

News from Jones Street

*Your legislative updates from Jackson Cozort,
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When Jones Street Was Boring (And Why That Wasn't a Bad Thing)

There was a time when Jones Street was, by most definitions, boring. Not quiet. Not unimportant. Just steady. Predictable. Routine. And honestly, that wasn't a bad thing. Government isn't supposed to feel like a reality show. It isn't supposed to keep people guessing. State government works best when it feels like the infrastructure and services it is meant to fund: solid, dependable, and quietly doing its job in the background so people can live their lives without worrying whether teachers and state employees will get raises, or whether state retirees will get COLAs.

Many years ago, that was much closer to reality. The General Assembly met, budgets were built, and agencies went back to work. And trust me, there was still drama, but it was handled quietly, not paraded across news cycles and social media feeds. "Boring" meant dependable. It meant you could plan. It meant stability. The legislature was smaller, the state budget was smaller, and systems like pensions were simpler and more straightforward. The pace was slower, relationships mattered more, and there was room to believe that tomorrow would look a lot like today. That kind of boring created confidence.

For state retirees, that stability and confidence mattered deeply. When government was boring, retirement security felt almost automatic. You didn't have to track every committee meeting or budget draft to feel secure. You didn't have to worry about whether you were going to be remembered when the final budget was written. People had faith that when the work was done, they would be taken care of. Advocacy always will be important, but it didn't always feel urgent, because you trusted the people you elected to honor the promises made to public servants.

Today, Jones Street is anything but boring. It's faster, louder, and under constant scrutiny. Budgets run into the tens of billions of dollars. Pension systems support the retirement security of hundreds of thousands of families. Decisions are compressed into tighter windows, more often than not completely made behind closed doors, and the consequences are far larger than they once were. The loss of "boring" isn't just about missing a quieter political culture. It's about missing the predictability and reliability that people once associated with state government.

When government was boring, trust came more easily. When government becomes divisive, intense, unpredictable, and inefficient, trust erodes. For retirees especially, this shift is not just hypothetical. When you have dedicated your life to public service and are living on a fixed income, massive government unpredictability is not just frustrating. It is frightening.

Jones Street may never be boring again, and that is likely the natural result of a growing and evolving state.

But sometimes boring isn't a flaw. Sometimes boring is the sign that things were working exactly as they should. And honestly... after everything this past session, a little boring wouldn't be so bad.

January 16, 2026

NC Property Tax Push:

Homeowner Relief or Local Government Survival? Cities & Counties Sound the Alarm

You pour your morning coffee, sit down at the kitchen table, and stare at a property tax bill that's rising far faster than your fixed retirement income. For many homeowners, especially state and local retirees relying on pensions, Social Security, and modest savings—the sting is real. Higher home values may increase your net worth, but they don't ease the squeeze on retirees who simply want to stay in their homes with dignity and security, without fearing that rising expenses will push them out. Lawmakers in North Carolina are hearing the alarm. The new House Select Committee on Property Tax Reduction and Reform, launched in late 2025 by Speaker Destin Hall, is exploring practical solutions including stronger exemptions, smarter revaluation practices, and even potential caps to soften the blow.

Now consider the other side of the ledger. While homeowners struggle, cities and counties are bleeding from a thousand cuts inflicted by the state legislature itself. Over the years, the General Assembly has centralized tax power, slashing personal income taxes, expanding sales tax exemptions, and completely restricting local revenue options. No broad local income tax authority exists. Federal aid for local governments has dropped sharply since the pandemic, leaving less support for mandated programs and infrastructure. What remains for local governments to fund this is property taxes, which provide 60 to 70 percent of local budgets in many counties, funding that goes primarily to schools, public safety, and roads. It is the last meaningful lever cities and counties have to keep these essential services running.

On January 14, 2026, the committee met at 10 a.m. in the Legislative Office Building and heard directly from the North Carolina League of Municipalities and the NC Association of County Commissioners. The groups presented the hard numbers: how rates are set during spring budget cycles, where every dollar is spent (heavily on education and safety), and the stark challenges of inflation, unfunded mandates, and growth-driven costs. Their message was unmistakable. Homeowner relief is needed, but slashing or capping property taxes without providing alternative revenue sources forces local leaders into impossible choices: cut services, raise other fees, or risk fiscal collapse. Wake County Commissioner Shinica Thomas stated it plainly: local governments spend efficiently, but heavy-handed restrictions could trigger painful decisions that undermine quality of life.

Both perspectives are valid. Homeowners deserve fairness amid skyrocketing assessments. The bipartisan committee (15 Republicans, 8 Democrats, co-chaired by Reps. Julia Howard, Erin Paré, and Mitchell Setzer) is committed to finding balance. Yet local officials warn that without new revenue tools or full state funding for schools, and basic necessities, it could become a dangerous political game. One where state lawmakers claim credit for tax cuts while counties and cities absorb the consequences.

This is not abstract policy. It affects all families, kid's classrooms, rural fire stations, and the thousands of active and retired public service members who built this state through their local government efforts. The committee will continue meeting through April, with recommendations targeted for the 2026 short session. This is a tough issue, one that has put both homeowners and local governments in a difficult bind, but a balance must be found that protects affordability of housing while ensuring local governments have the resources to provide the programs and infrastructure necessary for their communities to thrive.

January 6, 2026

Remembering Governor Jim Hunt: A Personal Reflection on Leadership, Legacy, and Accountability

As North Carolina begins a new year, many of us are still carrying the warmth of the holiday season, shaped by time with family, moments of rest, and a welcome chance to reset. But this year, that season of reflection was marked by a profound loss. We said goodbye to someone who wasn't just a towering figure in North Carolina's history, but someone who, for me, was woven into the earliest chapters of my life: Governor Jim Hunt. Most people know Governor Hunt as a transformative leader, a champion for education, a visionary for rural communities, and a steady hand in times of change. But before I understood any of that, I knew him simply as the man whose home I crawled around in before I could even walk.

Not many readers know this, but my father served as Governor Hunt's head legal counsel during his first two terms. That meant my childhood was shaped, quite literally, inside the Governor's mansion. While my father and the Governor worked late into the evenings, Carolyn Hunt and my mother kept an eye on me, or at least tried to. Years later Carolyn loved to remind me, that all it took was a moment of distraction before I'd disappear, only to be found in a closet pulling clothes off hangers as I tried to stand. Those memories aren't political. They're personal. They're family.

And that's how Governor Hunt led, with a sense of family, responsibility, and deep personal accountability. One lesson he instilled in my father, and eventually in me, has stayed with me throughout my life. He would say, "Nobody is perfect. If you make a mistake, own it. Own it right away, then fix it and move on."

It was simple, direct, and honest. It is the kind of political leadership principle and accountability that feels increasingly rarer if not nonexistent today.

North Carolina still remains the only state in the country without a passed budget. Without a budget, there are no raises for state employees or teachers, and no COLA or pension supplement for retirees, people who devoted their careers to serving this state and now watch inflation erode the value of the pensions they earned. This is a mistake.

As we enter the new year, RGEA will continue pressing the legislature to take responsibility for this mistake. The budget is hundreds of days overdue, but it is not too late to do the right thing. Being the last state in the nation without a budget makes the mistake obvious. The next step is the one Governor Hunt would insist on:

Own it. Fix it. Move forward.

While many remember him for his leadership in education, Governor Hunt also left a quieter but deeply significant legacy for state employees and retirees: the creation of the North Carolina State Health Plan. At a time when public workers across the country often lacked dependable employer-sponsored health coverage, he recognized that a strong public workforce needed more than a paycheck, it needed security. Under his guidance, North Carolina established a statewide health plan that provided affordable, reliable coverage to teachers, state employees, and eventually retirees. It became a model other states sought to follow, and many still do, even as North Carolina lawmakers are now among the few to take that retiree benefit away from future state retirees in 2021.

His passing reminds us that his long-term investment in people, education, institutions, and public service lifted North Carolinians who aspired to do better for themselves and their families. We value and appreciate our elected leaders who hold this vision. Thank you, Governor, for your service, your vision, and your humanity. North Carolina will miss you. I will too.