

Brooks Pierce Capital Dispatch: Governor Delivers Speech, Senate Begins Voting on Medicaid Expansion Deal

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Governor Roy Cooper spoke this week at the General Assembly and the Senate began moving the health care bill that would expand Medicaid coverage.

Governor's State of the State Speech

Gov. Cooper on Monday night delivered his State of the State speech to a joint session of the General Assembly. This is a biennial tradition with the speech given early in the odd-numbered "long" legislative session.

Some highlights from the speech are:

- The opportunity to make additional investments in education, infrastructure, the economy and workforce given the financial health of the state and the influx of federal funds resulting from COVID-19,
- North Carolina's economic success, including being named the No. 1 state for business in 2022,
- The bipartisan accomplishments of state leaders, including a recent agreement on Medicaid expansion, and use of federal funds to invest more than \$2 billion in Internet infrastructure and another \$2 billion in updating outdated water infrastructure, and
- A preview of his budget recommendations, which will likely be released the week of March 13. They will include funding for public schools and mental health without raising taxes.

Link to the Governor's speech as prepared for delivery: <https://nc-governor.medium.com/governor-cooper-state-of-the-state-2023-a82ebabd8e17>

Lt. Governor Mark Robinson delivered the Republican response to Cooper's speech.

Medicaid Expansion

Two Senate Committees (Health Care and Finance) passed a health care bill (H 76) this week that would expand Medicaid health insurance coverage to hundreds of thousands of North Carolinians. The Senate Rules Committee is expected to hear the bill next week prior to sending it to the full Senate for a vote.

Other health care matters in the bill include the Healthcare Access and Stabilization Program (HASP), which could bring a significant amount of federal health care funds to North Carolina, and reduction in the number of Certificate of Need (CON) approvals. CONs require hospitals and other health care entities to get state approval before certain construction projects and equipment purchases.

Budget Bill Work

Legislative leaders this week agreed on spending targets for the budget bill. Senate leader Phil Berger (R-Rockingham) and House Speaker Tim Moore (R-Cleveland) announced target spending increases of 6.5% for FY 2024 and 3.75% for FY 2025. This step will guide budget writers as they craft this year's bill.

Now that joint meetings of the Appropriations subcommittees have ended, House members are working on the budget bill. Speaker Moore has stated a goal for the House to pass it by mid-April. Gov. Cooper is expected to send his budget recommendations to the General Assembly next week.

Information about bills and work of the General Assembly can be found at its website: www.ncleg.gov.

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