



North Carolina Spirits Association

Legislative Report
October 13, 2023

This week, the Republican-controlled General Assembly successfully overturned a series of vetoes issued by Democratic Governor Roy Cooper. The five (5) bills in question encompass a range of contentious issues, including changes to the political balance of power, alterations to election regulations, support for a pipeline project, and the reclassification of nuclear energy as "clean energy." Republicans hold a supermajority in both the House and Senate, and that has enabled them to override Governor Cooper's vetos this session. On Tuesday, the House and Senate met to consider the five vetoed bills. As expected, the override votes generated substantial debate and contention. All five vetoed bills were ultimately overridden, with five Democrats voting with Republicans on the veto overrides for Senate Bill 678, Clean Energy/Other Changes, and House Bill 600, Regulatory Reform Act of 2023.

Given that all five vetoes were overridden, the bills now become law. Here are the bills that now become law:

Senate Bill 747, Elections Law Changes. This bill eliminates the three-day grace period for receiving absentee ballots, prohibits the use of private funds for election administration, and grants more authority to partisan poll observers. Critics argue that these changes may hinder voter participation, while supporters assert that they enhance election integrity.

Senate Bill 749, No Partisan Advantage in Elections. The bill revamps the structure of state and local elections boards, transferring appointments from the governor to legislative leaders. The law mandates an even balance of Republicans and Democrats on these boards, potentially leading to deadlock in decision-making. Critics argue that this could result in partisan manipulation of election results, while proponents contend that it eliminates partisan bias.

Senate Bill 512, Greater Accountability For Boards and Commissions. This bill reallocates some of the Governor's appointments to legislative and Council of State members, affecting various boards, including those overseeing transportation and utilities. Critics argue that this violates the separation of powers enshrined in the state constitution, while supporters claim it brings balance and accountability to unelected boards.

Senate Bill 678, Clean Energy/Other Changes. The bill allows nuclear energy to be classified as "clean energy," counting toward carbon-free energy goals. Critics view this as a divergence from efforts to reduce carbon emissions, while supporters argue that it strengthens energy production in the state.

House Bill 600, Regulatory Reform Act of 2023. The bill relaxes water quality requirements for the MVP Southgate pipeline project and limits the scope of considerations for permitting hog farms. Critics believe this could result in environmental degradation, while proponents see it as a reduction in regulatory burden.

Looking forward, all eyes are focused on the imminent release of the Congressional, State Senate, and State House legislative maps, slated for release next week. It is expected that all three redistricting maps will be considered and approved the week of October 23.

The legislature has probably wrapped up their consideration of substantive legislation for the session. There are a few conference reports that could be approved, and there has been discussion of a budget technical corrections bill. But for the most part, committee meetings and the consideration of substantive bills has probably concluded until the 2024 legislative session.

BILL STATUS

Senate Bill 527, ABC Omnibus Bill. The bill was not considered this week, and has not been enacted into law. It is unclear whether this bill will be considered again during this legislative session. The bill is eligible for consideration during the 2024 legislative session set to begin in May 2024.

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