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Legislative Updates
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November 4, 2019

Representative Nasif Majeed
District 99 - Mecklenburg County



STATE BUDGET UPDATE

PEACE. North Carolina still does not have a State Budget in the traditional sense, but much of the State Budget has passed into law. That is why you do not see parks closed or public services shuttered – problems you typically see when the federal government fails to pass a budget.

Yet the failure to pass a State Budget is still really bad for a number of reasons.

1. Teachers and Public School Employees have not gotten a pay raise of any kind.
2. No statewide bond for school facilities and clean water infrastructure.
3. No Medicaid Expansion.

This past week the impasse continued. The General Assembly passed billions in tax cuts, with the largest tax cuts going to large corporations, while at the same time passing bills with teacher and public school employee pay raises significantly SMALLER than the raises the State is providing to all other state employees. Governor Cooper is likely to veto these bills.

Here are a few of the important bills that legislative leaders put forward:

Corporate Tax Cuts

North Carolina has the lowest corporate tax rate in the country. [SB 578](#) lowers the franchise tax paid by corporations and mostly helps the largest corporations. It reduces revenue over the next four years by over \$1 billion.

Teacher Pay

[HB 377](#) is the Republican teacher pay bill. It funds the “step increases” that teachers are already entitled to by law, but invests no money in teacher pay raises. It also offers no money for pay raises for public school employees like custodians and nurses. Our budget counterproposal does not provide more corporate tax cuts and allows us to offer 5% raises for school employees and average teacher raises of 8.5% over the next two years.

Retiree COLA, Community College, and UNC Employees

[HB 231](#) is the Republican pay bill for UNC and community college employees and the bill providing a one-half of one percent one-time COLA for state retirees. Our counterproposal would double the COLA to one percent each year. It would provide 5% raises for UNC employees and 4% for community college employees – both double what the Republican plan offers. Legislative leaders also continue to refuse to hear a Medicaid Expansion bill.

Republicans are holding educator pay hostage for their corporate tax cuts.

- By conditioning higher pay raises on the override of vetoed budget, Republicans are using educators as pawns in a petty political struggle.
- If the veto is overridden, a raft of corporate tax cuts would become law, and they are desperate to perpetuating irresponsible damage to public education.
- Speaker Moore has made it clear by his underhanded tactics that he is desperate to override the veto, and this is just more evidence of how far they will go to win at all costs.

If they really cared about educators, Republican leaders would not condition higher raises on a veto override.

- What does a veto override have to do with increasing educator pay? Nothing. This is nothing more than crass political posturing by Republicans.
- Governor Cooper has repeatedly offered to negotiate in good faith with Republican leadership on educator pay and the greater budget, and Speaker Moore and Sen. Berger have steadfastly refused.
- Adjusted for inflation and enrollment growth, public school funding in North Carolina is still well below pre-recession levels, and this bill does nothing to change that.
- Politicians in Raleigh are forcing public schools to exist in a permanent recession so they can give yet another tax cut to the top 1%.

Why do educators deserve less pay than other state employees?

- Other state employees have already been granted 5% pay raises, while education support professionals, our lowest paid educators, are only being offered a 1% raise. Why?
- Republican leadership saw fit to give other public employees a 5% pay raise, but they're refusing to give teachers more than 3.9%. Why are the people who commit their professional lives to our children worth less than other state employees?
- Retired educators are again completely denied a cost of living adjustment (COLA) under this provision. It has been more than a decade since retirees received a COLA.

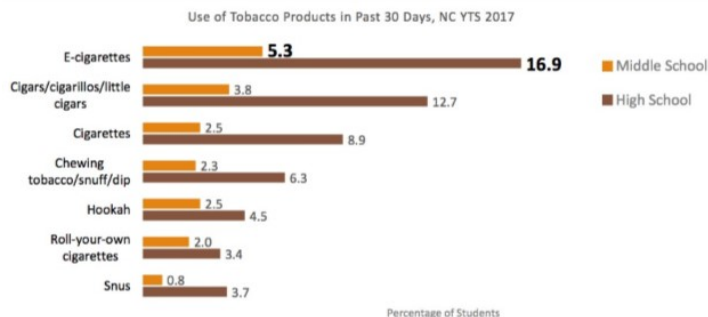
This proposal offers nearly the same compensation than the already vetoed conference budget – why would educators accept that?

- The vetoed budget offered teachers a 3.8 percent over two years, and this proposal is only offering a 3.9 percent increase. (Governor Cooper's compromise budget would give teachers an 8.5 percent raise.)
- For ESP's, our lowest-paid educators, the vetoed budget was offering less than a 1 percent raise, while this proposal is only offering a 2 percent.
- Providing our children with a high-quality education requires recruiting and retaining effective teachers in every classroom. These are not the actions of legislators who are serious about improving the quality of education in NC.
- This is clearly not a bill from lawmakers who values public schools, students, or educators.
- Instead of giving more tax cuts to the top 1%, lawmakers should pass a budget that restores education funding to pre-recession levels.

The General Assembly has now adjourned until November 13th. It has been months since Governor Cooper and legislative Democrats put forward a counterproposal to the Republican State Budget. During that time, Republican leaders have focused overriding the Governor veto instead of negotiating. The next step should be a negotiation between the different sides, but we will have to wait and see.

E-cigarettes are still the #1 product

used by youth



Vaping: An Emerging Youth Health Crisis

Source: 2017 North Carolina Youth Tobacco Survey Results. Graph courtesy, NC DHHS

- Electronic cigarette use increased **78%** among high school students and **48.5%** among middle school students since 2017.
- There is a growing body of evidence supporting **vaping as a one-way bridge to cigarette smoking** among youth. "Vaping as a risk factor for future smoking is a strong, scientifically-based rationale for restricting youth access to e-cigarettes."
- A national survey showed that approximately **72%** of U.S. youth believe e-cigarettes **cause little, some harm, or even NO harm**
- The Centers for Disease Control are now tracking the lung injury apparently caused by vaping on a weekly basis. **34 deaths** have been confirmed in 24 states.

Last week the House Finance Committee passed an amendment to tax vaping products similar to how cigarettes are taxed and to use those funds to pay for anti-vaping programs focusing on our youth. The amendment passed with Democrats and Republicans in support.

Unfortunately, legislative leaders and tobacco lobbyists intervened, and stripped out the anti-vaping amendment behind closed doors. The amendment is dead for now, but the issue will likely come up again next year.



From left to right: Genesis Torres, Damiana Dendy, Rep. Majeed, Aiden Graham, Michael Hachey

In this session, I have cosponsored several bills advocating a fair living wage. Recently, I had a productive and educational meeting with leaders of the North Carolina state AFL-CIO to **discuss a living wage for workers in the airline kitchen** servicing American Airlines flights at Charlotte Douglas International Airport. Wages for airline catering workers are lower in Charlotte than at any other American Airlines hub airport in the country, with wages starting as low as \$8.40 per hour.

In all, 98 percent of the LSG Sky Chefs workers, who primarily cater American Airlines flights, start at Charlotte Douglas making less than \$15 an hour. Some workers have been there over 30 years and still make less than \$15. Last year, American Airlines operating profit was \$1.9 billion and it has earned \$15.8 billion in profit over the last 5 years. I'm

urging corporate leadership to address these issues and [pay their workers a FAIR living wage](#).

North Carolina's Infant Death Rate Reaches Record Low, But Racial Disparities Persist

North Carolina's infant deaths in 2018 reached their lowest rate in the 31 years that deaths have been tracked. According to the newly released [2018 North Carolina Infant Mortality Report](#), 806 infant deaths happened in 2018 compared to 852 in 2017.

The report reflects that notable disparities persist in infant mortality, particularly among African Americans. The African American infant mortality rate also reached an all-time low, but it is still more than twice the white infant mortality rate.

Research published in 2018 in the American Journal of Public Health found that states that expanded Medicaid saw a greater rate of decline in infant mortality, with greater rates of decline among African American infants.

Commenting on the report, North Carolina's Secretary of Health and Human Services Dr. Mandy Cohen noted, "It should come as no surprise that a baby's health is impacted by a mother's health, reinforcing why North Carolina needs to expand access to affordable health insurance."



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