



January 6, 2023

Your State House Concord, New Hampshire



To my constituents in [Allenstown](#), Dunbarton, [Epsom](#), Hooksett, & [Pittsfield](#):

Happy New Year!

I've been appointed chair of the Executive Departments and Administration (ED&A) committee. We deal with the state pension system, professional licensing, administrative rules, the state building code, and the organization of the state government - so it's a busy committee. Almost none of our bills make headlines, though!

Since the House is so closely divided between parties, my committee (and most others) is evenly split. I'm planning to have two of the subcommittees (those on government organization and rulemaking) with Democrat chairs and majorities; the Republican majority subcommittees are the ones on licensing and pensions.

I was also elected chair of JLCAR, the joint legislative committee on administrative rules. This committee confirms that agency rules (which have the force of law) comply with the actual laws and are in the public interest. Fortunately, there's a staff of attorneys who do most of the detail work.

On January 4, the House met, as constitutionally required, to confirm the elections of the Governor and Council (spoiler alert, Chris Sununu was elected!) We also introduced the first batch of new bills. ED&A has 21 so far; I scheduled nine easy ones for next week and asked to have two redirected to more appropriate committees.

More importantly, we adopted revisions to House Rules. New deadlines, supermajority requirements to special order a bill to a different time, and language cleanup all passed without comment.

Then came some changes not already approved by the Rules committee: allowing proxy voting was debated and failed, 171-204. Allowing remote or hybrid committee meetings was also debated and failed, 180-195; I was strongly opposed to both of these because of the possibility of abuse, and because my experience with hybrid meetings in 2021 was so horrible.

Another rule change, changing the procedure for bills that tied in committee from an automatic "ought to pass" motion to the recommendation of the committee chair, had a tabling motion brought out immediately. This failed on a 188-188 tie, so we debated the original rule. I supported it, since as a committee chair, I usually have a good idea of how a bill will fare in the House even if the committee is divided. The opposition was based on the idea that the chair would automatically move the Republican position; I don't believe that because first, not all tie votes are purely partisan; and secondly, taking up and debating a failing position before going to the likely motion wastes time and energy. Also, more bills are killed than passed, so "inexpedient to legislate" (kill) would make more sense as the default motion. Nonetheless, the rule change died, 184-191.

Adding a ban on deadly weapons in the chamber was debated and failed, 177-197. The news media made a big deal about this, but in fact concealed weapons have been allowed for years, only being banned when there is a Democrat majority (after the elections of 06, 08, 12, and 18.) A change to requiring 10 members, rather than one, to remove a bill from the consent calendar was debated and passed, 206-167. This was a non-partisan debate for a change! A motion to replace "prayer" with "invocation" failed 183-190, after a short, dull debate.



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Then we debated changes to unanimous consent. This is a period at the end of the session where any member can sign up to speak on *any* topic. Memorials to deceased members used to be included, but last term we moved them up to the beginning of the day. History lessons are popular topics. The basic idea is that if someone does not consent to the speech, he can object and a vote of the House determines if the speaker can continue. Majority vote approves continuance. So, first we had a change to a 60% vote to continue, which passed on a voice vote; another change to allow a second objection be raised was explained and passed, 200-173.

Committee procedure was the topic of the next two rule changes proposed. First, a *requirement* for alternating pro and con speakers in testimony was debated and failed, 114-256. This is usually the case, but the actual order of testimony is up to the chair's discretion. (for example, if there are a lot more "pro" speakers than "con" alternating should be 2 or 3 pro, then a con.) The other change was to codify good practice, which is that a committee member who testifies for or against a bill cannot go back behind the table and ask questions during the hearing. After a brief explanation, this passed 200-169.

At the end of the session, a member got up for unanimous consent to speak about the events of January 6 in Washington. I know this person, so I quietly went out to the anteroom, withdrawing my consent, when someone objected and they called for a vote. I returned and started to vote to let him continue (I believe in free speech, even if I don't want to listen to it) until Matt Santonastaso pointed out that he believed in free speech, too, but on the speaker's own time... The vote to stop the speech was decisive.



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