

Top Stories

Senate Bill Sparks Debate Over Attorney General's Powers Amid Budget Talks

The North Carolina Senate Rules Committee advanced Senate Bill 58, which would prevent Attorney General Jeff Jackson from challenging presidential executive orders in court. The bill, sponsored by Sen. Timothy Moffitt (R-Henderson), faced opposition from Democrats, who argued it could set a dangerous precedent. Sen. Jay Chaudhuri (D-Wake) raised a hypothetical about an executive order banning sweet potatoes, questioning whether the state AG should be barred from intervening. Moffitt responded that the General Assembly could direct the AG's office to act. When pressed about enforcement, he suggested lawmakers could strip the AG's office of all authority.

Meanwhile, budget briefings continued at the General Assembly, with lawmakers working through a compressed schedule to navigate the \$34 billion state budget. Rep. Dean Arp (R-Union) emphasized the importance of these sessions in guiding both new and experienced legislators through the complexities of state spending.

NC Lawmakers Push for Student Cell Phone Restrictions in Schools

North Carolina lawmakers are considering two bills aimed at limiting student cell phone use during instructional time. Senate Bill 55, sponsored by Sen. Michael Lee (R-New Hanover), would prohibit student cell phone use during class, requiring school districts to submit compliance plans by Sept. 1. The bill allows emergency phone use if authorized by a teacher and aligns with AI-powered school safety systems.

A similar but less restrictive House Bill 87, sponsored by Rep. Neal Jackson (R-Moore), would require school districts to adopt their own policies, ranging from elimination to severe restriction of cell phone access. Lawmakers cited concerns over distractions, behavioral issues, and mental health impacts from excessive phone use, while some parents worried about emergency communication during school crises.

Both bills received favorable reports and are advancing through legislative committees.

NC DMV Commissioner Wayne Goodwin Resigns Amid Legislative Scrutiny

North Carolina DMV Commissioner Wayne Goodwin announced his resignation Wednesday just before addressing the Joint Appropriations Committee on Transportation. While Goodwin stated he had been contemplating the decision for some time, his tenure saw persistent legislative criticism, including debates over privatizing the DMV and issues with licensing vendor Idemia.

Under Goodwin's leadership, the DMV tackled high vacancy rates, reducing them from 30% in 2022 by hiring over 400 employees, but temporary positions remain 75% vacant. DMV wait times improved from an average of 38 minutes in 2018 to 26 minutes in 2024, aided by expanded hours at 50 offices and a new text reminder system that cut appointment no-shows from 34% to 9%.

The self-service kiosk program processed 21,000 transactions across nine locations, with the Fayetteville kiosk seeing the most traffic. Meanwhile, the state's online DMV service, PayIt, processed 5.6 million transactions last year, earning praise for modernization efforts.

Despite operational improvements, tensions persist between the DMV and license plate agency (LPA) contractors, with contractors alleging hostility and unfair contract practices. Lawmakers are expected to continue examining DMV reforms as Goodwin's successor is selected.

The legislature adjourned on Thursday and will reconvene on Monday, March 3.

Bills of Interest

House Bill 198, Amend Law on Notice from ALE of Violation, modifies existing laws regarding Alcohol Law Enforcement (ALE) notifications to alcohol permit holders. Under the bill, when an ALE agent or local ABC officer issues a citation to an employee of a permitted establishment for a violation occurring on the premises, they must notify the permit holder within five business days via electronic means or certified mail. Additionally, if the Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) Commission receives a report from another law enforcement agency documenting a violation at a permitted establishment, the Commission must notify the permit holder within five business days of receiving the report. The notification must specify the alleged violations and the employee involved.

This act takes effect immediately upon becoming law and applies to violations committed on or after that date.

Introduced by Reps. Miller (R) and Pyrtle (R) and referred to House Alcoholic Beverage Control Committee.

House Bill 216, CAM Accessibility & Sustainability Act, establishes the Continuous Alcohol Monitoring (CAM) Fund to assist individuals who are ordered to undergo alcohol monitoring as part of a sentence but are financially unable to pay for it. The fund will be administered by the Division of Community Supervision and Reentry under the Department

of Adult Correction and will cover monitoring costs for eligible defendants as determined by the court.

To finance the fund, the bill imposes an additional five-cent charge per bottle of spirituous liquor sold in North Carolina. These proceeds will be collected by local ABC boards and transferred monthly to the CAM Fund. The bill also allows courts to order the CAM Fund to cover costs when a defendant cannot afford monitoring, providing an alternative to incarceration for alcohol-related offenses.

The act takes effect July 1, 2025, and applies to liquor sales and court sentences issued on or after that date.

Introduced by Rep. Clampitt (R) and referred to House Judiciary 2 Committee.