

## General Assembly Adjourns 2006 Short Session

The 2006 short session of the General Assembly, which adjourned July 28, was marked by passage of an \$18.9 billion state budget that included \$30 million in additional funding for the judicial branch ([S1741](#)). The legislature passed an ethics reform bill, enacted a comprehensive drunken driving bill and established the first innocence commission in the nation.

Although increased financial support was welcomed, dedicated funding to the judicial branch fell below 2 percent of the total state budget for the first time in more than 10 years. (For a summary of the judicial branch budget, please see the July 11th edition of the [Governmental Affairs Update](#).)

Aside from the budget, the legislature passed several bills, including an ethics reform bill impacting all three branches of government ([H1843](#)). The North Carolina Bar Association played an active role in the ethics reform bill, drafting language to prevent attorneys who practice administrative law from being required to register as lobbyists.

Additionally, the NCBA worked with its delegation of lawyer legislators to ensure reporting requirements are not overly burdensome on attorneys who are currently serving or who wish to serve in the legislature.

Noteworthy legislation included the enactment of a comprehensive bill that rewrites or amends many of the statutes related to drunken driving offenses in North Carolina ([H1048](#)) and the adoption of the first innocence commission in the United States ([H1323](#)).

The Omnibus Courts Act ([H1848](#)) contains a number of important provisions related to operations of the court system and a requirement that the Administrative Office of the Courts study the most effective way to address the increasing numbers of pro se litigants in North Carolina.

In a first step toward a major effort to increase the salaries of judges, the General Assembly created a commission to study the compensation of North Carolina's state-elected and appointed officials.

A significant salary adjustment will be a top priority for the NCBA's Office of Governmental Affairs for the 2007-08 session as North Carolina's judges currently are the lowest paid in the southeastern court system.

Of particular interest to NCBA members was the introduction of a bill by Sen. Berger to sunset the mandatory \$50 surcharge on state bar dues used to finance judicial campaigns. Upon introduction, the bill ([S1978](#)) was immediately referred to the Committee on Rules and Calendar Operations of the Senate.

No additional action was taken on the bill, marking the second session in a row that the NCBA was prevented from debating the surcharge in an open legislative forum.

Finally, the General Assembly welcomed two new lawyer legislators. Sen. Pete Brunstetter (R-Forsyth) was appointed on May 30, and Rep. Larry Hall (D-Durham) was appointed on July 11.

Both members were extremely helpful in furthering the efforts of the NCBA during the short session. Currently, there are 37 lawyer legislators serving in the General Assembly (17 senators and 20 representatives).

A complete recap of legislative session proceedings will be provided by the Office of Governmental Affairs in the Legislative Bulletin. The latest edition, available by the end of August, will include a synopsis of the session in a user-friendly format that links directly from the summaries to the complete text of each bill.

For additional information, please contact Doug Heron, NCBA Director of Governmental Affairs.