

April 12 2015

Hello All,

The snow has receded. The sun shines. It's warm and clear and the breezes light—a beautiful early spring day and I hope you are able to enjoy it.

Here's an announcement from Wendy Hopkins about the Pownal Historical Society's Annual Meeting.

**The Annual Meeting of the Pownal Historical Society will take place on Sunday, April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at the Solomon Wright Public Library, Main St., Pownal.**

The business meeting will take place at 2:00 PM, followed by refreshments and conversation. President Ken Held will review the work of the Society during the past year and highlight upcoming activities. Two directors are proposed for election to three-year terms on the Board: Wendy Hopkins and Frances Lampman. Other directors may be nominated by petition signed by at least four Historical Society members. Nominations should be mailed to the Society in advance of the meeting at the address above; petitions may also be presented at the meeting.

In other news, enclosed with this mailing is our latest e-News, a survey sent to many of our members via email last month. If you haven't yet filled it out, please take a moment to tell us what programs, events and activities would interest you; additional ideas are welcomed.

Pownal Historical Society also now has a presence on Facebook! Please visit and 'like' us at [www.Facebook.com/pownalhistoricalsociety](http://www.Facebook.com/pownalhistoricalsociety).

Now that many of the House's major bills have been sent to the Senate we are spending more time back in committee reviewing Senate proposals. However some House bills are continuing to come to the floor for debate and some are controversial. Here's my weekly account of what cleared the House this week.

#### **H. 76 An act relating to the requirement of mandatory binding arbitration and to the elimination of strikes and imposed contracts in connection with collective bargaining for teachers' and school administrators' contracts**

This bill took a long path to the House Floor and involved two differing recommendations from two House Committees. House General, Housing and Military Affairs has oversight of general law on collective bargaining and dispute resolution methods and the House Education Committee has oversight of education matters. This was a bill with very little common ground that stakeholders could find on dispute resolution and offered difficult choices in voting on the House floor. Underlying the discussion was the undesirability for all concerned with strikes and with imposed contracts without a clear alternative process when needed. After the committees reported their differing recommendations three representatives moved to amend the bill with a strike all proposal that would ban strikes and contract imposition and then undertake a study of how best to resolve disputes. A strike-all amendment removes all of the underlying bill's proposals. I did not support this approach as it would leave everything in an uncertain limbo with no real tools available for dispute resolution nor any way of understanding what the study would lead to and no process to go forward if the study did not lead to recommendations. The amendment failed 70 to 73. Then another strike all amendment was offered that proposed a working group with three members from each side led by a mutually agreed upon chair. That would keep the pressure on to make recommendations on how to resolve disputes. Given the choices available I believe this amendment was the more prudent choice. It passed 79 to 62 and I voted yes. Then the bill was moved to third reading, which under the rules takes place the next day. That vote was 75 to 61 and again I voted yes. The next day there was further debate and a final vote on the bill. Again I supported the bill but the majority did not and it failed 43 to 104. I would have preferred to keep the parties talking and bring them to proposing an agreed upon better dispute resolution system. With the bill's failure efforts will continue but not at this time along the lines of this proposal. Here are two vote explanations from the House Journal that capture the spirit of the discussion.

“The narrative of our votes here today shows that there is not a clear consensus on whether or how to change the way labor disputes are settled here in VT. It is clear that there is deep respect for our teachers and their right to collectively bargain—as well as for the diligent work done on our behalf by the

men and women who serve on our local school boards. I trust they can answer future questions of whether and how to change how they settle disputes.” – Rep. Copeland-Hanzas

and

“Mr. Speaker: In a speech on Labor Day in 1980, Ronald Reagan said, when referring to the brave workers in Poland ‘where free unions and collective bargaining are forbidden freedom is lost.’ I vote ‘no’ on this bill to ensure that we leave the collective bargaining process alone to let local people work out their differences. It works now and will work in the future.” –Rep. McFaun

#### **H. 123 An act relating to mobile home parks, habitability standards, and compliance**

I wrote about this bill which I sponsored a few weeks ago. It passed the House on a strong vote then. The Senate accepted the House proposal and added an amendment that improves the process for removing abandoned mobile homes. The House had not had time to undertake this and knew the Senate would bring forward a proposal. Removing abandoned trailers has been a nightmare for park owners and leads to blight in parks. The difficulties have also discouraged towns from putting these properties up for tax sales. Putting the House and Senate proposals together makes for a very good bill that was agreed to by all the stakeholders. Overall these measures should help mobile home parks improve but it will take proactive work by residents and owners to do so.

#### **S. 115 An act relating to expungement of convictions based on conduct that is no longer criminal**

This bill establishes a process for expungement of criminal records for certain crimes for people under 25 and after a number of conditions are met such as time has elapsed since the sentence has been served, restitution completed, time spent in the armed forces or AmeriCorps. Another factor is that the conduct leading to conviction is no longer criminal. The House proposed amendments to the Senate bill and sent it back to the Senate on a unanimous voice vote.

#### **J.R.H. 8 Joint resolution relating to military suicides**

This resolution addresses the reality of many suicides among members of the military service. A number of Representatives spoke to their personal experiences impacting their families and friends in their community. In this resolution and in a unanimous 138 to 0 roll call vote we recognized the deep sorrow of these occurrences, we recognized family members many of whom attended for the reading of the resolution, and we called for corrective steps. Here's what the resolution says.

*Whereas*, according to a January 16, 2015, report in the publication Military Times, nearly two-thirds of the military personnel who committed suicide in 2013 had seen a doctor within three months before taking their own lives, but fewer than one-half had a mental health diagnosis, and fewer than one-third expressed any intention to hurt themselves, and

*Whereas*, according to an August 2014 dispatch from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), 8,000 veterans commit suicide annually, and this averages to 22 per day, and

*Whereas*, the General Assembly acknowledges and appreciates the VA's efforts to increase its resources for mental health counseling and support, including working to improve access to these services for veterans who meet the national criteria and who live more than 40 miles from a VA medical facility, and

*Whereas*, the VA has a toll-free military crisis line (1-800-273-8255) and website [www.veteranscrisisline.net](http://www.veteranscrisisline.net) that are accessible 24 hours per day, seven days per week to service members and families for suicide prevention purposes, and

*Whereas*, despite the VA's and the U.S. Department of Defense's (DOD) suicide prevention efforts, including Congress's recent adoption of the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act, the suicide rate for our men and women who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces remains far too high, and

*Whereas*, military families have expressed concerns about the consistent staffing of crisis lines, access to therapy options and effective medications, as well as delays in obtaining mental health counseling appointments, and

*Whereas*, the DOD's anti-stigma campaign, "Real Warriors, Real Battles, Real Strength," features real service members who have reached out for support or sought treatment for invisible wounds and are continuing to maintain successful military and civilian careers, now therefore be it

*Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:*

That the General Assembly recognizes the need for greater public awareness of the military and veteran suicide rate, and be it further

*Resolved:* That the General Assembly supports the continued efforts of the VA, DOD, the Vermont National Guard, Vermont Vet-to-Vet, and other public and private organizations to address mental health issues, and be it further

*Resolved:* That the General Assembly supports the Vermont Veterans Legal Assistance Project in its work helping veterans review and appeal unfavorable discharges, possibly due to behavioral problems related to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI) or both, in order to qualify for, or gain access to, VA services, and be it further

*Resolved:* That the General Assembly supports that federal policies be established under the authority of the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act as follows:

(1) establish, support, and enhance peer support outreach programs for veterans; and

(2) train mental health counselors around military acronyms and situations specific to military life to help the veteran feel more comfortable when being treated for a mental health issue, and be it further

*Resolved:* That the General Assembly requests that the Secretary of Veteran Affairs designate Vermont as one of the five pilot program locations identified in the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act, and be it further

*Resolved:* That the General Assembly strongly encourages the Armed Forces and VA to establish, support and enhance peer support outreach programs for the families of veterans, and be it further

*Resolved:* That the General Assembly strongly encourages the U.S. Armed Forces to require a period of reintegration for returning veterans that maintains unit cohesion, and be it further

*Resolved:* That the General Assembly urges the Vermont National Guard to increase educational efforts related to mental health care services in order to reduce both the existing stigma among military personnel and veterans to seek mental health assistance and to lower future suicide rates, and be it further

*Resolved:* That the Secretary of State be directed to send a copy of this resolution to U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald, U.S. Secretary of Defense Ash Carter, the Vermont Congressional Delegation, Commissioner of Mental Health Paul Dupre, Vermont Adjutant and Inspector General Major General Steven A. Cray, and to the Vermont Office of Veterans Affairs.

## **S. 71 An act relating to governance of the Vermont State Colleges**

This bill makes changes to the membership, powers, and duties of the Board of Trustees of the Vermont State Colleges. It keeps the current number of legislative trustees, reduces the number of Gubernatorial appointments and allows the trustees to identify and elect members on their own. This will allow the State Colleges to identify individuals with needed skills and resources for the board while preserving the public identity of the board. The bill also allows the governing board to make a name change as long as the name includes the word Vermont.

Occasionally a representative will ask for recognition for what is called a “Point of Personal Privilege”. Over the last few years Rep. Caroline Branagan from Georgia has been doing so, speaking about the Civil War from a Vermont perspective as a way of recognizing the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that great conflict. This week marked the anniversary of the end of the war and she offered the following comments which were included in the House Journal. Here they are.

Remarks by Rep. Branagan of Georgia

“Mr. Speaker: 150 years ago today Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered his troops to Union General Ulysses S. Grant. This ended the American Civil War. General Lee had no other option. The battle at Petersburg had gone on and on. On April 3, Richmond fell to Union troops as Robert E. Lee led his Army of Northern Virginia in retreat to the West. He was pursued by Grant and the Army of the Potomac. A running battle ensued as each Army moved farther to the West in an effort to out flank, or prevent being out flanked by the enemy. Finally, on April 7, General Grant sent the first of a series of messages that ended with the meeting at Appomattox. Lee’s army was hungry and not properly clothed. Many southern soldiers had ill-fitting footwear or none at all. You will remember Mr. Speaker that one of the reasons the northern troops were able to be victorious in the Battle of Cedar Creek is that the

southern troops spotted rations that were abandoned when the northern troops escaped in the early morning of the battle. The Southerners stopped to eat the deserted rations giving the Northerners time to regroup and ultimately win the battle of Cedar Creek. After a series of notes between the two leaders, Grant and Lee agreed to meet on April 9, 1865, at the house of Wilmer McLean at 1 pm in the village of Appomattox Courthouse. The meeting lasted about two and one-half hours and ended the bloodiest conflict in our nation's history. Lee and Grant both held the highest ranks in their respective armies and had known each other slightly during the Mexican War. They exchanged awkward personal

inquiries. General Grant was five feet eight inches tall and a bit stooped shouldered. He'd been complaining of a headache for several days previous to this meeting. For the meeting with General Lee, he wore a mud spattered field uniform. General Lee was well over 6 feet tall with glistening white hair; he arrived in full dress attire, complete with sash and sword. Lee asked for the terms, and Grant hurriedly wrote them out. All southern officers and men were to be pardoned, and they would be sent home with their private property and with their horses for use with the spring planting. Officers

would keep their side arms, and Lee's starving men would be given Union rations. For all practical purposes the Civil War had come to an end. By 1865 Americans in the north and south were sick of war. The economic impact of the conflict had been devastating on the south and difficult also in the north. So

many young men were away at the war leaving women and old men to run the farms. And of course the loss of those who were killed in the fighting was a grief felt for a lifetime by those who remained. So celebration was difficult but people in towns in Vermont were pleased to hear the war was over.

The church records in my home church, the Georgia Plain Baptist Church, read that the church bell was rung for an hour on April 10 when the news reached. I've spoken before about the series of letters at the Historical Society Building in Georgia between a young husband and wife. That's the couple where the husband was serving with the Army of the Potomac, was trying to describe to his wife how to run the farm, or at least plant crops so that she and other family members had enough food to survive. She had young children and his elderly father in the household. The husband's last letter says he has heard the war might be over soon, he was stationed in Washington DC at this point. We know he returned home to Georgia because the couple built a new house which stands today on route 7 in the north end of town. There is no longer a farm there, but I always think when I drive by that wood framed house of the young wife and the difficulties she faced while her husband was away. It wasn't only the soldiers who sacrificed in this war. This war ended the question of whether our nation would be divided into north and south, we are one nation today. The bad feelings lasted many years, some say exist even now. But the question of whether all people regardless of color would be free was answered. And for that I am extremely proud of Vermont's role in this conflict."

May the coming week be very good for you and your family.

Stay in touch,

Bill

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