

Buyout looms over Senate race

Bowles, Burr aim to corral support

BY MARK PUENTE
STAFF WRITER

A proposed tobacco buyout program crucial to thousands of North Carolina farmers is weighing heavily on both candidates for the Senate seat being vacated by vice presidential nominee John Edwards.

Democrat Erskine Bowles and Republican Richard Burr say they support the pending legislation, but they differ on the details of the proposal, which is awaiting committee action after the summer adjournment.

The Senate coupled its buyout with legislation that gives regulatory power over cigarettes to the Food and Drug Administration.

The House version, supported by Burr — a U.S. representative from Winston-Salem — does not give the FDA that power.

Either way, the pending legislation is one of the most important bills facing tobacco-dependent rural North Carolina in decades.

Jack Fleer, professor emeritus of political science at Wake Forest University, said the buyout will be a significant factor in the election because it has consequences for both candidates and tobacco farmers.

"It becomes symbolic of what kind of representation and leadership that each candidate provides," he said.

Sam Crews, president of the Tobacco Growers Association of North Carolina, said either version of the bill will be welcomed by the industry.

He also pointed out that cigarette regulation is not a farming

issue but a manufacturing issue. "It is our only chance for survival," said Crews, who grows 150 acres of tobacco in Oxford. "We are facing devastation."

Crews said that the quotas can be bought, sold and rented like any other commodity on the market and that they can keep farmers from overproducing.

But he cautioned that the system is not necessarily the biggest problem for tobacco farmers.

Nevertheless, because North Carolina produces more tobacco than any other state, the buyout would provide roughly \$6 billion in aid to the state's farmers. The money likely would come from tobacco companies.

The buyout would end a quota system that has been in place for 70 years and controlled production and price levels.

According to the N.C. Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services, there are about 40,829 tobacco farms that work under the current quota system. They earned an estimated income of \$564.4 million in 2003.

Some critics contend that Burr is supporting the House version of the bill, which opposes FDA regulation of cigarettes, because tobacco giant R.J. Reynolds is located in his district.

But Doug Heye, a Burr campaign spokesman, said Burr will support either buyout plan that becomes law.

"He has not been running around trying to please (Senate Minority Leader) Tom Daschle and the FDA," Heye said.

He added that Bowles has been lobbying for Democratic senators to pass the buyout and is being lauded by Democratic Senate leaders for urging them to support the legislation.

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JACK FLEER, PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY

Both candidates have spent considerable amounts of time campaigning in tobacco-heavy regions of the state as they attempt to sway voters on the buyout issue.

North Carolina's is just one of the five Southern Senate seats up for grabs in November that are crucial to the Democrats if they hope to regain control of the Senate.

Bowles, a Charlotte investment banker and former chief of staff for President Clinton, has held a slight lead in polls against Burr since the spring.

Bowles is polling at 47 percent compared to 38 percent for Burr, according to a statewide poll conducted Aug. 8-11 for WRAL-TV, WUNC radio and The (Raleigh) News & Observer.

But the poll found 15 percent of voters undecided.

It has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

Bowles' lead could be attributed to the statewide name recognition he gained from his 2002 bid for the seat vacated by Republican Sen. Jesse Helms. He lost that bid to Republican candidate Elizabeth Dole.

Burr, who is vacating his 5th District seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, had little name recognition outside his district prior to entering the contest.

Still, the Burr campaign is not deterred by the candidate's deficit in the polls with less than 75 days remaining before Nov. 2.

Heye said Burr still is in the process of introducing himself to

North Carolinians. He added that most voters are just now starting to pay attention to political campaigns.

"(Burr) is a new face," he said. "He hasn't spent 16 million dollars and the last three years running for the Senate, like his opponent."

Fleer added that he is skeptical about recent poll numbers because many people are not paying attention to these races right now.

He said that Burr recognizes this and has a tendency to infuse his campaign with a lot of advertising and media ads in the last months before the election.

"Bowles has been high profile for roughly three years," he said. "And I expect that Burr will pour it on at the end to have a big push. In North Carolina, we are a partisan, polarized electorate when it comes to major elections."

Other factors in this race to consider will be the degree of competition and national coverage, said Michael Hawthorne, a political science professor at UNC-Pembroke.

He said that the poll numbers are not as far apart as should be expected at this point in the race.

Party leaders will be watching to see if the margin widens or closes. That will determine how much action either side takes.

"In almost all races, there is a narrowing edge as the election nears," Hawthorne said.

"Bowles certainly has name recognition, but Burr can overcome it with sufficient advertising. This is an important race being watched by both parties."

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

Ban on smoking hits campus halls

Officials seek to reduce smokers' woes

BY BRIAN HUDSON
ASSISTANT UNIVERSITY EDITOR

As a ban on smoking in residence halls takes effect this fall, students living on campus now will be forced outdoors to get their nicotine fix.

Smoking will not be allowed in any residence hall on campus, including rooms, balconies, breezeways and connectors. The policy, based on a recommendation submitted to the Department of Housing and Residential Education by the Residence Hall Association, was approved last spring and is undergoing constant revision.

The ban will be enforced by residential advisers and the campus community, and infractions will be treated like any other violation to students' housing contracts.

"A key component of the policy that we recommended be put in place was to constantly look to how smokers are affected and accommodate them," said RHA President Colin Scott said.

Chris Payne, director of housing and residential education, said his department has taken steps to provide adequate refuge for smokers.

"We have identified smoking areas that are outdoors in each community," he said. "The residential adviser or community office would know where they are if they're not obvious."

He said the areas tend to be located near areas where seating, such as benches or low walls, already is provided.

During the summer, temporary ash trays were placed throughout campus outside residence halls, Scott said. As summer students moved the ash trays to more convenient locations, officials took note and determined where to install more permanent, aesthetic urns.

Standard University urns replaced the summer's temporary solutions. Payne said the urns are semi-permanent and only can be moved by University officials.

Payne said the housing department is relying on student feedback to ensure that the locations are convenient for smokers.

To ensure the success of the program, housing officials are relying on communication among students, University employees and community governments, Payne said.

But for students who would rather not step outside every time they need a cigarette, a limited number of rooms will be available on the ground floors of Craige and Ehringhaus residence halls.

"There's a law that was passed by the (N.C.) General Assembly late last year ... that requires us to accommodate the demand for smokers," Scott said.

The rooms in Craige and Ehringhaus are default nonsmoking rooms, but residents can request to convert them to smoking areas.

Housing also has adopted a new plan that would benefit many students looking to change rooms early in the school year.

Students who want to change rooms can enter a lottery two weeks after classes begin. Names will be drawn for vacant rooms around campus.


Payne said the change offers more flexibility for students, compared with the previous "first come, first serve" policy for room change.

"The reason for the random selection is so that we can be consistent and not just those that submit first have priority."

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