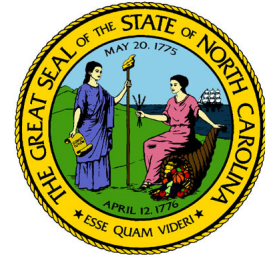




Rep. Ruth Samuelson

# Online with Ruth

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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Raleigh, NC

## Capitol Commentary from Rep. Ruth Samuelson

The pace of public debate has intensified in Raleigh. We're in the uniquely difficult position of being forced to live within our means while those means are still shrinking. The governor's call to cut wages and furlough workers was a painful indication that we must look at everything done by state government and be honest about its value to our citizens. As elected officials, we must all work together to find better solutions to meet the state's challenges. I'm working hard to find opportunities where good people can find agreement and put our efforts into things that simply make good sense.

Families, businesses and local governments are bending under the strain of rising costs, rising fees and rising taxes. We have to break the old habit of making decisions based on the assumption that there's always a way to raise more money. For example,

- I was in the 52 vote minority supporting an amendment to **HB 148, the "Congestion Relief/Intermodal Transport Fund,"** that would have allowed the new transportation revenue to be used for funding road projects as well as public transportation. As written, this bill provides authority for counties to decide by referenda whether to increase the sales tax only to fund public bus and light rail transportation systems. The failed amendment would have allowed local officials to have the choice to use this money for construction and maintenance of roads based on their communities' local needs. Given that the existing formula for dividing state road money ignores the impact of congestion, additional road funding is both a quality of life and environmental asset for urban counties.
- Several bills were filed to encourage **Energy Efficiency**. These will be rolled into one omnibus bill and should come to my Energy and Energy Efficiency committee soon. Meanwhile, **HB 349 Energy Savings Contracts**, otherwise known as Performance Contracting, has been in negotiation with the Treasury department and appears to be headed to committee as well. Both of these measures will enable and encourage utility savings for governments, businesses and families.
- **Bills addressing the charter school cap** would either eliminate entirely or put steps in place to increase the number of charter schools. **Senate Bill 379 and H.B. 288** are companion bills that would remove the cap entirely. **Senate Bill 397** would raise the cap by five schools per year, while another, **S.B.573**, would raise the cap by six schools per year, excluding high-performing schools and those which are the first charters in their counties. So far the President Obama's support for charter schools hasn't been enough to convince the protectors of the status quo. There is no question that charter schools save local school districts a significant amount of money by reducing the

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number of buildings and staff required to serve a smaller student population.

- **Merit Pay for teachers is a concern, too.** Efforts are underway to pass bills that would address teacher bonuses and assure that the performance of individual teachers is rewarded. Under the present system, all the teachers in a high achieving school are rewarded regardless of their individual performance. Meanwhile, quality teachers in challenged schools are overlooked at bonus time. More than ever, teacher pay is an emotional issue. My goal is to help assure fairness and reward excellence.
- As expected, **HB88, “The Healthy Youth Act”** was passed by the House majority, in spite of wide opposition. This bill changes the way all school districts may present curricula on sex education. I am grateful that amendments passed which protected the role of parents in deciding if their children will participate in these classes and removed language that could have been interpreted as going beyond the laws of the state in its definition of relationships. I will continue to encourage parents to exercise their responsibility to review all of the texts and materials used in their student’s classes. Speak up when you see a problem. Teachers have many acceptable options available that they can use effectively without violating the standards of individual families. This bill still must pass the State Senate before it can become law.
- **House Bill 1268** should pass with the support of more than 2/3 of the members of the House. It proposes an amendment to the NC Constitution to assure: *“Private property shall not be taken by eminent domain except for a public use. Public use does not include the taking of property in order to convey an interest in the property for economic development. This paragraph does not apply to the taking of physically blighted properties as defined by general law, nor to takings for access to property. Just compensation shall be paid and, if demanded by the owner, shall be determined by a jury.”* This is an important safeguard for our state’s citizens.

It is important for you to continue to follow the news from Raleigh in the weeks ahead. We will be taking lots of votes and some bills will be radically altered during the negotiation process. Speak up when you see something that you think we need to examine closely, even if it seems “unstoppable.” Live deliberations from either the House or Senate can be heard through this link to

<http://www.ncga.state.nc.us>

Your views matter, as do your prayers for everyone who serves in government! You can reach my legislative office at (919) 715-3009 or you can email me at [ruths@ncleg.net](mailto:ruths@ncleg.net) or Susan at [samuelsonla@ncleg.net](mailto:samuelsonla@ncleg.net) .

It is my privilege to serve you.

RS

PS Oh! And to all you Moms out there “Happy Mother’s Day!”

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