



LEGISLATIVE NEWSLETTER LEGISLATIVE NEWSLETTER

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June Atkinson's Unexpected Departure

June Atkinson, who in her 40 years at the NC Department of Public Instruction was a strong CTE supporter, including the past 11 years as state schools superintendent, soon will be – to her surprise -- leaving her post as the longest-serving state superintendent in the nation.

Atkinson, a Democrat and the first woman ever to hold the state superintendent job, lost her bid for re-election on Nov. 8 to Republican Mark Johnson, 33, the second-youngest statewide elected official in the country, WRAL News reports. Johnson, an attorney and school board member in the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools, received 50.6 percent of the statewide votes cast.

Atkinson, in the past decade or so, became something of a fixture at NCACTE's annual Legislative Policy Seminar, often touting the high graduation rate of public schools students involved in CTE pathways. Her enthusiasm, leadership and love of her job will be missed. Still, NCACTE looks forward to working with Johnson and wishes him good luck in this important post.

Bittersweet Time: WRAL reports that, in a recent interview, Atkinson moved from moments of sadness, sometimes becoming emotional as she spoke about leaving the job she loves, and moments of frustration as she recalled comments Johnson made during the election.

"I have two pet peeves. One is it bothers me when people swim in the swamp of ignorance or swim in the swamp of dishonesty," Atkinson said. "It bothers me that my opponent would say disparaging things about people here in the department, that they are incompetent, that there are a bunch of bureaucrats here who don't work well. I don't take that personally because I know what it's like to run for office. It's the first time, however, I've run for office when I felt as if my opponent was dishonest in what he said."

Atkinson and Johnson, she said, have not spoken about the election outcome, and she doesn't know what she'll say then. She promises a smooth transition when Johnson takes over in January. "It's really hard for me to figure out what I want to say to him, because I don't know where to start. I mean, he has taught two years. He's never run an organization that has almost

900 people. He has never traveled to the 100 counties. He doesn't have a background," she said.

According to WRAL News, Johnson plans to reach out to Atkinson in the coming weeks, as well as state school board members and other education leaders, to help solidify his game plan for the future of education in North Carolina. "I acknowledge that (Atkinson) has been at the Department of Public Instruction for 40 years, and she has a lot of institutional knowledge," he said. "I look forward to talking to her and hearing what she has to say about running the department and taking that into consideration as I go forward."

Nonetheless, he said, Atkinson should not underrate his experience as a teacher, local school board member and lawyer. As superintendent, Johnson will be empowered to dismiss or reassign dozens of people who are in exempt policymaking and exempt managerial positions. He said he hasn't given much thought to staffing yet. For now, Johnson says, he is trying to "be very deliberate and seek a lot of advice." He still has several personal issues to take care of before January, including putting his Winston-Salem house on the market and searching for a new home in Raleigh, WRAL reports.

Atkinson, meantime, said her urban area support could not overcome her opponent's support in rural areas. She also noted that she was surprised about the election results, adding that the coattail effect from the presidential election hurt her reelection bid chances. Atkinson said she is unsure of her future plans but that she does expect to write a book, "What I Really Was Thinking." Click [here](#) to see the full WRAL interview.

State House Leadership Decided

Moore More: As expected, North Carolina House Republicans picked Rep. Tim Moore, R-Cleveland, to serve another two years as House speaker, the chamber's top job, during a recent meeting in Raleigh. Although the vote won't be official until lawmakers reconvene and formally hold a vote at the General Assembly in January, Moore's reappointment is considered to be a done deal at a time when Republicans still will hold a super-majority in both the House and the Senate.

Interestingly, no other member challenged Moore. Rep. Harry Warren, R-Rowan, had announced a run but withdrew his name from the running, according to Moore and others who were in the room. Leadership elections among the House caucuses aren't open to the public. "The caucus chose fit to allow me to serve another term as speaker, so I'm very grateful for that," Moore said.

Other House Leadership Posts: Rep. Sarah Stevens, R-Surry, will serve as speaker pro tem, often considered to be the No. 2 job in the chamber although it also is largely ceremonial. In recent years, the pro tem has taken on a package of high-profile issues to move through the chamber and has served as a member of the speaker's leadership team. Stevens succeeds Rep. Paul Stam, R-Wake. He did not seek re-election this year. House Republicans also chose Rep.

John Bell, R-Wayne, as majority leader for the coming term, a post he'll assume now because it does not require ratification by the full House.

Other leadership positions will be held by: Rep. Steven Ross, R-Alamance, deputy majority leader; Rep. John Szoka, R-Cumberland, conference chair; Rep. Jon Hardister, R-Guilford, majority whip; Rep.-elect Destin Hall, R-Caldwell, freshman leader; Rep.-elect Brenden Jones, R-Bladen, freshman whip.

What's On Tap in the House: House Speaker Moore said last week that the legislature could revisit voter ID requirements and other election laws. Asked whether lawmakers would return to a special session to distribute funding for Hurricane Matthew and to address wildfires in the western NC, Moore was noncommittal. "We have not been given any dates yet for a special session," he said, adding that he believes the Governor's Office is still compiling needed information. "Certainly, there is a cost the state is going to incur, and we're still trying to determine what amount the federal government will pay."

Other Election Observations

Barbecue & Politics: Good lesson for politicians trolling for NC votes, from today's Insider Afternoon Update, in a column by D.G. Martin, which says in part about "North Carolina's barbecue guru, John Shelton Reed," and one of his theories:

John Reed likes to tie barbecue to politics, and "Holy Smoke" is full of stories about politicians who lost elections because of some barbecue-related gaffe they made on the campaign trail.

The latest, he told me the other day, was Hillary Clinton's choice of a barbecue stop in Charlotte at the end of the presidential campaign. She and President Obama ate at the Midwood Smokehouse. It has a varied and upscale menu, but it is not a traditional barbecue eatery. Meanwhile, Donald Trump was buying one of those \$3.50 barbecue sandwiches at Stamey's in Greensboro. "Maybe Clinton's choice sold in Charlotte," Reed said, "but the rest of the state was thinking Trump was eating at a real North Carolina barbecue stop, a big reason he won and she lost."

Quotes of the Week

"I look forward to not being responsible for so many things."

- Betty Lou Ward, member of the Wake County Board of Commissioners, on retiring from the board after 28-years (The News & Observer, 11/22/16).

"So, it's like, how do I teach or how do I help a person who is an infant in public education to become an adult overnight to be able to help public education in this state?"

- Outgoing State Superintendent of Public Instruction June Atkinson, on Mark Johnson, the Republican attorney and school board member who defeated her in the election (WRAL News, 11/21/16)

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