



Representative McLawhorn's News from Raleigh

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The House moved closer this week to rolling out a full budget, with budget writers meeting long and late to craft the \$20 billion spending plan. The full House could consider the proposal as early as next week and would then turn it over to the Senate. As always, we also continued to work on many important policy issues. A House committee has recommended changing the way criminal investigators perform suspect identification lineups, and another is considering ways to open birth records for adoptees. We also took time to honor our state this week by approving an official salute to the Old North State.

Budget

House budget writers have slowed down passage of the appropriations bill in anticipation of good news about more money being available from the Department of Revenue. House leaders still anticipate passage of their budget early next month. The measure will then go to the Senate, and lawmakers will try to approve a final version before the start of the next fiscal year on July 1. The pace of business in the House continues to quicken as we approach the May 17th "crossover deadline", which is the date non-funding bills must pass the chamber in which they were introduced in order to remain eligible for consideration during this two-year biennium. For the next several weeks, committees will hold extra meetings, and floor sessions will run long so bill sponsors will have the opportunity to pass their legislation.

The House Transportation budget subcommittee met yesterday afternoon and voted to recommend that annual transfers of funds from the Highway Fund and the Highway Trust Fund to the General Fund be eliminated by July 2013. Other budget subcommittee did not meet.

Health

Adults adopted as children would have access to their original birth certificates under a bill (H351) introduced in both the House and the Senate. The original certificates would contain the names of the adoptees' birth parents. The certificates are often sealed from public view at the time of adoption. Some descendants of a deceased adoptee could also make the request. Birth parents would be allowed to indicate whether they wanted to be contacted by the adoptee. They would also be allowed to provide an updated medical history form.

The state Department of Health and Human Services adopted new Medicaid reimbursement rates this week. This change will raise the Medicaid reimbursement rate for providers to \$51.28 an hour. Previously this rate was \$40 an hour, which many thought would contribute to declines in service. Hopefully this change will aid North Carolina's struggling Mental Health system.

Education

The fund established to hold the net proceeds of the North Carolina Education Lottery has grown to \$305 million after a recent transfer of \$86 million. Lottery sales totaled almost \$950 million between its inception on March 30, 2006, and April 19. State law requires at least 35 percent of net revenues be used for education initiatives such as class-size reduction, preschool programs, school construction and college scholarships.

Ethics

Public officials and state workers found guilty of corruption would lose their pensions under a bill approved unanimously in the Senate. The bill would cover legislators, judges, teachers and state and local employees convicted of election fraud or public corruption.

Public Safety

A House judiciary committee recommends adopting rules that law officers would have to follow when conducting eyewitness lineups. A state judicial commission proposed the changes a few years ago after evidence showed that lineups were sometimes faulty and failed to reveal the actual criminals. Some law enforcement trainers have taught officers the revised methods recommended by the commission, but they aren't obligated to. The bill (H1625) would require the training and use of the procedures, such as presenting the suspects or their pictures one at a time rather than all together and having an officer not involved in the investigation conduct the lineup.

The state Department of Justice has unveiled an updated sex offender registry Web site to help people better track people convicted of sex crimes. The new site allows users to register to receive e-mail alerts when a sex offender moves in a neighborhood or near a school and to view maps that show where sex offenders live within a 5-mile radius of a specific address. A person also can receive e-mails about a specific offender. State law requires people convicted of sex-related crimes to register with a local sheriff and the online registry provides information about the criminal, including a photo. <http://www.ncfindoffender.gov/search.aspx>

Notes

House members on Tuesday approved a bill (H351) that would give North Carolina an official salute. The salute, recited with an outstretched arm and the palm facing up, is: "I salute the flag of North Carolina and pledge to the Old North State love, loyalty and faith." The Senate has already approved a bill adopting the salute, and it now goes to Gov. Mike Easley for his signature.

North Carolina has one of the fastest-growing high-tech sectors in the nation, according to a new national study of the industry. The state ranked fifth in the report with a gain of 7,600 jobs in 2005, according to the report from the trade group AeA. North Carolina had the 16th-largest high-tech industry, employing 142,300 tech workers with a total payroll of \$10 billion.

The House will be back in session on Monday at 7pm.

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