

Wells and Karrick Report from the State House

Ken Wells and David Karrick State Representatives

New Hampshire's democracy is one of the oldest and purest in the United States, and it is fascinating to see all the ways people of New Hampshire can participate in the process. Most folks recognize that by voting in every election, they have played an important role in our democracy. But your right as a citizen to have a voice in our state government does not necessarily end with casting your ballot. Many people participate in their local town government by attending Town Meeting. But you have more power on the state level than you might realize! As your state representatives, David Karrick and Ken Wells, want you to know about ways to make your voice heard in Concord, and we stand ready to help you.

The easiest way to be heard is to simply talk to your Representatives, Ken Wells and David Karrick. You can call Ken at 735-5756 or David at 456-2772

(If they can't pick up when you call, leave your name, number, and some info about your issue so they can do a little research and call you back.), or send an email to kenwells3@gmail.com, or david at electdavidkarrick@gmail.com.

If you are eager to unlock your full power as a citizen in our democracy, it is helpful to understand how New Hampshire's representative government functions, and where you can get involved. It is not a hasty process, but extremely thoughtful and deliberate. Here is an overview.

Your direct line into state government is the NH House of Representatives, also known as "The General Court". The House legislative process is driven by the calendar, with specific actions happening in a certain order throughout the year. From November to mid-December of 2018, legislators drafted new bills and began seeking other legislators to sign-on in support of those bills. Each bill is then assigned

to one of twenty-four standing committees that specializes in a broad topic, such as "Fish & Game" or "Judiciary". The committee then schedules a public hearing and invites stakeholders to speak, providing "testimony" or information about their points of view. You can view every bill and its legal wording at gencourt.state.nh.us, or you can call Ken who has a hard copy of every bill and would be delighted to sit down with you at East Andover's Bachelor Library to examine a bill.

With nearly one thousand proposals for legislation, and less than ninety days to consider all points of view on each one, how does the legislature get it done? January and February are a busy time for the standing committees, listening to stakeholders who may be citizens, business owners or lobbyists, all making their pitches at public hearings. It is the job of the Representatives on the committee to read the bill and listen to all the testimony. A few days later the committee meets again to discuss the bill, altering it if necessary to achieve the greatest good for all parties. As you can imagine, there are often wildly different points of view about what "greatest good" means! However, the hearings and discussions are remarkably civil, even formally polite, so every person has an equal chance to express their point of view. The committee finally votes on the bill in its final wording, sending a recommendation to the full House to vote to pass or to reject the bill. In some cases, the committee may retain the bill because it needs more work over the summer, and bring the bill back in a year.

Bills that have been released from the standing committees are then voted on by all 400 members of the House. Some need to be sent to a second committee, like "Finance" or "Ways and Means" for another hearing to weigh the cost and feasibility of the bill. Bills must be finished by mid-March, when

they "cross over" to be approved or rejected by the NH Senate. The Senate, in turn, delivers all the Senate bills to the House for scrutiny. Bills that are passed by both House and Senate arrive at the Governor's desk to be signed into law, or to be vetoed. The legislature has an opportunity in September to override the Governor's veto if more than a two-thirds majority votes for the bill.

If you have an important viewpoint about a particular proposed piece of legislation, you can attend a public hearing, listen to the testimony and add your signature to support the bill. If you wish, you can make your own presentation to the committee. Contact Ken Wells or David Karrick to find out how, and for guidance on how to best present your case. The following is an example of how that might work:

All bills presented to the New Hampshire Legislature are drafted in legal language by state lawyers and assigned a bill number. For example, the 281st bill to be received is called HB281. This particular bill is of interest to the Town of Andover, because it relates to the Town's efforts to prevent beavers from plugging culverts and washing out town roads. Andover selectboard member Vicki Mischon realized that current state laws required the Town to get state approval before beaver-excluding devices would be allowed to be built in wetlands, and that the weeks-long permitting delay was more than enough time for the beavers to undo road repairs repeatedly. This is a foolish waste of money and effort, so the law needed to be changed. A previous attempt to fix the law died in 2018 without being passed. Vicki called Representative Ken Wells and explained the problem in detail. Ken found a new bill related to beaver dams, HB281, spoke to the legislator sponsoring the bill and signed on to the bill as one of its co-sponsors. Now as a co-sponsor, Ken contacted the chair of the Fish & Game standing committee. He sketched out several additions and changes to the bill that would address the culvert problem and asked the Committee Chair to invite Vicki and wildlife biologist Skip Lisle to testify at the public hearing. After waiting patiently to testify at the hearing, Vicki and Skip clearly and quickly made their case. A few days later, the Fish & Game committee met in executive session and adopted all four amendments that Vicki and Skip asked for. The bill was passed by the House and should have no trouble getting Senate approval and the Governor's signature into law.

Ken says, "I'm honored to have been selected to serve on the Science, Technology and Energy standing committee. This committee hears all bills related to electricity generation, long distance power transmission, local electric utilities, broadband, telephone sys-

See Concord on page 29



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