

Report from Raleigh

From Sen. Gene McLaurin: Recent news reports have indicated that insurance companies are seeking a rate hike on homeowner insurance that could amount to 35% in our area of the state. I am completely opposed to a rate increase and I stand with Commissioner Wayne Goodwin who has asked companies to withdraw their request. As a member of the Senate Insurance committee, I will be following this situation closely to stand up for our homeowners across the state who saw rate increases just over one year ago and cannot afford another one in these difficult economic times.

During January I visited schools, businesses, state agencies, civic clubs, volunteer fire departments and attended community meetings across the district. I have also been meeting with constituents about issues ranging from education and transportation to energy and the environment. I have also been attending monthly interim study committee meetings in Raleigh to gain knowledge on key issues we will be addressing when we return to session in mid-May.

Earlier in the month I attended the Hunt Institute (named for former Governor Jim Hunt) Legislators' Education Retreat in Greensboro to hear from national and statewide policy experts and analysts. This year the annual retreat for Senate and House members was renamed the Holshouser Legislators' Retreat to honor the late former Governor Jim Holshouser who passed away this past June. Governor Holshouser's daughter, Ginny Holshouser Mills attended the meetings and spoke of her dad's commitment to public education and to our state. On a personal note, I had the distinct pleasure of getting to know Governor Holshouser as we worked on several economic development projects together during the time I was Mayor of Rockingham. He was an outstanding leader and worked so hard for the people of NC. At the retreat Governor Hunt told about the beginning of Governor Holshouser's term and how they worked closely as Hunt served as Lieutenant Governor. At that time, there was a budget surplus and while some were advocating for a tax decrease, Governor Holshouser proposed using those funds to make an investment in early childhood education -starting the Kindergarten program in NC. This investment has paid off by helping our young children learn to read, make friends, share, and interact at a younger age. Later, when Governor Hunt led the effort to expand early childhood education and raise teacher pay, he had the support of former Governor Holshouser. This was an honor to join fellow lawmakers to learn more from these two great leaders who made a positive impact on our state through their commitment to PreK, K-12, community colleges, and universities. Each of these men not only had vision, but was able to put that vision into action by providing for our students and teachers.

This month, I have had the opportunity to join students, teachers, assistant principals, and principals, as well as other educators at L.J. Bell Elementary School and East Rockingham Elementary School in Richmond County. Visiting these two schools gave me the opportunity to see 'The Missing Link' at work. The Missing Link is a systematic, explicit approach to teaching children to read, using phonics. It is being used in K-1 classrooms in Richmond County. This approach, developed by Kathy Crouch-a former 1st grade teacher with over 30 years of experience in Richmond County Schools - has had great success in helping children master the foundational skills which are critical to producing proficient readers. I can tell you as a parent of three children, watching your child learn to read is profound and rewarding, just as it was when I visited Kindergarten and First grade classrooms to see this program in action. It was good to sit down with the teachers, assistant principals, and principals to hear their thoughts on state level policy and the state budget. I believe success starts with rewarding our teachers and teacher assistants with an adequate salary that reflects the respect and appreciation we have for them. We must find ways to give teachers the tools and resources they need to drive student success. We must always find ways to improve, and I believe that starts with listening to those who are in the classroom, who teach our children, who share with them the tools for success.

Other Visits: I enjoyed attending several services in the district to celebrate the national holiday honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. During one luncheon, I had the honor of introducing my friend, Dr. Eric Mansfield, a pastor, veteran, former state Senator and surgeon. It's important that we remember the sacrifices made by so many to establish and protect the civil rights of African Americans.

I recently attended the Anson County Toys for Tots Appreciation Banquet to thank those who contributed toys for children who otherwise would not have been able to have gifts under the Christmas tree. Over 3,000 children received gifts as a result of the generosity of local businesses and individuals.

One of the local chapters of the Autism Support group was kind enough to invite me to speak regarding legislation to provide support and services to children with autism and listen to their concerns. Autism affects 1 out of every 150 children born today. I will continue to offer my support to these children and their families.

I have been attending Chamber of Commerce and Commerce meetings and banquets in Anson, Richmond, and Scotland Counties. Thank you to the Chamber staff, members, and volunteers for your hard work in promoting local businesses.

In closing, it was great to be in Badin recently for their Annual Volunteer Fire Department BBQ. We are fortunate to have dedicated volunteer firemen who serve their local communities all across our district.

While we are out of session, I will be active and involved in visiting schools, businesses, chambers of commerce, community meetings, and more because I want to hear directly from you. My Raleigh office is open and staffed by Katie Stanley, my Legislative Assistant. Please call on Katie or me anytime at Gene.mclaurin@ncleg.net or mclaurinla@ncleg.net or by calling (919) 733-5953. Please call on us if you need help with an issue that involves a state government agency or service, would like to extend an invitation, or would simply like to share your thoughts on how to improve our great state. Thank you.

NC Poet Laureate Dr. Joseph Bathanti at SPCC

South Piedmont Community College and the SPCC Foundation invite you to a reading from and conversation with NC Poet Laureate Dr. Joseph Bathanti. They are delighted to offer two presentations.

• Monday, February 17, 7 p.m. at Old Charlotte Highway Campus, 4209 Old Charlotte Highway, Monroe. Salon B, Charlotte Pipe and Foundry Conference Center
 • Tuesday, February 18, 7 p.m. at Lockhart-Taylor Center, 514 North Washington Street, Wadesboro
 From 1985 to 1989 Dr. Bathanti traveled Anson, Union, and McDowell counties with the North Carolina Visiting Artist Program. He has earned numerous awards. His first novel, the semi-autobiographical *East Liberty*, was published in 2001 and won the Carolina Novel Award. In 2002, his poem *Land of Amnesia* won the Linda Flowers Literary Award from the North Carolina Humanities Council. His most recent work, the poetry collection *Restoring Sacred Art* (2010), won the Roanoke-Chowan Award for Poetry.

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