



Senator Harris Blake
Senate District 22

Senate Update



2009 Legislative Session
May 14, 2009

Senate and House Republicans held a press conference Tuesday morning and called on Democratic leaders to allow bills tied up in committee the chance to advance to a floor vote by this week's "crossover deadline." This deadline requires most bills to pass one of the chambers by today (May 14th) or lose eligibility for further consideration until 2011.

As in years past, a number of introduced bills were sent to committee and never heard of again. Many of these bills have long been supported by a majority of our citizens yet Democrats have refused to allow debate or votes on these proposals. It is past time for a more open process in the North Carolina General Assembly -- one in which a bill, if filed, is entitled to a committee hearing."

A sample of some of these bills include:

- **S.B. 87** and **H.B. 183** -- Taxpayers' Protection Act. An act to impose Constitutional limits on the growth of the state budget.
- **S.B. 1052** and **H.B. 1549** -- Limit General Fund Expenditures. An act to provide that General Fund expenditures shall not exceed revenue for the previous calendar year.
- **S.B. 494** -- Annexation/Meaningful Services and Oversight. An act to amend the annexation laws to require meaningful services and meaningful oversight.
- **S.B. 351** -- No Felon as Sheriff. An act to amend the Constitution of North Carolina to provide that no person convicted of a felony is eligible to be elected sheriff.
- **S.B. 272** and **H.B. 361** -- Defense of Marriage. An act to amend the state's Constitution to provide marriage between a man and a woman is the only domestic legal union that shall be recognized in the state.

Republicans are frustrated that Democrats devoted precious time to advancing frivolous legislation such as **H.B. 588** (to adopt an Official N.C. Irish Potato Festival) while ignoring many of their bills.

The Senate passed an amendment that would allow physicians to participate in lawful state executions without fear of punishment by medical licensing boards. Earlier this month, the N.C. Supreme Court ruled that the N.C. Medical Board cannot discipline doctors for participating in

executions, but death penalty opponents argued that this determination needed to come from the Legislature. The Medical Board's position resulted in a de facto moratorium on executions since August 2006. This amendment helps clear the way for the resumption of the death penalty in North Carolina.

This amendment is something that should have been passed several years ago; hopefully, the House will agree. The people of North Carolina overwhelmingly support the death penalty for first degree premeditated murder. The families of the victims of these heinous crimes deserve to have these sentences carried out. The delay has been far too long and without justification.

In other news, the Senate and House both passed the Senate's version of the smoking ban bill. The measure now goes to Gov. Beverly Perdue for her signature.

The *News & Observer* recently published a series of articles revealing that former Democratic Gov. Mike Easley took at least 25 flights on private jets with some in apparent violation of state campaign contribution limits. It appears that many of the individuals who paid for the flights were rewarded with plum appointments to powerful state boards. For example, the *News & Observer* highlighted Gov. Easley's close relationship with a N.C. State Trustee (appointed twice by Easley) who provided free flights, supported Mary Easley's \$170,000 job at N.C. State and helped Gov. Easley obtain an extraordinarily good deal on a piece of coastal property. The newspaper also recently reported that members of the Easley family were provided personal use vehicles at no charge by car dealers supportive of the former Governor.

Our leadership has called for a special prosecutor to investigate these issues. Senate Leader Phil Berger says the silence from North Carolina's chief law enforcement officer, Attorney General Roy Cooper, about these serious allegations is deafening and we should not be surprised since most of those under scrutiny are Democrats. I agree with Berger when he says that Cooper will not risk offending Democrats while seeking their support for a possible U.S. Senate campaign. For these reasons, we need an independent special prosecutor, free from political pressures, free from conflicts of interest and free to investigate these improprieties and allegations of corruption wherever they might lead.

This week I have had a productive meeting with the Secretary of Commerce as a follow-up to my meeting three weeks ago with Gov. Perdue. Both leaders are "on board" as we prepare to receive a delegation this summer from Hunan Province, China (population 70 million). The purpose of the visit is to begin a long-term relationship with Hunan that will lead to economic, educational and cultural exchange.

Finally, I want you to know how very much I appreciate the prayers and support received by our family during these difficult and final days for my dear wife, Barbara.

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