

May 5, 2013

Hello all,

Saturday and Sunday were beautiful days and it was good to be home for the weekend. My highlight was the planting party on Saturday at the Hoppy Valley farm that Peter Hopkins, John and Becky Armstrong and others have started on US 7 across from the Pownal View Barn. A large group showed up to help. Ruth and I enjoyed planting hops root cuttings around the poles you see in the field and now look forward to watching their growth over the summer. Here's wishing this new local agriculture venture every success.

It was a very full week last week in Montpelier as we work to wrap up the first half of the legislative biennium. One night we worked until 11:30 and next week will be long too as we are meeting on Monday. It is time to finish our work for the year and I'm looking forward to being home. Here's my weekly summary of bills that passed the House. Bills without a vote count passed on a strong voice vote.

S. 150 An act relating to miscellaneous amendments to laws related to motor vehicles

Almost every year the legislature makes miscellaneous updates to motor vehicle law. This year's bill which started in the Senate was amended in the House. It covers many subjects including policy on disability placards, temporary registrations, trailer fees, motorboat registrations, off-site display of vehicles by dealers, junior operator and learner's permits, non-driver ID cards, licenses, driver training instructors, driving on closed highways, DUI suspensions, sirens and emergency lights on exhibition vehicles, the motor vehicle arbitration board, the judicial bureau, texting while driving penalties, handheld portable electronic devices in work zones, idling of motor vehicles, and a veteran indication on commercial drivers' licenses. Here's a link to the bill <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/docs/2014/bills/House/S-150.pdf>

H. 483 An act relating to adopting revisions to Article 9 of the Uniform Commercial Code

The Uniform Commercial Code makes sure laws and rules governing interstate commerce are consistent. The revisions in this bill make sure the policies governing recording of names and addresses for lending purposes are the same state by state. All states are supposed to adopt the laws by July of this year. This bill was another bill that started in House Commerce.

J.R. S. 14 Joint resolution supporting the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets' proposal to adopt an administrative rule to implement international maple grading standards in Vermont

This bill which was supported by the Vermont Maple Sugar Makers' Association, the Maple Industry Committee of the Vermont Maple Sugar Makers' Association, the Franklin County Sugar Makers' Association, the Vermont Agriculture and Forest Products Development Board, and the Vermont Farm Bureau approves adopting the international maple grading standard. This will help Vermont maintain and hopefully improve its share of the international maple sugar and syrup making market by standardizing how the various grades of maple syrup are named and marketed. The original proposal by some sugar makers and the Agency of Agriculture was met with initial resistance but through working with all stake holders general support for this step emerged as small sugar makers saw the potential for their businesses and industry.

S. 88 An act relating to telemedicine services delivered outside a health care facility

This bill advances the use of telemedicine outside health care facilities. It proposes pilot projects to move us towards being able to deliver some medical services at home. This could help with managing chronic care, use our improving broadband network and lead to health care efficiencies.

H. 270 An act relating to providing access to publicly funded prekindergarten education

This bill proposes improving access to pre-kindergarten education. We know that early investment in education is critical to parents with both adults working and to children who are developing lifelong skills. Enrollment would be voluntary as would school districts' operating a center as it would allow for private providers. There is also flexibility in choice of child care providers. All education bills are debated extensively and this one was. It passed 97 to 43 and I supported the bill. This bill will now go to the Senate for the first time but as we are near the end of the session it may not see further action this year.

Here's the bill as passed by the House. <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/docs/2014/bills/House/H-270C.pdf>

S. 77 An act relating to patient choice and control at end of life

This bill was properly and lengthily debated before finally passing 81 to 64. The many amendments offered were turned down or adopted by similar margins. After hearing from many constituents with their concerns or their support for the bill and reading through the material provided by both sides I supported the bill. This bill is deeply personal for all of us. After thinking it through I came to the conclusion that proper safeguards and procedures are in place and that some people need this bill. It was one of the most difficult bills to vote on I have

experienced and I know my vote will disappoint some of you. Ultimately the bill compels no one and permits anyone to follow their own dictates and beliefs. I believe that is the correct course to follow. The bill now goes back to the Senate which offered a very different bill. As I write the final passage of this legislation is uncertain. Here is a link to the House amendment as passed.
<http://www.leg.state.vt.us/docs/2014/bills/House/S-077C.pdf>

H. 535 An act relating to the approval of the adoption and to the codification of the charter of the Town of Woodford

Woodford's Charter was voted through the House Wednesday and Thursday with a few technical cleanups. It now goes to the Senate. On a related note, Woodford Hollow Elementary School visited this week. Though I was sorry not to see them as their visit is always a real pleasure, I heard they enjoyed a very good trip with a personal tour of the Senate Chamber by Senator Sears.

S. 59 An act relating to independent direct support providers

This bill would allow Vermont to set standards for terms and conditions of employment for independent providers of home health care. The goal is to make sure we have quality home care services through Vermont's home and community-based programs. It also sets up a Direct Support Provider Workforce Council to advise the State regarding recruitment and retention of providers, and it allows independent direct support providers to bargain collectively with the State. Home health care workers allow Vermonters to stay in their homes rather than go to nursing homes. This not only yields cost savings, it greatly improves the quality of life of patients. Workers' salaries are set by the state. This bill would allow them to collectively bargain thus helping keep workers. The bill passed 94 to 41 and I voted yes.

J.R.H. 10 Joint resolution opposing the recalculation of Social Security benefits

The leaders of the three parties in the House offered the following resolution which we all supported on a voice vote. Here's the resolution.

Whereas, on August 14, 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act, Pub.L. No. 74-271, into law, and

Whereas, one of the stated goals of the Social Security Act was "to provide for the general welfare by establishing a system of Federal old -age benefits," and

Whereas, Social Security has a special tie to Vermont as the first ever recipient of Social Security benefits was Ida May Fuller from Ludlow who received her first monthly check of \$22.54 in 1940, and

Whereas, since that date not a single benefit payment has been missed, and

Whereas, according to the Social Security Administration, as of February 2013, there are approximately 53,880,000 Social Security recipients, of whom approximately 38,662,000 are 65 years of age or older, and

Whereas, a Social Security recipient's monthly benefit amount is adjusted annually by the percentage increase, if any, in the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (C.P.I.) from the third quarter of the previous year to the third quarter of the current year, and

Whereas, on April 10, 2013, President Obama presented to Congress his proposed FY 2014 federal budget, and

Whereas, with respect to Social Security, the President proposed that beginning in 2015, the current broad-based C.P.I. be replaced with a chained C.P.I. with a mathematical formulation that would slow the increase in benefits, and

Whereas, according to an editorial published on March 30, 2013 in The New York Times, fewer than one-half of Americans between the ages of 55 and 64 have any retirement savings, and of those persons who have established retirement savings, one-half have less than \$120,000.00 saved for this purpose,

and

Whereas, the majority of retirees with an annual income of up to \$32,600.00 rely on Social Security for two-thirds or more of their income, and

Whereas, the current financial challenges associated with the federal debt have no connection to Social Security, and

Whereas, without any changes, Social Security will meet 100 percent of its obligations for the next 20 years, now therefore be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:

That the General Assembly requests that President Obama and Congress seek an alternative to the proposed adjustment to the Social Security C.P.I. formula as a way to address the long-term financial problems of the Social Security System, and be it further

Resolved: That the Secretary of State be directed to send a copy of this resolution to President Obama and the Vermont Congressional Delegation.

S. 85 An act relating to workers' compensation for firefighters and rescue or ambulance workers

My House Commerce Committee reviewed this bill and agreed with one minor change to make sure training to fire, rescue and ambulance workers would be available. The bill makes workers exposed to certain lung and infectious diseases eligible for workers compensation. The bill has numerous safeguards to make sure it applies only to those truly eligible. A few years ago the legislature approved a similar measure for heart disease and certain cancers. Passage of this bill will bring us in line with most states in our region and is important to recruiting and protecting our volunteer and career rescue workers. Workers compensation costs in states where this policy has been adopted have been minimally impacted.

S. 155 An act relating to creating a strategic workforce development needs assessment and strategic plan

House Commerce offered this strike all amendment to a similar Senate bill. We expect to work out differences in conference committee. The bill tackles a very important goal for Vermont, coordinating and advancing our workforce training programs into an efficient and effective system. Here is the rationale for the bill

FINDINGS AND PURPOSE

(a) Over the years, significant resources have been devoted in Vermont to support many workforce development, training, and education opportunities that prepare individuals for employment. Among them are private and public education, social service programs focusing on work readiness, internships,

apprenticeships, training programs, and other forms of government support.

(b) Despite these investments, there is a gap between the readiness of individuals for employment and the needs of employers in the State. Graduates, underemployed, and unemployed workers express that they cannot find work, they do not possess adequate work skills and experience, or that jobs for which they are qualified are unavailable. At the same time, employers report difficulty in filling current and projected job openings due in part to the insufficient skills, training, or experience of the available workforce. Consequently, individuals are not advancing their employment interests and businesses are impeded in their success. The combination of these factors negatively impacts the revenues of the State and the well-being of our citizenry.

(c) There is broad agreement in the General Assembly that individuals should have adequate opportunities to engage in the workforce in the way that best suits their needs and wishes. There

is also agreement that the workforce needs of our employers must be met in order for our businesses and economy to thrive.

(d) Administrators and policy makers acknowledge that there are both gaps and overlaps among the many workforce development, training, and education activities in the State. There is broad consensus on the need for significantly improved coordination and strategic focus.

(e) In adopting this act, it is the goal of the General Assembly to create a process that will result in a comprehensive compendium of information about the workforce education and training activities that are taking place in the State. This information, which is not currently compiled in a way that is sufficiently useful to policy makers and administrators, will serve as the basis for the more effective and strategic use of both public and private dollars.

I hope everybody enjoys a very good week.

Stay in touch,

Bill

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