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The New Hampshire Legislature has reached the midpoint of the 2008 Session. Yesterday was "Crossover Day." This marks the point at which all the bills introduced in the House have to be acted upon by the House and all the bills introduced in the Senate have to be acted upon by the Senate. From now through May, the House will largely be dealing with senate bills coming over from the Senate, and the Senate will consider house bills that have passed the House. Here's a brief summary of some of the issues voted upon this past week:

REMOTELY READABLE DEVICES: The House passed legislation that will require labeling of products that contain remotely readable devices, also known as radio frequency identification (RFID). House Bill 686 will also ban the implantation of RFID chips in humans, and bar the State from using the devices in drivers' licenses. Despite the House Commerce Committee's recommendation to pass a much more limited bill, the full House voted 176-153 to adopt a minority amendment requiring labeling. Opponents of labeling argue that the bill will run into problems with laws on interstate commerce. The bill now goes to the Senate.

STANDARD WELLNESS PLANS FOR SMALL EMPLOYERS: The Senate passed Governor Lynch's proposal to require health insurers to offer small employers a standard wellness plan that emphasizes prevention, management of chronic conditions and the use of best practices. Senate Bill 540 will also limit the rates that insurers could charge for such plans. While the goal of this legislation is to reduce health insurance premiums for small employers, critics – including the Chamber, worry that the rate caps could force insurers to shift costs from small employers to other segments of the employer marketplace. The bill now goes to the House.

UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS FOR PART-TIME WORKERS: The Senate passed legislation that would enable workers who are laid off and only seeking part-time work to collect unemployment benefits. Under current law, only people who are searching for full-time work can collect unemployment benefits. The bill states that any claim for unemployment benefits by someone only seeking part-time work shall be based on wages earned in part-time. This provision may be problematic for the department and employers, as employers do not currently report wages as being earned in a full-time or part-time capacity. The format in which employers report wages to the Department of Employment Security may have to be expanded in order for the Department to implement this provision. This bill could increase the unemployment tax rate of businesses that tend to

employ part-time workers. The bill now goes to the House.

WORKFORCE HOUSING: On a vote of 176-150, the House passed legislation that clearly defines “workforce housing,” and helps expedite the municipal review process facing developers. House Bill 1472 would require towns to include in zoning regulations “reasonable and realistic opportunities” for the development of workforce housing, including multi-family units. Existing housing could be included when compliance is reviewed. The bill now goes to the Senate.

TAVERN LICENSES: The House passed legislation creating a new category of liquor license for “taverns.” This new license would not allow anyone under the age of 21 in the establishment. It would not require the sale of food as is currently the requirement for places that serve alcohol. Any establishment with a lounge to restaurant capacity ratio of 3 to 1 would be required to obtain a tavern license. No one under the age of 21 could be employed at a tavern. Proof of at least \$300,000 in liability insurance would be required. The license fees would be \$12,000 for an establishment capable of seating less than 50 people; and \$24,000 for establishments that could seat 50 or more people. The bill also requires a tavern license applicant to obtain the approval of the city or town in which the tavern will operate. The bill now goes to the Senate.

INSURANCE COVERAGE FOR BARIATRIC SURGERY: The Senate passed legislation requiring insurers to cover the cost of treatment for diseases and ailments caused by obesity and morbid obesity, including bariatric surgery. Senate Bill 312 now goes to the House.

REGIONAL GREENHOUSE GAS INITIATIVE: The House passed legislation to formally enter New Hampshire in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, which would cap large fossil-fueled power-generator carbon emissions at 2003 levels between 2009 and 2014, and to decrease CO2 emissions by 10% by 2019. HB 1434 will create a dedicated Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Fund by selling, through a regional auction, NH's carbon emissions allowances. Proceeds from that auction will be directed primarily to consumer-level energy efficiency investments. The bill now goes to the Senate.

CHAMBER INSIGHT:

GMCC Legislative Dinner March 31st

Are you a political junkie or just looking to get more involved in state level public policy? Good news, the 2008 GMCC Legislative Dinner is right around the corner! This year's dinner will be held on Monday March 31st at the Bedford Village Inn.

The GMCC believes a strong relationship between our elected officials and the business community is critical to ensuring our state's laws and regulations are in step with the needs of the businesses and their employees. The legislative dinner aids in strengthening that relationship by providing a relaxed environment for chamber members and our State Representative and Senators to socialize and discuss the issues that are important to them.

Besides the social aspect of the dinner, the evening also includes a formal program that is both informative and entertaining. A presentation recapping the Chamber's legislative priorities leads off the program, followed by moderated panel discussion featuring the Chairman of the State Republican and State Democratic Parties. Republican Party Chair Fergus Cullen and Democratic Party Chair Ray Buckley will each have the opportunity to offer some opening remarks and then will be asked a series of questions centered on

pending business issue in the legislature, the upcoming presidential election, and NH's changing political landscape.

The dinner promises to be an enjoyable evening and I hope you will consider attending. The cost to attend is \$75 for members and \$90 for non-members. To register please contact Laurie Gouley at customerservice@manchester-chamber.org or call 792-4122. The Chamber would like to extend their thanks to National Grid and Anthem for their generous support of this program.

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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