

Opinion

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EDITORIALS

No hasty vote

N.C. legislators should have time to learn what's in budget

A small group of legislative leaders has been working hard for weeks behind closed doors to achieve a compromise on North Carolina's \$17 billion budget. It's understandable that after all that effort, they'll want the legislature to swiftly affirm their work. But they shouldn't expect their fellow legislators to vote on a budget that may top 300 pages before taking reasonable time to go over it.

Needs are great. Money is tight. It's imperative that legislators know where taxpayers' dollars are going. A "trust-me" process, in which leaders divvy up the money and expect fellow legislators to rubber-stamp their efforts, puts too much power in the hands of a few leaders. Those leaders – and their favorites – benefit from it, but the best interests of North Carolina often don't. A closed-door process followed by a hurried vote invites deception, favoritism, even corruption.

In addition, ramming the budget bill through the House and Senate runs the risk of forcing legislators to adopt bad policy changes that should be considered separately, not attached to the budget. Creation of a state lottery and authorization for N.C. State and UNC Chapel Hill to set their own tuition, to cite two examples, should be considered on their own merits, not shoved down the throats of legislators who are forced to accept them or vote against the entire budget.

Voting on the budget with only the sketchiest of ideas about what's in it would be a dereliction of the legislators' duty to their constituents. Yet many legislators are too deferential toward legis-

lative leaders – or too scared of them – to object.

One who has objected is Rep. John Rhodes, a Mecklenburg Republican. He offered a full day to go over the recommended budget before voting on it. But the Democrats who run the legislature consider him a meddlesome malcontent, and his proposal vanished quicker than that ivory-billed woodpecker that was briefly seen in Arkansas recently.

Rep. Rhodes won't win any Most Popular Legislator awards, but he's right on this. Legislative leaders needn't take up his bill – in partisan Raleigh, that probably would be too much to ask – in order to give legislators a full day to study the budget before voting on it. House Speaker Jim Black and Senate President Pro Tem Marc Basnight should simply make that happen.

Tell them what you think

Do you want your legislators to know what is in the state budget before they vote on it? Then tell legislative leaders to allow a day to study it. Here's how to contact them:

■ House Speaker Jim Black, jimb@ncleg.net or (919) 733-3451.

■ Senate President Pro Tem Marc Basnight, Warob@ncleg.net or (919) 733-6854.

Or write to them at N.C. General Assembly, Raleigh, NC 27601-1096

THE HOT NEW NATURE MOVIE FROM RALEIGH...

MARCH OF THE LEWMINGS

QUOTABLE Most institutions demand unqualified faith; but the institution of science makes skepticism a virtue.
— ROBERT K. MERTON IN "SOCIAL THEORY" (1957)



The Observer Forum

Staying with abuse had deadly consequences

In response to "Mom: Son

evolution could be falsified in "Origin of Species." What research supports their theory? In what peer-reviewed journals

58 community colleges, for example, offer associate degree programs, occupational and vocational certifications, customized job training and adult basic