



Larry D. Hall

House of Representatives

29th District



JULY'S PREVIEW

From the Office of Representative Larry D. Hall

The House and the Senate moved nearer to a final budget deal this week, with members of both chambers agreeing to take over the full cost of the non-federal share of Medicaid. The takeover is intended to relieve counties from the rapid growth in costs and free up more local money for school construction and infrastructure costs. The counties' share of Medicaid is more than half a billion dollars this year and expected to continue to grow. House and Senate negotiators continue to discuss the best way to phase in the Medicaid relief plan, meeting several times a day to reach a compromise.

We also took steps this week to continue to tighten the state's ethics laws and improve education by moving the cutoff date for children to enter kindergarten. Further, we made state and university buildings safer for visitors and workers by allowing smoking bans and approved a stricter law for monitoring hazardous waste storage facilities to prevent future explosions like the one a year ago in Apex.

We worked diligently in the House these past weeks to get a permanent spending plan in place for the next two years. We agreed that we needed at least another month to continue negotiations in order to get the best result. Leaders in both chambers want to develop a comprehensive plan that takes back a significant share of the Medicaid expenses of the counties. As you recall the House initial budget proposal recommended giving the counties \$100 million based on their Medicaid costs.

We are also looking a plan now that over several years would totally take over all of the counties' Medicaid costs in exchange for a swap of some revenues, such as a portion of the sales tax that counties receive. The total county cost of Medicaid is expected to reach \$733 million in the next five years and shifting the cost to the state will allow better local financial planning.

We also had the honor of recognizing members of the state National Guard as they continue to protect the interests of our nation abroad.

Thanks you for allowing me to share this information with you and enjoy the Independence Day Holidays while remembering that we as citizens at all levels must work to improve and preserve this independence. In that effort I am requesting that you continue to contact me if you recognize any issues that you have any questions or proposed solutions about.

Legislative Page Report

We continue our effort to get our future leaders and citizens involved in legislative process. We want to take time recognize the both past and future pages for their service and the support of their families. We congratulate and salute the following Durham youth who volunteered as pages.



Kiara Brown, a student at Southern High School, recently served as a Page for the North Carolina House of Representatives. She is the daughter of Allen and Ponsella Brown of Durham .



Kyrell McKoy, a student at Wake Forest-Roseville High School, recently served as a Page for the North Carolina House of Representatives. He is the son of Kenneth and Tywana McKoy of Wake Forest .

Ethics The governor could immediately remove a disbarred judge or district attorney under a bill that received final approval this week in the General Assembly. The bill (S118) will also allow for the suspension of the disbarred lawyer's pay. It would be reinstated if the disbarment was reversed. Existing state law requires judges and DA's to be members of the bar in good standing, but doesn't provide for their removal. The bill came after a district court judge who lost his law license refused to leave his job, even though he was suspended from acting as a judge.

_ The House approved bill (S659) that would take away the pensions of state or local elected officials convicted of public corruption or election fraud. It now returns to the Senate for concurrence.

_ Officials convicted of felony misconduct must forfeit their pensions under a bill passed this week (S659). The bill requires officials convicted of a federal or state offense involving corruption or a felony violation of election laws committed in their official capacity to lose their retirement benefits earned in that office.

Education The legislature approved a bill that would move the cutoff date for children to enroll in kindergarten. Under the proposal, children would have to be 5 years old by August 31 to be eligible to enroll in kindergarten. The current cutoff date is October 16. The bill, (H150) is expected to help ensure that all children start school with the skills they need. The bill must still be signed by the governor before it becomes law. It would take effect in the 2009-10 school year. It has some further challenges as it will result in many children staying in the home longer, unless they are enrolled in more at four or other preschool programs.

Health Two bills to restrict smoking moved through the General Assembly this week. One measure (S862) would allow smoking to be banned inside and within 100 feet of any building in the University of North Carolina system. The UNC Health Care system and the medical buildings of East Carolina University would have discretion over the policies of their buildings and grounds. The second bill would prohibit smoking in any state government buildings and allow local governments to do the same on their property. Bill (H24) that would bar smoking in all buildings owned, leased or occupied by state government now goes to the Senate floor for final approval.

_ The House also approved a bill (S1086) that would ban the use of tobacco products on school campuses at all times. If the Senate concurs with changes made in the House, that bill will also go to the governor.

_ A bill that would provide insurance parity to people who receive mental health services cleared the Senate Health Committee this week. The bill (H973) would provide require private

health insurers to pay for mental health services on the same level as what they pay for physical health services. The bill is expected to save the state money spent by reducing the amount of money spent for public mental health services.

Voting- The legislature passed House Bill 91 which is expected to increase voter turnout by allowing people to register and vote on the same day in the final 2½ weeks before an election. Existing law cuts off voter registration 25 days before an election.

_ In response to the increased cost of statewide campaigns we approved a bill that would provide public financing for three Council of State jobs. The bill was endorsed by Insurance Commissioner Jim Long and state schools Superintendent June Atkinson. Their races and that of State Auditor Les Merritt would be eligible for public money if the bill becomes law. Candidates would have to receive at least 750 contributions of \$10 to \$200 to be eligible for public financing. The bill (H1517) now goes to the Appropriations Committee.

Public Safety The General Assembly approved a pair of bills to protect cemeteries. One bill (H105) would make vandalism of a grave marker or any other cemetery monument a felony instead of a misdemeanor and desecration of human remains would become a higher grade felony. Under existing law, vandalism that results in damage of less than \$1,000 is a misdemeanor. The other bill (H107) better defines abandoned and public cemeteries and attempts to make it easier for groups to set up trusts to pay for the cemeteries' upkeep. The bills have been sent to Gov. Mike Easley for his approval.

_ A bill that would require stricter oversight of hazardous waste storage sites was signed into law this week. The bill (H36) protects residents by requiring hazardous waste sites to take financial responsibility and conduct preventative screenings for environmental contamination when hazardous materials are released.

Property rights - The House concurred this week with minor changes the Senate made to a bill that defines and punishes residential mortgage fraud in North Carolina. The bill (H817) makes it a felony to knowingly misrepresent or exclude information in the mortgage lending process even if the victim is not harmed financially. Offenders can be sentenced to up to 16 months if they have no prior record and up to 31 months if they are linked to at least five cases of fraud with no prior record. The changes make it easier to protect people who were cheated out of lesser amounts.

Environment - The House unanimously approved minor changes made in the Senate to a bill that would require hazardous waste storage companies to tell their neighbors and emergency response officials more about the materials they store. The bill (H36) would also subject such companies to more inspections. North Carolina has 10 remaining commercial hazardous waste storage warehouses that receive chemicals and other materials from manufacturers and laboratories.

Elections - The House sent the Senate version of the one-stop voting sites bill (H91) to a conference committee this week. The bill would allow residents to register and vote right away at one-stop voting sites during the last two and a half weeks before an election. Presently voters can vote early at one-stop voting sites, but registration ends 25 days before an election.

Notes -- The House and Senate met jointly Wednesday to confirm the appointments of Kevin D. Howell and Eulada P. Watt to the State Board of Education. Watt is a special assistant to the vice chancellor for research at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte and also worked in the U.S. Department of Education. Howell is assistant to the chancellor for external affairs for North Carolina State University . Their appointments run through March 2015.

- The Senate and the House honored members of the North Carolina Guard for their services and sacrifices at home and in wars overseas. The resolution (H1720) honored the 11 National Guard members who died in the line of duty and six who were killed in action since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Nearly 11,000 members of the guard have been deployed overseas since that time and 135 have been wounded in action. Members and leaders of the North Carolina National Guard listened from the galleries as the names of their slain or wounded comrades were read aloud.

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