

speakers who ruled with an iron hand is past. Team play and consensus building are more the norm for getting things done in today's General Assembly. "It's more difficult to exercise leadership today," says Alan Rosenthal, director for the Eagleton Institute and a political science professor at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, N.J. "It is no longer possible for a single person to lead the body."¹²

C. A Stronger Minority Party Presence

Brubaker, Rep. John Brown (R-Wilkes), and Sen. Betsy Cochrane (R-Davie) say the trend toward shared power is for the better and that in North Carolina, their party is partly responsible for it. Brown, who first served in the General

Assembly in 1971, says the legislative process is much more open to the minority party today due to reforms implemented during the speakership of Rep. Joe Mavretic (D-Edgecombe) in 1989-90.

In 1989, Republican representatives joined 20 dissident Democrats and ousted Ramsey, elevating Mavretic to the speaker's post.¹³ Changes were then made that opened much of the legislative process to the public and to minority party participation, Brown says. Under this system, he says, the speaker has less chance to confine decision-making to a small group of close allies.

Republicans, roundly ignored during Liston Ramsey's regime, suddenly found themselves needed by a speaker whose rise to power had alienated many members of his own party. GOP

President Pro Tem's Office Evolves into Senate Power Center

While the speaker's office has evolved over the years in influence and prestige, the president pro tem's office in the Senate has seen a sudden and dramatic increase in perks and power. The development of the office as a rival power center on par with the speaker's office can be traced to 1989, when the legislature stripped the powers of the lieutenant governor and placed them under the control of the president pro tempore.

The power shift occurred when North Carolina's fourth Republican lieutenant governor, James C. Gardner, assumed office. The legislature transferred to the office of president pro tempore the lieutenant governor's major legislative powers—the power to appoint committee members and chairs and to assign bills to committee.¹ Former Sen. Henson Barnes (D-Wayne) was the first president pro tempore entrusted with these powers, serving from 1988-1992. Current President Pro Tempore Marc Basnight (D-Dare) is the second.

Along with these new powers have come growth in staff and salaries, increased appointments to boards and commissions in the execu-

tive branch of state government, and a larger budget. The budgets of the president pro tempore of the Senate, the House speaker, and the lieutenant governor are now roughly equal, at nearly \$525,000 a year.

Basnight says removing the lieutenant governor's legislative powers was the correct course because the lieutenant governor is an executive branch official. He says it's equally important that the president pro tempore's office have the same resources and powers as the speaker's office because the Senate is just as important to the passage of legislation as the House. "Nothing passes until it passes the Senate," says Basnight.

Barnes believes the change has been good for both the legislature and North Carolina citizens. It has given the Senate greater influence over policies affecting the state, he says, while removing undue influence over legislation by an executive branch official, the lieutenant governor. "If you believe in checks and balances of government, and that no branch should have power over another, then you believe the legislature has taken the right position in the frame-

lawmakers wound up chairing several subcommittees and playing a larger role in legislative debate, much to the chagrin of many Democrats. "Mavretic gave the Republicans effective control of the House," says Adams. "That's not the same as opening up the process." Disaffected Democratic legislators, meanwhile, revived what was called the Kennel Club—a sort of support group for Ramsey loyalists who suddenly found themselves in the doghouse with the new regime.¹⁴

Blue managed to knit these Democratic factions back together after a single Mavretic term as speaker. But Cochrane, who served four of her seven legislative terms in the House, says the growth in the number of Republicans in the legislature, and their potential to repeat the arithmetic

of the Mavretic coalition, has forced speakers to share their power with their supporters.

In 1963, for example, only 21 Republicans served in the House, compared to the 42 in 1993. "He's more answerable to his own people, and he has to work harder to see they're satisfied," says Cochrane. "The more he has to worry about us, the more he has to share power with Martin Nesbitt," she says, referring to the Buncombe County Democrat who co-chairs the House Appropriations Committee.

Brubaker agrees that the growing minority party presence means the speaker must work harder to keep Democratic House members in the fold on key votes. "It's sheer numbers," says Brubaker. "When I came [in 1977], he could let 10 or 15 of

work of our constitution," says Barnes.

But Former House Speaker Phil Godwin (D-Gates), who served as speaker in 1971, isn't so sure the legislature is headed in the right direction. "You've got a rivalry going on over there in the office of the president pro tem," says Godwin. "That tells the speaker he's got to protect his turf too."

As for the lieutenant governor, Godwin says, "He's just a gavel holder now." Godwin believes the lieutenant governor should have a share of the legislative powers now attached to the office of the president pro tempore. "If they shared power in certain circumstances, it might make for a more harmonious situation," Godwin says.

Both Basnight and Barnes believe a better solution would be a team-ticket approach—much as at the federal level and in 22 states—in which the governor and lieutenant governor run on the same platform and share a common agenda.² "There should be power sharing, but the lieutenant governor and the governor, they're the ones that should work together," Barnes says. In his 18 years in the legislature, Barnes says he observed too little cooperation between the two executive branch officials. "I saw all the time lieutenant governors tearing down what the governor was building up," says Barnes.

Basnight would add the gubernatorial veto to help balance the equation with the executive branch. "I don't think the governor should have

to come to see Marc Basnight or Dan Blue and pay homage," says Basnight. "To some extent, that's what he has to do now."

Godwin, however, sees fiefdoms developing within the legislature that ultimately may harm the institution. "It has almost gotten to the point that the three separate branches of government—the executive, judiciary, and legislative—have actually developed into four branches, namely the executive, the judiciary, the Senate, and the House," Godwin says.

Both Godwin and Barnes say a limit of two terms might help curb the power of the offices of speaker and president pro tem. But House Speaker Dan Blue already has signaled his intention to seek a third term, and apparently has every chance for success. As Veteran Rep. Vernon James (D-Pasquotank) puts it, "It's pretty hard to organize against a man who's in office. He'll cut your water off."

—Mike McLaughlin

FOOTNOTES

¹For more on these changes, see Ran Coble, "The Lieutenant Governorship in North Carolina: An Office in Transition." *North Carolina Insight*, Vol. 11, Nos. 2-3 (April 1989), pp. 157-165.

²For more on team election of governors and lieutenant governors, see Ran Coble, "Executive-Legislative Relations in North Carolina: Where We Are and Where We are Headed," *Wake Forest Law Review*, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, N.C., Vol. 25, No. 4, 1990, pp. 699-700.