

GREATER NASHUA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

# THE CHAMBER

## THE "BOTTOM LINE" LEGISLATIVE REPORT

A Weekly Report From the Chamber on Issues Affecting You in the State Capital

May 20, 2005

Issue #19

### THE WEEK JUST PAST...

E-Z Pass Delayed. On Wednesday, the Executive Council did not vote on the new E-Z Pass toll system. The real controversy is whether tokens will still be used after the E-Z Pass system goes into operation and whether motorists will still get a discount. Tokens, of course, can be purchased for a 50% discount. It looks like the legislature will probably be moving toward the elimination of tokens anyway.

It looked as if the Executive Council was going to vote to begin implementation of E-Z Pass and to provide a 30% discount for E-Z Pass users. However, the Governor has decided to delay the Executive Council vote until he receives additional information from the State Department of Transportation. There are still concerns out there regarding the tokens and the discount. At this point, it looks as if E-Z Pass will not be in place by this summer.

Senator Gottesman Plays Big Role In Passage Of New Bike Helmet Legislation. On Thursday, the New Hampshire Senate passed HB 118, the bill requiring that bicycle helmets be worn by bicyclists under the age of 16. The bill was previously passed by the House. This was controversial legislation in both the House and the Senate, and Nashua's own Senator Dave Gottesman played a key role the passage of the bill, taking the Senate floor in support. The Senate vote was 16 – 8, with Nashua's Senator Joe Foster also voting in favor of the legislation.

HB 118 is an interesting bill for the business community for financial reasons, as well as the more obvious safety reasons. The groups advocating for the enactment of HB 118 pointed out that a brain injury to a young person results in millions of dollars in Medicaid costs shelled out by the state over the course of that person's lifetime. Obviously, the taxpayers foot those bills. So this legislation (which the Governor will sign) may turn out to be not only a physically friendly bill for New Hampshire's youngsters, but a fiscally friendly bill for New Hampshire's businesses.

Senate Education Committee Surprises Utilities. On Wednesday, the Senate Education Committee was looking at HB 129, a bill to deal with certain school construction projects. The Committee added a section allowing for the use of energy efficiency funds for school projects designed to improve indoor air quality or energy efficiency. These energy efficiency funds are raised through the system benefits charge which is a part of utility bills for New Hampshire

ratepayers. The bill requires that one-third of the energy efficiency funds from each utility be set aside for these school projects. This bolt from the blue, which, after all, came from the Education Committee (not from the Energy Committee in either the House or the Senate) has caused some concern to the utilities. The energy efficiency programs have been set up through long efforts at the Public Utilities Commission over the course of several years, and it is probably fair to say that the utilities believe the programs are working pretty well as they exist right now. Earmarking such a big chunk of the funds just for schools would bring many other aspects of the efficiency programs to a crawl. HB 129 has a fiscal note attached to it, so the bill may well end up on the Senate Finance Committee for further review.

### **THE WEEKS AHEAD...**

May 24, 2005

**SB 125** (repealing health status and geographic location as small group rating factors, clarifying certain other issues relating to small group insurance, and establishing a reinsurance mechanism) – Subcommittee Work Session – 9:00 a.m., LOB 302

<http://gencourt.state.nh.us/legislation/2005/SB0125.html>

**HB 544** (land and community heritage program) – Subcommittee Work Session – 1:00 p.m., LOB 303

<http://gencourt.state.nh.us/legislation/2005/HB0544.html>

June 2 & 7, 2005

**HB 121** (local land use approval for facilities requiring air pollution control permits) – Ret Subcommittee Work Sessions – 1:30 p.m., LOB 301

<http://gencourt.state.nh.us/legislation/2005/HB0121.html>

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