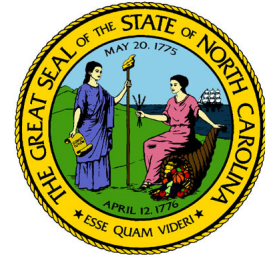




Rep. Ruth Samuelson

Online with Ruth

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June 18, 2009

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Raleigh, NC

Capitol Commentary from Rep. Ruth Samuelson

As I write this, our state budget for the next two years has passed through every chamber of government in North Carolina with many alterations. I voted against the \$19.9 billion state budget because it contains \$780 million in new taxes and \$86 million in new and increased fees. While I agreed with some of the cuts proposed the Democrat leadership, others appeared to be more politically motivated than wise and effective. Fortunately, a “zero-based” budget amendment by Representative John Blust was adopted which could provide a more business like approach to the budget process in future years.

The budget is now in “conference” where the competing versions will be reconciled. This responsibility rests primarily in the hands of the Democratic legislators who chair the House and Senate budget committees. My hope and prayer is that cooler heads will prevail and we will be offered a budget that cuts prudently and avoids job-killing tax increases, positioning the state to prosper when the economy turns around.

(If you want to follow all the political give and take on the budget from opposing insider views, check out www.johnlocke.org and www.ncpolicywatch.com . I am not endorsing either of these organizations but they will make you think!)

Other Business

It doesn't always make the news cycle, but there has been plenty of work to do aside from budget deliberations. I want to tell you about four bills that I'm working hard to get passed:

- **S600, H1080 Condemnation of Conservation Easements;** Senator Dan Clodfelter and I sponsored companion bills in the House and Senate to create a fair and reasonable process for public condemnations that involve lands protected with a conservation or historic preservation easement. You may not be aware that the NC Constitution states that it is the policy of our state to conserve and protect its lands and waters for the benefit of all its citizens. Yet our current laws concerning public condemnations do not recognize this preference, leaving these properties at increased risk of condemnation. This Bill passed the Senate easily and I am working with stakeholders to perfect the language of the bill to get broad support in the House as well.
- **H687, Tax Credits for Children with Disabilities;** This bill was originally filed in 2007 but was unable to get a hearing. The intent of the bill is to assist parents with special needs children in meeting the unique and complex challenges of educating their

children. It would allow an individual income tax credit for part of the expense of special education outside of the public school system for children whose education and related services requirements are beyond the scope of the local school's usual resources. This bill has the strong support of parents and some educators who recognize that serving these children well, even if it is outside of the usual public education system, benefits everyone. It should be noted that this "tax credit" bill would actually put an estimated \$5 million back into the state budget by reducing the cost to the state of attempting to adapt to the unique and complex needs of these students in a public school setting.

- **H1637 Modernize Precious Metal Business Permitting** is a bill I am pleased to have offered with Rep. Margaret Dickson (D- Fayetteville). The rising price of gold and other precious metals has highlighted the need to modernize the state permitting and record keeping process for precious metals businesses. The intent of this bill is to reduce the opportunity for stolen property to be quickly converted to cash and to improve the ability to track stolen items that may be offered for sale by a third party. The rising commodity value for precious metals has increased the risk of theft or unscrupulous vendors. This bill would provide both a deterrent and a source of potential evidence in prosecuting such cases. Working with the stakeholders on this bill has been a real education and I thank them for their patience and cooperation!
- **H1257 Medium Speed Vehicles** has important economic and environmental implications. I am proud to have introduced the bill with broad bipartisan support. Under the provisions of this bill the state would create a new licensing category for "medium speed" vehicles that would be allowed to travel on certain public roads in areas where the posted maximum speed is 35 MPH or less. A medium speed vehicle is defined as a "self-propelled electrically powered four-wheeled motor vehicle equipped with a roll bar or crush-resistant body design, which can attain a speed of 30 miles per hour but less than 35 miles per hour in one mile". These vehicles are already being used in some of our smaller municipalities, university campuses, large hospital complexes and retirement communities but must be registered under the more restrictive "Low Speed Vehicles" classification. They offer obvious economies for their owners, but beyond that their expanded use would significantly lower air pollution in locations where they became the standard means of local travel.

As you follow the news from Raleigh, please let me know whenever you have a question or a concern. There is great value in public awareness and public comment. If you haven't made use of the resources at <http://www.ncga.state.nc.us> , you might want to use it to follow one of the four bills I've detailed above or any other bill that you may be interested in following. You can reach me in my legislative office at (919) 715-3009 or you can email ruths@ncleg.net or samuelsonla@ncleg.net

Please continue to keep all of those who work in government in your prayers. Our need for Godly wisdom is even more critical when we face so many decisions that impact our future.

It is my privilege to serve you.

Ruth

"These days people seek knowledge, not wisdom. Knowledge is of the past, wisdom is of the future."

-- Vernon Cooper

Please feel free to contact us with any concerns or comments you may have. We look forward to hearing from you. You can reach us at our Raleigh number at (919) 715-3009 or you can email us at ruths@ncleg.net or samuelsonla@ncleg.net

Representative Ruth Samuelson
District 104, Mecklenburg County

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Susan Phillips Legislative Assistant