

## Joe Kenney Sworn In as Executive Councilor

“Filling the shoes” of Ray Burton

**Press release**

At the Governor and Executive Council meeting held at the State House on March 26, Governor Margaret Hassan administered the oath of office to Joseph D. Kenney, District One’s new Executive Councilor.

“I’m filling the shoes of a legend named Ray Burton, someone who is irreplaceable for the state of New Hampshire. I want to carry forth the legacy and good work that Ray Burton did in District One,” Kenney said.

Following the brief swearing-in ceremony, Councilor Kenney joined the other four members of the Executive

Council as they conducted their regularly scheduled meeting.

Councilor Kenney will be holding public meetings as well as meetings with constituents that will be e-mailed through the Executive Council office. If you would like to be included on the list, please send your e-mail to GCweb@nh.gov. Councilor Kenney’s schedules will be posted at NH.gov/council under District One.

Here is contact information for Councilor Joseph D. Kenney:

Home Office: PO Box 201, Union NH 03887, 473-2569, cell 581-8780

State House Office: 107 North Main Street, State House Room 207, Concord NH 03301, 271-3632, Joseph.Kenney@nh.gov.



## Mario Ratzki Reports from Concord: May 2014

House passes Senate bill to hike gas tax immediately

**By Mario Ratzki, NH Representative**

This past week was an eventful one at the capitol in Concord.

Looking back a year and a half, we predicted that the so-called balanced budget left us by the preceding legislature was based on faulty calculations. Unfortunately, this came to pass when a New Hampshire court decision invalidated the Medicaid Enhancement Tax levies from hospitals, to the tune of at least \$140 million.

In the past, the hospitals paid this tax in order for the state to get matching dollars from the federal government, after which the state would reimburse the hospitals. When the state failed to do so in fiscal 2012/2013, the hospitals sued and won.

If the court decision holds (and there is a good chance it will), this leaves a big hole in our state budget, just when things were looking up. It is possible the hospitals will settle for less and that revenues are coming in stronger, with a possible year-end surplus of \$60 million, which would offset our liability. Our work is not done.

The other momentous news was the passage of SB367, the road toll increase of 4.2 cents on a gallon of gas. This bill passed the House without amendments by a vote of 193 to 141 and will be signed by the governor. It will take effect on July 1.

All Democrats and Republicans (save two) on my Public Works and Highways Committee voted for the bill, brought to us by Senator Rausch. This will be the first increase in the road toll since 1991. No one questioned the necessity of taking care of our roads and bridges and completing the widening of I-93, the tourist and business artery of our state.

This increase, in conjunction with

the 10-year highway plan, would take care of I-93; the replacement of the Sarah Long Bridge in Portsmouth (50% from Maine, 50% from New Hampshire); and a substantial increase in state highways and bridges reconstruction. More importantly for New Hampshire towns, it will give them an additional \$67 million in the next two years for bridge aid, resurfacing, and rehabilitation of roads.

Block grants will also increase for our district’s three towns, and I was able to be sure the DOT knew of the sorry state of Highway 127 in Salisbury, parts of Highway 11 in Andover, and US 4 in Danbury, all of which should see DOT activity in the upcoming months.

**Going After Massachusetts**

When I began my stint as Representative in 2013, I introduced HB581, which instructed the Attorney General to go after Massachusetts for unpaid flood control monies to our 18 New Hampshire towns. This has resulted in a recent settlement with Massachusetts of \$1.12 million, about a quarter of what the commonwealth owed us. While the amount is disappointing, I will not second-guess the New Hampshire Attorney General and will take what we can get.

However, the Finance 1 committee in the House has decided that this payment, which is specifically earmarked for flood control mitigation payments to New Hampshire towns, should instead be integrated in the state general fund. The committee members (none of whom seemed to have read our Flood Control Compacts of the 1950s) seem to have forgotten that no payments were made to our towns in fiscal 2012/2013.

Salisbury is one of these towns and in the last two years has had to adjust its budget to make up for this lack of payment. SB370, which I co-signed, would have made the towns good for these two years, but Finance 1 decided that the bill was Inexpedient to Legislate. I have gotten in touch with the committee chair, selectmen, and representatives from the affected towns and will try my hardest to reverse that decision when the full Finance committee meets, or if that fails, at the Well in the House of Representatives.

Finally, a quick reminder that the Blazing Star Grange in Danbury (which has merged with Andover’s Blackwater Grange) is holding fundraisers for the restoration of its historic Grange Hall stage curtains. The next one will be on Saturday, May 10, at the Blazing Star Grange Hall in Danbury and will feature a vaudeville show at 7 PM. Plan to attend for a good cause.

Also, the South Danbury Church is holding a Friday Evening Speaker series, with a talk on wooden bridges on Friday, May 9, at 6:30 PM.

I am always available at MarioRatzki@gmail.com or 735-5440.



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