

Week 16 April 29, 2022

HURRY UP AND WAIT

At the beginning of the week the legislature appeared to be well on the way to adjournment. The FY2023 budget bill passed the Senate last week and the budget conference committee had been appointed and already met once before this week started. Historically (not counting the COVID-19 era) the legislature would adjourn two to three weeks after the budget conference committee was formed. For a while now there has been the specter of a gubernatorial veto, but in terms of the budget passing the legislature, things seemed to be on track for an early May adjournment.

Budget conferees spent Tuesday and Wednesday finalizing much of the budget language, but few decisions were made on spending. The conference committee had ambitiously scheduled three meetings per day, but by Thursday activity ground to a halt as they waited for policy bills containing spending to be resolved. As of the end of the day Friday, few of these bills had progressed, and budget conferees are looking to next week to dig into spending decisions.

It has been anticipated in recent weeks that lawmakers could adjourn by May 6. At this point that is looking less likely but things can happen quickly and unexpectedly at the end of the legislative session - so stay tuned. It also remains unclear that adjournment, whenever it happens, will actually signify the end of the session. Governor Phil Scott and the Democratic majorities in the House and Senate continue to disagree on a number of issues, including the budget. Democratic Lawmakers received a political boost on one of these issues this week after the bill to boost the state pension system received a unanimous vote in the House, was then adopted by the Senate and sent to the governor on Friday. This was all after the governor publicly criticized the bill, which could be a good sign for Democrats if they need to attempt to override a veto.

S.287, a bill that would bring equitable funding to Vermont's underserved school districts, was given strong support by the full House on a 132-11 vote. The bill would essentially redistribute taxing capacity across Vermont school districts so that for the first time in 25 years, low-income and rural districts as well as small schools and English language learners would be accurately counted for the purpose of distributing education funds. The bill heads back to the Senate for further consideration and a possible Committee of Conference before being sent to Governor Scott's desk.

In the effort to try and move things along, the House Commerce & Economic Development Committee amended S.11, a bill originally introduced to regulate robocalls. The new S.11 no longer has anything to do with robocalls and includes elements of H.703 and H.159, the workforce and economic development bills respectively. It remains unclear how workforce and economic development will cross the finish line and what legislative vehicle they will arrive in. There is also still disagreement between the governor and Democrats on these issues, so as with the budget and many other bills, a lot needs to be sorted before final adjournment.

As adjournment approaches lawmakers are beginning to let their post-session plans be known. For most that means running for reelection, for some it means running for higher office and for others retirement. It was reported and confirmed that Representative Sarah Copeland-Hanzas is running for Secretary of State, an open seat with the retirement of incumbent Jim Condos. Senator Josh Terenzini announced he will not seek reelection and there was much speculation in the statehouse about how many more retirements will be announced in the coming weeks.

The 2022 election is already in high gear with many high-profile state officials and lawmakers running for higher office. Lieutenant Governor Molly Gray, Senate President pro-tem Becca Balint and Senator Kesha Ram Hinsdale will face each other in the Democratic primary for Vermont's lone U.S. House seat. Representative Charlie Kimbell will face former Lieutenant Governor David Zuckerman and former Representative Kitty Toll in the Democratic primary to replace Molly Gray as Lieutenant Governor, while Senator Joe Benning is running for the Republican nomination. Representative Becca White will challenge Senators Alison Clarkson, Dick McCormack and Alice Nitka for one of Windsor County's three state senate seats. And Senator Balint's departure raises much speculation as to who will be the next president of the Vermont Senate. Senators Phil Baruth, Brian Campion, Andy Perchlik have all been rumored to be in the running.

With much uncertainty, it promises to be an interesting and chaotic finish to the 2022 legislative session.

DMV Miscellaneous Bill

This week the House passed its version of [S.280](#), An act relating to miscellaneous changes to laws related to vehicles. The underlying bill contains sections on new motor vehicle arbitration, the total abstinence program, overweight truck permits, nonresident titles, the purchase and use tax and towing abandoned vehicles. The House added numerous provisions including an education outreach program for idling of vehicles and a report on distracted driving, among other things. The Senate Transportation Committee reviewed the House changes and then proposed additional amendments that appear on the [Senate Calendar for Friday, 4/29](#), starting on page 3661.

Transportation Bill

Late last week the Senate passed [H.736](#), An act relating to the Transportation Program and miscellaneous changes to laws related to transportation. On Friday the House proposed an amendment to the Senate-passed bill which can be found starting on page 3002 of the [House Calendar for Friday, 4/29](#). It's hard to remember a time when the Transportation Bill was resolved without a conference committee but that is what the House and Senate are attempting to do.

Hydrofluorocarbons Emissions

This week, the Senate gave preliminary approval to [H.523](#), an act relating to reducing hydrofluorocarbons emissions. VADA supports the bill because the House removed new car and truck section sale requirements. The bill will be up for final action in the Senate next week.