

Letters

Report from Concord, October 2019

Ken Wells
NH Representative

It looks like the fall foliage in Andover reached its moment of maximum variety; its fullest spectrum, this week. I could see young maples whose lower and interior leaves held stubbornly onto their green, while yellow leaves stood out along their longest side branches, with splashes of brilliant orange and red around the treetops.

Stormy clouds have been rolling in dramatically around Kearsarge's peak, but so far have left quickly without much consequence. There has been a lovely run of clear, bright fall mornings that have been perfect for taking long walks; chatting with friends and neighbors. The evenings have been full of opportunities to share potluck suppers featuring our garden's harvest, or for taking a meal to dine with old friends that don't get out as much as they used to.

This makes me think ahead to Thanksgiving. I am nearly overcome by gratitude for the wealth of beauty here, and the wealth of good, old-fashioned community among us; the people of

these very special New England towns.
Budget Compromise

Since my "Report from Concord" last month, the Governor finally signed the compromise budget proposed by the Legislature, and a shutdown of all state services was avoided. Hallelujah! The new budget includes funding for many worthy programs, but one stands out as wonderfully beneficial for our towns: increased state spending for education and local property tax relief. Over the next two years, Andover, Danbury, and Salisbury can each expect more than \$100,000 in state revenue sharing dollars to spend on our town's school and town budget items.

Passage of this state budget stopped our tax dollars from being increasingly diverted to tax breaks for out-of-state corporations (such as the natural gas industry), taking state money away from things we need. We need safe roads and bridges, we need good public schools, we need state-wide efforts to combat the opioid epidemic. These are all things that we, as individuals, are unable to do by ourselves, but can accomplish if we unify our efforts through community

and state leadership that takes our best interests to heart.

Energy, Clean and Dirty

In the House Committee on which I serve, we have been examining the huge amount of money New Hampshire citizens spend on energy. We don't produce petroleum or natural gas in New Hampshire, but we have more carbon-free energy available than nearly any other state in the United States, including hydropower, biomass, solar and wind. New Hampshire is about the windiest place on the planet, and 10 to 50 miles offshore there exists more energy potential than 160 Seabrook nuclear power plants. Consider what New Hampshire's independent energy future could possibly look like in 20 or 30 years if we tapped this!

Why do we, year after year, annually send \$2 to \$6 Billion New Hampshire dollars out of our state to purchase filthy fossil fuels from places like Pennsylvania and Texas, when we have cleaner sources of energy in New Hampshire that are underdeveloped? Just think of the economic growth if those New Hampshire dollars stayed in New Hampshire, with New Hampshire families and businesses.

The money leaving the state today is equivalent to between two and six thousand dollars for every New Hampshire citizen. What would the money be able to do if it stayed in New Hampshire? It would turbocharge the growth of New Hampshire energy businesses, some large, well-established ones (like hydropower), and some brand new ones (like solar and wind) who would start building brand new New Hampshire energy infrastructures. Those businesses would hire New Hampshire workers for construction, engineering, plus office and support staff, who would spend their New Hampshire paychecks in their own New Hampshire communities – like, paying a babysitter and going out to dinner. Keeping local money in our community is a benefit multiplier. Every time New Hampshire dollars are earned and re-spent in New Hampshire, commerce increases and the benefit multiplies.

Wealth

Wealth is not merely the cash in your pocket and the balance in your checkbook, but all of the value you create through your efforts. Sometimes we may be paid directly for the work we do, and we think of that as our "job". But many people's efforts create value and wealth without a regular paycheck. For example, the work that women have traditionally done at home for their families is not a paid "job", but their efforts unquestionably add great value and wealth to their households. You and your neighbors may have been out splitting and stacking firewood to get ready for the heating season. You may have made an effort to repair or repaint your house, or spent your time to help a child learn to read, or to do fractions. Sometimes your work adds to your own property's value and your personal wealth,

and other times your work might contribute to the wealth of the children in your community. You could perhaps convert this wealth into money, by selling the firewood you split, or you might choose to enjoy the benefit of the wealth you created by enjoying the smart appearance of your freshly-painted house, or feeling the satisfaction of having helped a child in their educational journey toward a more prosperous future.

The natural beauty of the forests, mountains, and lakes in our region are also a type of wealth that I think we would be foolish to convert into McMansions or commercial or industrial properties. The wealth of products we can sustainably harvest from our beautiful forests helps prevent them from being "cashed out" to make mini-malls or suburban housing.

The Death of Biomass Industry

Unfortunately, there are ways that our wealth can be taken from us against our wishes. You may have read news reports that Governor Sununu, bending to the will of the New England Rate-payers Association (NERA), killed biomass in New Hampshire. There were six biomass plants in our state, and all the plants within driving distance of us have stopped buying wood chips and laid off their workers, effectively killing the industry. How did the Governor and his backers do this and why?

We don't often think about how "wealth" is different from "money", or how so-called "dark money" flows in New Hampshire politics. This "dark money" comes from anonymous out-of-state corporate sources. It's anonymous because federal law prevents us from knowing where it comes from (since the 2010 "Citizens United" United States Supreme Court decision), but in New Hampshire, we can see where some of the money goes. It pays lobbyists like NERA, whose lawyer's effort directly caused the collapse of the woodchip-fired biomass generators that help support our area's working economy. It pays lobbyists like Michael Sununu, who is not an elected official, but has worked as a lobbyist for the natural gas industry.

Jason Stock of the New Hampshire Timberland Owners Association says that closure of the Springfield woodchip-fired plant (north of New London near I-89) will put their 20 employees out of work. In all, the statewide biomass closures will affect 931 workers who run the plants. These layoffs are very bad news. That beneficial multiplier effect I described above works in reverse as well. Due to these job losses, a far greater number of people than those laid off, will not see that money spent and re-spent in their shops and businesses within our communities. It is disappointing that the Sununus' actions seek to tear us down, rather than build us up.

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