

The NC General Assembly's 2018 short session really was short, lasting just six weeks. In those six weeks, the legislature passed a budget adjustment bill, some policy bills, and six constitutional amendments that will be added to the ballot this fall.

In the budget bill, the legislature made adjustments to the biennial budget that was passed last year. In this year's budget adjustments, state employees received at least a 2 percent raise, an average teacher a 6.5 percent raise, principals a 7 percent raise, and state troopers an 8 percent raise. Republicans from the House and Senate negotiated the bill behind closed doors and didn't allow any amendments to the bill once it was presented to the full chambers for a vote. It passed along party lines. Governor Cooper vetoed the bill, saying it didn't do enough to fund public education and criticizing the process that was used in passing it. Both the House and Senate overrode the veto, making the bill law over Cooper's objection.

130 bills were enacted into law this session. Some of the bills that received the most attention included:

- **The Farm Bill: SB 711** was an agricultural omnibus bill. The thing that made the bill controversial was a provision added in response to several nuisance lawsuits that have been filed by residents who live close to large hog farms. The provision limits when and how neighbors of farms can file nuisance suits and creates tougher restrictions for those suits.
- **Opioids: SB 616- The Heroin and Opioid Prevention Enforcement (HOPE) Act-** is a follow-up to *The STOP Act* which was passed last year by the legislature to address the opioid epidemic. The HOPE Act gives law enforcement access to the state's controlled substance reporting system. It also strengthens the penalties against health care workers who steal, dilute, or substitute a patient's drugs.
- **Voting: SB 325- The Uniform and Expanded Early Voting Act-** makes early voting opportunities uniform state-wide and directs counties to adopt the same early voting schedule for all voting sites. The most controversial provision in the bill removed the last Saturday before Election Day as an early voting option. Governor Cooper vetoed the bill, but both chambers overrode the veto. Two days later, *HB 335- Restore Last Saturday Early One-Stop-* was introduced to reinstate early voting on the last Saturday before Election Day only for 2018.

The legislature approved six amendments to be on the ballot for voters to decide this fall. Those amendments are:

- ***HB 551- Strengthening Victims' Rights (Marsy's Law)***, would expand the constitutional rights of victims of crime and their families in the state justice system.
- ***HB 913- Bipartisan Ethics and Elections Enforcement***, changes the appointment process and composition of the N.C. State Board of Ethics and Elections Enforcement. The eight member board will be appointed by the General Assembly, with four members appointed by the Senate and four by

- the House. The Senate Pro Tem and Speaker of the House will select appointments from nominees submitted by their chamber's majority and minority leaders, and no more than four members of the board may be registered with the same political affiliation. The amendment also provides that the state legislature controls all board appointments, duties and responsibilities, and no sitting legislator may be appointed to a state board or commission that exercises executive or judicial powers.
- ***HB 1092- Amendment – Require Photo ID to Vote***, adds a constitutional requirement that a valid form of photo identification be presented for eligibility to vote at the polls.
  - ***SB 75- Amend. – Max. Income Tax Rate of 7%***, reduces the constitutional cap on personal and corporate income tax from 10 percent to seven percent.
  - ***SB 814- Judicial Vacancy Sunshine Amendment***, amends the appointment process for judicial vacancies by establishing a new commission to review judicial nominations. The commission will determine, through a merit selection process to be established, whether candidates submitted by the people of the state are qualified or not qualified and submit its evaluations to the General Assembly. The General Assembly will select at least two nominees deemed qualified by the commission and submit their names to the governor for consideration. If the governor fails to appoint one of the nominees within 10 days, the General Assembly may elect an appointee to fill the vacancy.
  - ***SB 677- Protect Right to Hunt and Fish***, would add the protection of traditional methods of hunting, fishing and harvesting wildlife to the state constitution.

The General Assembly adjourned on June 29 with an adjournment resolution calling them back into session on November 27. The adjournment resolution includes no restrictions on what legislation can be considered during that post-election session.

All 170 House and Senate seats are up for re-election November 6, which is a blue moon election in North Carolina. A blue moon election occurs every 12 years when there are no presidential or U.S. Senate candidates on the ballot. Participation is historically low during a blue moon election, which puts pressure on both parties to increase voter turnout through fundraising and campaign activities.

Governor Cooper and legislative Democrats will seek to break the Republican House and Senate supermajorities in November, while Republicans will fight to preserve their veto-proof margins of 72 Republicans in the House and 30 in the Senate. Democrats must gain four seats in the House and six seats in the Senate to end the GOP veto-proof majorities.