

Senator David Watters

The fall season in the legislative year includes bill filing for the session starting in January, commission meetings, and meetings with constituents. Having passed a budget in June, major attention this year will be on reauthorizing Medicaid Expansion and the opioid crisis, but we will also work through some 300 Senate bills and bills received from the House. As a member of the Senate Education, Transportation, and Capital Budget Committees, my work will concentrate on bills we will hear, and I will guide the 17 bills for which I am the prime sponsor through the legislative process.

As a senator, I am deeply committed to its collegial and, most often, bipartisan process. We know we cannot let the toxic political environment of Washington affect our ability to do what is best for New Hampshire. A good example of this is reauthorizing Medicaid Expansion for over 50,000 citizens, and continuing the progress made under the Affordable Care Act for another 70,000 people in the exchanges. A study committee has presented a path forward for legislation, and the commitment of Republican and Democratic leadership to improve the current plan is present. We all recognize that we cannot address the opioid crisis without Medicaid Expansion, which is the first line of treatment and prevention for at least 7,000 people. In my conversations with Health and Human Service, healthcare providers, recovery organizations, EMTs, and local police, there are indications that the many new programs and increased funding are strengthening our efforts, but our commitment in Concord must be unrelenting.

Commission work gives legislators an opportunity to take on big issues through extended work with stakeholders. As a member of the Decennial Retirement Commission, I participated in intensive meetings commencing in August and ending with the approval of a final report on December 7. The DRC heard from the New Hampshire Retirement System, municipalities, state and municipal employees, including teachers, police, and fire, and from the New Hampshire Municipal Association, among others. We heard detailed actuarial reports about the poor decisions of the 1980s and 1990s, the great recession, and changing actuarial assumptions, all of which resulted in an unfunded accrued actuarial liability of over \$5 billion. We learned that the painful changes to benefits and contributions, and an amortization schedule to eliminate the UAAL established in 2007-11, have set the system on a path to recovery. A study commissioned from Boston College researchers provided an independent analysis and several recommendations. The Commission passed a series of recommendation for legislation. The takeaway is that the NHRS is in good hands and on a sustainable path forward. One recommendation we adopted was my motion to restore some state funding of municipal pension liabilities to reduce the burden on the local taxpayer. I also voiced strong support for keeping the state's commitment to our hard-working and highly capable workforce at all levels.

The Coastal Marine Natural Resources & Environment Commission, established by my legislation in 2016, has completed the first phase of its work on the potential impacts of ocean acidification on valuable resources, such as oysters, in the Great Bay. The Commission is now studying the effects of nitrogen and nutrient loads on the estuaries. Commission members visited the Dover Wastewater Treatment Plant to see an award-winning, state of the art facility. This

Commission will investigate several issues that affect the Great Bay, a vital natural and economic resource for Dover.

Since it is the second year of the legislative session, bills mostly focus on policy rather than budgetary matters, with the one great exception being the Ten Year Highway Plan. My 17 bills cover a variety of matters, with two bills on substance use disorder recovery, and four on transportation practices at the DOT. The ongoing work of the Career and Technical Advisory Committee recommended introduction of two bills, one to facilitate people in trades and other professions getting accreditation to teach in a CTC, and another to confirm that math included in CTE courses counts for high school math requirements. We are starting to see a good response to my bill passed last year to permit sophomores to enroll in CTE courses. On another educational matter, I have been working with USNH and CCSNH on a bill about head injury and student athletes, with a particular focus on Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy. Working with Dover's Youth to Youth, I am introducing legislation on smoking regulation.

Two bills concern the electric vehicle charging station infrastructure. New Hampshire must prepare for a major change due to electric vehicles, so the states need to determine how a system of charging stations will be built, how the Public Utilities Commission will set rate structures, and how public access will be ensured. Another bill addresses endangered species and ivory wildlife trafficking.

The Ten Year Highway Plan sets a road map, revised every two years, for highway, turnpike, and state roads in municipal areas. Priorities and funding resources must match up. It is a careful and inclusive process, started at the regional planning level, continuing with the Governor and Council Intermodal Transportation commission, and concluding with passage of a bill through the House and Senate. The Strafford Regional Planning Commission has done a great job, as always, in ensuring projects necessary to the regional economy and transportation safety are included in the plan. I have worked closely with GACIT, and will continue to do so on Senate Transportation, to make sure that District 4 projects are included and funded. Such projects include the completion of the Little Bay Bridges and the rehabilitation or replacement of the General Sullivan Bridge, building All-Electronic Tolling stations at Dover Point and in Rochester, upgrading Route 108, planning Exit 10, and a number of road and bridge projects in Barrington, Somersworth, Dover, and Rollinsford.

Working with other senators and representatives, I am cosponsoring a number of bills to promote business development, investment, and workforce development. People across the state recognize that the seacoast region has a dynamic culture of economic success, so we must be sure that Concord is responsive to its needs. If there are any questions about legislation or other matters in Concord, please contact me at david.watters@leg.state.nh.us or call me at 969-9224. My very best wishes for a happy and peaceful holiday season.