



## **Representative McLawhorn's News from Raleigh**

**March 28, 2008**

Legislators understand that our constituents face issues in many different areas of their lives. Even during the interim when we are not in Session, we work to find solutions to problems you face so that we can make North Carolina stronger and better. This week I would like to give you an update on some of the issues that our committees are studying.

Thank you as always for your support and allowing me to share this information with you. Feel free to contact me if I can be of any service.

### **The 21st Century Transportation Committee**

As one of the fastest growing states in the nation, North Carolina has a complex transportation system. North Carolina and Texas have the country's largest state-owned highways systems, with more than 79,000 miles. The 21st Century Transportation Committee studies transportation infrastructure needs in North Carolina.

Since transportation issues are so complex, this committee is divided into several subcommittees to better address these issues. Members have heard presentations about road quality, federal funding and relieving traffic congestion. The committee has recently studied innovative ways to raise funds and offset the costs of improving our transportation system. Committee members have focused on the North Carolina Long Range Transportation Plan and needs. Members have also discussed expanding rail infrastructure and service. The committee will have its recommendations out to the public by the end of April.

### **Joint Select Committee on the Agricultural Drought Response**

North Carolina is experiencing its worst drought on record. Although recent rain has brought some relief, we still need to conserve water resources. The members of the Joint Select Committee on the Agricultural Drought Response are leading the General Assembly's response to this crisis and work closely with Gov. Mike Easley and state agencies to lessen the damage the drought has already caused in the agribusiness sector.

Committee members are continually updated on the history, current conditions, and outlook for the drought as well as the agricultural and economic impact of the drought. They have also listened to a report on the governor's response to the drought and legislative proposals for the General Assembly to consider. Members are discussing possible long-term solutions including new reservoirs, deepening existing reservoirs and interstate and intrastate transfers.

### **House Select Committee on Rising Home Foreclosures**

Most of us have heard about the increasing number of home mortgage foreclosures and how they affect our economy, interest rates and home prices. North Carolina has fewer adjustable rate loans, sub prime loans and nontraditional loans, and less mortgage fraud than the national average. Nonetheless, foreclosure starts have been increasing. For each foreclosure in a neighborhood, the surrounding homes lose about 1 percent of their value.

The House Select Committee on Rising Home Foreclosures is studying ways to decrease the number of foreclosures in North Carolina. Members have been discussing the need for more mortgage counseling

and the lack of affordable rental housing. The committee is also considering ways to increase funding for counseling services and to slow down the process so that homeowners and lenders have more time to resolve problems.

### **The Joint Legislative Study Committee on Public School Funding Formulas**

The Joint Legislative Study Committee on Public School Funding Formulas, of which I am a member, studies all public school formulas and distributions. The committee has been focusing on the allotment formula, funding history and expenditures in public schools. Members of the committee have also listened to national education experts' testimony on several educational topics that affect North Carolina students.

Most allotment formulas factor in the average daily membership of students assigned to a school. Basic allotments cover general needs such as supplies and teachers' salaries. Supplemental allotments can cover any extra funding schools may need. For example, additional funding has been provided for low-wealth counties and at-risk students.

The Joint Legislative Study Committee on Public School Funding Formulas has recently studied student transportation costs and the education of children with disabilities and limited English proficiency. The committee has also studied the Public School Building Capital Fund, NC Lottery funding, At-Risk Student Services/Alternative Schools, improving student accountability and funding for gifted students.

### **Legislative Commission on Global Climate Change**

The Legislative Commission on Global Climate Change met in conjunction with the Emerging Issues Forum last month. Dr. Rajendra K. Pachauri, Nobel Prize-winning chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change presented the science of global climate change, what kind of changes we could anticipate in NC, and what we could do about it. The commission adopted a resolution stating that Global Climate Change is indeed real, and further, that human activity is a factor in that change.

The Legislative Commission on Global Climate Change is considering policy recommendations for the General Assembly. Some of these include setting a cap for carbon emissions, establishing a cap and trade system for carbon emissions, developing a market for carbon offsets that could help our farmers, and adopting cleaner car standards as eleven other states have done. The commission is also considering developing more renewable energy opportunities such as offshore wind and wave energy along with other policies. The commission will make formal recommendations to the Legislature in May.

### **Environmental Review Commission**

The Environmental Review Commission evaluates actions of all boards, commissions, departments, and agencies of State and local government related to the environment and protecting the environment. In January the commission conducted five well-attended public hearings across the state to solicit comments on community, business and citizen concerns and ideas about what the study should address.

The commission is currently working on a water study with the Institute of Government focusing on the allocation of surface water resource availability and maintenance. The study will also involve regulations for transferring water from one river basin to another, the withdrawal of water for consumption, accuracy of equipment used to transfer water from river basins and the benefits of establishing formal and informal procedures for transferring water. Members of the commission are also studying the purposes of the Regional Water Supply Planning Act of 1971. The commission hopes to conduct a long-term study of issues related to water research and sources in the state to provide an adequate and high quality water supply for the future of North Carolina.

The commission is also continuing to address swine farm and energy issues, and the need for further regulation of hazardous waste transfer facilities, among other subjects on which it has been directed to study and make recommendations.

### **The Joint Select Committee on Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Management Recovery**

The Joint Select Committee on Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Management Recovery studies ways to improve our emergency and disaster preparedness. In the event of an emergency, local agencies such as firefighters and EMS are the first to respond. If the incident exceeds local capability, the county, the state and finally federal government will intervene.

This committee has studied floodplain mapping, the State Medical Assistance Team and the North Carolina National Guard's role in emergencies and disasters. Members of the committee have also heard presentations on the petroleum shortage, the drought, and protecting special populations such as the mentally ill, elderly, low-income, and prison population during emergencies and disasters. The committee is looking at how to better protect North Carolina from pandemic flu and how to safeguard our agricultural resources from disease and terrorist attacks.