

SENATOR MATTHEW HOUDE

January 20, 2011

Greetings,

Winter in New Hampshire is supposed to be cold and snowy and it has been just that so far! Great for skiing, sledding and snowshoeing; and for those who don't prefer these outdoor activities: reading while tucked under blankets and close by the woodstove. I hope 2011 has started off well for everyone!

The 2011-2012 legislative session is underway in Concord. As everyone knows, Republicans now have veto proof majorities in both the state House and the Senate so it is a very different political landscape than last session. I am now one of 5 Democrats in the Senate (last session, there were 14 Democratic Senators of the 24 total). Likewise, the House has a 3:1 ratio. Leadership has indicated, and I am hopeful, that much of the session will focus on budgetary and economic issues – figuring out ways to close any budget gap, re-visiting ways to make New Hampshire even more business friendly, and continuing efforts to keep unemployment relatively low by creating incentives for businesses to hire new employees. Federal stimulus dollars are not likely going to be available any longer and therefore cannot be used to help balance the budget. Reductions in spending, more cuts to social services and the like should be expected, including reform of the state retirement system and education funding. The method that New Hampshire presently uses to fund education is likely to be debated again – along with another effort to amend the state Constitution to allow for “targeted” education aid. With the dramatic shift in power, however, it is inevitable that other topics will be re-visited by the Legislature. (Every bill that is introduced is given a public hearing.) Much news coverage followed what happened early in the session in the House (for example, the repeal of the rule banning guns in the Statehouse and a bill directing the Attorney General of New Hampshire to join a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the federal health care law). Among other topics likely to be re-visited is a repeal of the marriage equality law and potential changes to voter eligibility. (One such effort is aimed at restricting college students from voting in NH if they were resident of another state prior to matriculating.) Needless-to-say, these are not changes I would support so we'll have to see how the session develops.

In non-partisan news, one of the bills that I am sponsoring is a bill to examine concussions and brain injury in youth sports, and ways to educate coaches, student athletes and parents about the potential risks. Several states have adopted legislation recently to implement a protocol for identification of such injuries and clearance for return to play. We want to make sure the best available protocols are in place for New Hampshire's student athletes!

As always, please do not hesitate to contact me with questions or concerns.

Respectfully,

Matthew Houde

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