

Notes from Concord, March 2017

Mary Anne Broshek State Representative

Given that this is Town meeting month and a major concern of residents is increasing property taxes, we are focusing on the ways that the State Legislature can bring back past funding to reduce property taxes and 2017 State legislation that will reduce or increase property taxes. Also included is how area legislators voted on those proposed bills. Note: ITL means Inexpedient to Legislate and OTP means Ought to Pass.

How the State Can Help

The information in this section is taken from a March 5, 2017 letter written by the town and city Board members of the New Hampshire Municipal Association and sent to all New Hampshire Legislators.

“Since 2008 there has been a significant reduction in virtually every municipal state aid program, reductions of such magnitude that they could never be offset by local spending reductions.”

Share the meals and rooms tax revenues with municipalities at the statutorily required rate of 40%, a percentage set forth when the meals and rooms tax was enacted 50 years ago, in 1967. The 40% was never reached and a catch-up formula was enacted in 1993. That worked well until the catch-up formula was suspended and has resulted in a loss to municipalities of approximately \$58 million from 2010 to 2017.

Restore revenue sharing. In 2010, revenue sharing was suspended; it has remained suspended ever since, a cumulative loss of \$200 million to date.

Restore the state’s 35% contribution toward the retirement costs of police officers, firefighters, and teachers, all of whom must participate in the NHRS. If the state had continued its 35% contribution, municipalities, school districts, and counties would have paid approximately \$80 million less in pension costs in 2016 alone. (See HB 413 below)

Fully fund the state aid grant (SAG) program for municipal water and waste water treatment facility updates, which was suspended in 2008 and remains underfunded. Most disturbing at this point is that there is no funding avail-

able for any projects approved locally after December of 2008. As of the end of 2016, there are 50 local wastewater projects that would qualify for \$90 million in state aid over the next 10 years if the moratorium were lifted.

Double the funding for municipal red-listed bridges. Bridge aid was supposed to double when the state increased the gas tax in 2014, with a goal to reduce the unreasonable 10-year wait list for state bridge aid. Bridge aid did double in 2015, but the doubling provision was eliminated just one year later. There were 338 municipal red-listed bridges as of June 2016, affecting commerce, citizens, and the state’s economy.

Maintain highway block grant funding. Here, finally, is a program that is working as promised! Municipalities receive 12% of the gas tax revenue and state motor vehicle fees. With the 2014 increase in the gas tax, which NHMA supported, an additional \$4 million has been returned annually to cities and towns for the maintenance and improvement of local roads.”

School Building Aid Not included in the letter was the elimination of school building aid which was 37 million per year and had been suspended in 2015 to pay only those projects that had been approved before the suspension. (See SB 192 below).

What has been disturbing in the past two legislative sessions has been the push to decrease or refuse to raise State taxes, and the subsequent additional burdens downshifted to towns and cities. Listed below are some of the bills that reduce revenue and some that would restore funding to towns and cities.

Legislation with Significant Impact

In 2015 The legislature voted to lower the Business Profits Tax (BPT) and the Business Enterprise Tax (BET). This was initially vetoed by Gov. Hassan and was later enacted into law with the addition of a rule that would revoke the decrease if specific revenue targets were

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House of Representatives Vote on Bills

Results of some actions

Natalie Wells & David Kerrick

The House of Representatives voted on over 200 bills, some of which were for housekeeping measures, clarifying issues, and bills of high importance to our state.

Education HB 345: Relative to State Board of Education rulemaking authority over home education programs. This bill wanted to remove home education rulemaking authority from the State Board of Education. HB 647 was to provide education choice for parents with special needs children. State funds that would be provided to the school district for their child would instead be placed into accounts for the parents to purchase allowable education expenses. Some constituents have emailed me that this was referring to only “private school education” and that it would only favor wealthier families. This is not the case at all. The bottom line for both these 2 bills is we need to encourage education freedom to allow all parents to choose the best public, private, charter, or home school programs for their children.

Election Law HB 116: relative to assessing the consequences of the Citizens United vs. Supreme Court decision. It called upon the New Hampshire congressional delegation to sponsor an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to overturn Supreme Court’s Citizens United decision. Both of our distinguished U.S. Senators have already formally co-sponsored a bill in the U.S. Senate calling for such a constitutional amendment, and similarly one of our distinguished U.S. Representatives has co-sponsored a companion bill in the U.S. House. This proposed bill by our state is completely unnecessary, wasteful of our limited resources, and duplicative, which is in essence the definition of “Inexpedient to Legislate”.

HB 447: Relative to allocating Electoral College electors based on the national popular vote. It was felt that this bill would dilute New Hampshire’s voice in the selection of our presidential election by creating an interstate compact and allocating New Hampshire’s votes. It supports the original intent of the Electoral College, which is to ensure that small states like New Hampshire have the ability to fully participate in national elections and are not cancelled out by large states such as Texas or California. It also encourages higher voter participation, and keeps New Hampshire’s status of First in the Nation.

I want to address a few remarks made by former Representative Mario Ratzki relating to HB 238 and HB 191-L. He stated in the Salisbury Grapevine Newspaper that Representatives Anne Copp and I voted to kill HB238. He also went on to say we “would rather vote with big business and against their own districts’ interest.” Anne Copp and I have been actively engaged in sitting in on the Danbury Broadband Committee, which seeks to have service in many rural areas of their town that do not have broadband accessibility. I couldn’t agree more regarding the need of good internet access for our communities. I fully understand the need for home businesses, home schooling, selling one’s home, etc. However, allowing municipalities to have their hand in controlling broadband has been proven to be devastating around the whole country. The Madbury Bridge/Bartlett Cleland of Frisco, Texas researched this issue and found that in all cases taxpayer money was put at risk often without approval of taxpayers. One instance, in Bristol, Virginia, the citizens were left holding the bag of \$124 million. Kansas City, Missouri politicians decided to invest \$10.5 million with only a few hundred people signed up. Expenses quickly took over; the town had to sell

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