

REPRESENTATIVES TO THE GENERAL COURT

The 2015-2016 Session of the NH General Court began with the unexpected failure of Republican Majority Leader Bill O'Brien's bid to become Speaker of the House. In a surprising turnaround, Democrats and moderate Republicans voted to place the Speaker's gavel in the hands of the much more moderate Republican, Rep. Shawn Jasper.

Bipartisan majorities were cobbled together time and again over the course of 2015 to produce a fairly creditable record of accomplishment. These successes included increased protection for victims of domestic violence, the expansion of redevelopment districts, restrictions on the sale of synthetic drugs (like "spice"), protection of workers' compensation, and the preservation of both the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) and the electric renewable portfolio standard (RPS) - the foundations of NH's renewable energy programs. In addition, we were able to prevent cuts to the budget of the Department of Transportation, ensuring funds to continue to maintain our roads and bridges, albeit at less than adequate levels.

As a first-time Legislator in 2015, I did my best to support civil rights, economic growth, and environmental protections. I co-sponsored a Bill out of my Resources, Recreation and Development Committee (R,R & D) that would increase protections for clean water and wildlife habitat via wetland buffers, and a Bill which both recognized the contributions of Bhutanese refugees to New Hampshire, and called on the federal government to aid in resolving the Bhutanese refugee crisis.

In 2016 I am sponsoring three Bills – all of which are designed to facilitate the transition away from our current dependence on fossil fuels, and move us towards a sustainable energy future based on renewable resources. As someone who worked for the National Academy of Sciences for almost a decade, I recognize the scientific validity of the data and methods used, and the conclusions reached, by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). And as a member of both the NH Legislature and the Plainfield Energy Committee, I am working to make more renewable energy options available to more members of our community.

Among the Bills I am co-sponsoring in 2016 is one that would go after one of the most outrageous tax loopholes currently on the books in NH. This Bill would suspend tax breaks for some of the largest companies in NH, and direct the monies saved to completing essential water and sewer improvement projects around the state. Once considered to be justified as encouraging "pollution control," these 1950s era tax breaks should have lapsed long ago, instead they were made permanent. The 13 recipients of this largesse include Seabrook Station owner NextEra, and Eversource, owner of the Newington Station and Schiller Station in Portsmouth. Currently these successful business ventures receive tax exemptions on properties assessed at roughly \$250 million, at a cost of roughly \$4.3 million to communities - and to property tax payers - across the state.

The New Hampshire Municipal Association asserted in its Legislative Bulletin: "We know legislators are tired of this issue. They could make it go away by doing what they know is the right thing: end this corporate welfare scheme and cast a vote for the taxpayers of New Hampshire by supporting HB 1427."

The 2016 portion of the biennium is already off to an unexpected start, with a marathon series of votes aimed at overturning the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision via a constitutional amendment. The surprising momentary victory of this measure in our overwhelmingly Republican legislature (before a parliamentary maneuver deep-sixed it) drew immediate national media attention. In the end the measure failed by only 2 votes. Those who attended last year's Town Meeting will recall Plainfield's unanimous vote in favor of precisely such a constitutional amendment, aimed at curtailing the corrupting

influence of big, secret money in our electoral system. After its passage, I took our Town Meeting's warrant article to Washington, D.C., where I met with the members of the NH Congressional delegation and their staffs, to discuss overturning *Citizens United* and supporting action on climate change. While both Annie Kuster and Jean Shaheen were fully engaged and committed on both these issues, Kelly Ayotte rejected our town's call for a constitutional amendment to overturn *Citizens United*, instead defending the position that money equals speech, and should therefore be protected.

Upcoming issues for 2016 include: Medicaid expansion; the opioid crisis; the establishment of a minimum (or a prevailing) wage; the state's relationship with Planned Parenthood; net-metering for renewable energy generation; and the perennial need to come to grips with the gap between the needs of NH's citizens and communities, and the revenues being generated. Please contact me with suggestions, advice, or concerns re issues before the Legislature, at Lee.Oxenham@leg.state.nh.us. I am here to represent you and our community. Thank you for the opportunity to do so.

Representative *Lee Oxenham*