



## ***Senior Tar Heel Legislature***

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October 6, 2010

### **Governor Perdue Explains State Aging Initiative To North Carolina Senior Tar Heel Legislature**

Raleigh, NC – The North Carolina Senior Tar Heel Legislature welcomed Governor Beverly Perdue to their final meeting of 2010. The Governor accepted a special award from the delegation for her service and support on aging issues. Throughout the meeting, the Governor and subsequent speakers addressed three topics including future challenges with an aging population, changes in government budgets, and a call to the upcoming Conference on Aging.

The Governor acknowledged the diligent work of the Senior Tar Heel Legislature (STHL) in supporting and protecting programs within the aging network including Project C.A.R.E. (Caregiver Alternatives to Running on Empty) and the Home and Community Care Block Grant (HCCBG). “We face several challenges as we age, the same challenges that many older adults face now,” explained the Governor, “I believe home care and community care are the options we should all fight for.” The HCCBG supports the bulk of aging services such as home delivered meals, transportation, and adult day services. Through Project C.A.R.E., caregivers can receive respite services and other support so that their loved ones can remain at home.

Following the Governor’s comments, North Carolina State Budget Director Charles Perusse, elaborated on the state budget noting that North Carolina’s economy is slowly growing and the unemployment rate is positioned at 9.9%. “It’s the first good news in two years,” he stated. However, increases in healthcare and education expenditures as well as the conclusion of federal stimulus funds and the 1% sales tax have created a “structural shortfall” of 3.5 billion dollars within the budget. In order to make up for the deficit, state agencies have been asked to submit budgets with 5%, 10%, and 15% reduction options. As the state prepares its budget, leaders will have to make some difficult decisions, consolidate programs, focus on core services, and re-organize government. The Governor’s 2011 budget will be sent to the General Assembly by January.

During the second day of the meeting, Dennis Streets, Director of the Division of Aging and Adult Services, stated that STHL advocacy efforts have made a difference in growing and sustaining aging programs. Mr. Streets encouraged the STHL to support the Governor’s Aging Initiative by attending the upcoming Conference on Aging on October 13<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> in Durham. The conference, titled *Building a Livable and Senior Friendly North Carolina*, is one of three components to the Aging Initiative. Other components include data gathered from several policy roundtables that were held throughout the state earlier this year. In addition, Mr. Streets noted that Executive Order 54 calls for an assessment of the State’s readiness for an aging population. So far, all 48

state agencies have participated in the assessment. All three parts will be used to develop an aging plan for the next ten years.

Follow-up speaker, Carla Obiol, Director for the Seniors' Health Insurance Information Program, reported great news on the Medicare Improvement for Patients and Providers Act (MIPPA) initiative called Relay for Extra Help. The purpose of the program is to identify people who are eligible for assistance in paying for their Medicare Part D prescription drugs. So far, the state has collected 7,121 applications. Now that Relay for Extra Help is in its second phase, leaders have been asked to assist 17,500 people over the next 24 months. More than 50,000 people in North Carolina are eligible for extra help to pay for their Part D prescriptions.

The STHL promotes citizen involvement and advocacy concerning aging issues before the General Assembly and assesses the legislative needs of older adults by convening a forum modeled after the North Carolina General Assembly. It is during these forums that the STHL establish priorities for the upcoming years. During this final meeting for the year, Senior Tar Heels chose five new priorities to send to the General Assembly in 2011. The 2011 legislative priorities for the STHL include: 1) Provide funding to sustain Project C.A.R.E.; 2) Increase funding for the Home Care and Community Block Grant by \$5 million; 3) Increase funding for senior centers by an additional \$2,000,000 in recurring funds; 4) Provide Dental Care for North Carolina's Adult Special Care Population; and 5) Mandate pre-employment and random drug testing for employees of nursing and assisted living facilities.

On a positive note to close out the year, the Senior Tar Heels participated in their 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Food Drive. This year's quantity greatly exceeded last year's amount. Collected cans of food will be donated to the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina. This organization has branches in Raleigh, Durham, Greenville, New Bern, Sandhills, and Wilmington.

One delegate and one alternate represent every older adult in the state's 100-counties. Please feel free to contact your local delegate or the regional Area Agency on Aging. Also visit the STHL website at <http://www.ncdhhs.gov/aging/sthl.htm>. The next STHL meeting will be March 2011.