



Lawyers, Retirees, and Real Estate Practitioners Expand Ranks in Legislature

Lawyers are making slow but steady gains in the N.C. General Assembly in the 1980s after a rapid decline from 1971-1981, the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research says in the 1989-90 edition of its guide to the N.C. General Assembly. The trend is one of several dramatic demographic differences in the legislature, say Center Researcher/Writers Lori Ann Harris and Marianne M. Kersey.

"From 1971 to 1981, the number of lawyers dropped from 68 to 36, but in the ensuing sessions, their numbers have risen steadily to 45 this session," says Harris, a co-author of the new guide. Harris also notes gains among retirees, women, blacks, Republicans, and real estate practitioners in the legislature.

This information about legislative demographics and trends in legislators' occupations can be found in the Center's latest publication, entitled *Article II: A Guide to the 1989-90 N.C. Legislature*. The book, which is the largest and most complete such guide ever published, contains pictures, biographical information, committee assignments, and voting records on all 170 members of the state House and Senate.

One reason for the decline in the number of lawyers serving in the legislature from 1971-81 is that it takes too much time away from their law practices, they say. Rep. Alex Hall (D-New Hanover) agrees: "The combination of campaigning and the time away from Wilmington has killed my law practice. I was in a group practice, now I'm practicing on my own. It's especially difficult for a lawyer who must spend time generating his or her own income." In the past four sessions, lawyers have gradually been rebuilding their numbers, though they are still far fewer than the

68 lawyers who served in 1971.

Accompanying this trend in the number of lawyers has been a decrease in the number of legislators in business and sales, as well as in farming. In 1971, there were 63 legislators who listed business and sales as their occupation. Now there are 52 legislators in that field.

The number of farmers has decreased from 21 in 1971 to 13 in 1989. "The decrease in the number of farmers is not surprising," says Harris, "because of the recent and rapid urbanization of the state's population and because the length of the legislative sessions now extends into the summer months."

The legislature has become a haven for retirees. The number of legislators who consider themselves retired now stands at 28, compared to 11 in 1971. "The average age of our state legislators this session is 54," reports Harris.

The number of legislators in real estate also has increased over the years. In 1971, seven legislators listed their occupation as real estate. Today there are 23, more than three times as many as in 1971, but fewer than in 1985 when 28 legislators listed real estate as their occupation. "Many of the legislators who listed real estate as their occupation are also employed in other occupations such as insurance, law, and business," adds Kersey, who co-authored the book with Harris.

"Three main factors account for these changes in legislative occupations," says Harris. "They are annual sessions, the length of sessions, and the increased cost of campaigns." Adds Kersey, "Being retired or having a flexible work schedule makes it easier to serve as a legislator."

In 1971, the number of legislative working days was 141. That was the last year the General

Trends in Legislative Demographics

Number in General Assembly		
Category	1971	1989
Women	2	25
Blacks	2	17
Republicans	31	59

Trends in Legislators' Occupations

Number in General Assembly		
Category	1971	1989
A. Decreasing		
Lawyers	68	45
Business and sales	66	52
Farming	21	13
B. Increasing		
Retirees	11	28
Real Estate	7	23

Source: N.C. Center for Public Policy Research

Assembly met for only one long session in the odd years. Since 1973, the General Assembly has been meeting annually—a long session in odd years and a short session in even years. There were 162 total legislative working days during the 1987-88 session. "This is a major time commitment for our lawmakers, and if the length of sessions continues to increase, North Carolina may progress to a full-time legislature, at least in practice," notes Kersey. Adds Harris, "If this trend continues, we may see more and more retirees serving in the legislature because they have the flexibility to spend more time in Raleigh, especially for interim activities such as legislative study commissions." Representative Hall says, "I'd hate to see it [the legislature] go full-time."

As Harris noted, the cost of running for legislative office has skyrocketed in recent years. The average candidate running for the state House in 1988 raised \$14,912, while Senate candidates raised \$21,812. Just two election cycles ago, House candidates raised an average of \$6,396 and Senate candidates \$12,756. This is an increase of 133 percent in House campaign costs and a 71 percent increase in the cost of Senate campaigns.

The most dramatic change in legislative demographics this session is the increase in the number of Republicans. The Grand Old Party picked up 13 seats in November 1988, increasing its numbers in the legislature to a record 59 (35 percent). This was the largest gain for Republi-

cans in any legislature in the country, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. It was also a major factor that led to the House revolt against former Speaker of the House Liston Ramsey and the election of Speaker Josephus Mavretic, both Democrats.

Legislative turnover rates have stabilized at low levels during the last two sessions. In 1971, the turnover ratio in both the Senate and House was 36 percent. The ratios fluctuated in ensuing years, with highs of 42 percent turnover in the Senate in 1975 and in the House in 1973. However, says Kersey, the turnover ratio for the 1989 General Assembly is down to 10 percent in the Senate and 21 percent in the House. This compares to a 12 percent turnover in the Senate and a 21 percent turnover in the House in 1987. "As the Center predicted two years ago, there is a trend in favor of incumbents in North Carolina," says Kersey. "We're also seeing this decline in legislative turnover rates nationally."

This is the seventh edition of the guide. The Center began publishing these directories during the 1977-78 General Assembly, in a handy pocket-sized format.

"We publish the guide to provide information to the voters of North Carolina about their elected representatives," says Harris. "It is the best of the legislative directories available because it is the only one which contains three measures of performance—votes on 16 selected bills in the past

session, a record of how many bills each legislator sponsored and got enacted, and past rankings of legislators' effectiveness if they have served in prior sessions," adds Harris.

The effectiveness rankings are the most controversial feature of the guide. At the end of each regular legislative session, the Center surveys the legislators themselves, registered lobbyists, and capital news correspondents and asks them to rank the effectiveness of individual legislators. The Center then publishes the scores. "This was an evaluation of legislators by their peers and by people who saw them working every day," explains Kersey. The rankings contained in this edition of *Article II* were originally released in April 1988. Rankings for the current General Assembly will be released in April 1990.

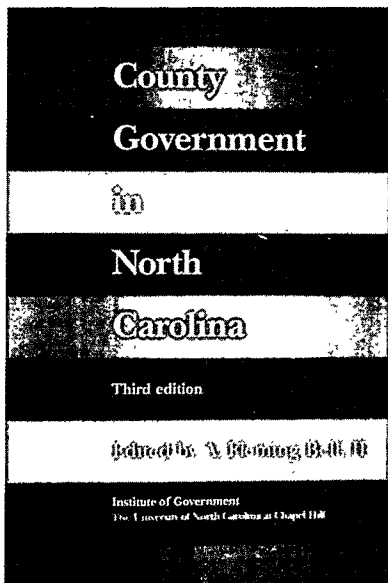
Average Cost of Running for the N.C. Legislature

Year	House	Senate
1984	\$ 6,396	\$ 12,756
1986	11,671	20,654
1988	14,912	21,812

Source: The Charlotte Observer

Article II: A Guide to the 1989-90 N.C. Legislature is available for \$20.00, plus \$1.00 tax, plus \$1.50 postage and handling from the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research at P.O. Box 430, 5 W. Hargett Street, Suite 701, Raleigh, NC 27602 (919) 832-2839. It is a handy reference book for news reporters, lobbyists, and citizens interested in the legislature. ☐☐

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