

OPINIONS

Ken Wells Reports from Concord

Representative Ken Wells

During the last few weeks, the House has voted on hundreds of bills. There are several dozen bills still to go before the deadlines looming late in March. Some bills were passed or shot down on quick voice votes, and others had hours of speeches and debate. Here are a few highlights, and I apologize that there isn't time or space to summarize all the important work being done.

The House passed a bill to help fund education and provide some relief from

local property taxes. In this bill, money is raised for education by extending the current 5% tax on interest and dividends, to capital gains on the sale of stocks and securities. This would affect some very wealthy individuals who make more than \$25,000 in capital gains alone, and would generate tens of millions of dollars.

A bill that failed was an attempt to abolish the State-Wide Education Property Tax (SWEPT). While this bill, HB676, aimed to reduce local property

taxes, the bill did not have a way to prevent the \$363 million loss of school revenue caused by abolishing SWEPT from falling right back onto the towns. Work to lower property taxes while properly funding adequate public education is continuing; I've attended working sessions as the Education Committee's bills are vetted by Finance and I hope there will be good news to report next month.

The House protected our local environment and jobs by blocking HB157, another attempt to kill the biomass energy industry in New Hampshire. As you recall, last fall the legislature overrode the Governor's veto of SB356. In overriding the veto, they restored the market for wood chips produced by our local forest industry. Opponents of wood chip-fired biomass power plants tried again this session to kill it, by essentially halving the price paid for biomass - so low it would be uncompetitive with natural gas. At such a low price, it would be unprofitable to chip and transport the wood waste out of the forest. It's important to consider that natural gas, while cheap, is not a New Hampshire product, so purchasing it sends money out of our state. In contrast, wood chip biomass is a local

product, and purchasing it puts dollars in New Hampshire forest workers' pockets and helps maintain the health of our timberlands by removing the slash that would otherwise increase fire danger if it remained in the forest.

The House passed HB166 to continue the Public Utility Commission's role in negotiating fair electric rates with the utilities and in funding energy efficiency programs. Many Andover area residents will recognize NHSaves and Weatherize Kearsarge as energy efficiency programs supported by this legislation. (There are often Beacon articles about these programs, if you want to find out how they can help you too, to save energy and money!)

The House ensured all people would be protected from discrimination by passing HB446 which makes it easier to change gender markers on birth certificates.

The House voted to enact HB186 for a minimum wage in New Hampshire. This will help families afford a good place to live, put food on their table and purchase goods and services. Families having more money to spend will help stimulate our economy as well. Wages will

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signed Fund Balance.

Warrant articles to add \$243,500 to several previously established Capital Reserve Funds and to add \$31,000 to several previously established Expendable Trust Funds were approved. These expenses will be partially offset by \$2,954 from the Unassigned Fund Balance.

The Warrant Article to raise and appropriate \$224,257 for Elbow Pond Road culvert repairs was amended to \$244,257 to correct a typographical error, and then approved. This will be funded by \$61,064 from the Bridge

Rehabilitation Capital Reserve Fund, and \$183,193 from the Unassigned Fund Balance.

The total appropriations voted were \$2,443,547. Offsetting revenues reduces this amount to a net appropriation of \$2,135,236. This is up from the 2018 net appropriation by \$11,133 (0.5%).

Andover Fire District Meeting

The Andover Fire District voted to raise and appropriate \$168,647 as recommended by the Commissioners and the Budget Committee. Offsetting revenues reduce the net appropriation to \$137,440.



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Gross, Jim Danforth, Duncan Coolidge, Jim Delaney, Dave Blinn and Chuck Keyser. All of these people decided to give up hours and hours of their time for an opportunity to serve the people of Andover or to give back to the town in thanks for the many wonderful things this community offers.

The best part about serving on any board, is getting to know the people you work with. That includes other board and committee members, specialists from the State Offices, bridge engineers, all the people who work on the town roads, the staff at the transfer station, people who market our recyclables, local town officials from neighboring towns. It's impressive when you realize how many people volunteer their time for their communities.

One of my favorite things that I did as a selectwoman was to perambulate the Andover/Wilmot town boundary last November with Wilmot selectman Nick Brodich and Planning Board member Paul Currier. The nine hour hike was guided by local forester Tim Wallace, and took us from the shoulder of Mt. Kearsarge to the side of Ragged Mountain above the Fish and Game Club. I learned a new word that day - "grapple", a tiny round snow pellet that

looks like tapioca, and it showered on us throughout the afternoon.

I could never list all the important changes that have come about over the past ten years. Some of these had only minimal involvement with the Select Board, and others are a result of years of work. I'll list a few that have had a great impact on our town: the combining of the East Andover and Andover Fire Precincts; beginning the process of building a Highway Department; bringing the Town Office into the 21st century with up to date computer technology and staffing; creating a Transfer Station that is flexible and able to deal with a constantly changing recycling market and providing a clean and safe office there for staff and residents; welcoming a new Chief of Police and budgeting for a second full-time officer; joining with the City of Franklin to provide improved Emergency Medical Services, and improving the energy efficiency of the Town Office/Library Building.

Thank you to all who gave me the opportunity to serve on the Select Board for so many years. And don't forget to say "thank you" every now and then to all the folks who keep this community going. If you don't know who they are, take a look at the full page of volunteers at the beginning of the town report!



Wilmot House



Once a boarding house, Wilmot House is a property rich with history! Purchased over a year ago by the current owners, the antique home has been updated and restored to its former glory. Exposed wide pine floors, beams and details. Updated fixtures, appliances and wiring. Original antique features with a fresh look and feel. Large open kitchen with dining area, gorgeous formal living room leads to a first floor den or office, 2nd floor has three bedrooms and 1.5 bathrooms. Here the sounds of babbling Kimpton brook on the opposite side of Route 4A. So much charm and ready to move in!

Wilmot - \$219,000



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