

OPINION

Report From Concord March 2020

Ken Wells, NH State Representative

The first two weeks of March provided ample reminders that while our state government is charged with important duties and responsibilities to the public, the “politicking” involved in getting the job done can be petty, cut-throat, and infuriating.

During the current session, the House heard 951 House bills. Each bill gets an introduction and public hearing before one of the 24 House committees, in which any member of the public, agency employee, or paid lobbyist can express their views in public testimony.

For about three weeks in February I filled in as the Science, Technology, and Energy Committee’s clerk, while the regular clerk took a three week trip to Central America on a cruise ship. (Alarming! What we know now about COVID-19 was not known then; it was even being proclaimed a “hoax” by some.) Back in school I learned to take excellent, nearly verbatim handwritten notes, but I’m a terrible typist.

Each hearing day we heard about five bills. The notes for one particularly long bill ran 26 pages long. It took me a long time to type up and submit every bill to our committee assistant for the record, but it’s important to provide an accurate written record of the testimony on each bill. If the bill should be challenged, even years later in the courts, the judges will want to look back at these notes for more details to clarify the “legislative intent” of the bill.

A week or so after the hearing there is a second, deliberative committee “work session” on every bill. This is a slightly less formal exchange between members of the committee expressing their positions on the bill. Sometimes a committee member will suggest an amendment, which then needs to be polished by one of the state’s lawyers into proper “official” legal language.

The discussions are not truly conversations; every comment needs to be directed to the Chairman, not to another member, just like we do at Town Meeting. Nevertheless, the exchanges can be pretty heated and ideological differences flare.

For example, “should we update the radiation monitoring in the seacoast area, to try to get data to identify the causes of three clusters of multiple, rare childhood leukemia cases?” Or, should we “trust the professionalism of the nuclear power plant and not unnecessarily increase the plant’s costs, which they will simply pass onto ratepayers”?

Such arguments can go on for more

than an hour, without compromise. The power plant’s spokesperson was present, but since this is no longer a hearing but a work session, he is not to speak unless he is asked a question by the chairman.

The third meeting for a bill is the committee’s “executive session” on that bill. There may be a final polished amendment presented and explained to the committee.

Eventually a motion will be made by a member on whether to pass, amend, kill the bill, or send it to further study. (The member who makes the winning motion is also volunteering for the chore of writing the committee’s Majority Report. Someone on the other side of the vote has the option of writing a Minority Report.)

At the end, the committee members vote on the bill one-by-one in a roll call by the clerk (my job), who records each vote, tallies the outcome, and adds it to the official record.

There can be several votes on a difficult bill – if the initial motion fails, another member might make a different motion, such as “interim study,” which essentially sends the bill into dignified obscurity. Some of the bills, due to their complexity or expense, are then sent to a second committee (such as Finance) for a second round of this whole process.

It took all of January and February to get all 951 bills through committee, and then the bills will be voted by the full House in the very impressive Representatives Hall. I wrote five bills this session (and co-wrote a sixth), and they met a variety of fates. The Commerce committee unanimously recommended killing my HB1184, which would have given more guidance to entrepreneurs navigating the various state permitting processes, because they judged that adequate guidance already exists. (Ouch.)

Because there was no dissent among the committee, they placed it on the so-called “consent calendar” as ITL. (“Inexpedient to Legislate”) For bills on Consent, the full House makes a single vote to accept the committees’ recommendations without debate.

Another one of my bills, HB1185, proposes a industry-supported youth apprenticeship program, modeled on the system used so successfully in Germany. That bill has strong bipartisan support and also went on Consent, because it was unanimously passed 17-0 by the committee. (Yay!)

My other bills have had more complicated histories that I won’t explain
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vices you use, such as cell phones and computers, there have been recent reports of scammers using the COVID-19 pandemic as a means to hack, steal, or ransom personal data, such as passwords, and credit card and bank account numbers. Beware of e-mails from unfamiliar sources asking you to click on a link for important virus updates, or messages on your cell suggesting you download an app for coronavirus mapping or information.

Don’t click on and open links from senders you don’t know, or download apps without checking the source. Don’t provide personal information to any unchecked sources.

Do change your passwords often, and don’t use the same password on all of your accounts. Do keep your anti-virus software device protection plans up-to-date. Do look for the “https” tag at the start of any website address. The “s” on the end is typically more secure than the “http”. Many secure websites also have a padlock icon next to the website. But, don’t just rely on the “s” or the padlock. Scammers are clever and can disguise themselves as a secure site.

If the website is unfamiliar, you may want to re-type the website name into a search engine like Google and do a little research on them before you decide if you want to proceed. When in doubt, don’t! And check out Consumer.FTC.gov, a safe site, for more tips on keeping your devices and your personal information safe.

Nancie Jacobson

Vote for Dan Feltes

Dan Feltes is running to be our next Governor. Senator Feltes is now in his third term representing Concord, Hopkinton, Henniker, and Warner. At 40 years old he is New Hampshire’s youngest Senate Majority Leader. Dan has a record of accomplishment working with other Senators and Representatives, both Democrat and Republican.

Dan Feltes previously helped low income families as an attorney with New Hampshire Legal Assistance. Dan and his wife Erin come from working class backgrounds without family political and financial advantages enjoyed by our current Governor. Dan Feltes will be Governor for all our citizens, not just the fortunate few.

Dan’s priorities include clean efficient energy, affordable public education from kindergarten through college, a woman’s right to choose, a living wage, job training, access to substance use disorder treatment, and paid family and medical leave. Some of these priorities were bills sponsored by Dan and passed with bipartisan support. These and other bills were among the 57 bills vetoed by our current governor.

I’m proud to say that I’ve campaigned with Dan and worked with him at our State House. Let’s get our State Government working for everyone again. Please vote Dan Feltes for Governor in the New Hampshire State Primary on September 8, and in the General Election on November 3.

David Karrick

NH State Representative



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