**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

March 20, 2011

Hello All,

First day of spring and what a change from last week  as a lot of snow went away between when I left for Montpelier Monday morning and returned Friday night. Saturday at the Transfer Station folks were bringing in the results of spring cleaning. Sunday afternoon I enjoyed Maple Sunday at Keith Armstrong’s. With the recent cold nights and days above freezing this may be a good sugaring year.

Here are announcements from Jim Boutin and Linda Hall about upcoming Internet safety workshops with ideas on how you can participate. This is an important issue. As we use the internet more and more to communicate, understanding how to handle and protect our personal information and that of our family’s becomes more and more important.

**WEBINARS: INTERNET SAFETY FOR PARENTS MARCH 21, 24
By Jim Boutin, Old Military Rd,** **jim.boutin@comcast.net**
Wednesday is the first Internet Safety for Parents webinar when you can get a 30-minute snapshot of Internet safety issues (see announcement below). For an in-depth, interactive session on Internet Safety please join us on March 23rd at 7:00 pm for the second Vermont State Colleges workshop being presented by e-Vermont. It will take place at Pownal Elementary school and a reminder of that opportunity is also below. This is an area of concern as preparations have begun to start sending students home with their net-book computers. We hope you can let other Pownal residents know of upcoming ways to learn more about a very important topic.

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Internet Safety for Parents
Tune in to 30 minute sessions March 21st or 24th
                Learn about steps you can take to keep your kids safer online, including tips for privacy settings, passwords, safer searching, and more. This webinar is easy to participate in wherever high speed Internet access is available.
                To attend, go to <http://vscmymeeting.acrobat.com/evtwebinars/> on the date and time of your choice. We encourage you to log in 5 min. before the session begins.  You will need to turn on your computers sound/speakers.

No registration required.
Webinar Dates (same webinar repeated 3 times):
Thurs March 17, 6:00-6:30pm
Mon March 21, 6:00-6:30pm
Thurs March 24, 6:00-6:30pm
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**From Linda Hall, Solomon Wright Library**

For those interested:  March 21st From 5:45-6:40 pm
                The 3 public access computers at the Solomon Wright Library will be reserved & available for anyone wanting to access the webinar re: Internet Safety & Security made available by our town's eVermont grant on Monday night the 21st.
                Security and Safety is a concern for all of us as we use our computers more in our everyday life.
                More than one person can use a computer and people can come in, use a comfy chair, our wifi with their own computers with their headphones/speakers and take notes.
                The eVermont Committee specifically asked for the posted Wed. 23rd in-depth class [7pm, Pownal Elementary School] to also be available because it is an ongoing issue that is dealt with by businesses and individuals alike.
Have a good day!!!

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Here is my weekly list of bills that passed the House this week. They will all go to the Senate for further consideration.

**H. 172** **An act relating to repealing the sale or lease of the John F. Boylan airport**

This bill repealed a bill passed last year that would have allowed this airport in the Northeast Kingdom to be sold for development to a particular party. That initiative did not go forward so this bill releases the state from its obligation to sell or lease the airport to the interested parties and it keeps the state’s authority to lease the property. The bill passed on a voice vote.

**H. 431** **An act relating to extending the implementation date of certain employment-related disclosure requirements**

This bill would extend the implementation date from April 1, 2011 to July 1, 2011 for the statute which requires a prospective employer to request, and a previous employer to disclose, all factual information that would lead a reasonable person to conclude that the prospective employee engaged in conduct jeopardizing the safety of a minor or vulnerable adult while working for the previous employer. The judiciary committee felt that more time was needed to address implementation issues.

**H. 11** **An act relating to the discharge of pharmaceutical waste to state waters**

This bill deals with the problem of leftover prescription drugs. Often they are discarded into waste water systems and end up causing harm to the systems and ultimately to the waters of the state. The bill was proposed as a study, but the House Fish and Wildlife Committee recommended to  make it so that the patient who uses the drug if they have lawfully obtained it, can deliver the drug to a person authorized to dispose of prescription drugs. The bill basically helps ensure that prescription drugs, which contain controlled substances, can be disposed of properly.

**H. 66** **An act relating to the illegal taking of trophy big game animals**

This bill increases the fines for big game violations and increases the restitution values for illegally taken wildlife. The bill also made some changes to the policy for both resident and non-resident armed forces service members to streamline the application process for hunting and fishing licenses. The bill came from the committee with a unanimous vote and the House vote was also unanimous.

**H. 287** **An act relating to job creation and economic development**

This bill came from the House Commerce and Economic Development Committee and received strong support in the legislature and in the business and economic development community. The basic ideas in the bill were proposed by the administration after working with the business community. The goal is to improve the climate for job creation by the private sector. The bill also looks forward to a strong statewide economic development plan led by the Administration’s development cabinet and supported by local and regional economic development planning.

The bill also has a number of incentives to entrepreneurs to attract and grow businesses such as an incentive to a company that can bring a related company to the state with five or more employees. It also focuses on parts of the state with comparatively high unemployment rates such as this area and in the northeast and it encourages businesses to work with the Department of Labor to hire the long-term unemployed. The bill also helps agriculture through a large animal veterinarian educational loan repayment fund. It aims to attract vets to areas in the state where there is a short supply and real need. A Good Agricultural Practices grant program would help farmers comply with rules and regulations required by supermarkets such as Hannaford and Price Chopper so farmers can sell to these markets. A skilled meat cutters apprenticeship program offers a competitively awarded grant to develop a meat cutting training program for slaughter house operators, meat processors, chefs and livestock farmers with on-the-job and classroom training. Also a local food coordinator would be a hub for all the farm to school, farm to plate and similar efforts to help growers. The bill also helps develop worker housing and redevelopment of downtown buildings. Other ideas include improvements to forming merchant banks so that entrepreneurs can have better access to capital. The bill also helps with tuition payments for people with needed science, technology, engineering and math experience. The goal is to help hire young people in these needed fields and keep them in state. Also training programs and internship opportunities are increased. The bill passed 122 to 13. I supported the bill and worked to move it through the committee process and floor vote.

**H. 264** **An act relating to driving while intoxicated and to forfeiture and registration of motor vehicles**

This bill stiffens the consequences for drunk driving, especially when injuries occur. The purpose section of the bill states:

PURPOSE

“This act is intended to help prevent the harm caused to Vermonters and their families and friends by persons who repeatedly operate motor vehicles while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. The list of Vermonters who have died or been injured because of persons who repeatedly operate motor vehicles while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs is far too long. It includes both the victims of recent high profile cases, such as Nick Fournier and Kaye Borneman, as well as others whose deaths and injuries may have received less public notice. All of these people are and were equally precious. This act cannot now help them, but it is intended to use lessons learned from these losses to create new approaches to help prevent the needless and heartrending harm suffered by the victims, living and dead, of those who drive under the influence.”

The bill puts in place stronger sentencing guidelines for repeat offenders—those with three or more DUI offenses. In those cases some time will be served in jail and fines are increased. It also makes it a crime to allow someone who you know to be drunk to drive your car. The bill also puts in place substance abuse treatment for fourth offense drivers. The bill passed 136 to 0 sending a strong message that drunk driving is unacceptable.

**H. 430** **An act relating to providing mentoring support for new principals and technical center directors**

This bill would improve first two years experiences for principals and technical center directors who haven’t served in that position previously by connecting them with an experienced mentor. The bill passed on a voice vote.

**H. 41** **An act relating to requiring employment breaks**

This bill drew a great deal of attention as some thought it was hard on some businesses. After listening to the testimony I supported the bill as the new policy of having to offer a thirty minute break to employees who worked six hours straight seemed reasonable, brought Vermont into line with current policy in neighboring states and would ultimately be more productive. Employees do not have to take the offer and employers would have alternatives in situations where only short breaks are possible because of the nature of the work. The bill would protect workers from choosing between losing their job or risking health consequences. For almost all Vermont employers and employees this bill will not apply. Their employment practices are excellent.

In the first roll call on the bill it passed 78 to 56. In a final vote it passed 72 to 61.

**H. 201** **An act relating to hospice and palliative care**

This is an important bill. Vermonters need help with pain management and with end of life care. Here are the findings in the bill and they well describe the need for this legislation.

FINDINGS

The general assembly finds that:

(1) Despite the desire of more than 80 percent of Vermonters to die at home, 50 percent die in a hospital and 27 percent die in a nursing home. Among those enrolled in hospice, 76 percent die at home. Doing an improved job in helping Vermonters to remain at home would better meet their desires.

(2) Current medical technology allows very ill patients to be kept alive far longer than was the case in the past.

(3) On average nationally, patients spend only two weeks in hospice care when they could benefit from much earlier referrals. Vermont has one of the lowest utilization rates of hospice in the country. In Vermont, per capita spending on hospice care by Medicare is well below the national average.

(4) Good palliative and hospice care is available in Vermont, but a better system needs to be in place to ensure access to that care. Financial pressures or insurance limitations sometimes contribute to the lack of access to palliative and hospice care.

(5) Hospice care helps to meet the needs of patients with advanced illness by providing palliative care, including effective pain and symptom management, as well as support for the emotional and spiritual needs of patients and their caregivers. Hospice care allows patients to have a greater sense of control at the end of life.

(6) Presently, hospice care is limited to a patient with a physician certification of an illness with a prognosis of not more than six months’ life expectancy. That patient must choose between curative and hospice care. Because individuals cannot receive both at the same time, they must forgo curative care to be eligible for hospice.

(7) When hospice benefits are extended from a six-month to a 12-month end-of-life prognosis and a patient can access treatment without being first required to discontinue curative therapy, a higher proportion of patients select hospice care. This results in significant increases in the use of hospice services and a decrease in the use of acute care services. Net medical costs have been shown to decrease by as much as 30 percent, and many patients live longer with a better quality of life and a dramatic increase in patient satisfaction.

(8) A national health insurance company has extended to all its members an “enhanced hospice access” benefit, whereby the definition of “terminal illness” is expanded from six months’ life expectancy to 12 months, and members may access hospice without being first required to discontinue curative therapy because of the demonstrated effectiveness of the company’s pilot project.

(9) Vermont is one of only six states that does not require any continuing medical education as a condition of physician licensure or renewal and health care professionals in Vermont lack sufficient education and training in the areas of end-of-life-care, palliative care, and pain management.

(10) In order to ensure continuity of care and seamless transitions between settings, the Clinician Order for Life Sustaining Treatment (COLST) form along with Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) orders should be standardized for all health care providers in the state.

Overall, the bill does a number of things. It encourages, but does not mandate, health insurers to provide coverage for a terminal care program and an “enhanced hospice access” benefit. The definition of terminal illness would expand from six months’ life expectancy to twelve months. Those in the insurer’s plan could access hospice care without having to first discontinue curative care.

The bill also has the Department of Vermont Health Access apply for a waiver or apply to have Vermont be a demonstration project so coverage could be available to recipients of our State health care programs. The Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living would revise policy to allow individuals who have been admitted to hospice to apply for the Choices for Care to help pay for at home services. The bill would also make sure physicians working in this area have training in hospice and palliative care as part of re-licensing. Vermont is one of only six states without a hospice education requirement.

H. 201 also updates language and obligations relating to do-not-resuscitate (DNR) orders and clinician orders for life sustaining treatment (COLST).

There was a roll call vote on the bill and it passed unanimously. Yeas, 138. Nays, 0.

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                Next week will be extremely full as the Health Care bill, the Miscellaneous Tax Bill and the Budget bill will all come to the floor for debate and a vote. If you would like to read the bills go to <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/> . On the right hand side under highlights are links to the bills and related documents. The budget isn’t posted yet as it is scheduled to be voted out of committee Monday.

                Here is a one page outline of the bill as amended by the House Health Care Committee. Their proposal has three major elements and would be implemented over four plus years. It makes sure Vermont complies with the new federal law to establish a health care exchange. It also establishes an oversight board and it puts in place initial steps for a universal health care system.

**H.202 House Health Care Amendment**

**Three Major Components**

* Green Mountain Care Board (to control health care cost growth)
* Vermont Health Benefit Exchange (to reform health insurance purchasing and administration, consistent with federal law)
* Green Mountain Care (to provide universal access and maximize cost savings)

**Green Mountain Care Board**

* Responsible for Vermont’s health care system that currently lacks integration and systemic coordination.
* Independent from executive and legislative branches.   Five members, nominated by a new Green Mountain Care nominating committee and appointed by Governor with consent of Senate
* Oversees and evaluates payment reform at all levels – primary care, specialty care, hospital care – aimed at moving from payment for volume to payment for value
* Builds on and maximizes savings from Blueprint (patient-centered medical home)
* Develops overall budgeting with a reasonable rate of growth
* Eliminates cost-shifting going forward
* Provides strategic planning for Vermont’s health care system through comprehensive data systems, adequate staffing and expert analysis

**Vermont Health Benefit Exchange**

* Consolidates purchasing and simplifies purchasing of health insurance:
	+ Creates easy to access website for health insurance, one-stop-shopping
	+ Provides Vermonters with apples-to-apples comparisons
	+ Provides access to federal health insurance subsidies.
	+ Will ensure outreach to Vermonters and simple enrollment
* Acts as the “engine” of health care reform – implements payment reform and administrative simplification for as much of the population as possible
* Maximizes administrative simplification for patients, employers and providers

**Green Mountain Care (implementation likely not before 2015)**

* A universal health care program providing health care to all Vermont residents including providing them access to primary care, preventative care, chronic care, acute care, and hospital services.
* Occurs after Affordable Care Act waiver is obtained and financing plan and budget are enacted into law.
* All Vermonters covered by virtue of residency with penalties for falsifying residency
* GMC board proposes three year budget that must be approved by legislature.
* Financing must maximize federal funds and spread costs fairly
* Integration and financing plans will address:
	+ - What will the overall costs/savings be?
		- How much federal $ will we get?
		- How do we deal with border issues?
		- How are public and private coverage integrated?

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Please let me know if you have questions on any of the bills I write about. I hope everybody has a good, healthy first week of spring.

Stay in touch,

Bill

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