



## North Carolina NOW Legislative Update—21 May 201



Teachers' March on Raleigh May 16, 2018

On opening day between 20,000 and 30,000 teachers from all across the state marched and rallied in Raleigh in support of higher pay for teachers and more funding for schools. Many took the opportunity to visit their representatives to explain that over the past 10 years teacher pay and per capita spending for students has actually declined when adjusted for inflation.

### **Budget**

On May 16 the legislative session began. This year's session is what is called a short session whose main purpose is to adjust the two-year budget passed last year. (For an excellent discussion of what a short session is and does, see: <http://strongernc.org/whats-a-short-session-anyway/>.) This year lawmakers will

have an estimated 347-million-dollar surplus to work with. State senate and house leaders have been meeting behind closed doors and have agreed on an overall spending target of 23.9 billion dollars, an agreement that may help shorten the session. The Republican leaders have also agreed not to alter the teacher pay raises included in the budget passed last year and to implement the tax cuts passed then (for more details, see <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/north-carolina/articles/2018-05-07/n-carolina-lawmakers-expect-357m-surplus-uptick-next-year>). Governor Cooper has offered an alternative budget proposal that includes better pay raises for teachers and more school spending paid for through a delay in implementing the tax cuts.

### **Party Agendas for the Session**

Democrats have set forth their legislative agenda in a document called “Our Carolina Promise” that calls for increased teacher pay, redistricting reform, and Medicaid expansion among other things. (For more details, see <http://www.thestate.com/news/politics-government/national-politics/article211110324.html>). Republicans have not publicly announced their agenda for this legislative session, but certain issues will almost certainly come up, including proposed amendments to the state constitution and some version of judicial reform.

### **Amendments to the State Constitution**

Faced with voter anger and backlash against Trump, Republicans are feeling the need to turn out their base in the upcoming mid-term elections by putting proposed amendments to the state constitution on the ballot. Some proposed amendments surfaced last year, but others are rumored. One rumored proposal is to pair a voter identification constitutional amendment with a victim's rights amendment known as Marsy's law. Another proposed amendment would make hunting and fishing activities protected under the state constitution—guns must figure into this plan some way. Another proposal is a cap on state income tax written into the state constitution. Later in the session it should become clearer which proposed amendments are on the Republican agenda.

### **Judicial Reform/Judicial Gerrymandering**

The driving force behind what he calls “judicial reform,” but which actually is extreme judicial gerrymandering to favor conservative candidates, has been Rep. Justin Burr, who will not be returning to the legislature because he lost his

primary election. It is not known if Rep. Burr will abandon the attempt or double down to go out in a blaze of glory. Senate leaders favor a plan to eliminate judicial elections and appoint judges instead.

### **The ERA is Alive**

Since legislators have constitutional amendments on their mind, supporters will probably want to take the opportunity to remind them that there is one amendment to the federal constitution that needs to be passed—the Equal Rights Amendment. It can be considered this session, and we should let our representatives know that ratification is long overdue.