



LEGISLATIVE NEWSLETTER

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Issue 409

February 3, 2012

Former House Speaker, Other Leading Dems Bowing Out: In another surprise move by Democrats, Rep. Joe Hackney, a 32-year state lawmaker and former speaker, said Thursday he won't seek reelection. The retirement by the House minority leader follows a spate of top Democrats, including Gov. Bev Perdue, announcing in recent days that they will step aside.

"I think I made my contribution," Hackney said in his typical pithy style. The departure by Hackney, a Chapel Hill attorney, did not appear to be part of a coordinated game plan by Democrats. Still, it is reminiscent of similar departures announced by Democratic state senators two years ago.

Hackney's move comes at a time when there is a deep rift between Democrats and the new Republican leadership. The retirement of many of the Democrats is directly related to avoiding what otherwise would be bitter re-election battles in unfavorable districts newly drawn by the GOP-controlled legislature.

Hackney's retirement adds to a growing list of Democrats – including U.S. Reps. Brad Miller and Heath Shuler – who aren't seeking re-election. Rep. Alice Bordsen, a Mebane Democrat retiring after a decade in the NC General Assembly, said: "I think what it tells us is that we are experiencing a sea change within the party. Change is scary – you see people who are very talented leaving."

Hackney, 66, was first elected speaker in 2007, succeeding disgraced Speaker Jim Black, D-Mecklenburg, who served prison time following his conviction on corruption charges. In his four years as speaker, Hackney brought a badly needed infusion of integrity to the leadership of the House. Through the years, Hackney made his mark as a political and policy leader who excelled in fund-raising, championing issues such as the environmental protection and ethical changes in the legislative electoral process. State Rep. Grier Martin, D-Wake, termed as "the

understatement of the decade” Hackney’s observation that the former speaker made “a contribution” to the state, according to The News & Observer.

Bowles Won’t Enter Gubernatorial Race but Etheridge Will: Bob Etheridge, a former U.S. House member and state schools superintendent, announced on Thursday that he's seeking the Democratic gubernatorial nomination within hours after Erskine Bowles, former White House chief of staff and UNC system president, said he will not run. Etheridge's bid further complicates the party's gubernatorial future after Gov. Perdue said last week she wouldn't seek re-election.

Etheridge, a former state legislator from Harnett County, also served seven terms in Congress. He released a statement that improving the state's public education system has been his life's ambition. The public schools will be a major issue in the campaign as Republicans passed a state budget that Democrats have lambasted for reducing spending by several hundred million dollars.

"As we move forward, we must ensure we are making the key investments in public education, community colleges and the university system," Etheridge said. "This election is about leadership. It's about moving forward -- not moving backward."

Etheridge's last run at elected office ended in 2010 when, as the 2nd District incumbent, he narrowly lost to Republican Renee Ellmers. A viral video showing him grabbing a man who was taping him on a Washington street contributed to his defeat.

Etheridge will join Lt. Gov. Walter Dalton and state Rep. Bill Faison in the party's May 8 primary for governor. Several others still are considering whether to enter the race. Bowles, who also had two unsuccessful bids for U.S. Senate, had been urged to enter the race by many Democrats who said his long resume in state and national politics would be a big plus.

U.S. Reps. Brad Miller of Raleigh and Mike McIntyre of Lumberton and former State Treasurer Richard Moore each said after Bowles' decision they were still considering getting in the race. Campaign filing starts Feb. 13.

State Board Chair Urges Public Schools Awareness Campaign: State Board of Education Chair Bill Harrison urged board members Thursday to promote public education as lawmakers continue questioning the value of taxpayer-funded schools. Harrison told board members that they should engage in an "aggressive communications effort" that underscores the value of public education.

A new law offers tax credits to parents of disabled children who send their children to private schools, and one of its legislative supporters wants to expand it. Another law allows private companies to run "dropout recovery" programs in school districts using taxpayer money. An early version of a bill that removed the 100-school cap on charter schools limited the state board's authority over charters in favor of a new commission.

State lawmakers removed oversight of the state preschool program from the state Department of Public Instruction and put pre-K under the Department of Health and Human Services. "We're dismantling public education," said Earlie Coe, chair of the Surry County Board of Education. He sits on the state board as an adviser.

But House Majority Leader Paul Stam said the talk of undermining public education is rhetoric. "There is no attempt to dismantle or destroy," said Stam, but parents should have more options. "Parents generally know what's best for their children, and it's good for the state to empower their choices," he said.

NC FreeEnterprise Foundation Spin: In a post this week, NCFEF reports:

Although indecision reigns near the top of North Carolina's election ticket due to last Thursday's announcement that Bev Perdue will not seek a second term as the state's Governor, a number of down-ballot races are beginning to take shape, while others remain very much in flux. For example, as of this writing there are 29 seats for the North Carolina House that are open in 2012, meaning no incumbent member is running. Fourteen of these open seats are the result of redistricting and 15 are due to currently serving members announcing plans to retire or run for another elected office...Based on the large number of open seat races in 2010 and again in 2012, it is quite possible that over half of the members of the 2013 North Carolina General Assembly will be serving in just their first of second term.

Condolences: NCACTE's condolences continue to be extended concerning the death of Meg Murphy, a former DPI consultant and long time member of our professional association. Our condolences and prayers are extended to her family and friends. Meg was a loved and respected member of our CTE family.

Quotes of the Week: *"There is more to life than increasing its speed."*

- Gandhi

"He may be a nice guy, but he's in over his head."

- Mitt Romney, GOP presidential aspirant, on President Obama

"He took out Bid Laden, saved GM and he can sing like Al Green. That may be enough."

- Don Imus (Imus in the Morning, 2/2/12) on President Obama's reelection prospects