



Larry D. Hall
House of Representatives
29th District



April's Update

From the Desk of Representative Larry D. Hall

April 26, 2007

This month my colleagues and I moved issued a long overdue apology for slavery and other legalized racial injustices and outlawed investments by our state in Sudan, where the government is accused of widespread human rights abuses. We announced a plan to help increase the number of high-school graduates in North Carolina and made very important appointments to the University of North Carolina Board of Governors. We also took time to recognize the remarkable season of the national champion men's basketball team from Barton College and the CIAA Men's Basketball Champions from Elizabeth City State University. House education leaders moved quickly this month to start work on an initiative to improve the state's high school graduation rate, holding an informational session with educators, business people and leaders of community groups. Meanwhile, budget writers neared agreement on an education package. Outside of our chamber state government and state education leaders have started a review of campus safety in the wake of the tragic shootings at Virginia Tech. We wish them well and pledge to help protect our college students in any way we can.

One looming issue will be the state budget which we in the house are trying to have prepared by May 17th. Under the able leadership of our Senior Appropriations Chairman, The Hon. H.M. "Mickey" Michaux we are fast approaching that goal. It is a much less than perfect process and requires the best efforts of all involved. It is always a challenge to divide our resources consistent with our professed priorities and needs.

Thank you as always for allowing me to share this information with you and please let me know if I can be of any service.

EDUCATION

_ Speaker Joe Hackney, along with other leaders in the House, announced the start of an initiative to improve the state's high school graduation rate by setting up pilot programs that will serve as models for other schools. A recent report showed that about 30 percent of the state's students aren't graduating within four years of entering high school. The House plans to set aside money this year for the program and has set a goal of a 100 percent graduation rate.

_ The House appointed eight people to the University of North Carolina Board of Governors, the policy making board for the state's 16 public universities. Ronald Leatherwood of Waynesville, former

Robeson County schools superintendent Purnell Swett and former Fayetteville Mayor Marshall Pitts were elected to the board for the first time. The House also elected five incumbents: Brent Barringer of Cary; Charles Hayes of Sanford; G. Leroy Lail of Hickory; Gladys Ashe Robinson of Pleasant Garden; and Priscilla Taylor of Chapel Hill.

_ The House approved a measure that would give school systems more scheduling flexibility. Under the bill, the State Board of Education could grant waivers for educational purposes to school districts that want to start before Aug. 25, the date set in state law. Some parents and the travel industry want the state to continue enforcing that law. School boards and educators say the strict scheduling requirements limit students' academic options. The bill must now go to the Senate.

_ A House committee voted in favor of legislation that would ban corporal punishment in the state's schools. Right now, 67 school systems in the state allow corporal punishment while 48 have banned it. A survey by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill found that students are seldom spanked in the systems that allow it. School groups are divided over the proposal. The N.C. School Boards Association believes the decision should be left to local boards, while the N.C. Association of Educators argues that some teachers in counties that allow corporal punishment are being forced to uphold a policy they oppose.

_ Education, community and business leaders gathered this week to help provide the House Education Subcommittee on Pre-School, Elementary and Secondary Education with some guidance as it begins a new initiative to improve the state's graduation rate. Howard Lee, chairman of the State Board of Education, State Superintendent of Public Instruction June Atkinson, as well as the presidents of Communities in Schools, the North Carolina Association of Educators and the N.C. Society of Hispanic Professionals and representatives from the Hunt Institute, the N.C. Justice Center and SAS attended the hearing, along with Speaker Joe Hackney, House Majority Leader Hugh Holliman and other lawmakers. Each of the presenters agreed that the state needed to use a multi-faceted approach and increase community involvement if it wanted to address the needs of students at risk of dropping out of school. The next step in the initiative is to hold two public hearings – one in Raleigh and one in Durham, where local community leaders administrators, teachers, parents, and students are expected to share their concerns and ideas about how to reduce the dropout rate. The House is expected to approve legislation this session, possibly to create pilot programs using some of the ideas gathered from the public at the hearings and from educators.

_ The House education budget subcommittee has agreed with the Senate on a nearly \$11 billion budget proposal. The draft offers about \$114 million less than what Gov. Mike Easley wants and would not allow for his Learn and Earn program to be offered online to all of the state's high schools. Budget writers in both chambers hope that more money will be available for education after the budget and finance packages are refined.

CITIZEN & HUMAN RIGHTS

_ Lawmakers in both the House and the Senate introduced resolutions expressing "profound regret" for slavery and legalized racial segregation. The bill in the House, introduced Wednesday, has four sponsors and two co-sponsors while the Senate bill was filed by Sen. Tony Rand and co-sponsored by 35 of the Senate's 50 members. "It's a part of our time that is difficult to confront, of course, but in this way and time it should be confronted," said Rand, the Senate's Democratic majority leader. House Speaker Joe Hackney is also supportive of the bill, which he says will have a "healing" purpose. By passing the measures North Carolina became the third state in the nation to formally apologize for slavery. The resolutions included apologies for the state's Jim Crow laws and other legalized

segregation dating to the 17th century. Several lawmakers say they hope the discussion will lead to a longer debate on how the vestiges of slavery and racism still permeate our society and that their colleagues will back proposals aimed at eliminating racial disparities. Legislatures in Virginia and Maryland recently approved similar resolutions.

_ The state House voted in favor of a bill that would require the state to divest its holdings in companies that do business or have strong ties to the Sudanese government. That government is accused of genocide and human rights abuses in the Darfur region. North Carolina would be the first state in the Southeast to enact such a ban if the bill becomes law, supporters say. Moore has already taken steps on his own to sell the state's holdings in nine companies that have done business with Sudan.

_ Activists working on behalf of government workers want lawmakers to abolish a nearly 50-year-old law that prevents state employees from bargaining collectively. The law allows state employees to join unions and associations, but prohibits them from being represented by such groups during contract negotiations. The International Labor Organization, a United Nations agency, ruled recently that North Carolina's laws violate principles of freedom of association and the right of unions to seek improved conditions for their members. North Carolina and Virginia are the only states that specifically prohibit state and local governments from collectively bargaining with their employees, the N.C. Public Service Workers Union says.

_ A revised bill (H259) to restrict smoking in North Carolina has again cleared the Judiciary I Committee, this time without the proposed ban on smoking at businesses that some lawmakers opposed. The latest version of the bill would prohibit smoking in restaurants and lodging facilities statewide and allow local governments to impose stricter regulations for other businesses. Existing law doesn't allow local governments to enact anti-smoking rules more restrictive than state regulations.

_ The House unanimously approved a bill (H267) Monday that would outlaw the use or possession of alcohol inhalers. Violating the proposed law would be a Class 1 misdemeanor. The devices vaporize distilled alcohol and mix it with oxygen, allowing it to be breathed rather than drunk. The process allows alcohol to enter the bloodstream quicker. Seventeen other states have banned the devices. The Senate also has passed a version of the bill. The chambers will negotiate a compromise.

HEALTH

_ Smoking around most buildings in the University of North Carolina system would be banned under a bill supported by the House Health Committee. The bill allows exemptions for the University of North Carolina Health Care System and medical buildings at East Carolina University. The measure wouldn't apply to private businesses within the 100-foot buffer zones. The measure now goes to a House judiciary committee.

_ I joined a bipartisan group of representatives introduced legislation this week that would give Medicaid relief to the state's counties. Medicaid spending in the state has increased from \$3.1 billion in 1995 to \$8.5 billion in the last fiscal year. During that time, the counties' share of that spending has nearly tripled to about \$450 million. The proposal would cap the counties' contributions to what they spent in the 2005-06 fiscal year and would also allow the state to offer financial help to poor counties or others struggling to pay their share of Medicaid costs.

_ Some nurses asked the North Carolina Board of Nursing to follow the lead of the state Medical Board by passing an ethics policy that bars its members from taking part in executions. The N.C. Nurses Association plans to discuss the issue later this month, but its position would not bind the licensing board. A nursing board spokesman says the group would have to seek legislation to keep nurses from participating in executions since the board has no authority to discipline its members for ethics violations as the medical board does. The Medical Board's policy has resulted in a de facto death penalty moratorium in the state as the courts seek to resolve the board's stance with a state law that requires doctors to attend executions.

_ A revised bill (H259) to restrict smoking in North Carolina that I sponsored in cooperation with Majority Leader Hugh Holliman received a favorable report from the Judiciary I Committee and should be voted on by the full house on Tuesday, May 1. The latest version of the bill would prohibit smoking in restaurants and lodging facilities statewide and allow local governments to impose stricter regulations for other businesses. Current law doesn't allow local governments to enact anti-smoking rules more restrictive than state regulations.

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ENVIRONMENT

_ A new report from the Environmental Review Commission recommends that North Carolina spend as much as \$25 million dollars over the next 10 years to find better ways to produce fuel from plants. The report also suggests that by 2017 10 percent of the state's liquid fuel should come from crops grown in the state. Currently, the state uses 5 billion to 6 billion gallons of petroleum based fuel in a year. The report also recommends the creation of a biofuels commission to work on policy, guide research and coordinate efforts in the public and private sectors to make and market biofuels.

_ A Senate measure (S1103) is expected to help revive the state's shrinking oyster population. Disease, declining water quality and over harvesting have destroyed 90 percent of the state's oyster reefs since the early 1900s, according to state officials. Oysters are considered essential to the marine habitat because they filter water and their reefs serve as habitat for other species. The bill proposes spending \$16.3 million for a statewide oyster hatchery program that would spawn up to 5 billion larvae a year.

CHAMPIONS RECOGNIZED -

_ Members of Barton College's championship men's basketball team visited our chamber this week and welcomed with great enthusiasm. Barton trailed the reigning national NCAA Division II champions from Winona State by seven points with 40 seconds remaining in the game and staged a remarkable comeback to win 77-75 on a basket scored as time expired. Barton, based in Wilson, finished the season with a 31-5 record and won their last 21 games.

_ The Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association's (CIAA) men's basketball champions from Elizabeth City State University were honored in the House on Tuesday. The Vikings went into the CIAA tournament in Charlotte with a losing record and were lightly regarded, but they won four

straight games, all by 5 points or less, and upset perennial contender Virginia Union in the finals to capture their first CIAA men's basketball championship in 26 years under Chancellor Willie Gilchrist and Head Coach Shawn Walker. The Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association was the first collegiate conference championship basketball tournament in the country and remains one of the largest if not the largest in the nation based on attendance. The CIAA conference has had the most schools in their conference in this state, numbering up to nine (9) schools. Further, several of the founding schools of the MEAC were members of the CIAA.

BUDGET

_ The main budget-writers in the General Assembly asked their fellow lawmakers to trim Gov. Mike Easley's proposed \$20.1 billion budget by about 1 percent. The \$210 million cut would reduce the governor's proposed \$350 million expansion budget by 60 percent. Easley's recommended education budget would be reduced by \$115 million, while the Health and Human Services proposal would lose \$26 million. Part of the reason for the proposed cuts is uncertainty over the state's tax structure. Easley and some members of the House favor keeping a half-cent sales tax and an income tax increase for the state's wealthiest workers – both approved in 2001 – on the books. Some members of the Senate want to eliminate the taxes, which together generate about \$300 million.

TRANSPORTATION

_ The state's drivers will soon be seeing red. Starting April 16, the blue lettering on the state's standard-issue license plates will be replaced with red letters. The Wright brothers' plane and sea grass will remain as the background. The change is the first to North Carolina's standard license plate design in 25 years. North Carolina has had the same standard plate longer than any other state except Delaware. Its plate dates to 1962. The state set aside \$1.2 million for the more than 600,000 new plates it plans to distribute during the first year.

NOTICES

NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL TEAM – Repeat CIAA Champions for 2005 & 2006 will be honored at the general assembly on Tuesday May 1, tentative time is 3:00pm at the Legislative Building located at 16 West Jones Street, Raleigh, NC 27601. This is a unique honor as the Eagles were repeat conference champions and were undefeated during the regular season in 2006.

What: Honoring NCCU Football Championship Team

Where: NC House Legislative Chamber, 16 W. Jones St., Raleigh, NC

When: Tuesday May 1, 3:00 p.m.

THE HOUSE INITIATIVE ON DROPOUT REFORM - will meet Tuesday, May 1 with administrators, teachers, parents, students and community leaders for a public hearing on how to improve the state's graduation rate.

I will be hosting this meeting will be conducted at Shepard Middle School in Durham in District 29. Representatives Susan Fisher and Earline Parmon as co-chairs of the commission.

They hope to hear from all sectors of the community about the issues facing students at risk of dropping out.

I enthusiastically encourage members of the public are encouraged to attend, and each presenter will be given up to four minutes to speak. I would recommend that where possible you have written comments to be presented in case there is not sufficient time for follow-up.

A second hearing is planned for May 8 in Raleigh. We hope you will be able to attend.

What: Meeting of House Initiative on Dropout Reform

Where: Shepard Middle School Auditorium, 2401 Dakota St., Durham

When: Tuesday May 1, 6-8:30 p.m.

Please remember that you can listen to each day's session, committee meetings and press conferences on the General Assembly's website at www.ncleg.net. Once on the site, select "audio," and then make your selection – House Chamber, Senate Chamber, Appropriations Committee Room or Press Conference Room.

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