growing, and what is possible for the future? (3) *Military Installations in Eastern North Carolina*: What are the benefits and challenges in having five major military bases in this region, and how do federal base closures or relocations affect the East? This project follows up on previous issue of *North Carolina Insight* published in 2001 focusing exclusively on Eastern North Carolina, the state's poorest region. It aims to combine the best of the Center in its roles as a watchdog evaluator of public programs and a think tank that envisions what is possible for the future.

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