

Under the Dome:

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## Panel suggests putting House debate online

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A committee convened to look at televising debate at the state House of Representatives recommends broadcasting on the Internet, assuming the legislature can afford it.

The committee has all but finished a report on the issue and has set out recommendations guiding how to start and run the House show.

The plan would be to wire certain committee rooms and the House chamber and install broadcast-quality video cameras. The video would be broadcast on the Internet with lower quality, but television stations would have access to video for newscasts.

The catch: All that could cost \$1.3 million. It's a small fraction of the state's \$21.5 billion budget, but lawmakers are bracing for a deficit next year that could be as high as \$3 billion.

House Speaker Joe Hackney is keen on getting the House on television.

"As soon as there is money for it and as soon as it can get done, the speaker wants it done," said Bill Holmes, a spokesman for Hackney.

The committee recommended that the House begin with Web-only broadcasts, but work toward finding a place on television for them. Policies governing the broadcasts would be set out by the speaker and the minority and majority leaders, the committee recommended.

### **Student leads online revolt**

A Raleigh high school junior is organizing an online revolt against the state's new high school graduation requirement -- the graduation project.

Alex Paschall writes on his Facebook page about organizing protests at State Board of Education meetings, but they have not materialized.

Paschall said in an interview that he'd like to fill the entire meeting room with students but that he can't because the board meets during school hours.

Instead, Paschall said, he plans to write board members about his objections. He'll post those letters on his Facebook page and encourage others to write their own letters.

"My issue is not with the project itself," he said. "It's with the state school board mandating the project."

He hasn't decided what to do with the online petition.

Paschall, who attends Leesville Road High School, is doing his graduation project on the USA PATRIOT Act, examining the sections he argues are unconstitutional.

Students are required to find mentors to guide them. Rep. Marilyn Avila, a Raleigh Republican who met Paschall while they were working the polls during the election, is his mentor.

### **Democrats keep leaders**

State Democrats are sticking with their leaders.

At a meeting Wednesday in Raleigh, Democratic legislators picked Rep. Joe Hackney for a second term as speaker of the House and Sen. Marc Basnight for a record ninth term as president pro tem of the Senate.

Rep. Hugh Holliman will again serve as House Majority Leader, while Sen. Tony Rand will again be Senate Majority Leader.

### **How Etheridge got his seat**

A retirement in New York and one of President-elect Barack Obama's appointments boosted U.S. Rep. Bob Etheridge to a seat on the powerful House Ways and Means Committee.

The Lillington Democrat was one of at least 20 members of Congress who hoped to snag one of two open seats on the 40-member committee.

One was vacated by retiring U.S. Rep. Thomas Reynolds of New York, the other by Rep. Rahm Emanuel of Illinois, who is leaving Congress to become Obama's chief of staff. The House committee plays an important role in setting policies on taxes, health care and other major areas of policy.

Etheridge argued he should get the seat because North Carolina has not had a Democratic representative on the committee since 1953. He also benefited from a realignment of the geographic regions the committee typically uses.

Previously, Rep. John Tanner of Tennessee had represented the region including his home state, the Carolinas, Alabama and Louisiana. The new region opened up a possible seat for North Carolina.

"We thought [North Carolina] was underrepresented," Etheridge said. "We made that argument to leadership ... and they were willing to listen."

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