



February 24, 2023

Your State House

Concord, New Hampshire



To my constituents in Allenstown, Dunbarton, Epsom, & Hooksett,

This week, we met in session for two days. First, we approved the committee recommendations on 40 non-controversial bills, then special ordered HB 20, naming a bridge in Merrimack for Speaker Hinch. After a laudatory speech, the bill passed 356-4.

HB 459, exempting some businesses from the consumer protection act, was killed without comment. HB 531, requiring the tobacco tax be set based on the rates in neighboring states, was briefly debated and killed on a voice vote. HB 639, legalizing cannabis and having the Liquor Commission sell and regulate it, was debated at length and passed, 234-127. This wasn't my preferred regulatory scheme, but it's better than nothing. HB 504, on the adult parole board, passed without comment.

HB 272, increasing per pupil funding for charter schools, passed 348-11 when a notorious "standard public school only" Democrat urged us to vote in favor (many Republicans, including me, are strong supporters of charter schools and want them to succeed; fewer Democrats support charters.) HB 492, requiring the department of education provide the education committee with copies of their laws and rules, passed without comment, as did HB 529, adjusting the education formula for special education students.

HB 250, doubling the accidental death benefit for Group II (police, fire, corrections) members, was very briefly debated and passed, 260-103. HB 436, deleting the pension transition steps for Group II that were imposed on non-vested employees in 2011, was debated and passed, 282-80. This is a

massive benefit increase for the 1731 people in that group who are still working, worth over \$100,000 per person (exact calculations are still in progress.) I voted (and spoke) for it, since this is the formula we worked out to encourage recruitment and retention (the changes are phased in over ten years, so we're hoping many will stay until they get the better benefit.) If I could have come up with a cheaper plan, I would have. HB 571, a cost of living increase for some Group II (only) retirees, was debated and passed, 192-167. I spoke against it, since it seems divisive to me – all other cost of living increases have been for both Group I and Group II. All three bills went on to Finance, to figure out how to pay for them. At least none will be downshifted to property taxpayers – all are paid by the state.

HB 282, expanding Medicaid to cover children and pregnant women who are lawful immigrants, was debated and passed, 186-170. HB 565, expanding Medicaid for a year after giving birth, was debated and passed, 184-179. I was opposed to both as Medicaid is such a poor medical plan, for the recipients *and* the taxpayers. HB 574, establishing a tiny (\$30/year) improvement in the WIC program that has over \$300,000 in administrative costs, was amended, 283-80, debated, failed to pass 180-184, not tabled, 181-183, then killed, 185-179. Whew!

HB 614, directing a study on how to study whether PFAS in Merrimack causes kidney cancer, was passed without debate. I think half a million to study a study is excessive, and I hope some in Finance will agree.

HB 57, instituting a state minimum wage and increasing it to \$15/hr, was debated and failed to pass, 178-183, not table, 180-183, then killed on a voice vote. The opponents seemed to think that actual wages would be set by this legislation, when



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anyone looking at help wanted signs knows unskilled, part time jobs are going for \$15-17/hr! HB 74, requiring unused vacation or other paid time off be included in final wages, was debated and passed, 187-174.

HB 489, establishing a **county** tourism fund, was debated and killed as unnecessary, 190-171. HB 212, adding \$2 million to the PFAS fund, passed without comment. HB 276, establishing the cyanobacteria mitigation fund, passed, 199-160, also without comment. HB 534, providing assistance for private wells in the case of a natural disaster, was debated and passed, 179-177. I was opposed because the bill is vague and grants the environmental services commissioner very broad authority to define the program in rules rather than law – and they consider drought a natural disaster!

HB 108, criminalizing making false statements of child abuse, was debated and passed, 214-143. I was opposed – the whole abuse process seems to be missing due process protections. HB 124, temporary alimony guidelines, passed 179-178. HB 151, creating a study committee on various forms of non-married cohabitation, was passed 199-155. I was opposed since that's a study committee I would hate to serve on!

HB 97, adding penalties for crimes that involve an invasion of privacy, passed without comment. HB 160, forbidding towns to have ordinances banning public displays of chest, was debated before being killed, 223-129 – I voted in favor of the bill, but without real enthusiasm. HB 191, requiring the state police to set up a gun take back program that would destroy the weapons, was debated and killed, 237-121. HB 201, decreasing the penalties for driving without a license, was debated and passed, 190-165. HB 581, repealing the state controlled drug act, was debated and killed, 286-

70. I was among the anti-prohibitionists! HB 643, another marijuana legalization bill, was killed without comment.

HB 45, a study committee on student loan forgiveness, was killed without comment, 312-43. HB 131, requiring schools to publish their recording and observer policies, was killed without debate. HB 540, adjusting the funding formula for special education students, passed without debate.

HB 601, having the state enter the Medicaid direct certification program for free and reduced price school meals, had an extensive debate. This bill would have the state share with the schools information on the Medicaid rolls, so no application would be required and all eligible children would be enrolled in the (federal) free and reduced price program. The concerns are that not every family completes the application, for one reason or another; many high school students, in particular, don't really like the program; and not every school is in the federal program. Still, a floor amendment to limit data sharing passed, 176-174, the bill was not tabled, 161-195, and after more debate the bill passed, 205-151. I supported the amendment but not the bill.

HB 196, a commission to review campaign finance laws, was tabled, 339-7. HB 252, exempting agricultural operations from municipal noise ordinances, was debated on including "agritourism" in the exemption – some people apparently didn't want to listen to wedding music! An amendment to delete agritourism failed, 164-176, and after more debate the bill passed, 266-84.

HB 35, requiring middle and high school ID cards have the eating disorders hotline number on them, was special ordered to first thing Thursday so that the high school student who came up with the idea



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(and his parents) could be present. It was debated, with the supporters talking about the issues with eating disorders, and that adolescents don't think of an eating disorder as a mental illness; opponents were concerned that a list of special purpose numbers would diminish the usefulness of the system, and that the eating disorders hotline was only available for limited periods. It passed, 238-105; I was opposed. Of course, when I was in high school the eating disorders were concentrated among the wrestling team....

The committee amendment to HB 180, renaming Columbus Day, satisfied nobody: my committee decided to change it to Italian Heritage Day, which was unacceptable to opponents *and* supporters of Columbus. So I moved to table it before we started the (probably lengthy) debate, which was adopted on a voice vote. HB 338, using an inactive program to mandate subsidies for insulin, was killed, 283-61, without debate.

CACR 6, raising the mandatory retirement age for judges from 70 to 75, was explained by the sponsor, Representative Bob Lynn, who had been forced to retire from the bench and then decided to run for the House. Seventy isn't as old as it was in 1784, when this limitation was created. The amendment passed, 321-27. HB 63, exempting religious organizations from all land use restrictions, was killed, 189-158. It's a nice idea in principle, but even a church needs to keep its well away from the septic system, and the driveway needs sight lines!

HB 240, requiring interracial marriages to be accepted, passed 218-132. I was opposed because it's not necessary; New Hampshire has accepted interracial marriages since it was founded. HB 254, allowing remote or hybrid meetings for local boards, was killed without debate. HB 256,

prohibiting municipalities from discriminating in the use of public facilities, is Dan's bill to prevent the town from not renting a park to the local Republican group even while a craft fair was going on in another part of the park. No problem in discriminating on *usage*, but this was a group that wanted to sit on the picnic benches and talk politics! The committee had decided he should have sued the town instead of putting in a bill, and it was killed without comment.

HB 308, allowing hybrid meetings for *state* boards and commissions, was debated and passed, 222-127. I was opposed; hybrid meetings are fine for a lecture, or a very small group, but once you reach a certain size, the interactions between members are stifled, and public comments are difficult to properly consider. I chaired hybrid committee meetings in 2021, and it was *very* inefficient, with half the committee present and half on video, and the public entirely on video. OK to listen to the testimony, but questions were a problem, and the debate necessary to decide on a position was horrid.

HB 44, allowing four units in every single family zoned district that had public water and sewer, was debated at some length. Supporters wanted to increase the number of houses (and apartments) in the state; opponents talked local control. I supported this idea last session, when the supporters were talking about triple deckers downtown and splitting some of the giant Victorian houses into multiple flats – both seem appropriate for downtown areas. So I voted for it, but it lost, 117-232. After that, the concerns about building four townhouses on tiny plots of land – and the fact that towns can allow this density, as Allentown and Pittsfield do – convinced me to vote to kill it, 209-141. HB 123, making school board and selectboard members of the local budget



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committee non-voting, was debated, not passed, 168-176, then tabled on a voice vote. I supported the bill because, from my time on Epsom's budget committee, the school board member was always an advocate for the school budget rather than a working member of the committee.

HB 226, allowing municipalities to regulate single-use plastics, was killed, 257-90, without debate. HB 312, raising the number of voters (to 10%) required to petition for a special meeting, was tabled before debate, 316-30. HB 357, extending the terms of some county officials in Belknap County, was tabled, 177-162. I was opposed because it was a special bill for only one county: if their county attorney needs a four year term, why not those in every other county?

HB 403, restricting the authority of selectmen to abate taxes from "for good cause" to only "administrative or clerical errors," was killed, 200-144, without debate. I voted for the bill because it's an anti-corruption position, limiting arbitrary tax abatements for friends or family. (I don't know that it actually happens, but "good cause" is certainly easier to finagle than a clerical error!)

HB 310, requiring a hydrology analysis when building a subdivision, was killed without comment. Apparently this expensive requirement couldn't be relied on for very long, as water flows pretty freely...

HCR 1, requesting a federal constitutional convention under Article V, had a very long debate, with opponents being concerned about "runaway conventions" and supporters convinced that a convention was the only way to restrain Congress. Dan spoke in favor, about the achievements of some New Hampshire constitutional conventions, and actually got a round of applause! He convinced

me; I am normally not very concerned about Washington – Concord is all I can manage. Also, I'm typically opposed to resolutions as they don't really accomplish much. HCR 1 failed to pass, 156-192, was not tabled, 163-184, and finally killed, 198-150.

HR 8, urging Congress to ban assault weapons, had another lengthy debate before being killed, 181-162. This was largely partisan: nine Democrats, including Alan Turcotte from Allenstown, joined all Republicans in opposition. HR 9, urging an "American Marshall Plan" was killed, 176-169, without debate. HR 10, supporting statehood for the District of Columbia, was debated before being killed, 179-168. HR 15, affirming opposition to establishing a state religion, was killed on a voice vote.

At this point, (2:15 Thursday) the Democrats realized that they had the numbers and moved to take off the table HB 430, requiring EFA students serve at least one year in public schools before they were eligible for this program. This passed, 177-169, and after a series of reconsideration motions (and a failed motion to indefinitely postpone the bill) HB 430 passed, 176-169. HB 234, which repeals the law that allows utilities to "sweep" unassigned renewable energy certificates, was likewise removed from the table, reconsidered, and passed, 178-169. Both of these bills have been Democrat priorities; the "sweep" repeal has been considered multiple times, and limiting the use of EFAs has been an goal ever since we created them two years ago. With the tiny margin we have in the House, I'm afraid more Democrat priorities will pass, and we can only hope the Senate and the Governor will stand firm.

Finally, HB 111, a study committee on electric vehicle charging for renters, was not killed, 172-



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174, then passed, 175-172. HB 498, requiring conservation officers to get a warrant for search and seizure, was debated and killed, 233-113. I supported this bill, as I have several times in the past: fish and game officers should not be able to violate our constitutional rights!

HB 598, creating a dedicated fund for maternal mortality reviews (and using marriage license fees to fill the fund!) was tabled without discussion. Marriage license fees shouldn't be used to fund unrelated priorities or it becomes a tax; right now nearly all the fee is used to fund programs to aid victims of domestic violence, even though unmarried people are most of them.

HB 7, calling for the Federal government to preserve Medicare and Social Security, passed 333-12. HR 16, posing questions to the Internal Revenue Service, was briefly debated before being killed, 283-60.



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