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Gov.-elect Beverly Perdue on the reports: 'Now we've got to figure out how to make it work for everybody.'
Staff File Photo by Paul Magann

State's wants dwarf its means

Reports from public meetings across N.C. show many needs. It's unlikely the state can afford them

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RALEIGH -

Gov.-elect Beverly Perdue wanted to know what needs fixing in North Carolina, and in a series of meetings open to the public, her transition staff heard an earful.

Many of the challenges are well-known -- there is a desperate need for more community-based options for mental health care, the state's probation system is struggling and the state's mechanism to pay for building roads is coming up short.

But 14 reports released by Perdue on Monday offer a much broader look at the issues facing the next governor, from whether to buy more hybrid cars for the state's motor pool to whether the legislature should ban trans fats in restaurants. One report called for a new Cabinet-level position to deal with military issues in North Carolina. Some of the ideas dealt with ways the state could scale back on costs, such as a recommended 10 percent cut in travel by government officials.

The overwhelming majority, though, would cost more money. And money figures to be scarce with the state facing a potentially large budget shortfall next year.

Perdue, a Democrat, said the reports were meant to give her administration public input to go along with the bureaucratic view of what government should be doing.

"I am going to expect folks to listen to the citizens," Perdue said in an interview. "I think that's good for the state."

The meetings, held across the state, attracted 500 to 700 people. They heard presentations

from state officials and then had an opportunity to suggest and discuss priorities. The reports, most 10 pages or more, summarize who was there and what was said. They often contain bureaucratic jargon, such as one suggestion that the state should "incentivize DOT to partner."

What doesn't work

But on the whole, the reports are a summary of many of the things that don't work in state government. They don't cover all criticisms. Rep. Alice Bordsen, a Mebane Democrat, said she was disappointed that the report on the Department of Correction did not present a big-picture view of how the department should be operating or discuss removing offenders younger than 18 from the adult justice system.

"Let's see what comes of it all," she said of the reports.

The education report recommends expanding the state's early childhood services, among other changes that will cost money the state doesn't have, said Terry Stoops, an education policy analyst with the John Locke Foundation, a Raleigh think tank.

"It looks expensive," Stoops said. "It's going to sit on the shelf until economic conditions improve."

Perdue said she intends to study the reports during the holidays. Her agency heads will receive a copy.

"It's a great way to start for a new administration," she said. "We've got it from the bureaucratic perspective and the people's perspective. Now we've got to figure out how to make it work for everybody."

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