



# LEGISLATIVE NEWSLETTER

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**State Political Leaders Weigh in after the Storm:** State and local officials today continued surveying damage from Hurricane Irene, with legislative leaders and Gov. Bev Perdue promising to help folks affected by the storm. The Category 1 storm ripped through eastern North Carolina on Saturday, taking lives and inflicting widespread damage to homes, businesses, roads, beaches and farms.

“The Outer Banks has taken a hit, and we saw damage everywhere we stopped,” Perdue said in a statement after touring the coast on Sunday. “Lives have been lost, homes and property destroyed... We will work with our local, state and federal partners to assess damages and to seek assistance to recover from these losses.”

Senate leader Phil Berger, House Speaker Thom Tillis and other lawmakers also visited eastern North Carolina to assess the damage. “The North Carolina House and the General Assembly as a whole stand ready to support the governor and the Council of State in any efforts related to emergency response and recovery from Hurricane Irene,” said Tillis, R-Mecklenburg.

Meantime, state officials said that N.C. Highway 12, the main road running along the Outer Banks, was breached at least once and damaged in at least two other places. The state Department of Environment and Natural Resources said local wastewater treatment systems in at least 10 counties had reported overflows at pump stations or treatment plants. That's caused some waste to be treated partially or not all.

**Governor Trims Positions:** Gov. Perdue has reacted to budget cuts in her office by eliminating eight positions, but has also shifted salary responsibility for four policy analysts to four separate state agencies. Perdue's office, in response to questions from The Insider, a newsletter that covers state politics, said that the four former staffers now work for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Commerce and the Department of Transportation.

"They all are integrally involved with, and serve as liaisons between, their agency and the Governor's policy staff," Perdue representative Mark Johnson said in an emailed statement.

"They attend staff meetings at their agencies, as well as in the Governor's office." Johnson said

that the four had been moved to existing positions within the state agencies. In all, their salaries total \$317,000.

The budget passed by state legislators in June directed Perdue to cut her office expenses by \$1,448,321, or 23 percent. Earlier versions of the budget targeted specific employees in her office, including top communications staffers, calling for 18 positions to be eliminated. Senate leader Berger, R-Rockingham, called the personnel shifts "frustrating." "It's not a surprise, I guess," Berger said. "The old story always seems to be, no matter how much you cut from state government, very few people actually lose their jobs."

According to state personnel records obtained by The Insider on Aug. 9, Perdue's office employed 67 people at a combined salary of \$4.5 million. The numbers appeared to include at least three of the workers moved to state agencies. Perdue's office employed the same number of staffers, with roughly the same total payroll, two years earlier. Some of the salaries are paid with federal grants and receipts, The Insider reports.

**Buncombe Schools and the Pledge:** Buncombe County school officials are devising a policy requiring schools to set time aside for the Pledge of Allegiance after learning a 2006 state law requires boards to have such a policy. The action comes after a complaint that students at Reynolds High were not reciting the pledge daily.

"It was my understanding that, regardless of what the law had said, the practice in our schools was to recite the pledge," said Steve Sizemore, chair of the school board. Sizemore said school officials found a couple of other high schools — Owen and North Buncombe — were not setting aside time daily for the pledge. The state law requires "that recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance be scheduled on a daily basis," but students aren't required to recite the pledge.

The board will consider the policy at its next meeting, according to the Asheville Citizen-Times. Meantime, the superintendent sent an email to all the schools directing them to set aside time for the pledge. "Effective immediately, if your school is not already scheduling the recitation of the pledge, please do so. The Buncombe County Board of Education will also enact a policy to this effect as soon as possible," Superintendent Tony Baldwin told principals in an email, according to the newspaper.

**Vulnerable Politicos:** The Hill, a non-partisan publication of Capitol Hill, lists 8th District U.S. Rep. Larry Kissell of Biscoe as the most-vulnerable Democratic incumbent in the nation and 11th District U.S. Rep. Heath Shuler of Waynesville as the fourth-most-vulnerable. Writing in the Hill's Campaign Blog, Cameron Joseph notes that Kissell "barely survived" in 2010 in a district in which he won 53 percent of the vote.

The old district gave GOP presidential candidate John McCain 47 percent of the vote. The newly realigned district would have given McCain 57 percent of the vote. Among the Republicans lining up to challenge Kissell are Scott Keadle, a former Iredell County commissioner; state Rep. Justin Burr of Albemarle; and state Rep. Jerry Dockham of Denton.

The Hill also notes that Shuler won in 2010 by nine points. But that district has gone from a 52 percent McCain district to a 58 percent McCain district. Shuler is being challenged by Republicans Jeff Hunt, a district attorney; Spence Campbell, a former Henderson County GOP chair; and Don Eichenbaum, an ophthalmologist. Although The Hill named only the top five most-endangered Democrats, it mentioned nine Democrats on the honorable mention list, including two from North Carolina: 13th District U.S. Rep. Brad Miller from Raleigh and 7th District U.S. Rep. Mike McIntyre of Lumberton. No state had more endangered Democratic members of Congress than North Carolina.

**Quote of the Week:** *“The idea is not to block every shot. The idea is to make your opponent believe that you might block every shot.”*

- Bill Russell, former NBA star

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