

Sep 14, 2009

Perdue favors requiring anti-fire circuits

Gov. Beverly Perdue supports a building code requirement for an electronic switch designed to prevent house fires.

On Friday, Perdue sent a letter to Dan Tingen, the chairman of the Building Code Council, which sets building codes for the state. The council has been considering whether to roll back a requirement that arc fault circuit interrupters be used for all rooms of new homes. The council appeared ready to roll back that requirement until Perdue asked for a delay.

The devices replace regular circuit breakers and are designed to sense fluctuations in current that could lead to a fire. Opponents, mostly from the homebuilding industry, say the devices add hundreds of dollars to the cost of a home and can trip when devices such as ceiling fans are turned on.

Perdue wrote that she had her staff research the issue. "The real benefits of fires prevented and injuries and deaths averted do outweigh the incremental cost and the occasional nuisance tripping," Perdue wrote. "I strongly believe we should not roll back important advances in fire prevention and consumer safety."

Perdue's request isn't binding on the council. But members are appointed by the governor's office, and when they meet this week, Perdue's letter likely will play an important role in the vote.

A funny place to meet

State Rep. Ty Harrell, whose most recent campaign report is under scrutiny by the State Board of Elections and the Legislative Ethics Committee, had an interesting expense in his fourth-quarter report for 2008: Harrell listed \$235.92 for an "operating expense" for a "committee meeting" paid to the Lamb's Ear at North Hills mall in Raleigh.

Lamb's Ear is not a restaurant but a pricey children's clothing store: "Everything your child needs from casual wear to formal events, shoes to gloves for Cotillion," the store's Web site boasts.

Prisons officials advance

Three longtime employees of the N.C. Department of Correction have been given new administrative duties.

Ricky Anderson, a 30-year corrections veteran and superintendent of the Pasquotank Correctional Institution in Elizabeth City for the past two years, was tapped as the state's deputy director of prisons. He began his career as a corrections officer in Wayne Correctional Center in 1979, then worked in prisons around the state. In 2008, Anderson was named Warden of the Year.

In the state Division of Community Corrections, where the state's probation system has been under scrutiny in recent years, Diane Isaacs was tapped to oversee field operations for the 2,000 probation/parole officers and the 117,000 offenders under their watch. Isaacs started her career in 1982 in Cumberland County as a probation/parole officer. Since February, she has been acting administrator of the Community Corrections division that covers 21 counties.

Terry Gootee, who began his career as a probation and parole officer in Charlotte, will fill the post that Isaacs will leave. He has worked for the state Department of Correction for 30 years.

Burr still leads rivals

U.S. Sen. Richard Burr's approval rating remains below 40 percent, which might ordinarily be bad news for a politician, but he's still ahead of his potential Democratic challengers in next year's election, according to a new poll.

The approval rating for Burr, a Republican, was 38 percent, according to the survey by Public Policy Polling, a Democratic firm.

Against possible Democratic opponents, Burr beat:

- U.S. Rep. Bob Etheridge of Lillington, 41 to 34 percent.
- Both Secretary of State Elaine Marshall, who officially launched her candidacy last week, and former Lt. Gov. Dennis Wicker, by the same margin, 42 to 31 percent.
- Former state Sen. Cal Cunningham, 42 to 30 percent.
- Chapel Hill Mayor Kevin Foy, 43 to 29 percent.
- Durham lawyer Kenneth Lewis, 43 to 27 percent.

The poll of 600 voters was conducted Sept. 2-8 and has a margin of sampling error of 4 percentage points.

ben.niolet@newsobserver.com or 919-829-4521