



Week 17 - May 6, 2022

THE VERMONT STATEHOUSE INSIDER

Weekly politics & analysis
of the issues in Montpelier



SHAKEUPS

The Vermont Legislature is scheduled to adjourn on Thursday, May 12. At least that is the plan, and after a couple weeks of highly complex air traffic control with the budget and many other bills it looks like lawmakers may be able to meet that goal. It has been challenging for lawmakers to find the balance between the FY2023 budget and tax package and a number of other policy bills that contain spending, and all the pieces have yet to fall into place. But on Thursday afternoon, after more than a week of waiting for clarity from the policy and tax committees, the FY2023 budget conference committee moved swiftly to close out most of the annual appropriations bill.

This burst of activity indicates the interchange is being ironed out between the budget, tax bills and policy bills like S.11, the new workforce/economic development package. S.11 was originally a

bill relating to the regulation of robocalls, but was used as the vehicle to get the House and Senate workforce and economic development priorities through the legislative process. The original workforce bill, H.703, and economic development bill, H.159, both stalled out. S.11 is now in a committee of conference.

While the adjournment picture is becoming a bit more clear, the timeline for the actual end of the legislative session is still unclear. Governor Phil Scott has been vocal about his willingness to veto the budget and any other bill he does not support. He has held to that promise and vetoed multiple bills in the past week, including S.286, the bill to reform the state employee and teacher pension system. S.286 was vetoed despite broad support from the governor's own party. His veto was overridden unanimously in both the House and Senate.

If the governor vetoes the state budget, lawmakers will have to return to either override the veto or negotiate a budget deal the governor will sign. It is difficult for elected officials to fully launch electoral campaigns until the legislature is adjourned *sine die*, in part because of fundraising restrictions, and in part because legislating takes away from time they would otherwise be on the campaign trail. Not every bill the governor vetoes must be negotiated until it becomes law, but the budget certainly does. This raises a question that is currently circulating in the statehouse - if the governor vetoes the budget how long will it take for lawmakers and the administration to work out a deal?

In previous years legislative leaders have set a veto override session in late May or early June. If they do that this year, there will be limitations on their ability to campaign. If they don't schedule a veto session they can only return if the governor calls them back. He would have to do so in order to settle the budget, but he would control when it happens. If he were to call them back a day or two before the new fiscal year starts on July 1, it would limit the time lawmakers have to address vetoes beyond the budget.

While lawmakers are not yet in a position to start campaigning, some individuals, both inside and outside the legislature, have announced their intentions about whether they will be running for office. Earlier this week longtime State Treasurer Beth Pearce announced she will not seek re-election due to health concerns. Mike Pieciak, who had previously announced that he would leave his job as Commissioner of the Department of Financial Regulation, announced on Friday he would seek the Treasurer's office. Attorney General TJ Donovan announced that he will not seek re-election, and signaled that he may well leave his position before his term expires at the end of the year. That prompted Washington County State's Attorney Rory Thibault to announce his campaign to replace Donovan on Friday morning, and Donovan's current Chief of Staff, Charity Clark, has said she is seriously considering launching her own bid for AG. Longtime state senators Jeannette White of Windham County and Anthony Pollina of Washington County said they would not seek re-election, and Montpelier Mayor Anne Watson announced that she is running to be one of Washington County's three state senators.

While Governor Scott has not yet said whether he will run for re-election, community activist Brenda Seigal announced that she would seek the Democratic nomination for governor.

All of this recent electoral news is in addition to the open races for the U.S. Senate, the U.S. House, Lt. Governor, and Secretary of State.

TRANSPORTATION BILL

[H.736](#), An act relating to the Transportation Program and miscellaneous changes to laws related to transportation, the so-called “T-bill” will likely pass without a conference committee. This bill contains a lot of funds to help electrify Vermont’s transportation sector. The House and Senate have traded amendments and have come to an agreement. The House needs to vote to approve the agreement one last time before the bill heads to the governor’s desk.

DMV MISCELLANEOUS BILL

Earlier this week the Senate passed a proposal of amendment to [S.280](#), An act relating to miscellaneous changes to laws related to vehicles. The Senate struck numerous provisions contained in the House version of the bill including an education outreach program for idling of vehicles and a report on distracted driving, among other things. The House postponed action on the bill until May 10, to give the House Transportation Committee time to review the Senate’s proposal. This bill could be in trouble but there are still a few days for compromise to be forged. There isn’t anything VADA requested or needs in this bill.

HYDROFLUOROCARBONS EMISSIONS

This week, the House and Senate reached agreement on [H.523](#), an act relating to reducing hydrofluorocarbons emissions. VADA supports the bill because the House removed new car and truck section sale requirements.