



GREATER MANCHESTER CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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Sponsor's Analysis

The legislature, like parents and students, get a February vacation, taking the traditional New Hampshire vacation week off next week. There will be no legislative action next week, but the calendars are full for weeks thereafter.

This past week saw a flurry of committee activity in the House as the solons were faced with their first self-imposed dead line for taking votes on bills pending before their respective committees. Bills that are required to be reviewed by a second House committee had to be voted out of the first committee by this past Thursday. Such bills are those that set policy and require funding so they are first acted on by the committee of jurisdiction and then are scrutinized by the House Finance Committee

It may be a good time to reflect on how the legislature is doing its business so far. Off to a slow start, as the new leadership found its way, both House and Senate now seem to be handling bills with dispatch, often scheduling both the hearing and executive session for a vote in the same calendar. Many "social" legislative proposals, including life-related issues like including "unborn" in the definition of "another" in homicide laws, and others favored this year as in the past by conservatives, seem to be getting handled (heard and recommended for defeat) quickly by the Democratic-dominated committees. Conversely, the repeal of the parental notification of abortion law got quick action in support. Such things as school choice and a bill to repeal the death penalty in New Hampshire, await action.

Business issues such as the investment tax credit and other initiatives have not yet been heard, and there are many major issues, notably the Governor's budget, with all of its policy components that will occupy the House and then the Senate after their winter break.

Needless to say, most of the work lies ahead.

Quick Takes:

- The Senate passed a smoking ban in restaurants and cocktail lounges; look for the House to concur with that vote within a couple of months thus having NH join the rest of New England as a smoke free, hospitality state.
- Expect a significant debate over the creation of a dedicated fund for

LCHIP as the House Municipal & County Government Committee narrowly (9-8) recommended against endorsing a \$40 fee for documents filed at Registry's of Deeds.

- A bill to increase the minimum wage was heard yesterday. It has the governor's full support and will pass into law later this year. The only question at this time is whether the wage for "tipped" employees will go up as well.
- The House Resources Committee has unanimously recommended a bill that would have required a 10-cent fee on every gallon of water withdrawn for resale for the scrap heap.
- A sub-committee voted down a ban on prescription drug advertising. The full committee and House are expected to confirm that vote.
- And finally, it appears that this will not be the year that Cannon Mountain Ski Area is similarly leased like its counterpart, Mount Sunapee Ski Area. A committee voted that proposal down, 11-8, along party lines and the governor vehemently opposes such a lease.

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CHAMBER INSIGHT:

After a sluggish start, the legislature hit its stride the past few weeks. The House and Senate churned through hundreds of public hearings and have started to make a dent in this session's slew of bills. This momentum will come to halt this week as the legislature breaks during school vacation week. Here is an update on some of the key bills the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce has weighed in on thus far:

As mentioned above, Senate Bill 42 "the smoking ban" passed the full Senate by a 17-7 vote on Thursday. As the Chamber has stated in the past, the smoking ban represents a significant enhancement of New Hampshire's business environment. Not only will SB 42 help protect our workforce, but will also put New Hampshire on equal footing with our neighboring states in competing for tourists. Looking forward, the smoking ban looks to enjoy broad support in the House and Governor Lynch has stated he will sign SB 42.

House Bill 143, relative to the apportionment of civil damages, passed the House by a vote of 202 – 150 despite the opposition of nearly every major business organization in New Hampshire. Just to recap, this bill defines the term party in a lawsuit as only those who are named in a lawsuit. The bill will promote plaintiffs to go after defendants with the deepest pockets, businesses and their insurance policies. The Chamber feels that establishing policies that allow defendants to be held liable for damages that are grossly disproportionate to their amount of blame is bad public policy and unfair. This issue looks to be headed for another close battle in the Senate. Please contact your Senator if you are concerned with HB 143 or feel free to contact the Chamber for more information.

House Bill 311, establishing a committee to study liability limits for rail operation, received a warm reception in the House Transportation Committee this week. Similar bills have never made it out of committee due to the opposition of the Trial Lawyers Association and questions regarding the constitutionality of liability caps. This year, however, appears to be different. Rail advocates and the Trial Lawyers voiced their support for this study bill in the hopes that it will lead to some a solution supported by all parties. The Chamber has identified commuter rail as one of its key strategic goals in 2007 and testified in support of HB 311. Next up on the rail issue will be SB 75, a bill that creates a rail authority for New Hampshire.

As always, feel free to contact that Chamber with any questions or concerns on pending legislation. Remember, we are here to be your business advocate. Capitol Insight will be on break next week along with the rest of the legislature. See you in two weeks!

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NH State Legislature www.state.nh.us

The Union Leader www.theunionleader.com/primaryindex.html

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