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The Halls of the State House were abuzz this week as many contentious pieces of legislation were debated either in committee or on the floors of the House and Senate.

HB 1565 “relative to notice of video or audio surveillance in a public building or in a business” was heard recently by the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety. The committee acknowledged right away that audio surveillance is covered by our wiretapping statute and focused on the video piece. This bill would require public notice of any ongoing video surveillance whether in a public building or business. Strong testimony was presented in opposition to the bill by representatives of The Retail Merchants Association and The New Hampshire Bankers Association. There was no testimony in favor of the bill except that of the sponsors, leading privacy advocates. The bill will be discussed further in a subcommittee work session on February 12 at 9am in room 204 of the Legislative Office Building. The public is welcome to attend.

HB1499 “An act replacing the electric consumption tax with a tax on electric generation” was deemed inexpedient to legislate by the Committee on Science, Technology and Energy recently and that recommendation was supported by the full House on Wednesday, February 6. Opponents of the bill had told the committee that it would put NH at an economic disadvantage with other states in the region and send a bad message to businesses considering development in NH. The bill would not only have taxed power from renewable sources at the time when the State is attempting to encourage just such generation but it would have taxed industries that attempt to self generate for manufacturing purposes and consumers who generate small amounts of power for their own use in homes.

HB1293 “relative to hazardous material reporting and establishing fees for hazardous material facilities” is the product of a recent study committee. The report of that committee recommends that, the State should play a role in ensuring the safety of the public from hazardous materials stored at facilities here and any emergency arising from those materials. Facilities using hazardous materials must, under Federal law report quantities and uses of such materials to EPA. This information is then available to first responders who must enter the premises at the time of any emergency. HB1293 would require that that information be provided to the State and that fees be levied by the State Fire Marshall’s office based on the quantity and type of material a facility may have on hand. It is the intention of the sponsors of the bill that these fees be used to fund regional HazMat response teams.

The business community's concerns voiced during the period of the study committee as well as at the public hearing on the bill resulted in a cap of \$1000 per business, though most would be required to pay much less. The bill will sunset in 2013. While it did pass the full House on February 6, it will now go to the House Ways and Means Committee for a hard look at the fee structure.

On the Senate side in the coming week, The Senate Committee on Energy Environment and Economic Development will be looking at SB 412 "Establishing the Office of Technology Development and Telecommunications Planning and the position of Director of Telecommunication Planning in the Department of Resources and Economic development" The hearing is set for Tuesday February 12 at 230pm, in room 102 of the Legislative Office Building. In addition, the same committee will hear SB 312 that afternoon that will attempt to establish a "State Economic Development Advisory Board."

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CHAMBER INSIGHT:

Education Funding: A Call to Action

With over a month of the legislative session in the books, the education funding debate is once again poised to come to the forefront. Next week, the Senate Judiciary Committee is expected to hold a public hearing on a bipartisan constitutional amendment sponsored by Majority Leader Joe Foster and Minority Leader Ted Gatsas that will allow that state to target education aid to communities most in need. With bipartisan support in the Senate, it seems likely the amendment will garner the necessary two-thirds support to advance to the House of Representatives.

The GMCC, along with several other business organizations, plan to advocate for the passage of this amendment or any similar measure in both the Senate and House. In order for these efforts to be successful, however, we need your help. With election year politics muddying this debate, legislators will need to hear grass roots support for an education funding amendment from you, their constituents.

The inevitable question you may ask is "why should I care enough to call my legislators?" It's a fair question; here are some answers:

- The issue of education funding has dominated Concord for over 25 years now. It's time to put this issue to rest once and for all by passing a constitutional amendment that will allow for the targeting of aid.
- Allowing the state to thoughtfully target aid to the communities most is the most efficient use of our tax dollars. 45 other states target education aid, if it's good enough for them why not New Hampshire?
- The risk of doing nothing is too great. The threat of future lawsuits will always threaten the future cost of an adequate education. Unless the state can target aid, the threat of increased taxes to pay for additional court required education aid will remain indefinitely.
- An educated workforce is critical to the future social and economic prosperity of our state. During a time when New Hampshire is losing its young people to surrounding state we cannot afford to have instability in our school funding system.
- Regardless of whether you support or oppose a constitutional

amendment relative to school funding, isn't it time the voters get a chance to weigh in on this issue? After 25 years of debate in the state legislature its time for this issue to be placed on the state ballot and face the voters.

These are just some of the reasons why education funding should matter to you in 2008. Please consider contacting your local legislators with your thoughts on this issue. Need help? Visit the Chamber's [Who Is My Legislator](#) page for contact information.

As always, please feel free to contact the Chamber with any questions. Remember, the GMCC is here to be your business advocate and your voice in Concord. In order for us to do so effectively, we need feedback from you! Please direct any questions to michaels@manchester-chamber.org or call (603) 792-4107.

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