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Hanig's Headlines

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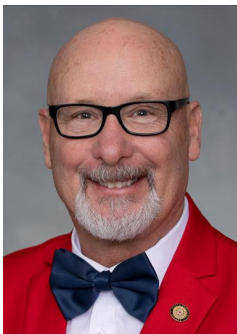


Senator Bobby Hanig Weekly Newsletter



District 3

Bertie, Camden, Currituck, Gates, Halifax, Hertford, Martin, Northampton, Tyrrell, Warren



Senator Hanig This Week

Looking ahead, as the session for 2023 draws to a definitive close within the next thirty days, I'd like to take a moment and discuss what lies ahead.

Once we get through veto overrides and redistricting, it is anticipated that things will slow somewhat but not stop altogether. During the period between adjournment this year and the start of the short session next year, there will be committees appointed to study various issues from crime and public safety, agriculture, health care, and various other matters that the General Assembly addresses.

Additionally, constituent service never stops. All legislative offices stay open year-round to assist constituents on agency-related issues, or if they have general questions about state government.

Lastly, the interim is used to try to assess what needs to be accomplished in the short session-- essentially unfinished business. My office and I will be working with colleagues and the General Assembly staff to prepare for the short session to tie up loose ends in the short time available to us in the short session.

New State Budget Makes Important Investments in the NC Coast

OCEAN, N.C. - The newly approved state budget includes significant investments to bolster coastal environmental projects that benefit the region's economy. It allocates funding to the North Carolina Coastal Federation to carry out critical initiatives such as living shorelines, marine debris cleanup, water quality enhancement, and the advancement of North Carolina's oyster industry.

"This year's state budget makes substantial new investments to protect our coastal environment and the jobs that depend on preserving it," Federation Executive Director Todd Miller said. "We are grateful to our partners at the legislature for their leadership."

Miller attributed the success of the coastal budget allocation to the bipartisan backing that coastal protection enjoys among the public, as well as the increasing influence of the coastal legislative delegation. Notable support came from all coastal lawmakers, led by Senators Mike Lee of New Hanover, Norman Sanderson of Carteret, Bobby Hanig of northeast North Carolina, Bill Rabon of Brunswick, as well as Representatives Edward Goodwin of Chowan and Celeste Cairns of Carteret counties.

The budget designates \$2 million for living shorelines, responding to the surging demand for natural estuarine shoreline management systems that employ marsh grasses and sills to shield coastal areas from erosion. Dr. Lexia Weaver, the Living Shoreline Program Director for the Federation, emphasized the soaring demand for living shorelines across the coast. She noted that "This funding will help match private and public funds and protect more of our coastline from constant everyday erosion and severe storms."

The Federation will also receive \$500,000 to sustain ongoing efforts in marine debris removal. Marine debris, stemming from storm-damaged docks, lost fishing gear, poorly managed construction sites, abandoned boats, plastics, and irresponsible littering, has been a persistent issue. Since Hurricane Florence in 2018, the Federation has collaborated with state and local agencies and communities to hire fishers and contractors to remove over 400 tons of debris, recover thousands of lost crab pots, and clean up nearly 400 abandoned and derelict vessels. This initiative not only contributes to the cleanliness of the coast but also injects funds back into the communities where this work is done.

Oyster farmers will also benefit from a \$800,000 appropriation to help develop and equip an Aquaculture Hub in Carteret County. The hub will include a dock and utility building with refrigerated storage to provide a place to safely store oysters before they are sold. The General Assembly set a goal of increasing oyster farm production and its economic benefits to the state from \$6 million in 2018 to \$100 million by

2030. The Hub will help provide critical infrastructure to support oyster growers, and North Carolina's booming aquaculture industry, which needs such facilities to get shellfish from farm to table.

Finally, the legislature appropriated \$5 million to develop a pilot Stormwater Retrofit Cost Share Program. The program will provide matching funds and technical assistance to repair and install upgrades to stormwater systems and better track their operation and maintenance to comply with state rules. Since 1988, the State has issued approximately 15,000 coastal stormwater permits to residential, commercial, and institutional development projects, but many of the systems are not operating properly and failing to protect coastal water quality. The failing systems also contribute to local flooding in coastal communities following average rainfalls resulting in costly problems for local communities.

In addition to these investments, the Town of Morehead City will receive \$4.6 million to complete the development of a living shoreline around Sugarloaf Island, which is experiencing significant shoreline erosion. The funding supplements a previous appropriation for this project that aims to restore Sugarloaf Island, ensuring its role in providing recreational opportunities, fish habitat, and storm protection for the downtown and adjacent State Port. The budget also includes \$10 million to support grants to local governments awarded by the N.C. Resilient Coastal Communities Program managed by the N.C. Division of Coastal Management.

Spotlight: Washington Regional Medical Center

This week, I had the opportunity to travel to a medical center in the region that provides medical services to Washington, Martin, and Tyrrell Counties. This medical center, contains an emergency department, services for cancer screenings (particularly mammograms), and a brand-new outpatient primary care facility. What impressed me the most is that they try to operate in such a way where either same-day or next-day appointments are commonplace rather than the exception.

The hospital was purchased in 2019 by Affinity Health Partners. Since that time, WRMC has gone from 38 employees to an average of 150 at any given time. Additionally, they have made significant facility upgrades and upgraded their standard of care. As such, the hospital has gone from having a poor relationship with the community to an excellent relationship. They've also gone from having a poor relationship with the local EMS to an excellent relationship.

Additionally, the hospital has introduced home care that allows a home-based caregiver to continue regular communication with WRMC. The hospital makes this happen through regular monitoring and follow-up with the loved one providing the care.

Even with all the improvements, WRMC still faces several needs and challenges. The emergency department needs expansion, and the operating room needs renovation, among other challenges. This is not a unique situation.

Two years ago, then-Senator Bob Steinburg and I worked to secure funding for the renovation and upgrading of equipment for the College of the Albemarle nursing school. The school had outdated equipment and inadequate facilities. Even with that, it was in the top five in terms of quality among all the nursing schools in the United States. There is clearly a need to try to do the same for WRMC.

Washington Regional Medical Center has demonstrated that is definitely deserving of whatever assistance the state can provide in terms of additional improvements that will help strengthen an already excellent relationship with the community.





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