

Law cuts lobbyists' influence Board looks to expand program

BY ELIZABETH DEORNELLAS
STAFF WRITER

Lobbyists in North Carolina will face tougher regulations under a new law signed by Gov. Mike Easley on Friday.

The law, which will take effect Jan. 1, 2007, aims to hold both lobbyists and lawmakers more accountable for financial disclosure.

The rules close the goodwill loophole, which required lobbyists to disclose money spent on lawmakers only when a specific issue was discussed.

Under the new legislation, all spending more than \$10 must be reported.

The law also creates a "cooling-off period" that bars legislators from becoming lobbyists within six months of leaving office.

"It will slow down the revolving door between legislators and lobbyists," said Ferrel Guillory, director of the UNC-Chapel Hill Program on Southern Politics, Media and Public Life.

"It's a step — an important step, (but) it's important to say, too, that it is not the end of lobbying."

He said that professional lobby-

ists will learn to adapt and that the public and the media still will have to remain vigilant.

And he said the new legislation creates more accountability and should raise public awareness of government spending and public confidence in their legislators.

John Hood, president of the John Locke Foundation, said the law will force legislators and lobbyists to be more accountable for expenditures.

"Lawmakers will now have a reason, an excuse really, to say, 'No, no thank you,'" he said. "The bill creates incentives for both lobbyists and public officials to make better decisions."

Christie Barbee, president of the N.C. Professional Lobbyists Association, said the law will not substantially change how lobbyists work with the General Assembly.

But the section of the legislation that regulates executive branch lobbying is completely new, and Barbee said there is a lot of confusion as to how it will be interpreted.

"That is the area of the bill that needs the most work," she said.

Bob Phillips, executive director

of Common Cause North Carolina, said he thinks the bill will be effective, but it could be stronger.

Phillips said he supports extending the cooling-off period to at least a year and prohibiting lobbyists from contributing to campaigns.

Phillips also said he feels North Carolina should move toward spending limits similar to programs in other states.

For example, he said Kentucky limits lobbyists' spending to \$100 per legislator per session.

Phillips said South Carolina's "no cup of coffee" policy goes even further, forbidding lobbyists to give anything of value to a public official.

"I do believe there is far too much money in the system," he said.

Phillips said the excess of money spent on lobbying contributes to public cynicism and apathy.

There is a perception that money creates influence on the legislative process, he said.

"This is not healthy for our democracy."

BY LEYLA BALLANTYNE
STAFF WRITER

Orange County Board of Education members received a report on the possibility of expanding language programs at the board's Monday meeting.

Orange County Schools are on the cutting edge for second-language programs — it is one of the few systems in the nation to implement a program in elementary schools.

The program was initiated last year in order to ease the transition into middle school and create a more comprehensive language program.

Beverly Griffin, a Spanish teacher at Efland-Cheeks Elementary School, emphasized the importance of introducing a second language at an early age.

"The younger kids just acquire it," she said. "They immediately respond."

Educators hope that if languages are introduced at a younger age, students will acquire proficiency earlier, giving students the option of taking a third language in high school.

Rebecca Garland, associate superintendent of curriculum and instruction, said, "Students who choose to be exposed to a third language would probably have advantages over students who did not."

But introducing second-language programs in elementary schools requires a curriculum change. Time spent studying other disciplines must be sacrificed.

Trading classroom time traditionally spent learning math and

English causes many to feel uneasy. There is a concern that students will not be as adequately prepared in these areas.

But some say studying a second language can help performance in other areas.

"The problem is fitting it all in," Garland said. "Our students are spending two and a half hours a day learning English."

In addition to time constraints, budget issues pose a problem.

Despite those limitations, Garland expressed her hopes for the future.

"We would love to see an Asian or Pacific Rim language added at high school or middle school level," she said.

"If that's where the economy is growing, in the Asian part of the world, that student would enter college or the business world with an advantage."

Many board members were concerned about the dwindling number of students interested in taking French classes.

"I've had some conversations with French teachers in high school, their numbers are shrinking considerably," Garland said.

"We need someone looking at what's happening with that."

NOMINATION
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to submit information, including memos she has written and cases she has represented, both as a private lawyer and during her time in the White House, Gerhardt said.

William Marshall, professor in the School of Law at UNC-CH, said Miers' confirmation process will be more difficult than that of newly minted Chief Justice John Roberts.

"The stakes are somewhat higher."

Because Miers is nominated to fill O'Connor's seat, she is in place to either continue or end O'Connor's role as a critical swing vote.

Democrats might fight harder now than they did for Roberts' bid to replace the late Chief Justice William Rehnquist, Marshall said. Roberts was confirmed 78 to 22.

"(Miers) record is so unclear that who will be pleased with the nomination will take some time to work out," Marshall said.

Miers' lack of judicial experience is not uncommon for Supreme Court justices, he said.

Rehnquist, a U.S. assistant attorney general when he was nominated

in 1972 by President Richard Nixon, had no judicial experience before beginning his term.

Bush emphasized Miers' loyalty to the Constitution and the laws of the nation in announcing her nomination Monday morning.

During his address, Bush praised her judicial restraint.

"Miers will strictly interpret our Constitution and laws," he said. "She will not legislate from the bench."

Miers received both her bachelor's degree in mathematics and her law degree from Southern Methodist University. Miers, 60, is single and has no children.

If confirmed, Miers will be the

third woman to serve on the Court. O'Connor became the first when she was appointed by President Reagan in 1981. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg still is serving.

The Supreme Court opened for the 2005-06 session Monday faced with a long list of controversial cases. The issues that could be discussed include assisted suicide, military recruitment, abortion rights and the use of DNA evidence in death penalty cases.

O'Connor will continue to serve until her replacement is confirmed.

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programs and operations, and funds also went toward endowments and capital, said Peter Vaughn, Duke's executive director of alumni and development communications.

While private universities have long relied on donations as a major part of funding, similar initiatives at public universities mark a more recent trend, Vaughn said.

"They are particularly new in

the areas of public universities," he said. "But the privates have been doing it for a long time."

Leaders at top universities realize the potential of private funds, he said.

"It makes sense," Vaughn said. "All of these places have national constituents, and a lot of their alumni don't live in the state of North Carolina and don't support them through state taxes."

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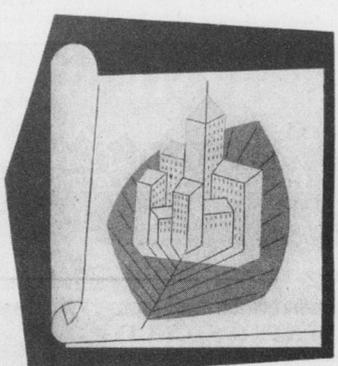
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