



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF NORTH CAROLINA

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

June 11, 2010

Two Lobby Days and the Second Primary Runoff Debate

Voter-Owned Elections Lobby Day will be held at the General Assembly June 22

This year we are excited to present Professor Larry Lessig as our Lobby Day keynote speaker. Lessig is a Professor of Law at Harvard University and a frequent national commentator on the growing influence of special interests in our political system. He is currently the Director of Harvard's [Edward J. Safra Foundation Center for Ethics](#) where he studies institutional corruption. To get more of an idea about his work, you can read his recent article, "[How to Get Our Democracy Back](#)," published in *the Nation*, or view a selection of his famous, rapid fire [presentations](#) (seriously, you'll be stunned).

[Click here to register.](#)

There are [two bills](#) on our legislative agenda that would push reform forward in North Carolina.

The first would expand our successful Council of State program to additional statewide races where there is an awkward reliance on money from regulated industries (e.g. State Treasurer, Commissioner of Labor). The second would allow municipalities to create local public financing programs. Both bills help break the fundraising dependencies that have led to state ethics scandals. Both would make state elections more accessible to average voters and grassroots-oriented candidates.

The event is being sponsored by our state campaign reform coalition, NC Voters for Clean Elections. Their partners include the [League of Women Voters](#), [Democracy North Carolina](#), the [NC Center for Voter Education](#), [Common Cause NC](#), [AARP-NC](#), the [NC Council of Churches](#), the [NAACP of NC](#), the [NC Association of Educators](#), and the [NC Justice Center](#).

[Click here for more information](#) on the schedule, parking, and directions.

Clean Water Lobby Day will be held at the General Assembly June 23

Citizens from across the state will gather on June 23rd at the North Carolina General Assembly for Clean Water Lobby Day. We'll be walking the halls of our state legislature and urging our representatives to protect and conserve the state's valuable water resources. It's important that your legislators hear from real people like you who want clean and healthy drinking water, protected watersheds, and a healthy environment for the future.

Can you join me on June 23rd and be an advocate for clean water?

[Yes - sign me up!](#) I want to find out more and try to attend Clean Water Lobby Day on June 23rd in Raleigh.

We will ask legislators to support a number of clean water issues, including:

- protecting our coast from offshore drilling,
- protecting mountain streams from dangerous developments on steep slopes, and
- our dwindling water resources from overuse.

This event is being sponsored by the NC Conservation Network.

NBC 17 is producing, with the LWVNC, a televised candidate debate for the Democratic US Senate Primary runoff. (Voting day is June 22).

The Runoff Debate for the Democratic US Senate primary race will be televised on **Tuesday, June 15** (live and available statewide) from 8-9 pm with Cunningham and Marshall going head-to-head.

The Budget

Waiting on Washington (abbreviated) by Chris Fitzsimon

This was supposed to be the General Assembly session in which lawmakers passed a budget on time, maybe even early, a few days before the next fiscal year begins on July 1st.

For a while, it looked like the plans for speedy session were on track. The Senate passed its budget May 20th and the House gave final approval to its spending plan last Friday (June 4), a week ahead of the already ambitious budget calendar laid out before the session.

But now uncertainty in Washington threatens to derail lawmakers' efforts to pass budget by the end of the month and return home to talk to voters. Both the House and Senate budgets count on more than \$450 million in additional Medicaid funding from the federal government that seemed such a foregone conclusion that more than 30 other states included the additional money in their budgets too.

Congress was widely expected to approve the funding by Memorial Day, but partisan wrangling has delayed it, leaving state lawmakers in a financial and political lurch. It is not a problem they can ignore. The state constitution requires a balanced budget.

That leaves legislators only a few alternatives if Congress continues to drag its feet, and none of them have much support.

House and Senate negotiators could proceed in their work to resolve the differences between the two chambers budgets and deal with the \$450 million hole by passing another bill that outlines the additional cuts that will be made if the federal money doesn't come through.

That means more tough decisions in the next few weeks about where to make deep cuts to education and human services, areas that are already reeling under reductions made last year and the ones proposed by the House and Senate this session.

Lawmakers could agree on a budget and direct Governor Perdue to make the cuts if the federal money is not forthcoming, but that approach has little support among legislative leaders who want to protect their priorities and programs.

The House and Senate could start the budget process over or at least reconsider the budgets they have passed and come up with a version that makes the additional cuts. Senator Linda Garrou half-heartedly suggested that approach recently, but nobody wants to slash budgets further if there is a chance they don't have to.

Lawmakers could also include new revenue to make up the difference, but that was ruled out before the session began and nothing seems to have changed in the political calculus about what a tax increase would mean in an election year.

The General Assembly could simply stay in session until there is a definite answer from Washington about the Medicaid money, but that's the most unlikely scenario of all. Lawmakers could pass a budget in the next two weeks and then come back in special session if the additional federal funding isn't approved, but that isn't appealing either. Legislators want to leave Raleigh soon and stay out of town until next January.

But those are the only options left in a year when uncertainty is the last thing legislative leaders were hoping for.

For additional information on The League of Women Voters of North Carolina and our policies and partners, please visit www.lwvnc.org. The Legislative Update is compiled by Beverly Kawalec (bevkawalec@nc.rr.com). If you wish to subscribe or unsubscribe, please email Patty Dale at daleph55@gmail.com.