

# Bill's Seat – A Report from the North Carolina Legislature - May 16, 2010 (Orange County)

By Representative Bill Faison

This is the second week of the Legislative Short Session. The focus is on promoting jobs, protecting education, streamlining government, and avoiding new taxes.

## **Community Colleges Play a Vital Role in Preparing Folks for New Jobs:**

We are very lucky to have two community colleges in our District, Piedmont Community College (PCC) in Caswell and Durham Technical Community College (DTCC) in Orange. Both are very important for helping people learn new skills to help them get better jobs. The current Budget spends over \$14.5 million at PCC and \$24.1 million at DTCC. Special allocations were made to each for equipment and Technical Education Programs. Enrollments in community colleges are up as more people turn to them for help qualifying for new and better jobs. During the Short Session we need to continue making these programs available to people who need them.

**Protecting Education:** The most important thing our State does is help educate our children. Approximately 55% of the State's Budget is spent on Education. It is approximately the same percentage of revenue collected from personal income taxes. You could say that almost all personal income taxes are spent on education. Last Session we raised additional funds for education without raising income taxes on folks making less than two hundred thousand dollars a year. Those funds saved 34 teacher jobs in Orange County and 15 in Caswell County. This Session we are again facing how to protect education without raising taxes.

**Medicaid:** Many folks depend on Medicaid for their health care. Several years ago Medicaid costs were going up so fast that counties were having a hard time paying the benefits. Some counties were raising property taxes so fast that folks were getting hurt. The Legislature and the Counties struck a deal. The State took over paying for Medicaid and the counties turned over a small percentage of sales tax. Last year this deal benefited Caswell \$843,348 and Orange \$500,000.

**Reducing Prison Population:** The big three expenses in the State's Budget are Education (appx. 55%), Medicaid (appx. 25%) and Prisons (appx. 10%). These total 90% of the Budget. There are some people who need to be in prison for the protection of the rest of us. However, some people are in prison because they cannot handle alcohol or fail at probation. A little money wisely spent could help save a lot of money, without turning hardened criminals loose on the rest of us. Last Session we made Justice and Public Safety Awards to Caswell for \$58,013 and to Orange/Chatham for \$173,467 in an effort to help. We need to find common sense ways to save money and cut government costs.

**Study Committees:** It is important for our community that I serve on Study Committees that can help us. Between Sessions, I Chaired the Study Committee on High Speed Internet Access in Rural Areas, and served on the Study Committees on Use of 911 Funds, and Coyote Nuisance Removal.

**High Speed Internet in Rural and Urban Areas:** Our children's education and job growth are closely linked to true high speed internet availability at an affordable price. True high speed internet is hard to come by in rural areas. We do not fit the business model for the big phone companies and cable operators. I have been working to have high speed internet made available to you at an affordable price. There is still much to do.

**Use of 911 Funds:** We all depend on 911 to get us help in an emergency. The call to the center starts the process that ends when the first responder (volunteer firemen, deputy, EMS) arrives at our side. We all pay a portion of our monthly phone bill (less than 71 cents) to support 911 services. Currently the money cannot be used for first provider radios. I have been working with Sheriff Pendergrass and Andy Gates to change this. My Study Committee has recommended new legislation allowing 911 funds to be spent on first responder radios.

**Contact Me:** Contact me and let me know what you think as new issues come up. Please contact me at [Bill.Faison@ncleg.net](mailto:Bill.Faison@ncleg.net) to share your thoughts.