

SENATOR MATTHEW HOUDE

January 21, 2012

I hope everyone is keeping warm this chilly winter! By the time this legislative update is available to read in the Plainfield Annual Report we will be roughly half way through the 2012 legislative session in Concord. And while much of 2011 focused on the budget and its implications for municipalities (end of the state's contribution toward local retirement costs), education (over 40% reduction in the state's contribution to higher ed), and social services (cuts to funding levels for many programs and services), other significant legislation passed as well, including dramatic changes to the state's retirement system. This session we are likely to see efforts to deal with education funding through a constitutional amendment (again), social issues (un-funding of Planned Parenthood and an effort to repeal same-sex marriage), and more gun issues!

In the past 5+ years I have represented Plainfield, first in the House and now in the Senate, I have tried to avoid being too partisan in my legislative updates. After-all, while I am a Democrat, I represent all of the residents of Plainfield – and those of Senate District 5. For this update, I have collaborated with Rep. Foose from New London to bring you an assessment of where we are. You, of course, are the final judge.

In the 2010 campaigns, both Republicans and Democrats agreed that the State of New Hampshire needed to address the economy and jobs, improve investment in infrastructure, and avoid downshifting costs to cities and towns. There may have been disagreements on how best to address those issues, but there was general consensus on the issues. Both sides also agreed that the recession, coupled with the end of federal stimulus support, was going to result in a dramatic reduction of available revenue.

The election produced super-majorities for Republicans in both chambers. The choice of the majority last year was to cut, cut, and cut some more - including, at the last minute in the budget process, a cut to the tobacco tax. This year is the second year of the biennium and – notwithstanding last year's reductions in spending - we continue to struggle out of a recession. And while it is true New Hampshire has fared better than most other states, bills dealing with the issues of job creation, infrastructure improvement, or avoiding downshifting are, unfortunately, nowhere to be found. Instead the calendar for the House is full of bills designed to hinder implementation of the federal health care law, eliminate funding for Planned Parenthood, repeal same sex marriage, require picture identification to vote, bring back predatory payday and title loan lenders, and, of course, expand the use of firearms. And all of these efforts will make their way to the Senate, distracting the Legislature from the economic issues relevant to all in New Hampshire.

That said, some Democratic legislators continue to propose efforts for bi-partisan work that could prepare a new legislature for its efforts as it convenes in 2013. Here are some examples:

* A commission with members of the House and Senate, the executive branch and the various well-established groups that have as their mission the review of budgetary policy. In a hearing before the House Finance committee the author of the bill agreed that the results of the bill should be presented after the November election to reduce the political impact.

* Legislation that would try to quantify the connection between education and job growth. Since almost all members of the business community constantly advocate for a strong work force the bill's author has drawn the conclusion that, as it deals with a new budget in 2013, the legislature should be prepared to understand the relationship between subsidization of our technical colleges, our university system and our specialty schools like New Hampshire School of Law and the need for a newly constituted workforce that would support the business needs of the coming decades. If that relationship could be clarified outside of the rhetoric that attends each campaign season, the results and impact of our efforts would be significantly improved. And they would certainly suggest going in a different direction than a 40+% reduction in higher education funding, which was the action taken in last year's budget.

Many in the Legislature, including moderates in the Republican party, want to address the state's pressing needs but are forced to deal with an ideologically driven agenda that is not consistent with more centrist New Hampshire values - one typically committed to balancing the role of government with our citizens willingness and capacity to pay. New Hampshire has followed the latter path for decades under the leadership of both parties. That is how we built the New Hampshire Advantage.....and that is how we can sustain it.

Respectfully,

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REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

School Budget

General Position: The Plainfield School District has presented a budget that meets its stated goals as outlined during its deliberations. A line item review finds no egregious expenditures in meeting these goals. It is difficult to compare expenditures between years because of the change in grant money received. More noticeably, the budget represents an increase of 1.09% requested of taxpayers. Passage of all warrant articles, which the Finance Committee recommends, would result in an increase of 4.66% to the tax burden.

The town has been fortunate that medical insurance costs have not escalated. The school staff's usage of wellness programs has aided in keeping insurance cost increases low. However, it is unlikely to think that this trend will continue. The Finance Committee asks that the School Board and the school staff work diligently in determining a method to control insurance costs while attempting to maintain a similar service to what is provided today.

The Finance Committee is concerned with the continued increase to the special education budget, which is outpacing increases to regular education. State and federal mandates give the School Board little to no leeway in addressing this issue. The School District is