



**NORTH CAROLINA CENTER FOR
PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH, INC.**

NEWS RELEASE

Embargoed for release until Tuesday, April 10, 2012:
May be broadcast Tuesday a.m. and may
appear in Tuesday newspapers and electronic media.
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REPUBLICANS TOP LATEST EFFECTIVENESS RANKINGS, SAYS N.C. POLICY CENTER

Republicans claimed all 10 of the highest effectiveness rankings in the state Senate and 12 of the top 15 spots in the state House, according to the latest rankings of legislators' effectiveness released today by the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research. President Pro Tem of the Senate Phil Berger (R-Rockingham) and Speaker of the House Thom Tillis (R-Mecklenburg) topped the rankings. The effectiveness rankings are based on responses to surveys from the legislators themselves, from registered lobbyists, and from the capital news media who cover state government. The Center also released new rankings of legislators' attendance and participation in roll call votes.

In 2009, Democrats held a 30-20 majority in the Senate and a 68-52 majority in the House. The 2010 elections shifted power to Republicans, who now hold a 31-19 majority in the Senate and a 68-52 majority in the House. In 2011, Republican legislators with previous legislative service dramatically improved their rankings. On average, Republican Senators moved up 20 spots in the rankings, while Democratic Senators dropped an average of 14 spots in the rankings. Sen. Andrew Brock (R-Davie) moved up 38 spots to 12th, the most of any Senator. House Republicans improved their rankings an average of 49 spots, while House Democrats fell an average of 37 places. In the House, Rep. Marilyn Avila (R-Wake) improved her ranking the most by moving up 90 spots to 21st.

"Being a member of the political party which has a majority in the legislature is one of four factors that historically lead to a higher effectiveness ranking – but only one factor," said the Center's director, Ran Coble. "The other factors are how long someone serves in the legislature, whether they chair a committee, and their personal skills in moving bills successfully through the legislature."

Holders of Committee Chairmanships Rank High

Sixteen of the Senate's 20 most effective members and 18 of the House's top 20 serve as committee chairs. In 2011, Republicans held all but three Committee chairmanships, appointing only Democrats Rep. Jim Crawford (D-Granville), former Speaker Joe Hackney (D-Orange), and Sen. Michael Walters (D-Robeson) as committee chairs. Crawford was one of five Democrats who crossed party lines in 2011 to help override Democratic Governor Beverly Perdue's veto of the Republican budget. By contrast, in 2009, the Democratic majority appointed Republicans to six committee chairmanships. In 2005, when the Democrats had slim majorities in the House and Senate, they appointed Republicans to 31 committee chairmanships.

In 2009, no freshmen legislators were appointed as chairs of any standing committees. However, with 42 freshmen in the 2011 legislature, 11 freshmen Republican Senators were appointed to chair 15 committees. The Center said this is why freshmen were not clustered at the bottom of the rankings this year, as has traditionally been the case.

Some Legislators Consistently Rank Highly Whether Their Party Is in Control or Not

Over the years, the Center says some skilled legislators have done well in the rankings regardless of whether their party was in power. For example, Republican Senators Richard Stevens (R-Wake) and Fletcher Hartsell (R-Cabarrus) and Democratic Representatives Joe Hackney (D-Orange) and Bill Owens (D-Pasquotank) have all finished in the top 14, whether their party was in the majority or not.

Democrats Who Sided with Republicans on Veto Overrides Rank Highly, But Not All Will Return in 2013

The five Democrats who joined Republicans in the House in overriding Gov. Beverly Perdue's veto of the Republicans' budget received high effectiveness rankings. The five are Representatives Jim Crawford (D-Granville, who ranked 7th), Bill Owens (D-Pasquotank, ranked 14th), William Brisson (D-Bladen, at 25th), Timothy Spear (D-Washington, at 31st), and Dewey Hill (D-Columbus, at 33rd). However, three of them are not running for re-election (Hill, Owens, and Spear), and two face opposition in their May Democratic primary (Brisson and Crawford).

Most Effective Women and African Americans

Sen. Debbie Clary (R-Cleveland) was the highest ranking female in the Senate at 15th, but she resigned in January 2012 and will not return in 2013. Rep. Julia Howard (R-Davie), a 12-term legislator, was the House's highest ranking female at 9th. Sen. Dan Blue (D-Wake) at 17th and Rep. Mickey Michaux (D-Durham) at 38th were the top ranked African-American legislators in the Senate and House, respectively.

Legislators with Perfect Attendance

This marks the sixth time the Center has tabulated rankings of attendance and participation in roll call votes, using official records from the General Assembly. In the state Senate, eight members earned perfect attendance records – Senators Bob Atwater (D-Chatham), Andrew Brock (R-Davie), Jim Davis (R-Macon), Kathy Harrington (R-Gaston), Ralph Hise (R-Mitchell), Neal Hunt (R-Wake), Martin Nesbitt (D-Buncombe), and Buck Newton (R-Wilson). In the state House, 32 members tied for 1st with 100 percent attendance. This is the highest number of House members garnering perfect attendance records since the Center began tabulating the attendance rankings in 2002.

Representative Mickey Michaux (D-Durham) has had perfect attendance for five consecutive sessions, and Representative Phillip Frye (R-Mitchell) has had perfect attendance for four consecutive sessions. Representatives Hugh Blackwell (R-Burke), Nelson Dollar (R-Wake), Elmer Floyd (D-Cumberland), Julia Howard (R-Davie), Shirley Randleman (R-Wilkes), and Tim Spear (D-Washington) all had perfect attendance for the second session in a row.

The Center praised the dedication of most legislators in attending the session last year. Forty-seven of the 50 members of the Senate and 118 of the 120 members of the House attended more than 90 percent of the days in session. Center director Ran Coble says, "That's an impressive attendance record for part-time legislators who have full-time jobs back home, especially when many have to drive a great distance to Raleigh each week."

Legislators with Perfect Records in Participating in All Roll Call Votes

Four Senators voted in all 947 electronically-recorded roll call votes with no absences or excuses from voting last year – Andrew Brock (R-Davie), Rick Gunn (R-Alamance), Kathy Harrington (R-Gaston), and Neal Hunt (R-Wake). Brock also cast a vote every time in the 2003, 2005, 2007, and 2009 sessions, and Hunt participated in all roll call votes in the 2009 session.

Four members of the House of Representatives voted in all 1,326 electronically recorded votes in that chamber – Nelson Dollar (R-Wake), Mark Hollo (R-Alexander), Pat Hurley (R-Randolph), and Bert Jones (R-Rockingham). Dollar also participated in every vote in the 2005, 2007, and 2009 sessions, and Hurley in every vote in the 2009 session.

Ran Coble says that the N.C. Center compiles the three sets of rankings to give citizens different ways to evaluate the performance of their legislators. “The rankings of attendance and voting participation tell citizens how often their legislator was there to represent them,” he says. “The effectiveness rankings tell citizens how effective their legislator was when he or she was there. The surveys hold a mirror up to the legislature, and the rankings are the reflection.”

In odd-numbered years, the Center publishes additional evaluations of legislative performance. *Article II: A Citizen’s Guide to the Legislature* includes data on how many bills each legislator introduced and how many of those he or she got passed. The guide also includes all members’ votes on what legislators said were the 12 most important bills of the session. The Center now publishes a total of five different legislative performance indicators: effectiveness, attendance, voting participation, success in getting bills passed, and votes on the most significant bills of the session.

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 are asked to rate each legislator’s effectiveness on the basis of participation in committee work, skill at guiding bills through committee and in floor debates, and general knowledge or expertise in special fields. The survey respondents also are asked to consider the respect legislators command from their peers, his or her ethics, 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 mark the 18th time the Center has undertaken this comprehensive survey. The first edition evaluated the performance of the 1977-78 General Assembly. The response rate to the survey continues to be very high. Sixty-three of the 120 House members (53 percent) responded to the Center’s survey, as did 24 (49 percent) of the 49 Senators (Sen. James Forrester, R-Gaston, died in October 2011), 144 of the 407 registered lobbyists who regularly work in the legislature and are based in North Carolina (35 percent), and 6 of 22 capital news correspondents (27 percent) – all well above accepted standards of statistical validity. The overall response rate was 40 percent.

National Praise for the Center’s Rankings

Several states – including Arkansas, California, Florida, North Carolina, Texas, and Washington – have ranked the effectiveness of their legislators using different methods. California has ranked legislators in terms of effectiveness, integrity, energy, and even intelligence. “It is hard to deny that the ratings, when done responsibly, serve a legitimate public purpose,” said 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 Citizen's Guide to the 2011-2012 N.C. Legislature*, which was released in April 2011. The Center's guide profiles each member of the General Assembly and includes the following biographical and voting information:

- occupation and education;
- business and home addresses;
- telephone and fax numbers;
- legislative room number, phone number, and email address;
- party affiliation, district number, and counties represented;
- number of terms served;
- committee assignments;
- number of bills sponsored and enacted into law in the 2009-10 session;
- individual votes on 12 of the most important bills in the 2009-10 session; and
- past effectiveness rankings (1991-2009).

About the Center

The North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit research organization created in 1977 to evaluate state government programs and study important public policy issues facing North Carolina. The Center does *not* endorse candidates. The Center is supported in part by a grant for general operating support from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation in Winston-Salem, with additional support from 11 other private foundations, 110 corporate contributors, and about 500 individual and organizational members. The Center publishes a journal called *North Carolina Insight* and in-depth research reports, including a study of governance of the 16 public universities in North Carolina.

The Center recently has conducted in-depth studies on issues affecting North Carolina's rapidly growing aging population and key issues facing the state's community colleges, including whether all community colleges make federal student loan programs available to their students. Upcoming studies will evaluate the state's mental health reforms and examine state tuition and financial aid policy, including how to increase NC's college-going and college completion rates.

Printed copies of the new effectiveness rankings are available from the Center for \$10, or you may download a digital copy from the Center's website at www.nccppr.org for \$10. You also may order an entire set of online publications for \$40 – including *Article II: A Citizen's Guide to the 2011-2012 N.C. Legislature*, the effectiveness rankings, and rankings of the most influential lobbyists (to be released in August). To order just the printed rankings booklet, write the Center at P.O. Box 430, Raleigh, NC 27602, call: (919) 832-2839; fax (919) 832-2847; or email Tammy Bromley at tbromley@nccppr.org. To subscribe to *Article II* online, which includes both sets of rankings, visit www.nccppr.org.

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