



Anti-Annex Bill Held in Senate Panel

BY JOHN KRAHNERT III: NEWSROOM INTERN

If the involuntary annexation moratorium bill makes it out of the Senate Committee on Rules and Operations, it has a fighting chance at approval, according to Sen. Harris Blake.

"[If voted on], it is my opinion that it would pass," Blake said in a telephone interview Wednesday. Blake is a Pinehurst Republican who represents Moore and Harnett counties.

The bill, which would impose a nine-month moratorium on involuntary annexations across the state, was approved by the N.C. House by a 98-15 vote July 2. Senate leaders had been indicating they were hesitant to bring the legislation up for a vote.

Even the leaders of the anti-annexation movement at Pinewild Country Club, who helped score the major upset victory in the House, were less than optimistic about the bill's chances in the Senate. Pinewild residents have been fighting to stop the village of Pinehurst's planned annexation of the gated community.

Pinehurst had hoped

to complete the annexation by June 30, but a lawsuit has delayed those plans. A judge dismissed a suit in state court. A magistrate is now recommending that a judge dismiss a suit filed in federal court.

Blake declined to speculate on whether the bill would make it out of the Rules Committee. He said that decision was entirely up to Senate Majority Leader Tony Rand, chairman of the committee. As of Wednesday, the bill has not been added to the Senate calendar for a vote.

If the Rules Committee kills the bill or it fails in a vote, annexation opponents would be forced to go back to the drawing board to find a new way to have the existing annexation laws revised.

Blake also said he had "no idea" of how he would vote on the bill but noted that the moratorium movement has gained a lot of traction with the general public. Blake said involuntary annexation does have its merits and that he would not hamper towns hoping to annex land if it clearly benefited all parties involved. He said he also understood the annexation opponents' position and respects it.

He added that voluntary annexation is "pretty noble stuff."

Because of pending federal litigation in the Pinewild case, Blake said he did not think the bill would influence the situation in Moore County.

If passed by the Senate, the moratorium would go into effect Aug. 31 and expire on May 31, 2009.

Contact John Krahnert III at 693-2473 or by e-mail at jkrahnert3@gmail.com

All contents © The Pilot LLC. Contents cannot be reproduced or used without express written consent of the publisher.