

NCCA Lobbyist Report

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The legislative short session will get underway on April 24. Historically, the short session has run from mid-May to June 30, and was for adjusting the second year of the biennial budget and handling urgent and non-controversial policy issues. Although some of the short session customs are ensconced in the Rules, the short session has morphed into a regular session that starts shortly after North Carolina's primary elections and proceeds without a set end date.

2025 House Leadership Agreement

With Speaker Tim Moore's announcement that he will be leaving the state legislature at the end of his term and that he is running for Congress, there was a lot of speculation about who the new Speaker will be beginning in 2025. In order to avoid a battle that could split the House Republican Caucus, the leading candidates came up with an agreement amongst themselves about who will serve in which position. The group has announced that they will back Destin Hall for Speaker, John Bell for House Rules Chair, Jason Saine will be Senior House Appropriations Chair and Conference Chair, and Brenden Jones for House Majority Leader. Votes for each position will still be held after the elections this November, but it looks like they have the support of the rank-and-file. So unless there are some unexpected developments, Destin Hall will be the new Speaker of the House when they return next January for the 2025 long session.

2024 Primary Elections

Although the primary elections determine who will be the Democratic and Republican nominees on the November ballot for officials to take office in 2025, its impact in 2024 is greater. In many cases, a legislative race will be decided during the primary simply because the district is lopsided toward Democrats or Republicans. This year, Democrats are running in 168 of the 170 districts, and Republicans are running in 137 of the 170 districts. But only about 17 of those districts can be competitive in November due to the political makeup of the district voters. So, the majority of legislators will already be deemed elected when the session convenes.

Twenty-one sitting legislators did not file for reelection to their seats either because of retirement or seeking another elected office. Of those "empty seats," we expect 4 to be nail-biters while the others will elect a new member of the same political party as the retiring member. An interesting exception will be the race to replace retiring Wesley Harris (Democrat from Mecklenburg County) who has filed to run for State Treasurer. The district he is vacating has been redrawn to be slightly more favorable to a Republican, and Republican Tricia Cotham (who won as a Democrat but then changed parties during 2023) is the favored candidate.

Pending Issues

Several issues garnered a lot of activity in 2023 but were not resolved. Some of these issues that are expected to reemerge during short session are:

- Medical marijuana- the bill passed the Senate last year, but stalled in the House. Senator Rabon will continue to push for the House to hold a vote on the bill.
- Alcohol bill- a vote is expected in the House on an expansive alcohol bill that would allow local governments to permit ABC stores to open on Sundays starting at 10am, and would allow bars and restaurants to offer happy hour specials- something that is currently prohibited in NC. The bill has already passed the Senate.
- Casinos- the Senate is expected to continue to seek to expand gambling to four proposed casinos after the proposal was pulled from the budget at the last minute last year.
- Additionally, there could be discussion about the State Health Plan coverage, rural access to healthcare, and expanded scope of practice for nurse anesthetists.

Also, House Republicans signed onto a letter to Governor Cooper urging him to deploy additional National Guard troops to assist Texas in addressing illegal immigration at the border, and commit to signing legislation that mandates cooperation with ICE by local police departments to remove illegal immigrants who are committing crimes. The bill that would mandate that cooperation was passed by the House last year, and Speaker Moore says he expects the Senate to vote on it during short session.