

# Bill to seek garnished public wages

By JEFF LUTTRELL  
Staff Writer

In an attempt to raise the ethical standards of state elected officials, a bill will be introduced in the N.C. House next week to allow the wages of state officials to be garnished to pay debts.

The bill, introduced by Rep. Robert Brawley, R-Iredell, would allow the courts to take a portion of any elected official's salary to pay any unpaid debts the official might have.

Private citizens can have their wages garnished by the courts under current law, but state officials can only have them garnished to pay delinquent taxes and hospital bills, Brawley said.

The bill would allow any unpaid

with Brawley about the need for the legislation, Kaplan said. He said public officials should be held accountable for their debts.

The bill is one of many that will help raise the ethical standards of elected officials, he said. Kaplan wants to expand the standards to the judicial branch as well.

"This type of bill has been in the working for many years, and something has finally been drawn up," Kaplan said.

Some legislators speculated the bill was in response to Lt. Gov. James Gardner's financial problems in the 1970s, but Kaplan said the bill was not aimed at any party and was not a partisan issue.

"The problem here goes across

party lines," Kaplan said.

"Basically, I don't think that the public will be affected by the bill," he said. "It's an inside issue."

The bill would allow up to 40 percent of the wages of elected officials to be garnished for business debts or bad checks.

"Several years ago, a member of the legislature from Lincolnton had written bad checks. The judge ruled a judgment against him," Kaplan said. "This bill is in response to problems like this."

The bill seems to have a great deal of support in the House, Brawley said.

Kaplan said he feels optimistic the bill will pass in the Senate.

of life of its workers."

The bill would be funded by \$650,000 from the state's general fund and \$220,000 from the highway fund, Barnes said. The same amounts would be taken from the following year's state budget.

State employee officials are very supportive of the legislation.

"We are very pleased with the proposal," said Kay Wijnberg, president of the State Employees Association of North Carolina. "We're anxious to see (state employees) at or above the poverty level. We're working hard to see it adopted."

Many of the state's below-poverty-level employees work in grounds,

# State salaries fall below poverty level

By KAREN DUNN  
Assistant State and National Editor

More than 1,000 state employees are not earning annual salaries of at least \$11,612, the national poverty level for a family of four.

Rep. Anne Barnes, D-Orange, has authored a \$1.75 million bill to raise the salaries of 1,300 full-time state employees whose salaries don't meet the poverty level.

"I think it's disgraceful for state employees in full-time positions to not make salaries above the federal poverty level," Barnes said Tuesday in a telephone interview. "They are valuable employees who provide the state with valuable functions. The state should be sensitive to the quality

housekeeping or highway maintenance, Wijnberg said. Others are food service employees in hospitals and institutions for the mentally and physically disabled.

The low wages are not a new problem, said Tim Pittman, Gov. Jim Martin's press secretary.

"It's a product of the years of pro-Governor Martin," he said. "Governor Martin acknowledges there is a problem. He has asked for investigation of these historic inequities that have been there for years. It's a complicated process. Every salary class is getting review by the State Personnel Commission."

State Personnel Director Richard Lee said the legislation would be

difficult to regulate.

"I don't know how you would regulate a pay system for if you're married or if you're not," Lee said. "I don't know how it would work."

Unmarried people may not get the same pay as their family-supporting co-workers, he said.

"Single people would be up in arms and say they're being discriminated against," Lee said. "You won't know what family responsibilities someone has unless you get pretty nosy."

According to statistics released March 12, UNC employs 246 workers who earn less than poverty-level wages, said Jack Gunnells, University personnel director.

# Proposed primary move draws slim backing

By CHUCK WILLIAMS  
Staff Writer

A proposed bill which would make North Carolina's presidential primary the first in the nation drew little support in a House subcommittee meeting Tuesday.

The bill was proposed by Rep. Steve Wood, R-Guilford, who said he thinks an early primary would give North Carolina more political and economic clout.

The earliest primary is now held in New Hampshire on the second Tuesday in March. Iowa holds a caucus even earlier in the year.

"The bill would provide a political and economic bonanza for North Carolina," Wood said. Estimates of revenue collected during the Iowa caucuses range from \$150 to \$250

million because of the media-generated interest in the event.

Wood also proposed making North Carolina's the first primary in the South if his original proposal was rejected by the subcommittee. He said holding the first primary in the South would still accomplish 85 percent of the purpose of the bill.

In the 1988 presidential election, North Carolina held its primary on Super Tuesday — along with most other Southern states — in an unsuccessful move to bring the South more leverage in presidential politics.

Opponents of the bill believe New Hampshire would be angered and could respond by moving their primary even further back. Others believe the action could cause North Carolina to lose some of its political

respectability.

Competing with New Hampshire for the benefits of holding the first primary could hurt North Carolina's tourism industry and reputation, said Rep. Beverly Perdue, D-Craven. Perdue said something as important as a presidential primary shouldn't enter into competition for tourism between the two states.

"We should consider this action only to serve what the people of North Carolina want done, not just to be first in the South or first in the country," she said.

The bill has been set aside for now and will be discussed at a later time after subcommittee members study the proposal individually, said Rep. Walter Jones, D-Pitt. Jones is chair-

man of the Judiciary Subcommittee on Election Laws and Constitutional Amendments which is considering the proposal.

Jones said putting the bill aside for now was not an effort to kill the proposal. Discussion will be taken up again in a few weeks, and the subcommittee will vote after further discussion, he said.

# Nursing shortage prompts efforts to up recruitment

By GLENN O'NEAL  
Staff Writer

In response to a statewide nursing shortage, the Legislative Study Commission on Nursing has introduced a series of bills to aid in the recruitment and retention of nurses.

The state is about 12 percent below in the number of nurses it needs, said Cindy Barker, a lobbyist for the North Carolina Nurses Association.

"There are many hospitals that have had to close wings because there are not enough nurses," she said. Barker said many nurses have had to work extra shifts due to the shortage.

There are 50 nursing positions at North Carolina Memorial Hospital filled by traveling nurses who are fully trained and qualified, said Jon Ross, spokesman for NCMH.

"We are recruiting now to fill those vacancies," he said. "There is a measurable increase in the number of nursing applicants from last year to this year."

The starting salary for a nurse is about \$24,000, Barker said. The main complaint with nurses' salaries occurs after seven years when a nurse has reached his or her maximum earning capability.

The N.C. Nurses Association formed the N.C. Council on the Nursing Shortage two years ago, Barker said. The council's recommendations on combating the nursing shortage went to state legislators working on the issue.

One of the bills introduced to the state Senate would establish a Nursing Scholars Program similar to the Teaching Fellows Program, said Sen. Marvin Ward, D-Forsyth, co-chairman of the Legislative Study Commission on Nursing.

The program will provide 100 \$5,000-scholarships for four-year nursing students, 300 \$3,000-scholarships for students in two-year programs, 25 \$3,000-scholarships for juniors and seniors already in baccalaureate nursing programs and 52 \$2,500-scholarships for nurses who wish to get their bachelor's degrees in nursing, he said.

The other bills introduced in the Senate would provide positive exposure to the nursing profession, Ward said.

The legislature was faced with the nursing shortage last April when the Government Operations Committee noted a serious problem at North Carolina Memorial Hospital, said Rep. Martin Nesbitt, D-Buncombe, the other co-chairman of the Legislative Study Commission. As a short-term solution, the legislature allotted \$3,500,000 of the state's budget during the last summer session to increase nurses' salaries, Nesbitt said.

A subcommittee from the commission was organized to come up with long-term solutions, he said.

"We knew then that raising salaries was not going to solve everything," Nesbitt said.

Ross said attracting qualified nurses was complicated. "It involves education and training, it involves recruiting, and it involves salaries."

Ninety-five percent of all nurses in the state are employed by non-state agencies, Nesbitt said. "There are as many nurses (in North Carolina) as school teachers... the difference is we control teachers' salaries, but we cannot control the salaries of nurses because so few of them work for the state."

# Daily passenger train service may tie Raleigh to Charlotte

By SANDY WALL  
Staff Writer

Daily passenger railroad service between Raleigh and Charlotte may soon become a reality, according to state officials.

The Governor's Rail Passenger Task Force, appointed by Gov. Jim Martin, has been studying the possibility of establishing passenger trains within the state, said Bob Grabarek, a spokesman for the Public Transportation Division of the N.C. Department of Transportation (DOT).

The task force has recently submitted an interim report to Martin, Grabarek said.

The report contains preliminary recommendations for four daily trains, he said.

The first train would leave Rocky Mount in the early afternoon and arrive in Raleigh around 5:30 p.m. The train would then continue, stopping in Durham, Burlington, Greensboro, High Point, Salisbury and Kannapolis and would arrive in Charlotte around 9:30 p.m., Grabarek said.

The second train would leave Charlotte at 8:30 a.m. and arrive in Raleigh around 12:30 p.m. This train would stop in the same cities as the

first train and would continue from Raleigh to Rocky Mount, he said.

A third train would leave Raleigh at 8 a.m., stop at the same cities and arrive in Charlotte at noon, he said.

The fourth train recommended by the Task Force would leave Charlotte at 6 p.m. and arrive in Raleigh at 10 p.m., Grabarek said.

The railroad line between Raleigh and Charlotte roughly parallels Interstate 85, and the state currently owns 75 percent of the railroad line's stock, Grabarek said.

The line is leased by the Norfolk-Southern Corp., which operates freight service on it, he said. The Norfolk-Southern lease will expire in 1994.

"We are now waiting for the governor to comment on the (Task Force's) interim report," Grabarek said.

Jeff Merritt, a press assistant to the governor, said Martin could comment as early as this Friday.

Grabarek said the passenger service would provide travelers with a choice. "The trains are really seen as an alternative," he said. "They are tailored to suit the needs and wishes of North Carolina."

The state is exploring several

options as to how the service would be run, including having Amtrak, Norfolk-Southern or private contractors run it, Grabarek said.

"There are several options we would have to explore," he said.

Grabarek said Duke University professor Eric Pas has been contracted by the state to study the possible patronage of this service and the fare scales to be used.

Pas, an associate professor with Duke's Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, said he had been working with a colleague from the Duke Business School to supply figures to the DOT.

His preliminary report could be ready by the end of this week, Pas said.

Grabarek said some preliminary predictions have indicated the service would need a subsidy of around \$3 million a year.

"I don't think it's wise to undertake (the service) with the idea it's going to be self-supportive," he said.

Money from the N.C. General Assembly would be needed, Grabarek said. He said he wasn't sure whether a proposal could be presented to the General Assembly before the end of the term.

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