



LEGISLATIVE NEWSLETTER LEGISLATIVE NEWSLETTER

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What's Up

Hundreds of Schools Closed Following Hurricane: Our thoughts and prayers go out to victims of Hurricane Matthew at a time when hundreds of public and private schools in North Carolina closed today, with some not opening for multiple days, as communities grapple with the fierce storm's aftermath.

Closed Tuesday include Cumberland County, Johnston County and Wayne County schools. Officials said schools in Wayne County would be closed for the remainder of the week, calling the flooding there a "historical event. Click [here](#) for details.

Bonuses: State employees will get one-time bonuses in their October paychecks, the Office of State Human Resources announced last week. A single, 0.5 percent lump-sum bonus, as well as any performance bonuses, will arrive for most state employees at the end of October.

The bonus pay coincides with the middle of North Carolina's early voting period and less than two weeks before the Nov. 8 elections. The timing prompted some folks to ask about whether there were efforts to try to score points with the more than 62,000 full-time state workers when they vote. A McCrory aide denied the timing was political. "This has nothing to do with politics and everything to do with the success of Governor McCrory's policies which have helped to grow the economy, impose fiscal responsibility on state government and deliver major budget surpluses that can be used to invest in education, teachers, state employees, transportation and other key priorities," spokesman Ricky Diaz said.

More Pay Details: The state budget approved by McCrory and lawmakers had a 1.5 percent pay increase as well as two sets of one-time bonuses. Employees on the job, as of Sept. 1, will be eligible for the 0.5 percent lump-sum bonuses. For a state worker who makes \$40,000, about the state government average, that would be a \$200 bonus.

Qualifying employees who have received the proper evaluations will get an additional one-time \$475 payment if they were rated "meets expectations;" \$700 if they were rated "exceeds expectations." Those bonuses were promised as part of the budget that passed last summer.

Budget writers originally projected the extra payments would arrive in December in yuletide season.

Political Demographics

By the Numbers and Policies: North Carolina's Democrats outnumber Republicans by more than a half-million. Still, the GOP has controlled the legislature for six years, enjoying supermajorities most of that time to be able to override any gubernatorial vetoes.

Under Republican reign, taxes have been cut, unemployment insurance deficits have been slashed and regulatory regulations have become friendlier for business. The Associated Press reports that North Carolina also is dealing with an image problem, thanks to a new law dictating which bathrooms transgender people can use. The new law, also known as House Bill 2, is often called the "bathroom bill."

North Carolina, AP reports, is now a mix of Nasdaq and NASCAR, with an agrarian underpinning: Only Texas has more rural residents. Of 6.7 million North Carolina voters, 2.6 million are Democrats, compared with 2 million Republicans. Still, nearly as many – barely under 2 million - - are unaffiliated voters. That's interesting, says political scientist Chris Cooper of Western Carolina University. "Of all the states that went for Obama in 2008, we went for him by the smallest margin," Cooper says.

The right turn on public policy began in 2010, when conservative donors helped Republicans take advantage of a foundering state Democratic Party and win control of both legislative chambers for the first time since Reconstruction. In 2012, former Charlotte mayor Pat McCrory became governor.

Lottery Update

Lottery Update: North Carolina lottery officials and state lawmakers said recently they are they are considering reforms to better safeguard the games following a Charlotte Observer report that found hundreds of players who beat big odds repeatedly, raising concerns among experts.

The newspaper reported that dozens of repeat winners were lottery retailers or employees who were in business to handle potential fortunes with customers. Others may not have been the original winners. That's because North Carolina has a profitable secondary market, the Observer found, where players sell winning tickets at a discount, possibly to avoid automatic withholdings for back taxes and child support. Buyers in turn cash the tickets and sellers remain anonymous. The state has acknowledged the potential problem but has not done much to stop it, a move that could change with such developments following the report as:

- Lawmakers now are saying they'd push to make reselling tickets a crime. Lottery officials said they'd review the practice and speak with leaders in other states where it is prohibited.
- Lottery officials said they'd look into making retailer discipline easier.

- Commissioners overseeing the game's operations said they will review the policy that allows retailers to bet at their own stores to see if more protections are warranted.

Local and Other News

Pitt Grant: Pitt County Schools has gotten a \$16.2 million grant to improve teacher incentives, district officials announced at a recent board of education meeting. The Daily Reflector reports that Pitt is one of 13 districts in the U.S. chosen for the Teacher Incentive Fund grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

The money will be used over the next five years to develop strategies aimed at recruiting, retaining and rewarding quality teachers via "R3: Recruiting, Retaining and Rewarding Educators through Multiple Career Pathways and Performance-Based Compensation," or R3. Tom Feller, co-director of R3 and the district's professional development coordinator, said about 80 percent of the grant will go straight to pay supplements, like bonuses and incentives, for teachers and administrators. "For the county as a whole, that's \$13 million going straight into our economy," he said. "So that's a really exciting piece to look at."

Still Legislating: Despite being indicted on charges of federal and state campaign finance law violations, state Sen. Fletcher Hartsell remains a chair or vice chair of seven legislative committees. Last week, he ran a joint legislative oversight committee at the legislative building in Raleigh. A spokeswoman for Senate Leader Phil Berger said Hartsell has said he complied with the law, so "we will reserve further comment until this issue is resolved."

Third Gubernatorial Debate: Click [here](#) more info on WRAL's event at 7 p.m. on Oct. 18.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board [to vote Tuesday](#) on adding a student member.

Quote of the Week

"I play for championships – not for money."

- The late, great legendary golfer Arnold Palmer