

Despite Basketball Interest, Legislators File 156 Bills in Just Four Days

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Now that the winter weather has cleared and the House and Senate bill filing deadlines loom, last week at the General Assembly saw a significant uptick in the volume of bills introduced. Bill filing tallies have lagged this session compared to previous years, but last week House and Senate members kicked their drafting efforts into overdrive to get their proposals in before the self-imposed cutoff dates.

By the end of the day Thursday, March 12, the House had filed 65 pieces of legislation and the Senate had filed 91 since Monday, March 9. The 156 bill total comes out to almost one bill filed per member of the General Assembly in just 4 days. Even more impressive, most of this activity took place before committee leaders decided to cancel most of Thursday's committee meetings so that legislators could attend the ACC Tournament in Greensboro.

IT Restructuring, Homeowners Insurance Rates, Gas Tax, and The Birds and the Bees Act

Last week, House and Senate technology leaders filed a set of companion bills, House Bill 208 and Senate Bill 268, that would restructure the state's information technology ("IT") functions by creating a new Department of Information Technology and a cabinet-level secretary to lead its efforts. The legislation provides that the new department would be responsible for approving the proposed IT projects for all state agencies, unless a specific exemption applies. The bills also outline the new department's roles, reporting requirements, and procurement policies.

A set of identical House and Senate bills introduced by a large, bipartisan group of legislators last Tuesday, March 10 would overhaul the state's policies on setting homeowners' insurance rates and the methods by which insurers cover significant losses after a hurricane. House Bill 182 and Senate Bill 208 would allow the issuance of tax free bonds to finance losses insurers cover after catastrophic weather events such as hurricanes. If enacted, the legislation would give the North Carolina Insurance Commissioner the statutory authority to reduce homeowners' insurance rates. The bills are supported by Commissioner Wayne Goodwin.

Representative Charles Jeter filed legislation to completely eliminate the state's gas tax, opting instead to replace it with a \$201 annual fee for all vehicles registered in the state. Both the House and the Senate already have passed their own gas tax proposals this year, but neither has been approved by the other chamber.

On a lighter note, lawmakers also introduced The Birds and the Bees Act, which fortunately does not cover the subject matter that some might have expected given the bill's title. If enacted, The Birds and the Bees Act would prevent local governments from regulating bee hives while authorizing a study by the state of strategies for protecting species involved in pollination.

Military Issues

Issues related to North Carolina's military economy also took center stage last week as the Military Affairs Commission held its first quarterly meeting of the year in Raleigh and the House Committee on Homeland Security, Military and Veterans Affairs held its inaugural meeting of the session at the General Assembly. Ward and Smith, P.A. lobbyists were present at both meetings where presenters gave overviews of state and federal activity surrounding North Carolina's military installations, mission sets, Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) vulnerabilities and the tremendous economic impact those installations have on the state.

State Budget

In addition to filing a large number of bills, both chambers devoted a considerable amount of time to reviewing the Governor's budget, which was unveiled the previous week. To read the budget in full or to review Ward and Smith's coverage of the Governor's budget, please click [here](#) or [here](#). Appropriations Subcommittees entertained presentations from General Assembly staff as well as interest groups on the projected implications of the Governor's budget, if it were to be enacted. State Budget Director Lee Roberts fielded a slew of questions from legislators in a full Appropriations meeting last Tuesday, March 10. The budget drafting onus has now shifted to the House, which we expect will begin working on their proposal shortly.

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