



Under the Dome: Council of State members pick top staff; where GOP ballot challenges go next

Good morning and welcome to the **Under the Dome** newsletter. I'm **Emily Vespa**.

In recent weeks, several Council of State officials have announced their choices for an array of posts, including legislative affairs and leadership roles. Here's what to know about the new hires.

Dave Boliek, the state auditor, has tapped two members of state Senate leader **Phil Berger**'s office to join his team, according to a news release. They are:

- **Brent Woodcox**, chief of staff: Woodcox has worked in Berger's office for over a decade. Most recently, he served as senior policy counsel.
- **Randy Brechbiel**, public information manager: Brechbiel served as communications manager for Berger, and he previously worked in communications in the private sector.

Two new hires will join the Department of Public Instruction's government affairs team, State Superintendent **Mo Green** announced. They are:

- **Geoff Coltrane**, senior director of government affairs and strategy: Coltrane previously worked as former Gov. **Roy Cooper**'s deputy public policy director and senior education adviser. He also has experience working at the N.C. School of Science and Mathematics, the Hunt Institute, and as a kindergarten and first grade teacher.
- **Elizabeth Yelverton**, legislative liaison: Yelverton joins the department from the North Carolina Association of School Administrators, where she was the legal affairs and policy manager and executive board attorney.

Labor commissioner **Luke Farley** has also picked who will promote his department's legislative agenda to lawmakers. Per a press release, his government affairs team will include:

- **Edgar Starnes**, director of governmental affairs: Starnes will stay with the Department of Labor, where he formerly worked as the legislative liaison. Before joining the department, he represented Caldwell County in the state House for 20 years, serving as House majority leader for some of that time. [He resigned from his post in 2015](#) to serve as legislative liaison for the state treasurer.

- **Chris Bullard**, senior adviser and legislative liaison: Bullard joins the department from the Associated Builders and Contractors of the Carolinas, where he served as the director of government affairs.

Brad Briner, the state treasurer, named two senior leadership picks, he said in a press release. They are:

- **Thomas Friedman**, executive administrator of the State Health Plan: Friedman, who most recently worked at Duke Health, has previously served as the director of policy, planning and analysis and legislative liaison for the State Health Plan.
- **Amy Auth**, deputy treasurer for external affairs: Auth has been the director of legislative affairs for the state judicial branch. She also previously worked as the director of state affairs for UNC-Chapel Hill and as a deputy chief of staff in the state legislature.

ICYMI, Attorney General **Jeff Jackson** [announced his top staff](#), reports **Kyle Ingram**. They include:

- **Ryan Park**, solicitor general: Park will remain in his role as the state's solicitor general, which he's held since 2020, after Republican Sen. **Thom Tillis** [blocked his nomination](#) for a federal judgeship this summer.
- **Eric Wilson**, chief of staff: Wilson most recently worked as the director of administrative services for Cooper.

NC GOP OFFICIALLY LOSES HOUSE SUPERMAJORITY

House Republicans [officially lost their supermajority](#) by one seat Monday after the State Board of Elections certified contested legislative races, reports **Kyle Ingram**. That means it will be more difficult to override the governor's veto.

Losing Republican candidates challenged the outcome of several close races, including the contest between Republican Rep. **Frank Sossamon** and Democrat **Bryan Cohn**, who led by 228 votes. The state board dismissed the challenges, and a recount affirmed Cohn's victory.

FEDERAL JUDGE SENDS STATE SUPREME COURT ELECTION CHALLENGES BACK TO THAT COURT

Though the legislative races are settled, there's still one straggler: the race for state Supreme Court. The close race, in which Democratic incumbent **Allison Riggs** leads Republican **Jefferson Griffin** by 734 votes, has spurred two recounts and several lawsuits.

Kyle Ingram reports that the [state Supreme Court could now intervene](#) in the outcome after a federal judge on Monday declined to decide Griffin's challenge of over 60,000 ballots in the race, saying it's a matter for state court.

Griffin asked the state Supreme Court to intervene after the State Board of Elections, which has a 3-2 Democratic majority, dismissed his challenges, which primarily argue that ballots cast by voters without a driver's license or Social Security number on file shouldn't count. The case was quickly moved to federal court.

Now, the State Board of Elections could certify the race results as early as Friday unless the Republican-dominated state Supreme Court issues an injunction. Riggs has recused herself from the case.

WHAT ELSE WE'RE WORKING ON

- The General Assembly's long legislative session begins Wednesday. **Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan** [has the details](#) on what to expect as lawmakers return to Raleigh.

Today's newsletter was by **Emily Vespa**. Check your inbox tomorrow for more #ncpol.

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