



Bradford E. Cook
Direct dial: 603.627.8110
Fax: 603.641.2343
bcook@sheehan.com

Cook on Concord

Gambling defeat in House was a good move

Friday, May 07, 2010

On April 21, the New Hampshire House soundly defeated a massive gambling expansion, voting 212-158 to kill Senate Bill 489. The bill - which would have allowed six casinos and slot machine facilities to open around the state - had become a "Christmas tree" of ideas, with many communities, including Manchester and Groveton, seeking to get in on the act.

Gov. John Lynch, in a decisive move, announced that he would veto the bill if it got to his desk. Perhaps more significantly, the governor made strong and detailed statements on WMUR-TV about the need for a thoroughly designed regulatory framework to be put in place prior to any expansion of gambling, if such expansion is to occur. That statement would seem to indicate opposition to any "budget quick fix" gambling passage.

Proponents, largely funded by Millennium Gaming - which has an option to purchase Rockingham Park - wailed about the defeat costing jobs, economic prosperity and about its being in the face of popular support, all of which statements are dubious at best.

The fact is, expanded gambling will do New Hampshire no good and will detract from our quality of life.

The defeat of SB 489 was a good day for New Hampshire, in this writer's opinion.

Politics in New Hampshire is heating up. Sean Mahoney, publisher of Business NH magazine, announced his entry into the 1st Congressional District GOP primary race. He joins a list of other potential candidates, including Rich Ashooh, Bob Bestani and Frank Giunta. With the entry of more candidates, it will take a smaller percentage to win the primary, which appears to be a real horse race.

In an editorial, Foster's Daily Democrat reported on an interview it had with little-known candidate Bestani. This column has noted previously Bestani's significant record and experience. Foster's wondered whether he had too much experience to be elected to Congress, an interesting comment.

Elsewhere, the Republicans' U.S. Senate primary race appears to be showing the effect of massive amounts of money being spent by candidate Bill Binnie, who shares the lead with former Attorney General Kelly Ayotte in some polls.

In the governor's race, John Lynch felt it necessary to counter negative television ads by out-of-state groups which called him untruthful - in more colorful language - by running early ads of his own. This seems to demonstrate two things: first, the governor will take this race very seriously and spend what it takes to keep his job; second, winning a fourth term will not be as easy as winning the first three, given the economy, six years of making decisions, some of which were unpopular, and voter fatigue. Add that to a presumed good year for the GOP, and Lynch seems ready to do what has to be done.

Meanwhile, in the Republican race, none of the candidates is particularly well known and each will have an interesting time trying to become known, although the conventional wisdom is that former Health and Human Services Commissioner John Stephen will be the GOP candidate.

Former New Hampshire State Senate President and longtime Rep. Alf Jacobson died at age 86 on April 18.

Jacobson, a retired Professor at Colby-Sawyer College and a former columnist for this newspaper, represented the New London area in the Senate and in the House. He did so with style, grace and humor, coupled with firm beliefs and a good mind.

Jacobson ran for the U.S. Senate in the GOP primary in 1978, losing to Gordon Humphrey, who went on to become senator.

Jacobson, however, was accomplished in his life for more than his political career. A member of the "Greatest Generation," he served in the Marine Corps in World War II and acted as a battalion interpreter in the Far East. He memorialized the Iwo Jima battle annually in the Legislature, having lived through it for 28 days.

He was a professor of economics at Colby-Sawyer until 1986. He also held a divinity degree and was a Baptist minister.

Once, during a legislative hearing when this writer was representing a religious denomination and presenting its opposition to a certain bill, Jacobson asked what perhaps was the most interesting question I ever encountered — he asked me to compare my client's position with the philosophy of a medieval monk/theologian. Needless to say, I flunked the question!

Vigorous well into his 80s, Jacobson could be seen walking briskly around New London or on Elm Street in Manchester, and his warm smile and friendly bright eyes were a welcome sight.

A moderate Republican, Jacobson blended pragmatism, philosophy and patriotism without being ideological about it.

At his death, he was lauded by Republicans and Democrats alike.

Alf Jacobson certainly contributed greatly to the flavor, spice and educational, spiritual, civic and political life of New Hampshire. He will be missed by all who knew him and New Hampshire owes him its thanks.

Brad Cook is a shareholder in the Manchester law firm of Sheehan Phinney Bass + Green and heads its government relations and estate planning groups. He also serves as secretary of the Business and Industry Association of New Hampshire.