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Article By:

George M. Teague

THE 2023 SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONVENES

The General Assembly met for one day last week to pick new chamber leaders such as House Speaker Tim Moore and Senate leader Phil Berger, both of which announced their chambers' committee assignments. The legislature reconvenes on January 25 to begin the two-year session in earnest.

[Read more about House speaker Tim Moore](#)

A listing of Senate Committees can be found at: <https://webservices.ncleg.gov/ViewDocSiteFile/72744>

A list of House Committees can be found at: <https://www.carolinajournal.com/speaker-moore-announces-nc-house-committee-assignments/>

HOUSE COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS HINT AT 2023 REPUBLICAN STRATEGIES FOR 2023

New Committee assignments in the State House hint at a Republican strategy to exert more control over North Carolina's lawmaking process this year: Peel off a handful of Democratic votes to block Governor Roy Cooper's veto. Republicans hold a veto-proof supermajority in the state Senate. They are one seat shy of that mark in the House, meaning they need only to convince one Democrat to back their policies in order to pass them over the Democratic governor's objections. House Speaker Tim Moore (R-Cleveland), has said repeatedly that a handful of House Democrats are ready to work with the GOP Majority, but he has not mentioned names.

The Republican strategy this year appears to be two-pronged. The first: Look for common ground with moderate Democrats, enticing them with plum assignments and, once the state budget starts coming together, likely with projects funded in their legislative districts.

For the second prong, Republicans reworked House rules this year to give the speaker more power to set the daily agenda. The three-fifths threshold needed for a supermajority depends on the number of members physically on the House floor for a vote. So if a Democrat leaves the floor — to use the

bathroom, for example — Moore could quickly bring veto overrides to the floor for a vote.

Moore told reporters last week that he has no plans to "ambush" Democrats with this sort of vote. Democrats weren't buying that, and Cooper said in a statement that "it's a shame that House Republican leaders believe they can only override a veto through deception, surprise, and trickery."

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ISSUES LOOMING IN THE 2023 SESSION

Abortion

Following the session's opening date, Republican legislative leaders say they are already working on a proposal for more restrictive abortion laws than the state's current ban at 20 weeks. What's still unknown, observers say, is whether House and Senate Republicans can find unified support for a given proposal, and how its passage might or might not affect the 2024 elections.

On the session's opening day, House Speaker Tim Moore said House and Senate Republicans are already meeting in working groups to come up with a proposal that can be voted on in the coming weeks. "Senator Berger, I think, has laid out the notion they are looking at, perhaps something at a 13-week [ban], and then beyond that, in the case of rape, incest, the life of the mother, and if the child would not live," Moore told reporters. "I'm hearing a lot of support for that position in the House as well. But again, these are in the early stages."

A thirteen-week ban would make North Carolina the 18th most restrictive state in the country on abortion.

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Gambling Licenses

Supporters of legalizing online sports gambling are confident they have the votes to pass a bill this session, just months after failing by a single vote on the House floor. However, a coalition of North Carolina professional sports teams – big backers of legislation – are seeking changes that would aid their bottom lines but could splinter the stakeholder group that has supported legislation for nearly three years. Representative Jason Saine (R-Lincoln) said the state is seeking revenue leakage to states like Virginia and Tennessee since bettors can simply cross state lines to place a wager. "I believe sports betting will get passed this session," said Saine, who has been the face of the proposed legislation in the House.

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Health Care

As the 2023 Session of the General Assembly convened last week, lawmakers involved in the making of health care policy said they were readying their lists of priorities for the legislative biennium that began this week. The topmost issue on both sides of the aisle? The seemingly perennial issue of the past decade: whether North Carolina would ever join the majority of states and expand the Medicaid program to provide coverage for more than a half million low-income workers.

Senate leader Phil Berger (R-Rockingham), highlighted Medicaid expansion in an address after being elected as leader for the seventh time since 2011, saying it was one of the issues the legislature “must tackle.”

“In order to get ..., kind of, the broad bipartisan support that we had for the Medicaid expansion bill that we had before, there have got to be some measures that address the supply side,” he told reporters. “If you’re going to give 500,000, 600,000 people an insurance card that says they have a right to have their medical care paid for, then we need to do something to hopefully open up more access, to more primary care providers, and facilities where they can be treated.”

Old differences could reemerge, though, as members of the House and Tim Moore (R-Cleveland), the re-elected House speaker, talked about a “clean” Medicaid expansion bill that does not include mention of nurses or hospitals.

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Voter ID and Redistricting

Recent court decisions left lawmakers with at least three changes to make in state voting laws. They must draw and pass a new state Senate map, which may again be challenged in court. They’ll draw a new congressional map, which may also be challenged. And they’ll write a new law requiring voters to show identification at the polls — something that’s passed several times in various forms over the last decade but failed to survive court challenges. These issues are typically hotly debated, generating partisan disagreements. Map making in particular is key to power, since maps can be drawn to favor one political party’s candidates over another’s. GOP lawmakers hope a pending U.S. Supreme Court decision will give them more power to draw maps as they please with less court oversight.

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Education Funding and Teacher Pay

The new year in K-12 education is likely to look a lot like the past year with the Leandro school funding lawsuit and a controversial teacher and licensure proposal likely among the key issues North Carolina lawmakers will debate when their 2023 “long session” begins later this month.

Both topics garnered lots of attention toward the end of 2022.

In November, the state Supreme Court upheld a lower court’s ruling and ordered the General Assembly to hand over millions of dollars to pay for a long overdue school improvement plan.

The court’s Democratic majority ruled that the legislature must fund Years Two and Three of an eight-year, \$5.6 billion school improvement plan. The plan calls for high-quality teachers and principals, improvements to school finance and accountability systems, and early childhood education programs, among others.

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What happens with these issues and what others may come up is unpredictable as 50 State Senators and 120 State Representatives gather for an undetermined amount of time. North Carolina

has no requirement for session limit, but we would anticipate adjournment in mid to late July. All members, of which 25% are new, can file bills and resolutions, and the average lawmaker files about a dozen. So, only time will tell what the session will bring. Stay tuned!

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