**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 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

January 24, 2011

Hello All,

I hope everyone is staying warm in this frigid but beautiful winter weather. Coming home from Montpelier, the deepest snow I saw was here in Pownal. Thanks to all the transportation workers who are doing their best to keep the roads passable. I have heard from a few constituents about road plowing. I have contacted Nelson Blanchard at the Bennington District-1 garage and he has forwarded me the state policy on snow and ice removal. Here it is. [www.aot.state.vt.us/WinterMaintenancePlan.htm](http://www.aot.state.vt.us/WinterMaintenancePlan.htm)

One of the highlights of the week for me was the Food to School State House gathering where all the communities that are part of this program came together to share stories about their experiences. It was a happy event with many young people clearly enthused about understanding, growing, preparing and eating healthy Vermont food. I was especially happy to see constituents from Woodford who have led the effort by Mount Anthony Middle School to plan and implement a farm-to-school program for the middle school. In attendance and honored on their $15,000 implementation grant award were Maureen O’Neill and Alison Brigham with her husband Frank Palisano and their children. Congratulations to all who have worked on this project which brings together the classroom, the cafeteria and the community.

**This week in Montpelier**

The legislature now in its third week continues to receive briefings on major issues. Last week I wrote about the Blue Ribbon Tax Commission report. This week we received an update on the state’s fiscal condition and we heard a presentation from Dr. Hsaio on redesigning Vermont’s health care system.

**Fiscal Briefing**

The entire House heard from the legislator’s economist regarding budget projections for the rest of this fiscal year (until June 30), the next fiscal year starting July 1 and a longer view of future years based on projected income and expenses. We learned that income is running ahead of projections for the rest of this year which lowers the projected gap in planning for next year from 150 to 111 million. This is still a very challenging figure.

This coming Tuesday we will hear from Governor Shumlin in his budget address how he plans to address this and how he plans to provide resources for his priorities. The address is at 2PM and you can hear it on Vermont Public Radio either over the air or through their website.

Here is a link to an excellent report from the Joint Fiscal Office: Fiscal briefing <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/JFO/klein_presentations/Vermont_Fiscal_issues_Overview.pdf>

**Health Care Report**

Last year the legislature commissioned Dr. William Hsaio from Harvard University to study Vermont’s health care system and report to the legislature with his analysis and to present three options for a redesign that would lead to covering Vermonters at lower costs with quality care. One plan was a pure single payer system, another a plan with a public option and the third one of his team’s design. Dr. Hsaio delivered his report in a clear understandable presentation to the legislature. The response from all parties has been measured and thoughtful. The legislature will now study and take testimony on the proposal with an eye to improving health care experience and lowering costs where possible.

I am including links to his written presentation, his power point oral presentation and to information on how to offer public comment directly to Dr. Hsaio. The public comment period is open until 4:30 P.M. Thursday, February 3. Dr. Hsaio will then offer his final report. Dr. Hsaio’s recommendation is a public-private single payer plan.

Here are some of the basics of his report taken from the power point. This will give you a handle on the basic concept. The links will give you more detail. A hope you will look at them. They offer the clearest and most comprehensive presentation of a health care redesign I have seen.

**What is Single Payer?**

**It’s a system that provides insurance to every Vermont resident with a common benefit package and channels all payments to providers through a single pipe with uniform payment rates and common claim processes and adjudication procedures.**

**Recommendations**

• Option 3 — Public-Private Single Payer

• Most likely to be acceptable to major stakeholders.

• Produce most savings

• Rely on market when possible

• Minimize political interference

• Transparency and accountability

**Who Will Benefit?**

• The uninsured

• The under-insured.

• All Vermonters will have some dental and vision benefits.

• Most employers and workers will pay less.

• Most primary care physicians and practitioners will receive more net income.

**Who Will Bear the Burden?**

• Private Health Insurance organizations, especially ones outside of Vermont.

• Sales, marketing and underwriting personnel.

• Staff employed by hospitals and clinics for billing and claims.

• Employers who do not offer insurance now or offer very shallow health insurance (exempt salary <200% FPL).

• Two high earners in a single household.

**Overall Effects**

• Control health cost escalation

• Every Vermont resident covered with essential benefit package

• Increase in employment

• Higher economic output

• Bring in new workers due to higher wage

• Vermonters enjoy better health

**Conclusions**

• Vermont can fix its broken health system.

• A new system can control health cost escalation while providing universal coverage with essential benefits.

• A single payer system can reduce 8-12% of the health care cost immediately upon implementation and additional 12-14% over time.

• A single payer plan is an effective instrument to establish integrated delivery of health care.

• Vermont can show the way forward for the USA.

Health care report statement <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/JFO/healthcare/FINAL%20VT%20Hsiao%20Written%20Statment%20for%20Jan1911_1.pdf>

Presentation power point <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/JFO/healthcare/FINAL%20VT%20Hsiao%20Presentation%20for%20Jan1911_1.pdf>

Draft Full report <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/JFO/healthcare/FINAL%20VT%20Draft%20Hsiao%20Report.pdf>

Public Comment information prior to final report <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/JFO/healthcare/Public_Comments_on_Draft_Hsiao_Report.pdf>

**Commerce Committee**

Last year the Commerce Committee passed a bill requiring the Department of Public Safety to look at the problem covering the costs of emergency response to accidents on state and US highways and report back to the legislature with recommendations. Towns are often left having to pay fire department costs which aren’t always covered by insurance. The committee received the report and took testimony on the recommendation for more education to fire departments and towns on how to recover expenses. The committee remains concerned and asked for a plan and a timeline for education, especially to small towns without fire departments with major highways such as Woodford.

The committee also took testimony with House Education on the overall education and training infrastructure in Vermont.  Pat Moulton-Powden, Deputy Commissioner of the Agency of Commerce and Community Development remarked that “the number one concern among businesses in the state is meeting their current and future workforce needs.” High for Vermont unemployment and underemployment find Vermonters working multiple low skill jobs. The committees areasking how every Vermonter can access job opportunities and businesses can meet workforce needs. The many programs in the state including secondary school tech education, adult education, internships, post secondary education and workforce training programs for employers need better  coordination and flexibility to build the workforce of the future.

Finally we took testimony on  H. 21 – An Act Relating to the Uniform Limited Cooperative Association Act. The bill passed the House last year but died in the Senate. It would give cooperative associations a way to attract investment through a new corporate structure. Cooperatives often have a difficult time raising needed capital to take on opportunities. The committee also heard strong opposition to the bill focusing on traditional coop principals and on the use of the term “cooperative” for a limited cooperative. Commerce will take more testimony next week before turning to work on the jobs bill we expect to see soon after the budget address.

**J.R.H. 8 Joint resolution honoring women veterans and requesting that state and federal officials work cooperatively to assure that women veterans receive their due recognition and essential support services**

As increasingly women have become more and more involved in the military’s missions including combat, the Legislature unanimously passed this resolution to lend support to efforts to make sure women veterans receive needed services. Here are a few clauses from the resolution.

*Whereas*, women now comprise 14 percent of active duty and nearly 17 percent of those serving in the various Reserves and National Guard forces, and

*Whereas*, the number of women veterans is expected to be nearly two million by 2020 and will constitute more than 10 percent of the veteran population, and

*Whereas*, there is now an increasing need to improve health care services offered to women veterans and to ensure clinicians are properly trained to provide primary care and gender-specific care to women of all ages, and

*Whereas*, in light of the rapidly increasing number of women returning from deployments including some with exposure to combat, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and state and voluntary veterans’ organizations work cooperatively to ensure that needed health and other support services are available to these women who have patriotically served our country,

now therefore be it

*Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:*

That the General Assembly honors women veterans and requests that state and federal officials work cooperatively to assure that women veterans receive their due recognition and essential support services.

**H. 65** **An act relating to fiscal year 2011 budget adjustment**

The House Appropriations Committee brought to the full House the annual budget adjustment bill much sooner than usual. This year’s bill was relatively straightforward requiring adjustments in only a few areas of concern. Only one amendment was offered and it was recommended by the committee. In the House’s first roll call vote of the session, the bill passed 129 to 2 and I voted yes.

**H. 1** **An act relating to challenges for change outcomes for persons with disabilities**

This bill passed easily on unanimous voice votes. It simply made sure that any redesign of services that applies to elders 8 and families will also apply to persons with disabilities, mental health needs, or 9 substance abuse issues.

Please let me know if you have any questions on what I touch on in these notes or would like more detail on any bill, report or initiative.

I hope everyone enjoys a good safe week.

Stay in touch,

Bill

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