

## Report From Concord

Representative Ken Wells

In April, all twenty-four House committees have been holding “public hearings” and “executive sessions” on Senate bills, while the Senate similarly scrutinizes passed House bills. Some bills have already passed both legislative bodies and been sent to the Governor’s desk for signature or veto, and legislators are already maneuvering to collect votes for overriding or defending the vetoes. One such bill is HB455, which attempts to repeal the death penalty.

I’m one of twenty Representatives on the Science, Technology and Energy committee. This bipartisan committee tries to find ways for providing affordable services to households and businesses, and balance those against the far-reaching local economic development and global environmental consequences of choices we make today. A major part of the ST&E committee’s work involves deliberations about every aspect of electricity generation, transmission and distribution, as well as air pollution. We also are concerned with our statewide home heating fuel supply, waste disposal, communications, internet, and cybersecurity. While these goings-on may seem largely invisible in daily life to a casual observer, they represent transactions of literally billions of dollars within (and importantly, out of) our state. I’d guess you probably spend thousands of dollars per year on all this stuff (electric bill, cable, taxes for trash disposal, telephone, etc.), and your money for most of these services is being paid to big monopolies (Sometimes, monopolies are allowed - consider the Mexico City situation where there were two competing phone companies, so households needed two phones to be able to call every number in town. Terrible!). It is the ST&E committee’s role to create laws that make sure that these monopolies play fair. The committee’s tools for doing that are democratic “public hearings” and “executive sessions.”

In a public hearing, citizens, experts, and lobbyists give unsworn testimony to the committee. Their testimony helps the lawmakers understand the stakeholders’ points of view before making decisions on policy. “Citizens” who wish to give testimony get to speak first. They are just “regular folks” who have an important point of view to share, and they usually read a statement they have written out and edited. We have heard from loggers, truckers, small business owners, parents, retirees and many others, expressing a wide range of views. Many citizens who testify are accompanied by a number of friends who hold signs outside the com-

mittee rooms that say something like “I support HB455”, or “Defend our Constitutional Rights”. Following them, “experts” who testify have included leaders and staff of the NH Department of Safety (State Police), the Department of Environmental Services, the Public Utilities Commission, the Office of the Consumer Advocate and many town selectboard members, Senators and House Representatives from various districts, plus non-governmental groups like Clean Energy NH, Conservation Law Foundation, the Society for the Protection of NH Forests, the Audubon Society, etc. Last to speak are “lobbyists”, who are usually lawyers hired by companies to represent the company’s point of view. Lobbyists often provide slick printed brochures with their professional testimony, and sometimes text their staffs during meetings to get “new” facts and figures to bolster their position. Because of their special professional status, they are required by law to wear orange name tags that bears the name of the company that pays them.

In executive sessions, the committee reviews all the testimony before calling for a vote of “ought to pass”, “ought to pass with amendment” or “inexpedient to legislate”. The public may be present during executive session, but does not participate unless called upon by the committee chairperson. These sessions are usually brief and purposeful, and after the vote two representatives write short committee reports summarizing the majority and minority points of view for the entire House to consider before the House votes. Sometimes compromise is hard to reach, and a subcommittee will form to work for hours at ironing out details among all the stakeholders and parties. Because I collect a lot of personal notes during the public hearings, I enjoy being able to recall and summarize aspects of a bill before the committee and for the full House. Having been a science teacher helps me quite a bit in drafting a concise explanation of complicated bills!

I was surprised to find that there is plenty of drama in safeguarding democracy in the committee room! Sometimes lobbyists try to pass themselves off as NGO “experts”, and not as the “hired guns” that they are. One fellow representing the New Hampshire Ratepayers Association, when pressed by a committee member, refused to divulge who pays him, but admitted that his association only represents “approximately twelve ratepayers”. Another individual appears repeatedly with “evidence” that is as scientifically credible as “the earth

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## Concord Regional VNA Senior Health Clinic in Andover in June

Tuesday, June 18 at Andover Community Hub

### Press release

Concord Regional VNA is holding a Senior Health Clinic at the Andover Community Hub, 157 Main Street in Andover on Tuesday, June 18 from 10 AM to 1 PM. All Senior Health Clinic

services are provided for a suggested donation of \$10, however, services are provided regardless of a person’s ability to pay. Services offered include foot care, blood pressure screening, B-12 injections, medication education, and nutritional education. Call (603) 224-4093 or (800) 924-8620, ext. 5815 for an appointment.



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March with the  
Andover-Danbury-Salisbury  
Republican Committee  
at the Andover  
4th of July Parade  
and see us at our booth!

All Republicans and like-minded Independents are welcome to attend our next meeting on July 10 @ 6:00pm @ the HUB.



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