

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 12, 2006

Issue #17

THE WEEK JUST PAST...

The House and Senate met all day Thursday and traded messages, sometimes amicably and sometimes not. By the close of the day, many bills were off to Committees of Conference, many off to the Governor, and many off to the cemetery. Here's what happened to those still left that the Chamber cares about.

Committees of Conference:

HB 37, health insurance coverage for full-time students on medical leave of absence. The conferee from the Nashua region is Senator Gottesman.

The House and Senate versions both extend coverage to dependants who are full time students and who have to take a medical leave of absence. The coverage does not exceed 12 months. The Senate bill is more finite, however, and still has some technical issues. It is our hope the bill's intent will remain consistent.

HB 678, decrease in the insurance premium tax from 2% to 1%. In amending the House version, the Senate is requiring all insurance companies, including the health insurance companies, (who are not receiving a reduction in taxes) to pay their state premium tax up front in an annual estimated tax. This provision will cost the health insurance companies over a million dollars in lost revenue, and we know where that loss will be made up - premium increases. It will be very interesting to watch the political dynamics of the House and Senate on this one. The Chamber supports the decrease in property and casualty insurance premium taxes, but would prefer there be nothing that increases the pressure on health insurance premiums. We need those premiums lower, not higher.

HB 1334, creates a study committee on the unemployment compensation trust fund on employees with negative balances.

The argument on this bill is the duties of the study committee. The Senate expanded the duties to include: 1) expanding business tax credits to stimulate R&D by extending the carry-forward provision for the business enterprise tax credit; 2) analyzing the costs of health insurance on public employment contracts; and 3) studying the elimination of the requirements for group

health insurance carriers and stop-loss writers to provide an option to covered employees and their dependents to purchase an individual health insurance policy.

It will be interesting to see if the House wants to study so many diverse topics in one study committee.

HB 1474, dealing with unemployment compensation contribution rates and benefits. What a fight this will be! The real difference in the two versions is the Senate wants to investigate the possibility of merging the Department of Employment Security with the Department of Labor. The Senate also wants to restrict the Employment Security Commissioner from closing any district offices without the permission of the legislative fiscal committee.

HB 1752, requiring notice of independent contractor and employee classifications. The Senate really expanded HB 1752 from a “Know Your Rights” notice bill only requiring information about the criteria for classifying employees to a bill that creates a uniform definition of employee, and also clarifies the criteria for exempting a worker from employee status. The Senate version even includes the forms to be used.

Some of the business concerns to the Senate version are the burdensomeness of posting the criteria for classification and also the increased risk of temporary contract employees now claiming they are actually company employees. The Senate amendment is in response to the FedEx suit. Hopefully, the House will prevail on this one.

Off To The Governor:

HB 203, establishes a Commission on the use of radio frequency tracking devices. A huge victory for business and RFID technology, which is manufactured by many NH companies. The original bill was regulating and limiting the use of this important new technology that has many, many positive, far-reaching applications. Fortunately, the House and Senate acted prudently by establishing a commission to look at the implications of the technology and the privacy issues.

HB 1167, allocates an extra \$500,000 for LCHIP. Great news as the requests for funding are huge.

Dead:

HB 1582 - Real ID. The prohibition against NH being a pilot for a national real ID card is dead. What a fight between the House and Senate. The House wanted the prohibition, the Senate did not. The Senate won. Will we be the first to use the national ID card?

THE WEEK AHEAD...

May 15, 2006

SB 140 (acceptance of in-lieu payments for the restoration or creation of wetlands and the preservation of upland areas adjacent to wetland areas) - Committee of Conference Meeting - 1:30 p.m., LOB 103
<http://gencourt.state.nh.us/legislation/2006/SB0140.html>

SB 287 (changes to the eminent domain statute) - Committee of Conference Meeting - 1:00 p.m., SH 100
<http://gencourt.state.nh.us/legislation/2006/SB0287.html>

SB 376 (revenues dedicated to the education trust fund) - Committee of Conference Meeting - 11:00 a.m., SH 103
<http://gencourt.state.nh.us/legislation/2006/SB0376.html>

May 16, 2006

HB 1690 (renewable energy) - Committee of Conference Meeting - 1:00 p.m., LOB 304 <http://gencourt.state.nh.us/legislation/2006/HB1690.html>

May 17, 2006

HB 37 (health insurance coverage for full-time students on medical leaves of absence) - Committee of Conference Meeting - 1:30 p.m., LOB 302
<http://gencourt.state.nh.us/legislation/2006/HB0037.html>

HB 678 (insurance premium tax) - Committee of Conference Meeting - 10:00 a.m., LOB 302
<http://gencourt.state.nh.us/legislation/2006/HB0678.html>

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