

Report from Concord

Representative Ken Wells

Things have continued to be very busy in the State House, and I've been in the thick of things.

Starting on a personal note, I will admit it was a thrill (and a bit scary!) to make my first speech before 400 Representatives, media and gallery guests "from the well", as the pulpits on the House floor are called. I was happy that the the bill (HB358) I spoke for passed, stopping the yearly release of up to 500 pounds of lead up smokestacks. The bill repealed existing law which allowed burning construction debris such as painted wood (some from out-of-state) by big municipal incinerators like the one in Penacook. The lead would settle over the homes, schoolyards and agricultural lands of all the nearby towns. I'm astounded how many legislators voted to allow this pollution to happen! There is no cure for the damage caused by lead poisoning. You just have to ask, "Whose interests are they representing?" Certainly not the people of our towns!

I believe the new budget passed by the House improves the Governor's budget in several areas:

- Funding for education, including fully funding the state's obligation to support SPED and special-needs students. Up to this point the disproportionate cost of providing this much-needed support has fallen to the towns, not the state. This has driven up property taxes and put particular hardships on our locally-funded schools, who have been without adequate state support.
- Local property tax relief is my strong priority, and we have built strong bipartisan support for further progress with Representatives in rural towns across NH, including local Representatives Karrick, Ebel, Schamberg and Carson in the Andover Beacon's circulation area.
- Supporting mental health, heading off the opioid crisis, and supporting women and children's services.
- Raising \$150 million of new money annually by extending the existing Interest & Dividends 5% tax, to include capital gains made (for example) in the stock market. This tax will not affect most low and middle income people, but will impose a tax on folks who can well afford it. The 5% rate is still lower than in neighboring states, so it will not force the wealthy out of NH. The exemptions for retirees are raised from \$2500 to about \$7000, so only those who make more than \$7000 annual profits on sale of stocks will actually pay this tax. The intent of this new revenue is to provide local property tax relief, restore revenue sharing among the towns,

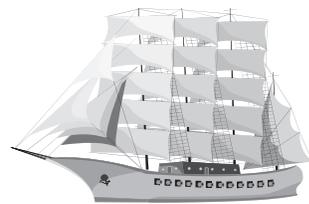
and continue stabilization grants to our schools. What this means to Andover, Danbury and Salisbury citizens is that the state will be able to pay more than \$3600 per pupil in our schools, thus reducing the town's dependence on raising property taxes to cover school costs.

I've been working on improving broadband access, especially in northern Danbury where cell and internet connectivity is spotty, if not non-existent. I'm calling out the communications companies whose representatives claim their service is great "in 98%" of NH towns, and 95% everywhere else". Among several options, I'm investigating USDA grants that could help bring access to 21st century technology to our rural areas, and encourage young people to work and live in our towns.

Right now, my committee is working on Science, Technology and Energy bills submitted to us by the Senate. Many of these bills look for ways to

- lower citizens' and business' electricity costs through programs for energy efficiency
- head off our rapidly increasing electric transmission costs
- protect our environment, which our forestry and our tourism industry, indeed, our very future, depends upon.
- Judging from the large number of calls I've received from all of you, the deteriorating condition of Route 4 is an important issue to nearly everyone. I have spoken with the chair and vice chair of Public Works and Highways, as well as our District 2 Engineer about the desperate need for repairs to Route 4. The good news is that work will begin around the end of May and includes the entire stretch from the Boscawen rotary to Naughty Nellie's Ice Cream, as well as Route 3 to West Franklin. The bad news is that NHDOT is too underfunded to do more than a light repave. To fix the underlying road bed properly requires a million dollars per mile and Route 4 is not the only project in the state. So new sources of funding for paving and red-listed bridge projects needs to be found. To that end, I support the House vote to block continued reductions in state business taxes. Had those tax cuts for businesses gone through, the shortfall would have been made up through even higher property taxes and road (gasoline) taxes. In an overwhelming bipartisan vote of 362-5 the House passed HB25 to spend \$12.5 million of state money to improve NH roads and bridges. The state leaves the actual scheduling of the work (and detours) up to the paving contractors

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To be included in next month's AYT, get your 30 words and optional photo to the Beacon by the 15th. Ads@AndoverBeacon.com • PO Box 149, Andover 03216 • 735-6099

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