

## Old North State Report – Jan. 30, 2023

Article By:

George M. Teague

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### 2023 LONG SESSION CONVENES

The North Carolina General Assembly returned to Raleigh on Wednesday after its usual two-week January break and turned to the business of legislating — filing bills on several topics familiar to veteran lawmakers.

The House and Senate held midday floor meetings, marking when the two-year legislative session begins in earnest. The legislature held one-day organizational sessions on Jan. 11 to reelect House Speaker Tim Moore and Senate leader Phil Berger. Committees are not expected to begin hearing measures until at least next week.

Republicans in charge of both chambers are expected to grapple this year with key issues from 2022 that did not get resolved. That includes whether to accept Medicaid expansion, license sports gambling and legalize the use of marijuana for medical purposes.

Passing a two-year state government budget also will be one of the legislature's chief tasks for this year's work period, which usually ends in early summer.

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### 2023 HOUSE AND SENATE MEMBERSHIP

Who did North Carolina voters send to Raleigh this year for the new legislative session?

We know that Republicans made gains in the November election and now hold 30 of 50 seats in the Senate, and 71 of 120 in the House. Click on the link below for a by-the-numbers look at some additional details about who is representing us in Raleigh, according to documents filed by the House and Senate clerks.

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### FAMILIAR ISSUES TO BE IN PLAY DURING 2023 SESSION

North Carolina's legislative ledger gets cleared every two years when the next set of 170 lawmakers

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are sworn in. The General Assembly starts from scratch filing and advancing bills.

Action on often-redrawn redistricting maps and another way to implement photo voter identification are likely, although appellate judges could step in and restore Republican legislation that they recently struck down.

These items are in addition to passing a state government budget, which is usually the heaviest lift for legislators annually.

And with the GOP now holding a veto-proof majority in the 50-seat Senate and just one seat short in the 120-member House following November elections, Republicans could again pass looser gun laws and tougher immigration directives with hopes to finally override Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper's vetoes.

Temporary House rules for operating the chamber, and likely to become permanent, deleted a previous two-day notice before a veto override vote could be attempted. This means Republicans could attempt overrides when they notice Democratic colleagues are off the chamber floor, even briefly.

House Minority Leader Robert Reives, who criticized fiercely the rule change and wants an override notice retained, said he'd like the legislature to pass measures that increase public education spending, promote affordable housing, give tax breaks to working people, and expand Medicaid.

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## MEDICAL MARIJUANA

A top Republican lawmaker is yet again pushing to legalize medical marijuana in North Carolina.

The new legislative session began Wednesday morning, and the very first bill filed in the N.C. Senate was Sen. Bill Rabon's "Compassionate Care Act". It would allow medical — but not recreational — marijuana use statewide.

North Carolina is one of an increasingly small number of states that still fully outlaws marijuana. Most states have legalized medical marijuana, and a growing number have made the plant fully legal, even for purely recreational use.

Wednesday's bill, [Senate Bill 3](#), is long and filled with highly technical details on medical and financial regulations. But the list of approved medical ailments is identical to last year's bill, and on first glance other parts of the bill also appear similar if not identical to the final version of last year's bill, which went through a number of revisions before ultimately passing the Senate.

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## POWER GRID SECURITY

When gunshots at two electrical substations cut power to thousands of central North Carolina homes for several days in early December, Republican state Rep. Ben Moss watched his vibrant district full of family farms, small businesses and sprawling golf courses become "a ghost town."

Moss has drafted legislation, obtained in its preliminary form by The Associated Press, that would require utilities to provide 24-hour security at substations, which transform high-voltage electricity into the lower voltages that power communities. Security provisions would vary across sites, some of which are already gated with nearby cameras while others are more exposed.

He considers the bill “a conversation opener” between lawmakers, utilities, and security experts to help the General Assembly identify cost-effective defenses that won’t drive up consumer prices.

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## **ABORTION PROTECTIONS**

The next chapter in the battle over access to abortion unfolded in the state legislature on Thursday.

Democrats proposed putting the right to abortion until viability into state law.

Ever since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe vs. Wade last summer and left abortion up to the states, it's been known that the issue was going to be hotly contested this session.

One of the first bills Democrats filed this year would write the Roe vs. Wade decision into state law.

The measure probably won’t see the light of day, but Democrats said it sends an important message.

House Democratic leader Robert Reives said the bill would add the rights granted in Roe vs. Wade into state law – a move he believes voters would support. However, Democrats are in the minority. And majority Republicans have already said they intend to pass new abortion restrictions narrower than the 20-week ban currently in state law.

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