

*****SPAM*** For Immediate Release**

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From the Office of Sen. Joyce Waddell, NC Senate
Mecklenburg County

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Greetings:

The mission of the NC General Assembly is the advancement of North Carolinians. We have taken a financial, physical, and spiritual hit from this pandemic, but we will get to place that we can breathe a sigh of relief. I know that, because North Carolinians are resilient and strong.

Sincerely,
Joyce Waddell

COVID Rates

The rate of new COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations stabilized last week after slowly rising since late March. The state reported 2,167 new cases Friday, bringing the average new daily cases reported over the past seven days to 1,891. DHHS reported 1,145 hospitalizations on Friday. That number has stayed around 1,100 the past few days. Since late March new case averages and hospitalizations have increased by

about 200 and 300 respectively. The percentage of COVID-19 tests coming back positive this week has averaged 6.1% per day, down slightly from 6.5% the previous week.

Meanwhile, a federal advisory committee on Friday recommended lifting the national pause on the use of the Johnson & Johnson coronavirus vaccine that was initiated after several women developed blood clots within two weeks of vaccination. The recommendation did not include any new restrictions based on age or gender. Anyone over the age of 18 can receive the shot. Officials agreed that the benefits of vaccination against COVID-19 outweighed the risks of developing blood clots, adding that a one-dose vaccine plays an important role in protecting vulnerable communities, such as the homeless and rural workforce

Apple Campus

After more than three years of courting and an initial snub, North Carolina is finally landing an Apple campus. Apple plans to invest \$1 billion in North Carolina over 10 years, including \$552 million to establish a campus in Research Triangle Park where it will create at least 3,000 jobs, according to the state Department of Commerce. The company says it will spend another \$448 million expanding its data center in Catawba County but not create new jobs there. The RTP jobs would pay an average of \$187,000 a year, according to the commerce department.

The company's decision was announced Monday morning at the monthly meeting of the Economic Investment Committee, which makes decisions about job development grants. The committee approved a jobs grant of \$845.8 million over 39 years to Apple. "North Carolina's competition for the project was primarily Ohio," said a spokesperson at the commerce department. "But there were a number of other states considered." The campus will be 1 million square feet on the Wake County side of RTP, on tracts of land straddling N.C. 540 near Cary and Morrisville. It will run on 100% renewable energy, the company said.

The Governor, the state Senate leader, the House Speaker and other leaders from both political parties held a rare joint press conference at the Executive Mansion to celebrate the announcement. "As the Apple CEO told me on Saturday, with this announcement Apple is showing that they're not just creating new jobs and building a campus," said the Governor. "They want to be a committed partner with our state for

the long-term. I told him that we look forward to that partnership.” A Senate Democrat, compared Apple’s arrival to IBM’s decision to come to RTP in the 1960s, establishing the Triangle as a place for other technology companies to settle. “It’s not just Apple that we celebrate coming here today; but it is the ecosystem that it brings with it,” he said. “Just as we saw IBM transform a region, we will see the same kind of benefit from this decision by Apple.”

Apple announced in early 2018 its plans to add an additional campus. North Carolina rose as a contender, with the Governor reportedly meeting with Apple in the midst of negotiations. In mid-2018, state legislative leaders reduced the threshold for both investment and new jobs required for so-called “transformative projects” under one of the state’s largest incentive programs, The News & Observer reported. With those changes, a company that creates 3,000 jobs and invests \$1 billion can receive a grant equivalent to 90% of its employees’ state income tax payments for up to 30 years, according to the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina.

In late 2018, North Carolina was seemingly out of the running with Apple announcing a new campus in Austin, Texas, and additional plans for Seattle, San Diego, Pittsburgh and other cities. Raleigh and North Carolina weren’t mentioned in those plans, and state leaders for the last two years have maintained the recruitment of Apple remained an “open” project.

The Governor said the repeal and expiration of legislation that targeted transgender people were a factor in Apple’s decision to come to North Carolina. Apple initially faced backlash from LGBTQ+ activists for considering the state for a campus in 2018. The state was still reeling from its legacy of House Bill 2, which required transgender men and women in schools and other government buildings to use the restroom matching the gender on their birth certificate instead of the gender they identify with. Apple’s announcement shows that North Carolina is “turning the page on the horrendous legacy of House Bill 2 and the five years of trauma it wrought on our state,” said the executive director of Equality NC. She said the group was “thrilled” Apple has chosen to come.

Tax Reprieve

A reprieve for people who take advantage of this year’s tax filing exemption is one vote away from the governor’s desk. House Bill 279 passed an initial Senate vote on Monday night, with a final vote on the

calendar for this afternoon. It would waive interest on income tax returns filed between the original deadline and the extended May 17 deadline. It also would make it clear that federal stimulus checks and North Carolina's "Extra Credit Grant" checks for parents wouldn't be considered as income for certain property tax exemption programs. While HB 279 would add some clarity to tax season, tax preparers will have to wait on whether recipients of Paycheck Protection Program loans can take a tax break. That bill passed the House but hasn't yet moved in the Senate.

Congressional Seat

North Carolina is getting another member of Congress. The state will receive a 14th seat in the United States House of Representatives based on the first public results from the 2020 Census, which were released Monday — months behind schedule due to the coronavirus pandemic and legal disputes. North Carolina had long been expected to gain another seat, which also gives it a 16th member of the Electoral College for the 2024 and 2028 presidential elections.

The 435-member House is reapportioned each decade based on population after each Census. North Carolina had 9.5 million residents in 2010, according to that year's census. A Census Bureau estimate of the state's population last summer was 10.6 million people. Last year's complete census put the state's population at 10,439,388 on April 1, 2020. North Carolina grew by 903,905, or 11.2%, since the 2010 count. The division of congressional seats is based on the "apportionment population," the number of a state's residents plus those from the state serving in the military or working for the federal government overseas and their dependents living with them. North Carolina's apportionment population was 10,453,948. By either measure, North Carolina remains the 9th most populous state, keeping pace with No. 8 Georgia and putting more distance between itself and No. 10 Michigan, which is losing a seat in the House. The state's two most populous counties — Wake and Mecklenburg — continue to grow. Each county is already too large to be contained in a single congressional district. The 2nd Congressional District (Wake) and the 12th Congressional District (Mecklenburg) are solely within county lines. With so much of the state's population centered around those two counties (and with rural counties losing population), the new district is likely to be there, too. More than half of the state's population growth (53%) from 2010 to 2015 occurred, according to an analysis by UNC's Carolina Demography, in three counties: Wake,

Mecklenburg and Durham. In 2016 and 2017, that number was 40% with suburban counties and retirement destinations seeing additional growth. Based on population estimates, all but one of North Carolina's current 13 districts now has a population that exceeds the rough estimate of 757,000 people that each of the 14 redrawn congressional districts will have. The largest districts are in Wake County (2nd), Wake, Durham and Orange (4th), from Johnston to New Hanover (7th) and in Mecklenburg (12th).

State lawmakers will draw the new lines for state and federal districts — a process sure to lead to legal challenges. Republicans hold majorities in the state legislature. Republican Senate leader said last year that “the legislature is committed to a process that's open and transparent.”

Mask Mandate

Starting Friday, people no longer will be required to wear masks outdoors in North Carolina, the Governor said Wednesday, issued a new executive order that further eases restrictions on rules meant to curb the spread of the coronavirus. Under the new order, the number of people allowed to gather in one place will be doubled to 100 people indoors and 200 outdoors, the Governor said. But he said COVID-19 is still too prevalent in the state to fully lift restrictions. While the numbers of new coronavirus cases and people hospitalized with COVID-19 have improved compared to this winter, that improvement has stalled. “We're grateful that North Carolina continues to hold steady when it comes to our COVID-19 metrics. But while our numbers remain stable, we're not seeing the decline in metrics that we'd like to see,” he said during a press conference. “This tells us that the pandemic is not over.”

The new mask order comes after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued new guidance Tuesday, saying those who are fully vaccinated no longer need to wear face coverings outdoors in small gatherings or while exercising outdoors alone. The CDC did not say that people should stop wearing masks everywhere outdoors. In North Carolina, athletes in youth, high school and amateur athletic events no longer will need to wear masks when playing outdoors, the order said. Masks are still required for indoor exercise and athletic events, the order said. The Governor announced last week that he expected to lift almost all pandemic restrictions by June 1. On Wednesday, he outlined what will happen in the meantime.

Under the current executive order that expires April 30, most outdoor gatherings are limited to 100 people and indoor gatherings to 50 people. Retail establishments can operate at full capacity, but restaurants and fitness centers are limited to 75% capacity inside. Bars, concert venues and sports arenas are limited to 50% capacity. Under the new order issued Wednesday, those capacity limits for restaurants, bars and other venues will remain unchanged in May, with one exception: Arenas and other large venues for live performances may be allowed higher capacity if state officials sign off on their health and safety plan.

In announcing plans to lift restrictions by June 1, the Governor cited the growing number of people who have been vaccinated against COVID-19 as well as progress in curbing the spread of the virus. As of Wednesday, about 39% of adults 18 and older in North Carolina have been fully vaccinated, according to the state Department of Health and Human Services. Of those 65 and older, who are among the most vulnerable to COVID-19, that number is 72.5%. The secretary of the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, said Wednesday that vaccinations among older people are producing results. "We are seeing significantly fewer cases and hospitalizations in older North Carolinians, and that's positive," the secretary said during the press conference.

So far this month, about 1,700 new coronavirus cases have been reported to the state each day on average. That's down from a peak of more than 6,400 cases a day in January but up from an average of 1,676 per day in March. The number of people hospitalized with COVID-19 has ticked up this month as well, from less than 1,000 at the end of March to 1,117 on Wednesday.

Teacher Pay

Two straight years of no teacher raises have dropped North Carolina down the national rankings for average teacher pay, according to a new report from the National Education Association. The NEA salary report released Monday estimated that North Carolina's average teacher salary is \$54,392, up slightly from last school year's revised total of \$54,150. The NEA projects that North Carolina is ranked 33rd in the nation, the same as last school year, but down from 31st in the 2018-19 school year. The state's NEA ranking has rebounded from when North Carolina had fallen to 47th in the rankings in 2013 after the recession. But the state has slipped as the budget fight between Democratic Governor and the Republican-led General Assembly have

resulted in teachers getting no raises for the past two years.

The Governor, with the support of the N.C. Association of Educators, vetoed the state budget in 2019 in part because he said the average 3.9% teacher raises over two years were insufficient. He later vetoed a standalone bill that included the teacher raises, again saying they were “paltry.”

“The salary ranking is not surprising considering the Governor vetoed a no-strings-attached 3.9% teacher pay raise and Democrats in the legislature voted to sustain his veto,” a spokesman for the Senate leader, said Monday in a statement. The president of NCAE, says the group stands by rejecting the GOP’s legislature’s proposed raises. She said it was a “matter of principle” to push for higher raises than offered. “They deserved a higher pay raise when we were in budget talks then,” she said in an interview Monday with The News & Observer. “They deserve a professional pay raise just like any other professionals this go around.”

Police Video

Democratic House and Senate members want to repeal a North Carolina law that requires a court order to view body-worn camera footage captured by law enforcement. The call for change comes as protesters line the streets in Elizabeth City demanding the release of body-cam video in the fatal shooting of Andrew Brown Jr. by Pasquotank County sheriff’s deputies.

“It’s also more than unfortunate that the death of Mr. Brown, and the actions of authorities afterwards have clearly demonstrated the inadequacy and fallacies of our current body-cam release law,” said a House Democrat, in a news conference Tuesday morning. Lawmakers filed House Bill 698 on Tuesday, which is identical to a previously filed bill, Senate Bill 510, and would require law enforcement to release footage from body-worn and dashboard cameras within 48 hours of an incident unless the agency receives a court order to seal the video for a set amount of time.

“Studies have shown that body cameras reduce officer misconduct and use of force, and body cameras reduce citizen complaints against law enforcement officials by 90%.” A Senator said the next step is making sure the public can access the footage. The bills, if passed, would put the onus on law enforcement and prosecutors to prove why the video should be withheld from the public. Currently, under a North Carolina

law passed in 2016, the public must petition the court for the videos' release.

Disciplinary Records

A government transparency bill would make police, teachers and other public employees' disciplinary records public. The bill comes as there is more scrutiny nationwide on the personnel records of law enforcement and other government employees in the wake of police shootings. In North Carolina, if someone was demoted, that's already a public record. However, if Senate Bill 355, the Government Transparency Act, becomes law, a general description of the reasons for demotion, dismissal, transfer or other change in position will be included in what's public — as it already is for promotions.

The executive director of the N.C. Police Benevolent Association, said the group is not opposed to the bill because of its efforts to be transparent. "No one hates a bad cop more than a good cop," he told lawmakers in Tuesday's Senate judiciary committee meeting. He asked for an amendment to the bill that would at least give police officers notice of records being released, saying that sometimes officers are disciplined "for matters of political expediency." Two changes that were made to the bill on Tuesday include the 80,000 UNC System employees in the bill, and clarify that sheriff's office employees would also be included. The N.C. Sheriffs' Association asked for that change. They join the state, city, county and other government employees who would be affected by the bill.

This is the third time a bill like this has come up in the past 24 years. In 1997, The Governor, who was then a state senator, sponsored Senate Bill 799. A 2011 bill, Senate Bill 344, closely mirrors the current bill. Neither made it to the governor's desk. One of the 2011 bill's co-sponsors, a Republican, is also co-sponsoring the new bill. The bill co-sponsor, is in the powerful position of Senate Rules chair, and the Senate is likely to move the bill within the next week or two before a key deadline.

The bill sponsor told lawmakers that pushing the bill "is still a good idea for us, because we are the people who pay state employees in North Carolina ... and should be able to identify bad apples out there." The State Employees Association of North Carolina didn't like the 2011 bill, nor does it support this one. SEANC Executive Director previously told The News & Observer that the bill is bad policy that's "like using a sledgehammer to try to kill a gnat." Another Senator said

that while she agrees about the reasoning on “bad apples,” she also doesn’t want information about employees’ health reasons for a transfer or “bogus complaints” made public.

Prison Visits

As the vaccine rollout continues behind bars, North Carolina state prisons are expanding opportunities for families to see incarcerated loved ones. All young children are now permitted to visit parents or family members in prison. This new policy went into effect on April 1, according to a Department of Public Safety Spokesperson. Nonetheless, some incarcerated people and as well as their family members appeared to be unaware of the change prior to being contacted by North Carolina Health News.

State-run prisons without “a significant outbreak of COVID-19” have technically been open for visitations on a limited basis since October 2020. Even those that were open to visitors had significant restrictions. The time a person could visit their family member was limited to 30 minutes, and notably, kids under 12 couldn’t visit at all.

Carceral settings, where many people live in relatively tight quarters and social distancing can be difficult, have long been considered “incubators” for transmission of the virus. During winter months, almost half of North Carolina’s 55 state prisons faced coronavirus outbreaks at once -- leading these facilities to once again close their doors as holidays came and went. Under the new policy, state prisons may also now extend visit times past 30 minutes, “at the discretion of the leadership at each prison facility,” according to the spokesperson. He did not have an available list of prisons that have implemented a return to normal visitation times. “I don’t know the duration of visitations at each of the 55 prisons,” he said. “They would vary.”

I am sure you have read my advice about getting vaccinated. I am continuously pushing this because of the greater good of us individually, our families and North Carolina the state. There are many avenues to get vaccinated, please choose one and get it done.

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