

The Speaker's Office as a Political Stepping Stone?

by Thad Beyle

How successful are speakers of the house in moving directly from the legislative chamber to the chief executive's chair? Or, in political science jargon, in how many races has the speakership been the "penultimate" office for candidates en route to the governorship?

During the 1977–1993 electoral period, there were 216 gubernatorial elections in the 50 states. Speakers and former speakers of the house were involved in 26 of these races (12 percent), with nine of them winning (35 percent). The winners include four incumbent governors who had moved directly from the speaker's office to the governorship for their first term, then won re-election.¹ In effect, 21 speakers have sought to move directly to become governor, five have been successful, and four have been able to serve a second term.

While the *number* of speakers entering governor's races nationwide is relatively low, the *success rate* of those who do enter compares favorably with offices more typically thought to be stepping stones to the governorship. (See Table 2, p. 31.) A total of 61 lieutenant governors entered governor's races from 1977–1993 and 17 were successful, a success rate of 28 percent. As for attorneys general, 53 entered the 216 governor's races, and 14 won, for a success rate of 26 percent. So for the period examined, the odds of a speaker who enters a governor's race actually winning are more favorable than for either lieutenant governors or attorneys general. It's just that fewer speakers enter.

Eight of the speaker candidates lost their bid for the governorship in their own party's primary, indicating that the power they have among their elected party colleagues in the state house was not transferable to party primary voters. The other nine lost in the general election, including one former speaker seeking a second term as governor.²

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Of the 26 races, 11 were in Western states (all Republican speakers or former speakers), and seven were in Midwestern states (four Democrats and three Republicans). Three races were in the Northeast (all Republicans), and five were in the South (all Democrats).³ Seven of the 21 individual speaker candidates were Democrats, and 14 were Republican.

Kansas has provided a virtual yellow brick road from the speaker's office to the governorship. Five speakers sought the office and only two met the wicked witch of electoral defeat. In fact, the governor of Kansas has been a former speaker for 13 of the past 17 years. New Jersey, Tennessee, and Utah have had speakers run and win two terms during the period. These are the only four states in which speaker candidates have been successful. (See Table 3.)

Most of the action for speakers occurred in the 1978–1986 period, when 21 of the 26 entered the governor's race. Since then, there have been only the re-election bids by three former speaker/incumbent governors initially elected in the mid-1980s, and two unsuccessful candidacies in 1990 by Don Avenson (D-Iowa) and Tom Loftus (D-Wisconsin).

As for the current speaker of the North Carolina House, Dan Blue (D-Wake), he has been mentioned as a possible gubernatorial candidate. But that wouldn't be until 1996 or thereafter. No North Carolina speaker tried to move directly from the speaker's office to the governor's mansion during the period analyzed here (1977–1993). Events in Kansas, New Jersey, Tennessee, and Utah show it *can* be done. But it's a gamble.

FOOTNOTES

¹ John Carlin (D-Kansas) won in 1978 and 1982, Tom Kean (R-New Jersey) won in 1981 and 1985, Ned McWherter (D-Tennessee) won in 1986 and 1990, and Norman Bangerter (R-Utah) won in 1984 and 1988.

² Mike Hayden (R-Kansas) lost his 1990 re-election bid.

³ The unsuccessful speaker candidates from southern states were: Joe McCorquodale (D-Alabama) in 1982, "Bubba" Henry (D-Louisiana) in 1979, and Clyde See (D-West Virginia) in 1984. Ned McWherter (D-Tennessee) won in 1986 and 1990.

Table 2. Odds on Lieutenant Governors, Attorneys General, and Speakers Entering and Winning the Governor's Races, 1977-93 ¹

	Lieutenant Governor	Attorney General	House Speaker
Number of governor races	216	216	216
Number in race	61	53	26
Percent in race	28	25	12
Odds: getting in race	3.5-1	4.1-1	8.3-1
Number of races	61	53	26
Number won	17	14	9
Percent won	28	26	35
Odds: winning race	3.6-1	3.8-1	2.9-1
Number of primaries	61	53	26
Number won	30	30	18
Percent won	49	57	69
Odds: winning primary	2-1	1.8-1	1.4-1
Number general elections	31	29	18
Number won	17	14	9
Percent won	55	48	50
Odds: winning election	1.8-1	2.1-1	2-1

¹ The discrepancy in having 30 attorneys general winning yet only 29 attorneys general running in the general election, and in having 30 lieutenant governors winning and 31 lieutenant governors running in the general election is due to the politics involved in the 1986 Alabama gubernatorial second primary. The attorney general, Charles Graddick, won by a close vote but was disqualified as the party's candidate. The disqualification of Graddick, a Democrat, occurred after the party determined Alabama's voting laws were violated when Republicans were allowed to cross over to vote in the Democratic party primary. The runner up, Lt. Gov. Bill Baxley, was declared the party nominee but lost in the general election.

Table 3. Number of Speakers Running for Governor, 1977-93, and States With Speakers in the Governor's Race

1977: 0	1986: 4 — AK, KS*, TN*, WY
1978: 4 — AK, ID, KS*, NY	1987: 0
1979: 1 — LA	1988: 1 — UT*
1980: 1 — WA	1989: 0
1981: 1 — NJ*	1990: 4 — IA, KS, TN*, WI
1982: 7 — AL, AK, CO, ID, KS*, KS, WY	1991: 0
1983: 0	1992: 0
1984: 2 — UT*, WV	1993: 0
1985: 1 — NJ*	

* denotes winner

Tables by Thad Beyle

Ramsey wanted the same number in the speaker's office. He wanted the two officials to have the same budget. He wanted the speaker to have the same number of appointments to boards and commissions as the Senate leaders did (either the lieutenant governor or the president pro tempore). And he made the speaker's job full-time, year-round.

"Liston was the first [speaker] to put in four-and-a-half days a week in the office in Raleigh," says Dot Barber, Ramsey's committee clerk and administrative officer since 1969. "Other speakers always had jobs to return to. Carl had his law practice. Green [who was speaker in 1975] had his warehouses."

Ramsey says he began serving full-time because the job had expanded. "I felt like it was my job," he says. "We [the General Assembly] had a staff, and somebody needed to be here to see that they came to work in the morning. I felt I owed it to the taxpayers, and, also, we had gotten into the study commission business pretty heavy."

The job that speakers like Taylor had been able to put behind them at the end of a legislative session—"Pat locked up the door and went home to his law practice," Barber recalls—had now evolved into a year-round position. In 1985, the General Assembly recognized Ramsey's full-time commitment by raising his salary from \$13,860 to \$25,044.

C. Election of Republicans in the Executive Branch

The election of Republican Governor Martin in 1984 helped focus additional attention on the legislative leadership, as the legislature remained firmly under the control of Democrats. Although Martin was the *second* contemporary Republican governor, his predecessor, James E. Holshouser (1973–1977), had been a former legislator more inclined to work cooperatively with the legislature. Thus, his style was less contentious and his single term had less impact on the power equation between the legislative and executive branches.

Jim Martin, however, served two terms as governor and adopted a more partisan style. During Martin's first term, Democrats still controlled the lieutenant governor's office, so the leading opposition voice belonged to Democratic Lt. Gov. Bob Jordan. But when Martin was elected to a *second* term in 1988 and Republicans also captured the lieutenant governor's office, the Democratic speaker became the primary voice of the opposition party.

The stage was set for a showdown over powers, and the legislature wasted no time in asserting its will. One of its first actions in the 1989 session was to strip certain key powers held by the lieutenant governor. Until James C. Gardner took office, the lieutenant governor had a foot in both the executive and legislative branches of state government. But with Gardner in the post and Martin in the governor's mansion, the legislature decided to place the lieutenant governor more firmly in the executive branch. It stripped the lieutenant governor's primary legislative powers—the ability to appoint committees and committee chairmen and to assign bills to those committees.⁸

Those duties were rooted in Senate rules rather than in state statutes or the constitution. The Senate's Democratic leadership argued that the majority party had the right to organize committees. In January 1989, it gave the president pro tempore of the Senate the power to appoint committee members and chairs and the power to assign bills to committee. The lieutenant governor's main legislative duty became presiding over the session, with the power to vote only in the case of ties.⁹

This had an impact on the speaker, because the president pro tempore, unlike the lieutenant governor, is elected by the Senate from within its ranks and is not a statewide elected official. Now the speaker—elected by the House—had an equal shot at becoming the unofficial spokesperson for the Democratic Party, and Blue ultimately assumed the mantle. (See page 40-41 for more on the development of the office of Senate President Pro Tempore.)

III. The Speaker's Ability to Affect Policy Issues

Even when a Democrat, Dennis Wicker, was elected lieutenant governor in 1992, the 1993 General Assembly chose not to return the powers it had removed from the office. The legislature had become more independent and did not wish to yield key legislative powers to an executive branch official, even if that official were a Democrat.

A. The Use of the Speaker's Power to Assign Bills to Committee

Blue, in particular, did not shy away from showdowns with the governor when his beliefs were tested. Instead, he used the time-honored power tools of the speaker's office—such as the committee structure—to win the day. Take, for example, Blue's response when Governor Hunt

urged the legislature to place a constitutional amendment on the ballot awarding the governor veto power. Blue sent the veto legislation to its burial in the unfriendly Constitutional Amendments and Referenda Committee, chaired by his close ally, House Majority Leader Toby Fitch (D-Wilson).

A similar incident occurred when Hunt changed his previous opposition to a state lottery and decided it was time to let the voters decide whether to approve a lottery in a state referendum. Blue—a staunch lottery opponent—didn't think so. He sent lottery legislation to the same committee, where it never came up for a vote.

Blue—like speakers before him—accomplished his legislative objectives without introducing substantive legislation or voting on major issues before the House. By tradition, the speaker

rarely introduces legislation, and he only votes when he thinks it appropriate, which is hardly ever. The power to decide who sits where in the House committee structure and to play traffic cop over the flow of legislation to those committees was enough to determine the outcome for both the veto and the lottery in the 1993 session.

B. Use of Authority to Organize the House

These highly publicized showdowns with the governor highlighted the power of the speaker's office and the prominence of the individual serving in that office. But there are other ways to wield power through the speaker's office. For example, the speaker can use his authority over House procedure for everything from controlling what policy is set in the budget bill to reorganizing the commit-

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House Speaker Joe Mavretic, Senate President Pro Tempore Henson Barnes and Lt. Gov. Jim Gardner confer in this 1989 photo.



Karen Tam

Table 4. Appointments of the N.C. Speaker of the House to Boards and Commissions in the Executive Branch: Where the General Assembly Appoints Upon the Recommendation of the Speaker

Name of Board	Citation in N.C. General Statutes	Appointments		
		Total Number by Speaker	of Citizens	of Members of the House
1. Agricultural Finance Authority, N.C.	122D-4	3	3	0
2. Air Cargo Airport Authority, N.C.	63A-3	3	3	0
3. Aquariums Commission, N.C.	143B-344.17	4	4	0
4. Arboretum, Western N.C. Board of Directors	116-243	2	2	0
5. Art, N.C. Museum of, Board of Trustees	140-5.13	2	2	0
6. Banking Commission, State	53-92	1	1	0
7. Building Commission, State	143-135.25	3	3	0
8. Child Day Care Commission	143B-168.4	4	4	0
9. Crime Victims Compensation Commission	15B-3	1	1	0
10. Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission, N.C.	17C-3	1	1	0
11. Deferred Compensation Plan, N.C. Public Employee Board of Trustees	143B-426.24	1	1	0
12. Disabilities, Governor's Advocacy Council for Persons with	143B-403.2	7	7	0
13. Economic Development Commission, Northeastern North Carolina Regional	158-8.2	5	5	0
14. Economic Development Commission, Southeastern North Carolina Regional	158-8.3	5	5	0
15. Economic Development Commission, Western North Carolina Regional	158-8.1	5	5	0
16. Environmental Management Commission	143B-283	2	2	0
17. Family Centered Services Advisory Committee	143B-150.7	4	1	3*
18. Farmers Market Commission, Northeastern N.C.	106-720	4	4	0
19. Farmers Market Commission, Southeastern N.C.	106-727	4	4	0
20. Fire and Rescue Commission, State	58-78-1	1	1	0
21. Genetic Engineering Review Board	106-769	1	1	0
22. Health Insurance Trust Commission, N.C.	58-68-15	4	4	0
23. Housing Finance Agency, Board of Directors	122A-4	4	4	0
24. Housing Partnership, N.C.	122E-4	5	5	0
25. Indian Affairs, State Commission of	143B-407	1	1	0
26. Information Resource Management Commission	143B-426.21	1	1	0
27. Low-Level Radioactive Waste Management Authority, N.C.	104G-5	5	5	0
28. Major Medical Plan, Board of Trustees of the Teachers' and State Employees'	135-39	3	3	0
29. Manufactured Housing Board, N.C.	143-143.10	2	2	0
30. Medical Database Commission, N.C.	131E-211	4	4	0

Table 4. *continued*

Name of Board	Citation in N.C. General Statutes	Appointments		
		Total Number by Speaker	of Citizens	of Members of the House
31. Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services, Commission for	143B-148	2	2	0
32. Milk Commission, N.C.	106-266.7	2	2	0
33. Nursing Board of Directors, N.C. Center for	90-171.71	4	4	0
34. Nursing Scholars Commission, N.C.	90-171.60	3	3	0
35. On-Site Wastewater Systems Institute, N.C., Board of Directors	130A-344	5	5	0
36. Petroleum Underground Storage Tank Funds Council, N.C.	143-215.940	5	5	0
37. Ports Authority, N.C. State	143B-452	2	2	0
38. Principal Fellows Commission, N.C.	116-74.41	1	1	0
39. Private Protective Services Board	74C-4	3	3	0
40. Property Tax Commission	105-288	1	1	0
41. Public Officers and Employees Liability Insurance Commission	58-32-1	1	1	0
42. Public Telecommunications Commissioners, N.C. Board of	143B-426.9	2	2	0
43. Teachers' and State Employees' Retirement System Board of Trustees	135-6	1	1	0
44. School Facility Needs, Commission on	115C-489.4	5	5	0
45. School of Science and Mathematics Board of Trustees, N.C.	116-233	2	2	0
46. School Technology, Commission on	115C-102.5	4	4	0
47. Science and Technology, N.C. Board of	143B-426.31	1	1	0
48. Seafood Industrial Park Authority, N.C.	113-315.25	1	1	0
49. Solid Waste Management Capital Projects Financing Agency, N.C. Board of Directors	159I-4	1	1	0
50. State Farm Operations Commission	106-26.13	1	1	0
51. State Health Plan Purchasing Alliance Board	143-625	3	3	0
52. Teaching Fellows Commission, N.C.	115C-363.23	3	3	0
53. Teaching, N.C. Center for the Advancement of, Board of Trustees	116-74.7	2	2	0
54. Therapeutic Recreation Certification, N.C. State Board of	90C-5	2	2	0
55. Transportation, N.C. Board of	143B-350	1	1	0
56. Travel and Tourism Board, N.C.	143B-434.1	4	2	2
57. UNC Center for Public Television Board of Trustees	116-37.1	1	1	0
58. Veterans' Memorial Commission	143B-133	5	5	0
59. Watershed Protection Advisory Council	143-214.6	2	2	0
60. Wildlife Resources Commission, N.C.	143-241	1	1	0
Totals:		163	156	7

* The statute does not limit the speaker's legislative appointments to House members.

**Table 5. Appointments of the N.C. Speaker of the House:
Where the Speaker Alone Makes Appointments to Boards and
Commissions in the Executive Branch**

Name of Board	Citation in N.C. General Statutes	Appointments		
		Total Number by Speaker	of Citizens	of Members of the House
1. Abandoned Cemeteries, Advisory Committee	143B-128	1	1	0
2. Advisory Budget Commission	143-4	5	0	5
3. Aging, Governor's Advisory Council on	143B-181	2	2	0
4. Air Quality Compliance Advisory Panel	143B-318	1	1	0
5. Andrew Jackson Historic Memorial Committee	143B-132	6	6	0
6. Aquaculture Advisory Board	106-760	1	0	1
7. Biotechnology Center (Established by N.C. Board of Science and Technology)	Bylaws of Biotechnology Center	5	5	0
8. Cancer Coordination and Control Advisory Committee	130A-33.50	4	1	3
9. Capital Planning Commission, N.C.	143B-374	4	0	4
10. Cherokee, N.C. Eastern Band of, Advisory Council on	143B-411.1	1	0	1*
11. Child Fatality Task Force, N.C.	143-573	7	5	2
12. Children from Birth to Five with Disabilities and Their Families, Interagency Coordinating Council for	143B-179.5 **	2	0	2
13. Children and Youth, Governor's Advocacy Council on	143B-415	2	0	2
14. Children, N.C. Partnership for	143B-168.12	6	6	0
15. Consumer and Advocacy Advisory Committee for the Blind	143B-164	1	0	1
16. Courts Commission, N.C.	7A-506	6	3	3*
17. Crime Commission, Governor's	143B-478	2	0	2
18. Criminal Justice Partnership Advisory Board, State	143B-272.6	3	2	1
19. Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Council for	143B-216.32	1	0	1
20. Economic Development Board	143B-434	4	0	4
21. Education Commission of the States	115C-104	1	0	1*
22. Educational Facilities Finance Agency, N.C., Board of Directors of	115E-4	1	1	0
23. Educational Services for Exceptional Children, Council on	115C-121	2	0	2
24. Education Standards and Accountability Commission	115C-105.2	4	3	1

Table 5. *continued*

Name of Board	Citation in N.C. General Statutes	Appointments		
		Total Number by Speaker	of Citizens	of Members of the House
25. Emergency Medical Services Advisory Council	143-510	2	0	2
26. Energy Policy Council	113B-3	2	0	2
27. Family, Commission on the	120-70.72	5	2	3
28. Farmworker Council, N.C.	143B-426.25	2	2	0
29. General Statutes Commission	164-14	1	0	1
30. Health Planning Commission, N.C.	143-611	5	0	5
31. Holocaust, N.C. Council on	143B-216.21	6	6	0
32. Home and Community Care for Older Adults, Advisory Committee on	143B-181.9A	1	0	1
33. Human Relations Commission	143B-392	2	2	0
34. Inaugural Ceremonies, Committee on	143-533	3	3	0
35. Indian Education, State Advisory Council on	115C-210.1	1	0	1
36. Infant Mortality, Governor's Commission on Reduction of	Executive Order 99 (Dec. 1989)	1	0	1
37. Internship Council, N.C.	143B-418	1	1	0
38. Library Commission, State	143B-91	1	1	0
39. Local Government Advocacy Council	143-506.14	2	0	2
40. Local Government Commission	159-3	1	1	0
41. Low-Level Radioactive Waste Management Compact Commission Advisory Committee	104F-4	2	2	0
42. Martin Luther King Jr. Commission	143B-426.34B	2	2	0
43. Minority Health Advisory Council	130A-33.4	5	3	2
44. Motor Vehicle Dealers' Advisory Board	20-305.4	3	3	0
45. Physical Fitness, Governor's Council on	130A-33.41	1	0	1
46. Pollution Prevention Advisory Council	Chap. 501, 1993 Session Laws	4	4	0
47. Quality Leadership Awards Council	Executive Order 10 (May 1993)	1	1	0
48. Rail Council, N.C.	143B-363	2	2	0***
49. Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Fund Board of Trustees	113-77.8	3	3	0
50. School Health Advisory Committee, State	115C-81(e)(6)c.	1	0	1
51. Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, N.C.	164-37	4	1	3
52. Sheriffs' Education and Training Standards Commission	17E-3	1	1	0

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Table 5. *continued*

Name of Board	Citation in N.C. General Statutes	Appointments		
		Total Number by Speaker	of Citizens	of Members of the House
53. Site-Based Management, Task Force on	115C-238.7	6	4	2
54. Southern Growth Policies Board	143-492	1	0	1
55. Southern States Energy Board	104D-2	1	0	1
56. Substance Abuse Advisory Council	143B-270	3	3	0
57. Teacher Academy Plan/Task Force on Teacher Staff Development	Chaps. 321 & 553, 1993 Session Laws	4	4	0
58. Teacher Training Task Force	Chap. 561, 1993 Session Laws	1	0	1
59. Vagabond School of Drama and Flat Rock Playhouse	Playhouse and School Bylaws	2	2	0
60. Vocational Rehabilitation Advisory Council	143-548	5	5	0
Totals:		160	94	66

* The statute does not limit the speaker's legislative appointments to House members for these boards and commissions.

** These appointments are recommended by the speaker but appointed by the governor .

*** The statute says the speaker's appointments to the Rail Council "may" be members of the General Assembly but does not require it.

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tee structure to improve its handling of legislation.

For example, the speaker and the president pro tempore of the Senate can exercise a great deal of control over the use of special provisions in the budget bill, and Blue has taken steps in this direction. In addition to appropriating state funds, the budget bill often is used for other policy changes—sometimes related to the budget bill and sometimes not. These additional changes generally are called special provisions, and they sometimes run far afield of their intended purpose of determining how state funds are spent. The North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research has opposed what it defines as inappropriate use of special provisions in the budget bill. The Center detected an increase in inappropriate special provisions in the 1993 budget bill. (For more on the speaker's role in shaping a budget bill and the use of special

provisions in budget bills to change state policies, see "Pandora's Box Revisited" sidebar on special provisions, pp. 42–43.)

Blue also has taken steps to streamline the committee structure of the House—once considered among the most unwieldy in the nation. Members complained that they sometimes had to be in two places at once or had little time for substantive debate on some issues. By his second term, Blue had cut the number of committees from a recent high of 59 committees and subcommittees under House Speaker Joe Mavretic to the current 44. "I'm trying to accommodate as many desires of the members so they can pursue as many things as they want to pursue, but also to maintain a reasonable number of committees to improve the flow of legislation," says Blue.

One of Blue's innovations was to lump subject areas that seemed to overlap into one commit-

tee. This change was intended to prevent legislation from being reported back to the House floor, only to be re-referred to another committee. Another change was to create subcommittees under major subject areas and give subcommittee chairs the authority to report legislation directly to the House floor. For example, the education committee chaired by Rep. Anne Barnes (D-Orange) is divided into two subcommittees: community colleges and university affairs; and preschool, elementary, and secondary education.

Blue says any further reduction in the number of committees would mean increasing workloads to such an extent that committees would have to meet when the legislature is out of session. "We're at a critical point now," says Blue. "We can still operate as a part-time legislature." The actual length of legislative sessions, Blue says, is "shorter than it was six, eight, 10 years ago."¹⁰

But if North Carolina still has a citizen legislature, its speaker is clearly a professional. When the legislature finally adjourned, Blue didn't lock the door on the speaker's office and go home to his law practice.

Instead, he was off to San Diego, Calif., to participate in the National Conference of State Legislatures. Then Blue returned home to face the task of appointing legislators to the dozens of study commissions that would meet during the following 18 months, preparing recommendations for the 1994 and 1995 sessions of the General Assembly. He also would serve as co-chairman of both the Joint Governmental Operations Committee and Legislative Services Commission, oversee his staff, and execute a speaking schedule fit for a man with ambitions for higher office.

IV. Mitigating Factors in the Power Equation

Given all these developments in the evolution of the office—increased staff, succession, more intensive media coverage, and equal status among legislative leaders—isn't the modern speaker more powerful than were speakers of earlier times? To address that question, one must look at the other side of the power equation, at the powers the speaker has lost.

A. Loss of Pork Barrel Appropriations to Maintain Discipline

Rep. Harold Brubaker (R-Randolph), a nine-term member, cites one important loss: pork barrel money doled out to individual members. Until

1989, when the General Assembly stopped the practice, each legislator was provided with a small amount of money to spend on local projects in his or her district. In the 1987 session, for example, senators got \$70,000 each and House members got \$40,000 each.¹¹ Senators traditionally got the larger share because they represent more people. Groups like rescue squads, rape crisis centers, and arts centers were often the beneficiaries, and the Democratic leadership defended the appropriations as a way for state government to support local needs.

Brubaker says there also was another purpose. "Back in those days, the check coming back to the district was the way to keep discipline" within the rank and file, Brubaker says. He says lawmakers who failed to follow the leadership on certain key votes were subject to having their pork withheld.

Democrats denied that maintaining party discipline was the purpose of pork. "This was a GOP contention—not fact," says Raleigh lobbyist Al Adams, a long-time legislator (1975–1984) and former appropriations committee chairman.

Stewart says that other elements of the legislative process have changed enough that the answer is no—speakers are *not* as powerful today. "It's my theory that in my day and before that, the speaker's word was final," says Stewart. "The speaker's wishes would be upheld by the House if there was an issue he felt strongly about—although speakers mostly let the chips fall where they would on most issues."

B. The Rise of Consensus Building as a Leadership Style

"Today, there's a lot less certainty on issues as they come to the floor of the House," Stewart says, adding that today's speaker "governs much more by consensus than I had to. A speaker today must consult much more with his members, with a myriad of special interests." Stewart pauses for a moment, then concludes, "Maybe that's a change for the better."

In North Carolina, one reason for the more inclusive leadership style is the rise in minority party presence. With 42 members, Republicans comprise more than a third of the 120-member House. The Democratic majority no longer can suspend the rules with a two-thirds majority and ram legislation through in a single day.

Other states have experienced similar changes in the leadership style of House speakers. *State Legislatures*, the magazine of the National Conference of State Legislatures, in an article titled "Leadership 1980s Style," notes that the era of

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.

them go off on their own. Now he has to work harder to maintain his majority."

Conclusion

Thirty years ago, speakers didn't have speech writers and research assistants. Government was less a part of the average North Carolinian's life, and it was the speaker's job, primarily, to carry forth a package of bills written by the governor and to assure that they got a fair hearing in the House. After that, he could pack up and go home and maybe later take a job as an appellate judge or campaign for higher office. But those speakers also didn't have to deal with the problems created by a legislative staff of 150, nearly 500 lobbyists, and a minority party that was within striking distance of turning him into a minority leader.

The raw power of speakers past has been blunted somewhat by increased minority party presence and the trend toward a more open, consensus-building style of governing. But the

"He's more answerable to his own people, and he has to work harder to see they're satisfied."

—BETSY COCHRANE (R-DAVIE)

contemporary speaker has benefitted from a number of developments that would appear to leave the speaker's office more powerful than ever. Consider these additional tools at the disposal of the contemporary speaker: (1) a larger personal research staff and a vastly expanded legislative staff that enable the development of an independent agenda; (2) full-time presence in Raleigh, enabling closer monitoring of state government; (3) ability to seek multiple terms of office; (4) expanded appointment powers to executive branch boards and commissions; and (5) removal of the most significant legislative powers of the lieutenant governor.

These powers are in *addition* to the considerable tools the speaker's office already had at its disposal, although the speaker's grip on these tools has been loosened somewhat by developments such

(1) Examples of statutory amendments unrelated to budget bill:

- transfers of the Marine Affairs Division (sec. 28) and of housing programs (sec. 305) to other state agencies;
- repeal of certain teacher recruitment statutes (sec. 128);
- amended laws affecting the oyster management program (sec. 263);
- amended laws on school violence (sec. 139), and;
- enacted a moratorium on granting any permit for a hazardous waste incinerator (sec. 268).

(2) Examples of new programs created:

- Principal Fellows Program (sec. 85);
- new judicial district (secs. 200.4-.6), and;
- Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Projects (sec. 276).

(3) Examples of new boards or commissions created:

- Commission on School Technology (sec. 135);
- regional economic development commissions in the west, northeast, and southeast (secs. 309-309.2).

(4) Examples of new studies not in the omnibus study bill

- driver education study (sec. 144.3);
- Coastal Area Management Act study (sec. 264), and;

"It's not that these are all bad ideas, but they should be discussed in separate bills and debated on their merits," says Coble.

—Mike McLaughlin

FOOTNOTE

¹ The Center's research and recommendations are outlined in Ran Coble, *Special Provisions in Budget Bills: A Pandora's Box for North Carolina Citizens*, North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research, June 1986, pp. 28-29. See also: "N.C. Center says 1986 Legislature Continued Abuse of Special Provisions in Budget Bills," a March 2, 1987 news release issued by the Center; and Art Eisenstadt, "The Legislative Rule Reforms of 1987—of Paper Tigers and Will-Power," *North Carolina Insight*, Vol. 10, Nos. 2-3 (March 1988), pp. 121-126, for updates on this topic.

Factors Increasing the Power of the Speaker of the N.C. House of Representatives

- Staff has increased for the speaker's office (now 6) and legislature as a whole (now 148).
- A specialized research staff enables the speaker to develop an independent agenda.
- The tradition of one-term speakers has been broken, and succession is now allowed.
- The speaker's office became a full-time position in the push for parity with the Senate and the lieutenant governor's office.
- Election of a Republican governor led to a larger role for Democratic leaders of the opposing party, and especially the speaker.
- Election of a Republican lieutenant governor led Democrats to strip the office of its major legislative duties, thereby enhancing the powers of the Senate president pro tempore directly and the speaker indirectly.
- Increased media attention for speaker's office resulted from all of the above.

Factors Diminishing the Power of the Speaker of the N.C. House of Representatives

- Elimination of pork barrel appropriations for individual members removes a disciplinary tool used by previous speakers.
- More open government means less opportunity to twist arms behind closed doors.
- A larger minority party presence means more opportunities for coalitions to defeat the speaker's agenda.

as increased Republican presence. The traditional powers include responsibility for appointing committees and committee chairs, control over budget decisions, and authority to organize the House. And all of these powers are magnified by the lack of any sort of gubernatorial veto to help balance the equation with the executive branch.¹⁵

The speaker's office has changed markedly, accruing significant new powers that enable more influence on statewide policy issues and a higher profile with the media that could enhance the position as a stepping stone to higher office. Still, in the end, the speaker's primary job is the same—to move legislation either through the House or into a House-dug grave. In 1903, in 1943, and in 1993, a speaker moved legislation in exactly the same way—by rounding up 61 votes. ■■■

FOOTNOTES

¹ The speaker's office budget is \$403,691 for the 1993–1994 fiscal year. Two of Blue's staff members, Fitzsimon and Lucille Thompson, his secretary, are carried on the books as members of the Legislative Services Commission. When their salaries, Social Security and retirement, and health insurance are added to the speaker's office budget, the total is approximately \$525,000, according to figures provided by the Legislative Services Commission.

² Brooks, legislative services officer from 1968 to 1970, would go on to win election as labor commissioner in 1976, a position he held until he was defeated by Harry Payne, the current labor commissioner, in the Democratic primary in May 1992.

³ See Jack Betts, "The Coming of Age of the General Assembly," *N.C. Insight*, Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 12–16, for more on succession by the House speaker as a turning point in the strengthening of the legislature as an institution.

⁴ Article III, Sec. 2(2), Constitution of North Carolina

⁵ For more on the impact of succession on the lieutenant governor's office, see Steve Adams and Richard Bostic, "The Lieutenant Governor—A Legislative or Executive Office?" *N.C. Insight*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (November 1982), pp. 2–10. See also 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.

⁶ Although legislators may have feared the strengthening of the executive branch through succession, North Carolina's governor has relatively few institutional powers compared to governors of other states. For more on this topic, see Thad L. Beyle, "The Powers of the Governor in North Carolina—Where the Weak Grow Strong Except for the Governor," *North Carolina Insight*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (March 1990), pp. 27–45. Succession or length of tenure, appointment powers, and ability to propose a budget are the only areas in which the North Carolina governor's office is rated strong or very strong compared to governor's offices in other states. Overall, the office is rated among the seven weakest in the nation due to the lack of any veto power and the large number of separately elected state officials (third most among the 50 states). At the time of the ratings, however, the governor's office was controlled by a



Karen Tam

**House Speaker Joe Mavretic and Minority Leader Johnathan Rhyne in June 1990.
A coalition of Republicans and dissident Democrats helped elected Mavretic
to a single term as Speaker in 1989-90.**

Republican, former Gov. Jim Martin, and the legislature by Democrats. Governors typically gain power when both branches of government are controlled by the same party.

⁷ For more on the lay of the land in the legislature when Ramsey assumed office, see Ferrel Guillory, "Legislative Leadership in 1981," *North Carolina Insight*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Fall 1980), pp. 2-7.

⁸ Coble, pp. 162-163. See also Ran Coble, Lacy Maddox, and Jim Bryan, *Separating the Executive and Legislative Branches*, N.C. Center for Public Policy Research, February 1982, for a report on legislators serving on executive branch committees and commissions.

⁹ Article III, Section 13 of the N.C. Constitution. The state constitution does not speak to the powers of the House speaker, except to say, "The House of Representatives shall elect its Speaker and other officers (Article II, Section 15 of the N.C. Constitution). For more on the evolution of the powers of the lieutenant governor, see Ran Coble, "The Lieutenant Governorship in North Carolina: An Office in Transition," *North Carolina Insight*, Vol. 11, No. 2-3 (April 1989), pp. 157-165.

¹⁰ According to the Institute of Government at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the long sessions of the N.C. General Assembly held in odd-number years have gotten shorter in recent years. For example, the 1983 long session lasted 138 days for the House while the 1993 session lasted 109 days. However, the reverse is true for the so-called "short"

sessions held in even-numbered years and initiated in 1974 to adjust the budget. They are getting longer. The 1992 short session lasted 42 days, compared to 16 days in 1982.

¹¹ Seth Effron, "Eating High on the Hog: How the Pork Barrel Spending Process Has Changed in the Last 10 Years," *North Carolina Insight*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (October 1987), p. 25.

¹² As quoted in Pat Wunnicke and Sharon Randall, "Leadership 1980s Style," *State Legislatures*, National Conference of State Legislatures, Denver, Colo., July 1986, p. 26.

¹³ For more on Mavretic's election to the speaker's office, see Thad L. Beyle and Fetzter Mills Jr., "Political Change in North Carolina: A Legislative Coup D'etat," *Comparative State Politics*, Illinois Legislative Studies Center, Sangamon State University, Springfield, Ill., Vol. 10, No. 2 (April 1989), pp. 2-15.

¹⁴ Rep. Vernon James (D-Pasquotank) says he organized the original Kennel Club in 1945 after voting against the 1945 speaker, Oscar Richardson of Union County.

¹⁵ For a pro-con discussion of the gubernatorial veto issue, see Jack Betts, "The Veto: After Half a Century of Debate, Still on the Public Calendar," *North Carolina Insight*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (March 1990), pp. 2-26. The package includes the following essays: Ran Coble, "Pro: North Carolina Should Adopt a Gubernatorial Veto," pp. 13-20, and J. Allen Adams and Abraham Holtzman, "Con: North Carolina Should Not Adopt a Gubernatorial Veto," pp. 21-26.