Your Government Pages

NC Senate District 47

Sen. Ralph Hise
Ralph.Hise@ncleg.net
919-733-3460

How can North Carolina make healthcare more accessible to more people across the state?

This is shaping up to be a central question in this year's legislative session. The House and Senate have reached an agreement on two major policy changes: expanding health insurance coverage through the state's Medicaid program and eliminating or easing certain Certificate of Need regulations.

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) mandated that states expand Medicaid health insurance coverage to anyone with an income below 138 percent of the federal poverty line, regardless of other factors, like age or disability, that had previously been considered. That mandate was struck down, leaving states with a choice to expand or not expand.

At the time of the ACA passage, it didn't make sense for North Carolina to expand Medicaid in that way. When Republicans gained control of the legislature in 2011, our state's Medicaid program was facing a budget shortfall and mismanagement issues. In the decade since, we have reformed Medicaid by moving from a fee-for-service model to a managed care model.

The program is now better equipped to expand coverage to low-income, working North Carolinians who are stuck between a rock and a hard place on insurance coverage. The ACA designed a "coverage gap" between the populations that receive government subsidies for private insurance and those that qualify for Medicaid – meaning, under the flawed design of the ACA, someone can be too poor to qualify for government assistance.

Expanding health insurance coverage to North Carolinians in the coverage gap is the first step. But another important component of increasing access and lowering healthcare costs is expanding the supply of healthcare.

North Carolina has two major barriers to expanding the healthcare supply. The first is an antiquated regulation on the advanced practice registered nursing workforce in the state. Current law requires Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) to practice under a supervision contract with a physician. But the contract is often just that – paperwork alone, with no substantive impact on patient care or oversight. Twenty-seven states do not require this contract, and they have no substantive decline in the care offered by APRNs.

In fact, allowing APRNs to practice independently within the scope of their license gives those providers more flexibility to start new practices and move into underserved areas of the state more easily. It also incentivizes North Carolina's nursing graduates to stay in North Carolina, instead of moving to one of the 27 states without a supervisory contract requirement.

Another outdated regulation limiting the healthcare supply in North Carolina is the Certificate of Need. Certificates of Need (CONs) are government permission slips for medical facilities to open or expand. These are costly and burdensome to obtain and prevent healthcare providers from expanding their capacity as they see fit.

Legislation to expand Medicaid coverage and repeal or reform some of the state's CON laws is working its way through the legislature. These are important measures to increase access to and affordability of healthcare in North Carolina, but we know there is still work to be done.

As always, please share your thoughts with me on issues related to the state government by emailing me at ralph.hise@ncleg.gov or calling me at 919-733-3460.

NC Commissioner of Labor

NC Commissioner of Labor
Josh Dobson
1-800-625-2267

Happy Spring everyone! We have experienced a variety of weather over the last couple of months and I personally, am looking forward to warmer weather and already enjoying the longer days. March was a busy month for the N.C. Department of Labor and the month of April will be no different.

In early March, I had the opportunity to visit two Sonoco Recycling locations in Jacksonville and Wilmington and present each of them with their first Carolina Star recertification. The Carolina Star Program recognizes leaders in occupational safety and health that are successfully protecting employees from death, injury, and illness by implementing comprehensive and effective safety and health programs and management systems. Congratulations to both Sonoco Recycling facilities in Jacksonville and Wilmington on this achievement.

On March 8, an agreement was signed between the Occupational Safety and Health Division of the N.C. Department of Labor and the Plumbing Heating Cooling Contractors of North Carolina. The partnership will establish an alliance to promote safe and healthful working conditions.

On March 15, I traveled to Newton Grove, along with members of the Agricultural Safety and Health Bureau, to present a Gold Star Grower award to WF Partnership for Best New Housing.

March began our Safety Award Banquet season, but I have eight safety awards banquets coming up in April. I'll be closer to the western part of the state on April 4 when I attend the Morganton banquet.

I hope everyone enjoys the beginning of Spring! Happy Easter and many blessings to all of you!

NC House District 86

Rep. Hugh Blackwell
919-733-5805
Hugh.Blackwell@ncleg.net

North Carolina Budget Process Well Under Way

In January, the North Carolina House of Representatives began the process of crafting a budget for the state to cover the two-year period that will begin July 1, 2023, and end June 30, 2025. As a result, the weeks since late January have had a particular focus on budget matters. There are multiple appropriations committees, each charged with responsibility for various sections or areas of the budget. These "area" appropriations committees have heard presentations from the various state agencies and groups funded by the state as to their respective priorities and budget requests. Each "area" committee, having heard the requests and priorities, plus factoring in priorities and requests of committee members, come up with a budget for the area committee's "area". This area committee proposed budget is then presented to a central group of appropriators who have a responsibility to fit all the areas together in a single budget that doesn't spend more than an agreed overall amount for total state spending for the budget period.

The overall amount of spending in the budget is held to a sum previously agreed to by representatives of both the North Carolina House and Senate. North Carolina is constitutionally required to have a balanced budget in which spending does not exceed available funds to pay for budgeted spending. Once the House completes a budget, it will be sent to the Senate. It will then go through its separate process of reaching its own version of a proposed budget.

Ultimately, the House and Senate always have budgets with different provisions that must be reconciled in some way. So, the two budgets are then sent to what is called a "conference" where the differences are resolved. This "conference" budget then must be approved by the House and Senate, each voting separately, to result in the state budget. That budget is sent, in turn, to the governor who can either sign or veto it. If he signs, the budget is then law. If he vetoes it, then, if the House and Senate each get 60% of their voting members to support the vetoed budget, it becomes law despite the governor's veto. If either House or Senate cannot muster the needed 60% vote, then there is no budget unless the vetoed budget is amended to something both houses of the legislature and the governor can support. So long as no agreement is reached, the state continues to operate basically on the previous year's budget, with certain modifications provided for under existing state law and written for such a situation.