



LEGISLATIVE NEWSLETTER LEGISLATIVE NEWSLETTER

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Lawmakers Set for Special Session Tomorrow, Other News

Open-Ended Session: Gov. Pat McCrory is summoning legislators back to Raleigh on Dec. 13 to approve disaster relief funding after Hurricane Matthew and mountain wildfires. But more may be discussed. That's because McCrory's proclamation, signed Friday, directs lawmakers to reconvene Tuesday morning to deal with funding for the two disasters as well as "any other matters the General Assembly elects to consider."

The state constitution authorizes a governor to convene a special session "with the advice of the Council of State," which he did Thursday by providing language of the session's scope to council members. Some Council of State members -- two Democrats, Gov.-elect and current Atty. Gen. Roy Cooper and Treasurer Janet Cowell, and Republican Labor Commissioner Cherie Berry -- told McCrory's attorney Thursday that the session should have been narrowed to disaster relief only.

Moot Point, Well-Founded Rumors? House Speaker Tim Moore, R-Cleveland, said the legislature can act on anything it chooses once it has convened, regardless of proclamation language. Democrats in the legislature and their allies are concerned about what other legislation Republicans could pass during the session. Moore said he anticipates lawmakers will debate a few topics beyond disaster relief, including possibly some issues left over from the last regular work session that ended in early July. He declined to identify potential topics because the House GOP caucus hasn't met to consider them, according to news reports.

Rumors are abounding these days. GOP critics, through social media and news conferences, have raised suspicions that Republican leaders want to pass legislation increasing the number of justices on the state Supreme Court from seven to nine, keeping a Republican majority on the bench even though Democrats won a fourth seat last month. Similar scenarios occurred by Democrats in past years when they were in command.

Executive, Legislative Branches Picture: Gov.-elect Cooper will have broad authority, when he begins his new next month, to appoint department heads and board members with authority over everything from environmental policy to voting hours. At the same time, Republicans still will enjoy "supermajorities" in the legislature not only override

Cooper's vetoes of their bills but also defeat many of his proposals. Some issues, according to news reports, likely not to occur will be any big changes on the UNC Board of Governors, whose members are named by the legislature.

School Funding: Some observers see Cooper's election as a victory for teachers, but how that will play out with legislators is unknown. "He's going to be asking, not telling," said Charles Jeter, a former Republican House member who now lobbies for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.

Jeter and Keith Poston, president of the nonpartisan Public School Forum in Raleigh, said Cooper's advocacy can help guide specifics in areas that have bipartisan support, such as increasing teacher pay. Areas where partisan differences are starker, such as Republican support for expanding charter schools and vouchers, may prove tougher for Cooper.

"If you're looking to have some joint victories, education is probably the most fertile ground," Jeter said. The governor appoints 11 members of the state Board of Education, which sets policy for the public schools and the state's Office of Charter Schools, but only as terms end or members leave.

Other News

Governor-elect New Hires: In the wake of Gov. Pat McCrory's recent concession of defeat to his reelection, Gov.-elect Cooper named three of his administration's first hires, two of whom have led his transition team. Kristi Jones will be Cooper's chief of staff, no big surprise as Jones has been his chief of staff at the attorney general's office. A news release from the transition team says Jones will be the first African-American woman to serve in the role.

Meantime, Brad Adcock will serve as Cooper's legislative director, overseeing what's likely to be a prickly relationship with the Republican-led House and Senate. He has spent three decades as a lobbyist for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina, and he also served on the UNC Board of Governors. Ken Eudy will be Cooper's senior advisor. Eudy is a former political reporter who founded the public relations and marketing agency Capstrat.

"We have a short transition period and we need a team who can quickly navigate the learning curve," Cooper said in a news release. "Kristi Jones, Ken Eudy and Brad Adcock share my vision for making North Carolina once again among the most admired states." Cooper plans to name cabinet secretaries and other hires "soon," according to the news release. He'll take office on Jan. 1, with inauguration set for Jan. 7, The News & Observer reports.

Senate Rules Chair Named: N.C. Senate leader Phil Berger announced recently that he has named Sen. Bill Rabon of Southport to the powerful post of Rules Committee chair. Rabon, who begins his fourth term in January, replaces Sen. Tom Apodaca of Hendersonville in the post. Apodaca resigned last summer and later told Business North Carolina magazine he was starting a "business development and public relations" firm. The Rules Committee almost never meets,

but the chair wields big influence by controlling the flow of legislation and the chamber's operations.

Quotes of the Week

"Hello friends and hello North Carolina -- finally."

- Gov.-elect Roy Cooper, speaking to supporters at a victory rally Tuesday night, one day after the concession of Gov. Pat McCrory and four weeks after Election Day (The Associated Press, 12/06/16)

"Our team leaves the state in a much better place than when we came into office."

- Gov. Pat McCrory, in a video release last week conceding defeat in his re-election bid against Attorney General Roy Cooper (News Release, 12/05/16)

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