Montpelier Notes,  An occasional email for Pownal and Woodford residents. If you would prefer not to receive these notes please reply to [botzow@sover.net](mailto:botzow@sover.net) and I'll remove you from the list. If you would like to be added please let me know. I do not give your email address to others. --Bill Botzow

February 14, 2010

Hello All,

Here’s wishing you a Happy Valentine’s Day. Last night’s Valentine Dinner Dance at the Legion was very well attended. A good meal plus Rich Ryder’s DJ-expertise made for a fun evening. Now it is Sunday evening and I am thinking back on the week in Montpelier and forward to the week ahead.

This is one of the busiest times of the year for the legislature as all the information we have gathered to date and all the legislative proposals introduced as bills are on the table. Now is the time to put the pieces together aiming for a more stable economy. We are fully aware of the importance of protecting our resources, meeting needs and investing for the future.

Part of the information we receive comes through reports requested by the legislature. Generally they are due in mid-January. Along with testimony we receive and contact with constituents, the reports inform us on the issues we face. There are many reports and they are accessible at the following two links.

**Reports 2010**

[**http://www.leg.state.vt.us/reports/reports2.htm**](http://www.leg.state.vt.us/reports/reports2.htm)

[**http://www.leg.state.vt.us/reports/externalreports.cfm**](http://www.leg.state.vt.us/reports/externalreports.cfm)

The first link covers reports authored by the legislature’s Joint Fiscal Office. The second link covers reports provided by agencies, departments and commissions. The subject areas are diverse as they address many of the issues we face as a community and as a state. If you would like more information on any of the reports, please let me know.

Here are notes on bills that passed the House this week.

**H. 507 An act relating to fostering connections to success in guardianships**

This bill “proposes to modify permanent guardianship law for children to comply with new federal provisions and enable guardians to access federal funds for guardianships.” The bill also helps foster families with transitions out of foster care when children mature.

**H. 534 An act relating to fiscal year 2010 budget adjustment**

The annual budget adjustment act came back from the Senate and the House spent time debating one of the amendments which addressed the canteen at the Vermont State Hospital. The canteen was closed a few months ago but was converted to vending machines and still serves as a gathering place for patients and their families. The House Appropriations Committee supported this cost savings plan from the administration. However the Senate approved a late arriving plan that would allow an outside group to come forward with a “cost neutral” plan in the next few months. Ultimately the House supported the Senate proposal.

**H. 759** **An act relating to executive branch fees**

The annual fee bill addresses the many fees we pay annually as businesses, municipalities and individuals for government services. Each year a portion of the fees are addressed and adjusted for the coming years. The bill makes sure to address fees as payments for services, not as taxes. Sometimes the line between the two is debated. For example, municipalities and businesses pay a fee to discharge hot water into the waters of the state. The state charges a fee for providing that service as all the waters of the state are held as a public trust. This year the fee for Vermont Yankee was adjusted upwards to reflect that service—their ability to discharge to the Connecticut River. Vermont Yankee’s fee is set at a flat amount whereas other users pay by the gallon. If Vermont Yankee were to pay by the gallon for the large amounts they discharge their fee would be about twice what we set. Nevertheless their increase was large this year. The other area that received attention was a proposal to charge a fee for point-of-sale scanners. The Department of Agriculture checks scanners at retailers statewide and currently there is no fee as there is for gas pumps or scales. The bill exempts small Mom and Pop operations while adding a modest fee for the service. Overall, the House largely agreed with the administration’s proposals and the amount of revenue raised by the fee bill. After making adjustments the House voted 100 to 42 to pass the bill and I voted yes.

**H. 229 An act relating to mausoleums and columbaria**

This bill updated statutes pertaining to mausoleums and as such affects cemeteries across the state. The bill deals with mausoleums with public access and sets policy that makes sure they are well built and durable. The bill also sets inspection standards for all mausoleums and updates policy on how to proceed if a mausoleum or crypt fails.

**H. 598 An act relating to sorting early voter absentee ballots**

The House Government Operations Committee recommended the bill which would help town clerks in all but the smallest towns prepare early voter ballots for counting. Current law allows clerks with election workers under strict guidelines to remove the outer envelope and record relevant data. The law already applies to large towns and the bill lowers the threshold number of voters on a checklist to 300 to be able to qualify for this practice. As many more Vermonters are using early voting, this bill will help town clerks provide an orderly polling place on voting day while maintaining strict security measures for ballots.

**Committee Work**

In my House Commerce and Economic Development Committee we are continuing to work on bills to help the economy and on measures to help our rural communities. This last week we continued work on two bills that would help towns recover costs from accidents on highways. While this is a statewide problem it is particularly an issue in small towns such as Woodford where a small population bears the burden of paying for fire and rescue protection not only for townspeople but also for travelers on a major truck route. We are looking for the best way to provide guidance to towns and fire departments to recover costs from the responsible parties in an accident. On Friday we heard from Woodford Select Board Chair Ryan Thurber who well described the impact on the town of a major accident.

This week I am including a report from a colleague on the Natural Resources and Energy Committee on their work. It covers their review of the Vermont Yankee situation and a bill they are working on that will address electronic waste. I know from my volunteer time at the Transfer Station that often television sets and other electronics go into the trash because there is no other alternative.

**Natural Resources and Energy by Rep. Margaret Cheney**

The House Natural Resources and Energy Committee continues to receive updates about the tritium leaks at Vermont Yankee from the Vermont Department of Health, the Department of Public Service, and most recently from the NRC and the EPA in a joint hearing with Senate Natural Resources and House Fish Wildlife & Water Resources. The Health Department, Agency of Natural Resources, and VY employees are working around the clock (with their services paid for by Entergy) to monitor tritium levels on-site and try to locate the source of the leak or leaks. In phone testimony from the NRC and EPA, we learned that neither agency is likely to take any action or assume direct responsibility at this time. Testing does show tritium levels rising, though not yet in drinking water wells. We expect to hear more next week.  
  
S.77, "an act related to the disposal of electronic waste,” will be on the floor Wednesday. The bill is a "producer responsibility" bill that addresses the fastest-growing and most hazardous portion of the waste stream. Effective next January, the bill would ban the disposal in landfills of all electronic devices, such as computers, monitors, TVs, printers, and other gadgets. These products contain lead, mercury, and other hazardous substances that pose a threat to human health and the environment if improperly discarded. They also represent a significant and fast-growing portion of our waste stream. Consumers who currently recycle such products voluntarily often pay a big fee to do so, which is a major disincentive. Vermont is joining some 20 other states in requiring the manufacturers of certain electronic devices to take responsibility for them according to their market share. Manufacturers would pay a fee to the Agency of Natural Resources, again according to market share, to fund free, convenient collection sites around Vermont. We expect this legislation to have a major, positive environmental impact.  
  
Natural Resources and Energy is also considering a number of bills related to renewable energy, with the aim of consolidating them into a committee bill that will continue to advance the deployment of renewable energy projects (and the green jobs associated with them) around the state. In updates about last year's standard offer legislation, we have learned that a significant number of good jobs will result from the jump-start we gave to green electric projects through the passage of Act 45 last year.

**Pownal Valley Affordable Housing**

Last week I received an email from Pat Kane who is a member of Pownal Valley Affordable Housing that describes the work this group has undertaken. PVAH grew out of the Vermont Council on Rural Development community visit a number of years ago. The group has a number of initiatives in mind for the coming year. Also, the group especially welcomes new members to join in.  Here’s a portion of Pat Kane’s email.

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| “We had our regular monthly meeting of PVAH tonight and furthered  ideas first discussed in January. We have decided that while we're on our way to actually funding an affordable housing project one day we  want to help people make their housing dollars stretch further. Here is a rough idea of what we have planned, subject to change:  Later this month we will be hosting a mobile home energy efficient  workshop presented by a new member of the Mobile Home Project. We are preparing posters and members from MHP will be assisting us in handing out flyers door-to-door in the coming days.  In June we are sponsoring a house tour for the 250 year celebration that will emphasize how energy sources, needs and attitudes have  changed in our community roughly every 50 years. This will not   necessarily help residents save money but it will get them thinking about where we've been and where we need to go regarding energy  consumption.  Over the summer we will be selling raffle tickets to build up our coffers (to pay for these and more energy initiatives) offering many prizes of energy-related products and services. To this end we are  becoming a legitimate non-profit!!  In September we are planning an Energy Fair where we will have exhibits (like low cost storm windows), demonstrations, speakers, and literature available. The raffle drawings will be held at the fair.  This will also be the kickoff for our Efficiency Vermont energy audit project - VT Community Energy Mobilization Project (VCEM), assuming this project is still funded. At our event later this month and at the town meeting we plan to solicit initial participants as both volunteer auditors and residents interested in having a home energy audit.  To accomplish this we are going to have to increase our membership, so if you know anyone who might be interested, please send them our  way. We have acquired a new vitality in 2010 and I'd love to see the spirit continue.” |

Congratulations to PVAH for their timely work. PVAH’s address is Pownal Post Office Box 40, Pownal, VT 05261. PVAH has also printed and distributed a handy flyer with the emergency numbers people may need to reach town and state officials. The flyer is appropriate for both homeowners and tenants and has been placed at town businesses, the library and town office.

I hope you have a very good week.

Stay in touch,

Bill

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