

April Fool's Day Pranks and Celebrity Visits Add Levity to a Week of Policy Disagreements

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With April Fool's Day pranks, an impending spring break, and even a visit from Richard Petty himself, last week at the General Assembly certainly had its share of levity. On Tuesday, famed NASCAR driver Richard Petty walked the halls of the state legislature with his family for several hours after Governor McCrory declared March 31st Richard Petty Day in North Carolina. To our surprise and excitement, the King of NASCAR even walked into a meeting that Ward and Smith's lobbyists were having with the Speaker of the House and several House members and staffers.



Refusing to be upstaged by Petty, the following day the House and Senate clerks cleverly conspired to print their respective calendars on the opposite chamber's stationary. Taking it one step further, Senate President Pro Tempore Phil Berger gavelled the House into session while House Speaker Tim Moore did the same in the Senate, much to the amusement of onlookers in the gallery.

Religious Freedom Bill Garner National Media Attention

But last week wasn't all laughs as national attention shifted from Indiana to North Carolina after The Religious Freedom Restoration Act, or RFRA as it was quickly nicknamed, was filed in both chambers. If enacted, the bill would protect certain businesses and government officials from liability if they refuse to serve someone based on conflicts with their religious beliefs.

When rumors swirled that the controversial measure might be taken up in the House Judiciary IV Committee on Wednesday, which the bill's primary sponsor chairs, activists, business leaders, and public figures quickly voiced their concerns with the bill. House Speaker Tim Moore told the Wall Street Journal on Wednesday that the legislation would not be heard in the near future, citing repercussions the Indiana Legislature has experienced since its passage of similar legislation.

Governor Pat McCrory also shared his concerns with the legislation, signaling that he would not sign the bill as it currently is written, if the General Assembly were to approve it and send it to his desk. The Governor did not specify whether he would allow the bill to become law without his signature or if he would elect to veto it. Apple, NASCAR, Angie's List, Walmart, and American Airlines are among the businesses that have spoken out publicly against the legislation, some of which have even threatened to reduce their business activities in the

states where it is enacted.

Minced Words over Historic Preservation

After the House's recent passage of a bill to reinstate an updated version of the state's historic preservation tax credits, many interest groups have been eagerly awaiting the Senate to schedule the bill for a vote. Their hopes may have been dashed last week when Senate Rules Chairman Tom Apodaca, the legislator in the Senate who has the power to decide whether bills get voted on or are left on the sidelines, said that the bill is "not anything the Senate is interested in," adding that the committee he sent the bill to was intended to be its graveyard.

The bill's primary sponsor and perhaps biggest advocate this session, Representative Stephen Ross, responded to the Senator's comments by reminding him that there are graveyards in both chambers, a statement that likely was intended to send the message to the Senate that some of its priority legislation might meet a similar fate if the historic preservation bill is not moved. Because of the political volatility of this issue, we suspect it will not be resolved until the end of session.

North Carolina Drivers See Gas Tax Cut

After the House and Senate agreed to a compromise gas tax plan and it was signed into law by the Governor, the state's gas tax rate dropped by 1.5 cents per gallon last Wednesday. Under the approved legislation, that rate will continue to drop over the next 15 months, while even deeper proposed reductions have now been repealed. To review Ward and Smith's previous article on this topic, [click here](#).

Spring Break

For the first time in recent memory, legislators will be taking a week long spring break this week in order to spend time with their families and enjoy a few days in their districts. Due to the anticipated lack of legislative activity this week, we will continue this blog upon their return on April 13th.

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