



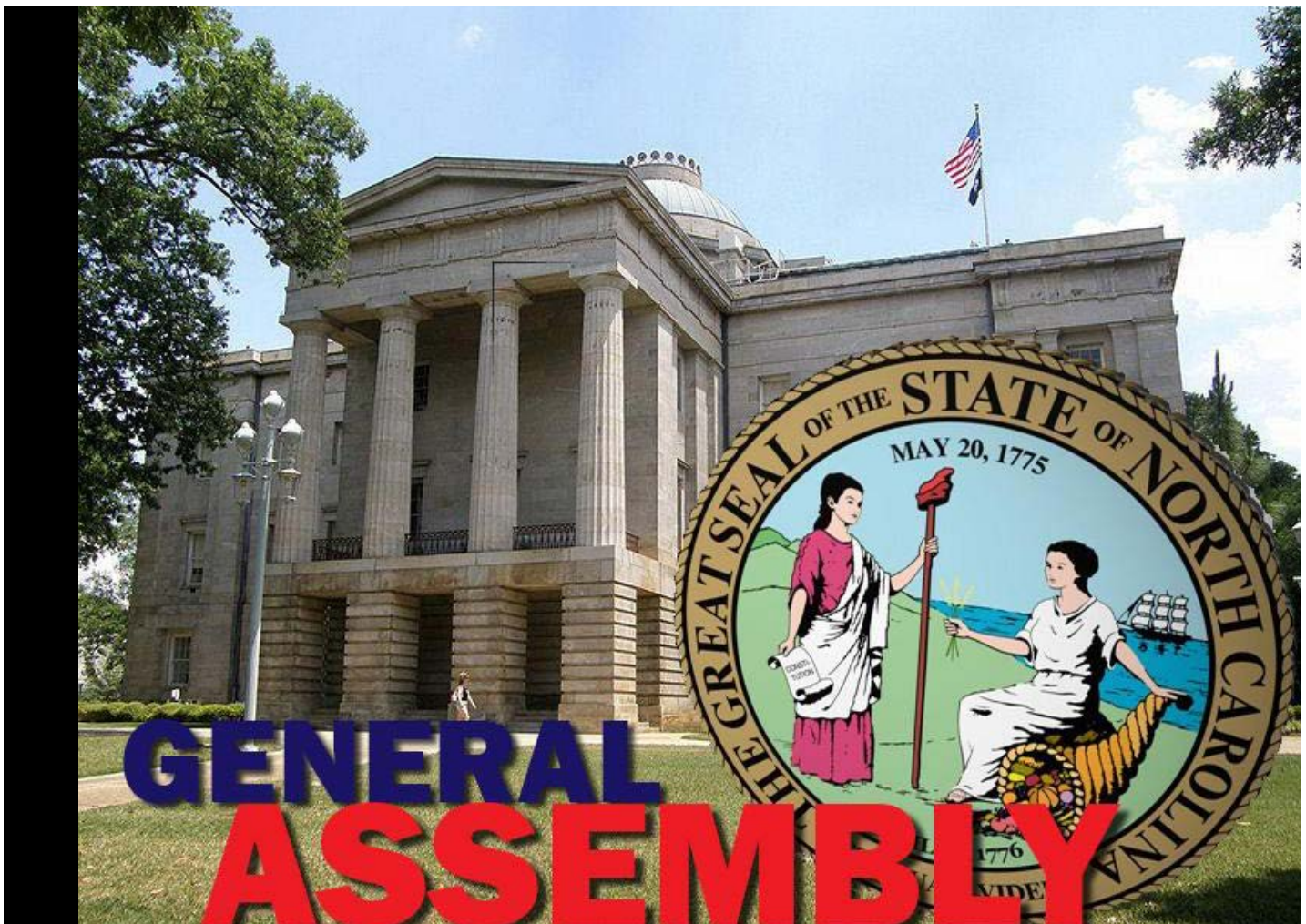
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Proposed state Senate budget ups the ante on teacher pay



Wednesday

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By the Associated Press

RALEIGH — North Carolina Senate Republicans on Wednesday previewed their plan to pay teachers more than what Gov. Pat McCrory and House members have offered, but didn't provide many details about how they would pay for it.

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Senate leader Phil Berger said the chamber is committed to raising average teacher pay — including local supplements — by several thousand dollars to more than \$54,200 by the 2017-18 school year. In a first step, the Senate's recommended budget adjustments, to be unveiled next week, would raise the state average to slightly more than \$51,000 this fall, he said.

North Carolina is currently ranked 41st in the nation for teacher pay, with an estimated average salary for the current school year of \$47,985, according to the National Education Association. The Senate plan, if implemented, would move North Carolina up to the middle among the states and District of Columbia, Berger said.

The effort “will make North Carolina the Southeast's leader in teacher pay and encourage the best and the brightest in the teaching profession to make a long-term commitment to our students and to our state,” Berger, R-Rockingham, said at a Legislative Building news conference.

McCrory's budget proposes raising the state's share of teacher pay on average by 5 percent this fall, to slightly more than \$50,000. The House budget, approved last week, would raise teacher salaries by 4.1 percent, not quite reaching a \$50,000 average, although House Republicans said they would provide more raises next year. One-time bonuses also are included in proposals by McCrory and the House.

The two chambers ultimately will work out a final agreement for the coming year to present to McCrory.

Action on 2017-18 salaries wouldn't occur until the next session and the next two-year budget.

Berger said the Senate's entire plan would cost \$538 million over two years and not require tax increases, relying instead on a stronger economy and healthy state revenues to pay for it. Pressed for what other spending changes, if any, would be needed to carry it out, he responded: “Once you see the full budget, you'll be able to see the details about it.”

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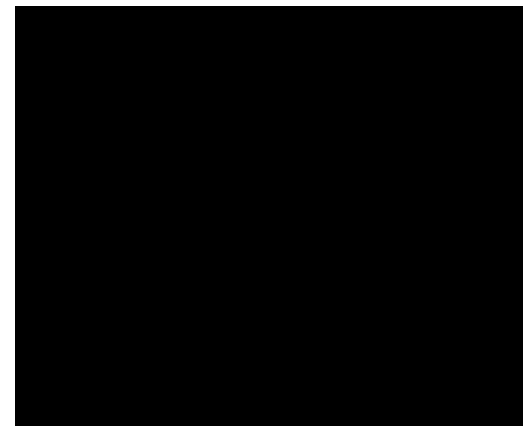
North Carolina's Justin Jackson after rout of N.C. State





Paying for raises this year would appear trickier given that House and Senate leaders have agreed to spend no more than \$22.2 billion in the new fiscal year starting July 1. Meanwhile, a Senate plan to increase standard income tax deductions, also expected in the budget bill, would reduce revenues by \$145 million next fiscal year, compared to a reduction of \$25 million in the House budget, which phases in the tax break.

Under the Senate's plan, for example, base pay for teachers with 10 years of experience would increase 6.3 percent to \$42,500 this fall and to \$45,000 the following year, according to a Senate Republican website referred to by Berger. The plan also envisions teachers reaching the current \$50,000 maximum on the state-only teacher salary scale at 15 years of experience, compared to the current 25.



“The Senate's proposal for teachers to earn more money, faster will help recruit top talent to the profession, reduce turnover and dramatically increase career earnings,” said Brenda Berg, who runs BEST NC, a business-oriented public education advocacy group.

The North Carolina Association of Educators, the state's largest teacher lobbying group and a critic of Republican legislators, was more suspicious about a plan lacking many details.

“Now, because it's an election year, Senate leaders are trying to play catch up from the destructive swath they created for our public schools,” NCAE President Rodney Ellis said in a release.

Teachers have received raises two years in a row, including a significant 7 percent average increase for the 2014-15 school year. But the most experienced teachers did not get permanent raises this year.