



## LEGISLATIVE NEWSLETTER LEGISLATIVE NEWSLETTER

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### Governor Makes Inaugural Address, Other News

**What's Up in Raleigh:** As lawmakers prepare to begin this year's long legislative session on Wednesday, with several key fundraisers set by legislative leaders before then, Gov. Roy Cooper laid out his goals in an inaugural address on Saturday from the Executive Mansion.

"I'll never forget my solemn duty to do what I can to create more opportunities for the folks who have it hard," the former attorney general said in his 15-minute speech. "And I'll listen to anyone with a good idea to move our state forward, regardless of his or her political party."

The new Democratic governor pledged to do all he could to reach consensus while setting parameters and making his case to expand Medicaid coverage and repealing HB-2, the so-called bathroom law. He called for rebuilding trust and a "government that reflects the priorities of its people."

The timing for the governor's comments was good for him. He spoke only to a television audience after a larger inauguration ceremony set for Saturday was nixed by the winter storm. His inaugural address, with viewership likely better because of inclement weather, followed more statewide coverage he got earlier Saturday morning as he conveyed via television the state's game plan to grapple with the storm.

**Framework:** Cooper, who defeated Republican Gov. Pat McCrory in November by a scant 10,000 votes following a month of uncertainty about the election's outcome, was officially sworn in on New Year's Day shortly after midnight. In his inaugural address this past weekend, Cooper said people are still hurting in the state due to stagnant wages and rising health care expenses.

Cooper also mentioned other highlights of his agenda including raising teacher salaries further, improving relations between state and local governments as well as between law enforcement and communities they serve. "Everyone is safer when a sense of mutual trust and respect prevails," Cooper said. GOP legislative leaders, as of today, had not responded publicly to much of the comments.

**Teacher Bonuses:** The State Board of Education last week discussed \$14 million for teacher bonuses. The General Assembly provided the money and set the terms of the bonuses last year. The biggest chunk of money, \$10 million, goes to third-grade teachers who landed in the top 25 percent in the state and/or their district based on student growth on reading tests. Payments to third-grade and high school teachers will go out this month, but some questioned the rules on who's paid and who's excluded, The Charlotte Observer reports.

**CTE Component:** The bonus program also includes payments to career/technical education teachers based on industry credentials their students earn, with a maximum of \$2,000 per teacher. The state board approved that \$600,000 program in December, with payments coming this month. NCACTE, which appreciates the program, will continue working with legislators in the upcoming biennium to try to expand the program.

**Economists Bullish for NC in 2017:** The NC Chamber, in a recent email, reported on its annual economic forecast done in conjunction with the NC Bankers Association. The email reports that this year's summit forecast extremely positive year for North Carolina's economy with at least 80,000 new jobs added and GDP growth of around 2 percent.

### Other Developments

**They'll be Watching:** The new governor always enjoys something of a honeymoon after inauguration. But, with social media and other factors at play, that period won't be as long. Some of Cooper's pledges concerning education have been:

- Bringing teacher pay in NC to the national average.
- More parental leave for school activities.
- Restoring child care tax credits.
- Increasing apprenticeship programs in high-need industry areas such as like construction trades and advanced manufacturing.

Now that Cooper is governor, one group of fact checkers has launched an online feature called the [Coop-O-Meter](#) to report whether he fulfills such promises. The News & Observer reports that some of those promises may be tough to keep, such as tuition-free community college, which former Democratic Gov. Bev Perdue also promised but failed to deliver. Still, the newspaper reports that Cooper's promise to stop further cuts to education funding should be an area where he can generally find common ground with the General Assembly.

Both K-12 and higher education saw funding decreases in the wake of the Great Recession. But now as both the national and state economies improve, North Carolina's population continues to boom, many politicians will be expecting more money to put toward education. Last year, Republican leaders raised teacher salaries and Cooper has said he wants more – promising to ultimately bring the state's average teacher pay to the national average. Cooper also proposed

offering state funds for individual school districts to audit their finances to "find savings to drive dollars to the classroom" – an idea that might gain traction with both teachers and conservative lawmakers.

**Update:** Former U.S. Sen. Kay Hagan of Greensboro is recovering from encephalitis at a Chapel Hill hospital, a family spokesman said last week. Hagan, 63, was taken to a Washington hospital Dec. 8 after falling seriously ill. "While she is not fully responsive, her doctors have not seen anything that precludes her recovery, but recovery will be a long process," the family spokesman said in an email. "The Hagan family appreciates the outpouring of concern, support, and prayers they have received and thanks everyone in advance for respecting their privacy as Kay continues to recover responsiveness early in the disease, can slowly recover over a period of months," he said, according to the Greensboro News & Record.

### Quote of the Week

*"It's too early to predict Wednesday."*

- Lisa Luten of the Wake County Public School System in looking beyond schools being closed again Tuesday because of snow and sleet (WRAL-News, 1/9/17)

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