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A weekly review in Education policy and politics

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January 22, 2021

Written by Dr. EduGram - Edited by Dail Willis

EduGram Thoughts of the Week:

For politicos of the Old North State, next week is like the first day of school. That first day after summer break when everyone returns to school with brand new Trapper Keepers, pens and pencils, and brand-new school clothes. That first day when hope and optimism abounds among the new kids and the older kids alike. Why do I say that? Well, next week is the beginning of the Long Session of the North Carolina General Assembly for the biennium. Some 170 legislators, fresh off elections, will return to the actual work of the people that elected them just a few months prior. These 170 individuals represent the best of

North Carolina and they will all converge onto Jones Street and start drafting bills and filing legislation in just a matter of days.

What I always enjoy about the first day of Long Session is watching the first years as they file that first bill at the Principal Clerk's office. I remember vividly filing mine and I was so appreciative of my friend Rep. Moffitt who got it framed for me, an act of kindness that I remember to this day. It still hangs on my wall. So, watching these newly elected officials file their first bills takes me back to that fond time in my past. And any time you have hindsight, you reflect on things you did that you now wish you hadn't. And the biggest mistake I made (no matter what Rep. Bell and Rep. Hager say) was thinking I could draft a perfect bill. Now, how do I know I didn't write any perfect bills? I mean, they all seemed perfect to me. I know that when I looked at my legislative partner, Britt Eller, she said she thought they were perfect, though it turns out maybe the talented Ms. Eller was just being kind to her wayward partner-in-crime. When I really learned I didn't write perfect bills was when a really good man, Sen. Tom Apodaca, made it very clear to me that I did not.

Now, Sen. Apodaca and I had always gotten along fairly well based on our joint pleasure in making witty and sarcastic comments in an effort to be funny. Heck, one of my favorite moments in the NCGA was when Apodaca made a point to come to the House Chamber to compliment me on a quote that had just been published. He said it was the first time he wished he had said the quote. Now, the quote in question was one I had made in response to criticism of the NCGA by former Duke Energy CEO Jim Rogers at a public forum in Charlotte. My exact quote was, “Jim Rogers criticizing the legislature for not doing enough for the environment is like Al Capone criticizing someone for stealing a pack of gum.” Tom loved it. And even though we shared this similar sense of humor, I’ll admit there was a difference between us. Sen. Apodaca was always funny when he wanted to be, while I learned the hard way never to try and make a humorous comparison of the Communist Manifesto and a bill from the Senate majority leader.

So one day I tracked down my friend Sen. Apodaca by the fountain between the chambers, convinced I could get him to move one of my

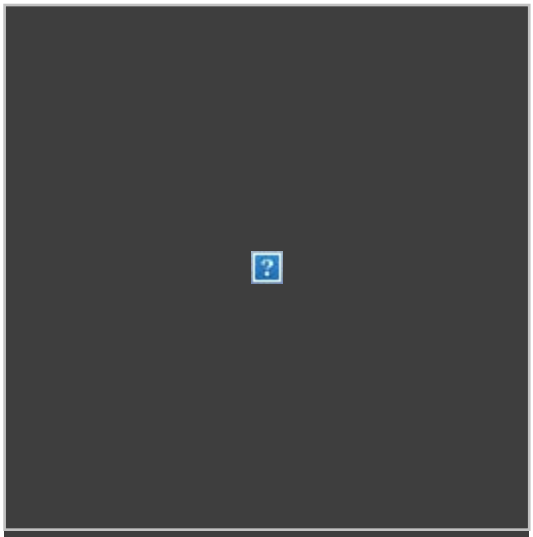
bills in the Senate. I walked up to him with the confidence and gusto of someone who had never faced certain death. I explained to the senator that I had, in fact, written the perfect bill, and I needed it passed in the Senate. And as I was pulling this bill out of my jacket pocket, Tom stopped me and put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Charlie, I'm still not even sure if you know how to read a bill, but I can guarantee that you can't write a perfect one." And with that firm, but somehow still warm fatherly guidance, I went back to my office and second-guessed every bill I ever filed.

I write about this topic this week because I don't want those freshman members of the NCGA to get down on themselves. I don't want you to doubt your ability at the first sign of roadblocks for that signature piece of legislation that you're convinced will change the world, or at least the state. You can, and will, do great work. But frankly, that work isn't always pretty and the old adage that watching laws getting made is very similar to watching sausage getting made is very true. And just because the work is hard, and just because you will fail getting your bills passed at an exponentially higher rate than those you will actually get enacted, that simply means you're part of the same group as every other legislator in that building. So, go into that building next week and try and conquer the world. Go in there and try and make our state better for all. Go in there and do what you promised you would do on all those campaign mailers you sent out last fall. But my best advice to all of you is to go in there and adopt the motto of World War II U.S. Army General Joe Stilwell: *Illegitimati non carborundum.*

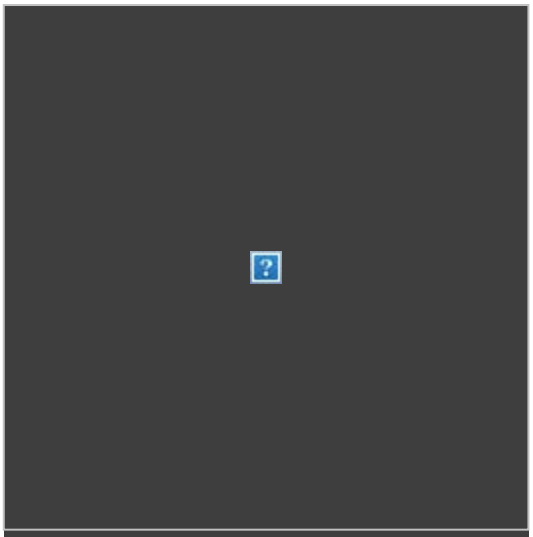
P.S. For all you freshman members, if your bill(s) get referred to the Senate Ways & Means Committee, don't fret. That committee meets all the time.

P.P.S. I still never walk on the state seal inlaid in the ground in front of the General Assembly because Sen. Apodaca told me not to many years ago.

This Week's Two Big Stories:



Will holding back struggling third-grade readers improve literacy?



How is the COVID-19 pandemic changing school discipline?

Other News from this Week:

CLT Observer: Majority of NC students are back to virtual classes due to COVID-19 spike

Fordham Institute: Bridging the Covid Divide: How States Can Measure Student Achievement Growth in the Absence of 2020 Test Scores

Ed NC: New president Thomas Stith gives first remarks at State Board of Community Colleges meeting

Carolina Journal: Broadband funding will capture lawmakers' attention this session

Hechinger Report: 'It's just too much': Why students are abandoning community colleges in droves

The 74 Million: Biden Expected to Make Narrowing Digital Divide an 'Early, Urgent Priority' to Help Students during Pandemic

Edutopia: How School Leaders Can Frame Tough Decisions

Ed Week: 1,000 Students, No Social Distancing, and a Fight to Keep the Virus Out

Chalkbeat: Tennessee bill threatens to withhold funds as school reopening debate heats up

WSOC: MLK 'Keeper of the Dream' award honors CMS employee who helps at risk children

*The EduGram tries and post a cross section of news articles that show differing thoughts and opinions on education. By no means does the EduGram endorse everything stated in every article shared, but the EduGram does make an effort to include relevant stories that show viewpoints from differing sides to ensure the totality of discussion on any education topic is presented here in order to form better and more informed positions. The EduGram is not attempting, nor does it serve, to change your opinion on any issue. It solely exists to try and provide enough information for you to reach any conclusion you feel comfortable with.

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