

How to Influence the Legislature

The "long" session of the N.C. General Assembly opened Jan. 24. New leaders were elected in the N.C. House: Rep. Joe Hackney was elected Speaker and Rep. Paul Stam was confirmed as minority leader.

In the N.C. Senate, Marc Basnight continues as Senate President Pro Tem and Phil Berger holds the minority leader position.

It is vitally important that we keep our issues in the forefront of our elected leaders' agendas. At the NCCCFA conference in 2005, Rep. Paul Luebke, who teaches political science at UNC-G, presented a workshop on grassroots influencing of the legislature. His core advice was for us to "visit them where they live."

By this he meant that we should speak with them in their district offices, or their places of business and their homes, or when we encounter them at church, or in restaurants, or meetings of civic groups -- in whatever "homeplace" you find yourself with them.

Speak with them and thank them for their support and remind them that community colleges are vital to the success of North Carolina's economy: We train the workforce. Without qualified faculty and up-to-date equipment, tomorrow's workers will only have yesterday's skills.

Through this kind of local contact, our message will penetrate the entire legislature. Your efforts are vitally important as this budgeting session progresses.