

NEWS RELEASE

April 10, 2008
For more information,
call Ran Coble at the
N.C. Center for Public Policy
Research at (919) 832-2839

LATEST RANKINGS OF LEGISLATORS' EFFECTIVENESS REFLECT CHANGES IN THE STATE HOUSE

The changing dynamics of the 2007 state House of Representatives and the relative stability of the state Senate are reflected in the new rankings of legislators' effectiveness from the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research. A new Speaker of the House and new committee chairs helped some legislators rise in effectiveness, while problems with ethics, the end of a coalition across party lines, and time spent campaigning for higher office caused drops in effectiveness. The Center's effectiveness rankings are based on responses to surveys from the legislators themselves, registered lobbyists, and the news media who cover state government. The Center also released rankings of legislators' attendance and roll call voting participation.

Center director Ran Coble says the Center compiles the three sets of rankings to give citizens different ways to evaluate the performance of their legislators. He says, "The rankings of attendance and voting participation tell citizens how often their legislator was there to represent them. The effectiveness rankings tell citizens how effective their legislator was when he or she was there. The surveys hold a mirror up to the legislature, and the rankings are the reflection."

The Center says that the changes in rankings of legislators' effectiveness in the House are a result of Representative Joe Hackney's becoming Speaker of the House, new committee chairs, and new Republican leaders as well. Hackney jumped from third place in 2005 to the number one spot for the 2007 session. The Speaker of the House has been ranked as the most effective member of the N.C. House 14 of the 16 times the Center has conducted the effectiveness survey.

Biggest Jumps in Effectiveness

Seven members of the 120-member N.C. House of Representatives made gains of 20 positions or more in their effectiveness rankings – four Democrats and three Republicans. Democrats hold a 68-52 majority in the House.

Rep. Melanie Goodwin (D-Richmond) made the biggest leap in effectiveness in the House, moving up 42 positions from 73rd in 2005 to 31st in 2007. Additional jumps of 20 or more positions were made by Representatives Grier Martin (D-Wake, up 38 spots); Pricey Harrison (D-Guilford, up 34); Skip Stam (R-Wake, up 32); Dale Folwell (R-Forsyth, up 31); Earl Jones (D-Guilford, up 26); Leo Daughtry (R-Johnston, up 25); and Maggie Jeffus (D-Guilford, up 20). Goodwin, Martin, Harrison, Jones, and Jeffus all gained important new posts as committee chairs under the new Speaker. Harrison also was a leader in passing the state's new renewable energy bill. Stam and Folwell attained new leadership positions within the Republican Caucus, and Folwell gained passage of a bill to change the age at which children start school. Daughtry was Majority Leader when the Republicans held a majority in the House from 1995 to 1999.

Major gains by second-term legislators and high rankings by freshmen historically also are useful forecasts for future effectiveness in the legislature, says the Center. Big jumps in effectiveness by sophomores in the House were posted by Representatives Fred Steen (R-Rowan), who moved up 19 positions to 79th, and by Nelson Dollar (R-Wake), who also moved up 19 positions to 91st. The highest-ranked freshman lawmaker in the House this year is Ty Harrell (D-Wake) at 52nd.

Biggest Declines Due to Ethical Lapses, the End of a Coalition, and Runs for Higher Office

For the first time, the Center asked survey respondents to the survey to consider each legislator's ethics when ranking effectiveness. The Center says the biggest declines in the rankings appear to be related to ethical lapses and allegations of impropriety. By far, the most precipitous decline in rankings was posted by Thomas Wright (D-New Hanover), who dropped 106 spots from 13th in 2005 to 119th in 2007 – the lowest ranking possible this session. Wright was expelled from the House by a vote of 109-5 by his colleagues on March 20th for failing to report campaign donations, misappropriating money intended for a nonprofit, and using his power as a legislator to pressure a state employee to write a fraudulent grant letter. This is the first expulsion from the House in 128 years. By contrast, the chair and vice-chair of the special legislative committee that investigated Wright – Rick Glazier (D-Cumberland), who ranked 4th, and Skip Stam (R-Wake), who ranked 10th – made their first appearance in the top 10 in effectiveness.

Additionally, Rep. Mary McAllister (D-Cumberland) saw her ranking drop 12 places to 99th in 2007. In September 2007, she was found to have received repayment for campaign loans she did not make and ordered to pay a \$16,294 fine by the State Board of Elections.

The House Republican Caucus showed significant shifts in this session's rankings. In 2003-04, the Caucus was bitterly divided over some of its members' participation in a coalition across party lines that installed Co-Speakers (one Democrat and one Republican) and passed both a budget and a redistricting plan. Three Republican members who were part of the Republicans' coalition with Democrats in previous sessions each saw their rankings decline this year – Debbie Clary (R-Cleveland) ranked 48th, Julia Howard (R-Davie) ranked 29th, and Danny McComas (R-New Hanover) ranked 42nd.

Another group of legislators saw their rankings drop as they engaged in campaigns for higher office. For example, Sen. Fred Smith dropped seven spots to 38th of 50 Senators as he runs for the Republican nomination for Governor, and Rep. Beverly Earle dropped 41 spots to 53rd of 120 Representatives as she ran for Mayor of Charlotte last year.

Six New Faces in the House Top 10, Only One New in the Senate Top 10

There are six new faces in the top 10 in effectiveness in the House. The biggest mover among them is Rep. Skip Stam (R-Wake), who moved up 32 spots to 10th. Others who moved into the top 10 include Appropriations Committee Senior Chair Mickey Michaux (D-Durham) at 6th, Education Appropriations Co-Chair Rick Glazier (D-Cumberland) at 4th, and new Majority Leader Hugh Holliman (D-Davidson) at 3rd. The other new faces in the top 10 in the House are Representatives Deborah Ross (D-Wake) at 7th and Dan Blue (D-Wake) at 8th. Blue is a former Speaker of the House who returned to the legislature after a four-year hiatus. Rounding out the top 10 are Representatives Bill Owens Jr. (D-Pasquotank) at 2nd, Jim Crawford Jr. (D-Granville) at 5th, and Pryor Gibson III (D-Anson) at 9th.

By contrast, the top 10 in effectiveness in the Senate have only one new face among them – Sen. Bill Purcell (D-Scotland). President Pro-Tem Marc Basnight (D-Dare) is again ranked 1st in the Senate for a record-shattering eighth time.

The highest-ranked first-term Senator is Sen. Pete Brunstetter (R-Forsyth), who was appointed to fill a vacancy in May 2006. The Senator who made the biggest gain in effectiveness is Sen. John Snow (D-Cherokee), who moved up 10 spots to 22nd.

Legislators with Perfect Attendance Records

This marks the fourth time the Center has tabulated attendance and roll call voting participation rankings, using official records from the General Assembly. In the state Senate, five members earned perfect attendance records – Senators Tony Foriest (D-Alamance), Neal Hunt (R-Wake), Floyd McKissick Jr. (D-Durham), Richard Stevens (R-Wake), and A.B. Swindell IV (D-Nash). Stevens also had perfect attendance in 2005, while Swindell has had perfect attendance for three consecutive sessions.

In the state House, 14 members tied for first with 100 percent attendance: Representatives Cary Allred (R-Alamance) John Blust (R-Guilford), George Cleveland (R-Onslow), Tricia Cotham (D-Mecklenburg), Jim Crawford Jr. (D-Granville), Nelson Dollar (R-Wake), Bob England (D-Rutherford), Phillip Frye (R-Mitchell), Bryan Holloway (R-Stokes), Mickey Michaux Jr. (D-Durham), Bill Owens Jr. (D-Pasquotank), Joe Tolson (D-Edgecombe), Ray Warren (D-Alexander), and Doug Yongue (D-Scotland). Blust, Cleveland, Crawford, Frye, Michaux, and Owens also had perfect attendance records in the 2005 legislative session. Michaux garnered perfect attendance in the 2003, 2005, and 2007 sessions, while Owens has had perfect attendance for four consecutive sessions.

The Center praised the dedication of most legislators in attending the session last year. Forty of the 50 members of the Senate and 103 of the 120 members of the House attended more than 90 percent of the days in session. Coble says, “That’s an impressive attendance record for part-time legislators who have full-time jobs back home, and many have to drive a great distance every week.”

Three Senators voted in all 1,241 electronically-recorded roll call votes last year – Andrew Brock (R-Davie), Tony Foriest (D-Alamance), and Richard Stevens (R-Wake). Brock also cast a vote every time in the 2003 and 2005 sessions. Three members of the House voted in all 1,407 votes electronically recorded in that chamber – Nelson Dollar (R-Wake), Phillip Frye (R-Mitchell), and Bill Owens Jr. (D-Pasquotank). Dollar also participated in every vote in the 2005 session.

In odd-numbered years, the Center publishes two additional evaluations of legislative performance. *Article II*, the Center’s guide to the legislature, includes data on how many bills each legislator got passed out of the total he or she introduced. The guide also includes all members’ votes on what legislators said were the 12 most important bills of the session. The Center now publishes five different legislative performance indicators – effectiveness, attendance, voting participation, success in getting bills passed, and votes on the most significant bills in the last session.

How the Effectiveness Rankings Are Done

The Center’s effectiveness rankings are based on surveys completed by the legislators themselves, by registered lobbyists who are based in North Carolina and who regularly work in the General Assembly, and by capital news reporters. These three groups were asked to rate each legislator’s effectiveness on the basis of participation in committee work, skill at guiding bills through committees and in floor debates, and general knowledge or expertise in special fields. The respondents also were asked to consider the respect that legislators command from their peers, his or her ethics, the political power they hold (by virtue of office, longevity, or personal skills), their ability to sway the opinions of fellow legislators, and their aptitude for the overall legislative process.

This year's rankings mark the 16th time the Center has undertaken this comprehensive survey. The first edition in 1978 evaluated the performance of the 1977-78 General Assembly. The response rate to the survey continues to be very high. Seventy-eight (66 percent) of 119 House members (one member resigned at the end of the session) responded to the Center's survey this year, as did 37 of the 50 Senators (74 percent), 187 of 614 registered lobbyists who regularly work in the legislature and who are based in North Carolina (30 percent) and 6 of 12 capital news correspondents (50 percent) – all well above accepted standards of statistical validity.

National Praise for the Center's Rankings

Several states – including Arkansas, California, Florida, North Carolina, Texas, and Washington – have ranked the effectiveness of their legislators using different methods. California has ranked legislators in terms of effectiveness, integrity, energy, and even intelligence. “It is hard to deny that the ratings, when done responsibly, serve a legitimate public purpose,” said a report about state legislative rankings in *Governing* magazine, published by Congressional Quarterly, Inc. “The ratings issued by the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research are perhaps the most straightforward and most widely respected.”

Another independent review of state rankings reached the same conclusion. “Most attempts at reputational rankings of state legislators don't deserve much credibility because of three problems: (1) no precise definition of who is being polled, (2) a low response rate among those polled because legislators and lobbyists don't want to risk getting caught making statements suggesting people they work with are ineffective, or (3) definitions of effectiveness that equate effectiveness with helping to enact an interest group's agenda,” said *State Policy Reports*. “Over the years, *Reports* has seen many of these ... that fail one or another of these tests. The exception is the rankings that have been done since 1978 by the North Carolina Center.”

The effectiveness, attendance, and voting participation rankings are published as a supplement to *Article II: A Guide to the 2007-2008 N.C. Legislature*, which was released in 2007. The Center's legislative guide profiles each member of the General Assembly and includes the following biographical and voting information:

- occupation and education;
- business and home addresses;
- telephone and fax numbers;
- room number, phone number, and e-mail address at the legislature;
- party affiliation, district number, and counties represented;
- number of terms served;
- committee assignments;
- the number of bills sponsored and enacted into law in the 2005-06 session;
- individual votes on 12 of the most important bills in the 2005-06 session; and
- past effectiveness rankings (1985-2005).

The N.C. Center for Public Policy Research is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit research corporation created in 1977 to evaluate state government programs and to study public policy issues facing North Carolina. The Center does not endorse candidates. The Center receives general operating support from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation in Winston-Salem, with additional funding from nine other private foundations, 120 corporate contributors, and about 600 individual and organizational members. The Center publishes a journal called *North Carolina Insight* and in-depth research reports, including a study of governance of public universities in all 50 states. The Center recently has conducted studies of ways to prevent high school dropouts and ways to reduce domestic violence, as well as an evaluation of charter schools. Upcoming studies will examine the future of North Carolina's community colleges, state water policy, and North Carolina's student financial aid policy.

The new effectiveness rankings are available from the Center for \$10. A set of publications including *Article II: A Guide to the 2007-2008 N.C. Legislature* (\$25), the effectiveness rankings (\$10), and rankings of the most influential lobbyists (\$10, to be released in August) is available for \$40. To order, write the Center at P.O. Box 430, Raleigh, NC 27602, call (919) 832-2839, fax (919) 832-2847, or order by email from tbromley@nccppr.org.

For more information about the legislative rankings, call Ran Coble at the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research at (919) 832-2839.