

FIREWORKS CELEBRATION



DTH FILE/MELISSA KEY

Fireworks returned to Kenan Stadium this summer to celebrate the Fourth of July, after being cancelled last year due to town budget restraints. The town and local businesses came together to make the celebration possible this year.

By Amanda Albright
Staff Writer

The N.C. General Assembly has voted to approve bills on topics ranging from the death penalty to fracking in the short session, which began May 16 and adjourned July 3.

Law makes it harder to overturn death sentence

The Amend Death Penalty Procedures law seeks to prevent the use of statistical evidence of racism in the court to overturn death sentences. The bill represents a second attempt by lawmakers to weaken the 2009 Racial Justice Act, which allows minorities to challenge their death sentence if evidence of racial bias is found in their sentencing. Proponents of the law have argued that the changes are necessary to prevent convicted criminals from avoiding the death penalty.

But N.C. American Civil Liberties Union spokesman Mike Meno said such statewide statistical evidence provides context to judges about how pervasive racial bias is in capital punishment. The bill was vetoed by Gov. Bev Perdue, who said that it renders the Racial Justice Act meaningless. But legislators voted to override her veto.

Sea level rise data faces questions by lawmakers

The growing standoff between environmental and economic concerns is reflected in the Coastal Management Policies bill. The bill requires the N.C. Coastal Resources Commission to create regulations that anticipate rising sea levels based on historical trends, rather than scientific data. Jenny Marienau, the N.C. field organizer for 350.org, said using historical data

would require the commission to assume an 8-12 inch rise. The commission's science panel predicted the state could face as much as a 39-inch sea level rise by the year 2100. But the bill's sponsor, Rep. Pat McElraft, R-Carteret, said the commission's panel only used one model and ignores historical data, even though she said the panel was asked to incorporate multiple models and historical data. She said the bill will commission another study into the matter. Perdue has not said whether she will approve the bill.

Legislators approve legalization of fracking

Lawmakers voted to approve a bill that will allow companies to obtain shale gas using hydraulic fracturing. Under the Clean Energy and Economic Security Act, the controversial drilling method — known as fracking

— would be permitted by 2014 after the state has established a regulatory framework. A report by the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources concluded that fracking can be done safely in the state if certain regulations are in place. Sen. Harris Blake, R-Harnett, said fracking has provided employment while causing minimal harm to the environment to states that utilize it. But Sen. Ellie Kinnaird, D-Orange, said a U.S. Geological Survey study found the method will only yield the state with gas for 5.6 years — less than previously estimated. Perdue vetoed the bill, citing inadequate protections for drinking water and land-owners rights. But the veto was overridden.

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