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House of Representatives  
29<sup>th</sup> District



## **January's Preview**

**From the Office of Representative Larry D. Hall**  
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Even when the legislature is not in session, lawmakers continue to work for the well being of our state. One of the ways they do this is through study commissions and oversight committees. During this past session, we used our study commissions to address several issues, including improving North Carolina's transportation infrastructure.

We are also continuing to evaluate the economic and environmental impacts of offshore drilling and working to better understand and reduce poverty, particularly in rural areas.

The following information outlines where we are now in our efforts and some of the recommendations and findings of our studies. I hope you will find them useful.

Thank you as always for taking an interest in North Carolina government and for supporting our efforts to make our state a better place.

Improving Transportation - The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Transportation Committee was established last year to look at ways to improve the state's transportation by reducing congestion, improving efficiency and productivity, increasing safety, improving the environment and supporting economic development.

After meeting more than a year, the committee recently issued several recommendations.

One of the main findings of the committee was that the state's continued growth presents great challenges to our infrastructure. North Carolina's population is growing at the ninth-fastest rate in the nation and the state already maintains more miles of road than all but one other state.

Preparing the state's roads for the anticipated growth will require funding sources that don't depend on gasoline use, as the existing system does, the committee determined.

The committee recommended several alternate financing options, such as increasing the highway use tax; implementing a vehicle miles traveled fee; increasing vehicle registration fees; authorizing a bond referendum to accelerate construction on high traffic, high congestion roadways; and authorizing a local option sales tax for transportation for counties, cities, and metropolitan regions.

Other policy objectives are to reduce congestion; preserve our current transportation system, while making improvements; reduce fatal accidents and serious injuries on transportation facilities; restore public trust and confidence in the delivery of transportation services; and increase cooperation and collaboration at all levels of government.

Televised Sessions - The House Select Committee on Televising House Sessions has recommended that the chamber begin offering live, gavel-to-gavel coverage of floor sessions. The committee's report also suggests that selected committee meetings – including those of the Appropriation and Finance committees – be televised.

Twenty-eight other states already have some form of over-the-air broadcasting of television coverage of the legislature. North Carolina broadcasts only audio coverage of the House and Senate floor sessions, but the committee agreed that the state's residents should be able to see and understand how their government and their elected representatives work for them.

Broadcasts should begin with Internet broadcasts with the goal of eventually being able to broadcast on television, the committee recommended.

The committee also wants the Speaker of the House to consult with the leaders of both parties to govern the content, selection and editorial policies of the program and has asked to be reauthorized for another year so that its members can continue to review issues related to creating the live broadcasts.

Eugenics - In North Carolina, more than 7,600 people were sterilized between 1929 and 1978 by the state's Eugenics Sterilization Program. Some of the victims of the program were disabled or mentally handicapped, but others were victimized simply because they were poor or black. In its final report, the House Select Committee on Compensation for Victims of the Eugenics Sterilization Program made recommendations for a range of reparations to be made to North Carolinians victimized by the state's forced sterilization program.

Among the recommendations are:

\_Each confirmed survivor of the North Carolina State Eugenics Sterilization Program should be compensated with a \$20,000 payment.

\_Mental health counseling benefits should be provided to all surviving victims of the State Eugenics Sterilization Program through the establishment of a Eugenics Survivors Assistance Program.

\_The committee recommends that General Assembly appropriate \$38,648 to the Department to the Department of Health and Human Services for the immediate establishment of a database to store all relevant data from the records of the State Eugenics Program.

\_An outreach campaign to publicize the compensation options to be made available to survivors and to encourage survivors to contact the department for verification of their status.

\_The committee recommends that the Department of Cultural Resources design and place a historical marker detailing the North Carolina Eugenics Sterilization Program in an appropriate location in Raleigh.

\_The committee recommends that the State Board of Education incorporate information about the eugenics program into its existing K–12 history curricula.

\_The Board of Trustees of the University of North Carolina should direct its students and faculty with the appropriate expertise conduct interviews with survivors of the State Eugenics Sterilization Program to document their experiences to share with future generations.

\_The Office of State Personnel should create an ethics training module to educate state, county and local government employees in issues relating to ethics and human rights.

\_The Department of Cultural Resources should create digitized copies of all records relating to the eugenics program and should make these digitized copies available for continued research and review, while maintaining absolute confidentiality of all participants of the program. The department shall make every effort to secure philanthropic grant funding to fund preservation of these records.

Offshore Drilling - Speaker Joe Hackney and President Pro Tempore Marc Basnight have established a joint Senate-House committee to consider the financial and environmental implications of oil and natural gas exploration off our state's coast. The study committee has not yet been appointed, but will be instructed to determine the relative costs and benefits of offshore drilling in North Carolina.

Poverty Reduction - Poverty in North Carolina is widespread, especially in rural areas and other areas that have lost significant numbers of agricultural and manufacturing jobs. The General Assembly has determined that an understanding of the causes and effects of poverty are critical in the reduction of poverty and in the economic recovery of low-wealth areas.

To help policymakers, the General Assembly has established the Poverty Reduction and Economic Recovery Legislative Study Commission. The commission has been asked to: study and develop a coordinated, integrated approach to poverty reduction and economic recovery

across the state; examine poverty in each region of the state with an emphasis on the following counties: Alleghany, Avery, Bladen, Columbus, Edgecombe, Graham, Halifax, Hoke, Northampton, Robeson, Scotland, Tyrrell, Warren, Watauga, and Yancey; examine other states' best practices in poverty reduction and economic recovery; and study any other matter pertinent to poverty reduction and economic recovery in North Carolina.

As always, several new state laws went into place this year and I wanted to bring you up to date on these important changes. These laws address several important issues, including insurance, health and the environment.

Transportation - The General Assembly has passed a new law (SB 509) that increases the amount of time people have to get their vehicles re-inspected after failing a motor vehicle inspection from 30 days to 60 days. The law also waives the civil penalty for failure to meet the emissions inspection requirement while on active military duty outside the state. The law also does away with the familiar inspection window stickers and ties the inspection date to the yearly registration renewal.

Business - A new law (SB 1032) requires insurers offering health benefits plans to provide insurance identification cards. The law will also require insurers to provide written notice to a health care provider or health care facility no less than 30 calendar days before seeking recovery of overpayments. The recovery may not be made more than two years after the date of the original claim payment unless the insurer has reasonable belief of fraud or other intentional misconduct.

Mortgage servicers will face regulation under a new act (HB 2463) that is meant to provide more protection to North Carolina home owners. Mortgage services will now be subject to the same state regulations as banks and lenders. Among its other provisions, the act requires mortgage servicer licensure under the Mortgage Lending Act.

Health and Environment - Under a new law (SB 1681) smoking will no longer be allowed in state-controlled passenger vehicles. Local governments are already authorized to make their vehicles smoke free, as recommended by the Justus-Warren Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Task Force.

A new law (HB 2498) will increase the fees paid by the owners and operators of petroleum commercial underground storage tanks and use the money to help assess and clean up pollution from the tanks. The law is also meant to reduce the incidence of leaks by requiring secondary containment for all components of regulated petroleum underground storage tank systems. Amendments to the law provide for the expedited assessment and cleanup of releases and discharges from petroleum underground storage tanks by requiring the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to establish a pilot program to evaluate the use of site-specific cleanup standards.

\_The state has authorized the sale of blocks of 10-day coastal recreational fishing licenses for \$150.00. The law (SB 1340) is intended to make fishing more accessible and affordable for visitors while maintaining the state's authority to regulate its coastal resources.

Elections - The General Assembly has established a new Joint Legislative Elections Oversight Committee to examine election laws in North Carolina and other states. The bipartisan committee created by the law (S 1263) will have 18 members – 9 from each chamber appointed by the Senate President Pro Tempore and the Speaker of the House. The members will serve for two-year terms beginning on January 15 of odd-numbered years.

\_The same law allows the State Board of Elections to use instant runoff voting in up to 10 jurisdictions during the 2009, 2010 and 2011 elections. Instant runoffs allow voters to pick winners without having to hold costly separate runoff elections. The communities selected will be required to develop and participate in a plan to educate voters and candidates about instant runoff voting. The law also requires candidates and political committees to keep all campaign money in accounts separate from private accounts or accounts into which other money is deposited.

*Please remember that you can listen to each day's committee meetings and press conferences on the General Assembly's website at <http://www.ncleg.net>. Once on the site, select "audio," and then make your selection. You can also use the website to look up bills, view lawmaker biographies and access other information.*

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