



Week 8 - March 11, 2022

# THE VERMONT **STATEHOUSE INSIDER**

Weekly politics & analysis  
of the issues in Montpelier



## Gordon Wisbach

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## CROSSOVER

Today (Friday, 3/11) is the crossover deadline for policy bills in the legislature. As a result, policy committees scrambled all week, and particularly yesterday and today, to get bills out. Those that do not impact the budget will go directly to the floor of their respective chambers. Bills affecting the budget will be reviewed by the appropriations committees next week so that they can be finalized by the crossover deadline for money bills, which is next Friday, March 18.

Noteworthy bills that moved this week relate to workforce development, the implementation of the retail cannabis market, legislative redistricting, wildlife management, the expansion of community mental health services, energy sourcing, affordable housing, education funding reform, addiction treatment and recovery, pharmacy benefit managers and the creation of a task force to examine how to address current and historic systemic discrimination in Vermont.

Many of these policy bills require appropriations, which has resulted in a logjam in the House Committee on Appropriations. Some members of the committee expressed frustration with the volume of incoming bills with only one week left to also finalize the budget.

While working to clear the queue of policy bills, the House Committee on Appropriations also continued its work to finalize the FY2023 budget. Decisions on what will be included and what will not began in earnest this week, as the committee walked through the budget language in an effort to finalize as much of it as possible. Next week final decisions will be made on the money, which is always one of the most dynamic and intense points in the legislative session.

The committee is working with a General Fund budget surplus and hundreds of millions of federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars. However, the committee still faces upwards of \$70 million in funding requests in excess of available funding, so they will need to make difficult decisions to balance the budget. The committee is expected to invest heavily in workforce development and

higher education, community health services and balancing the state pension fund among many other initiatives.

This week marked the return of the Senate for in-person legislating for the first time in two years. The House has been meeting in a hybrid format since the third week of January, but the Senate has remained fully remote up until this week. The Senate is also conducting a hybrid model, although the schedule varies from the more traditional one in the House.

Finally, the House overrode Governor Phil Scott's veto of changes to Brattleboro's charter that would allow 16 and 17 year olds to vote in local elections. The vote was 102-47, which is just two votes more than the 100 needed for a veto override. The measure received broad support from local voters but Scott says that while he supports engaging young Vermonters in civic participation, he does not believe the voting age should be lowered. The Senate will now need to decide whether to join the House in overriding Gov. Scott's veto. It is likely it will do so.

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## **MOTOR VEHICLE FRANCHISE LAW**

The Senate Transportation Committee (STC) discussed [VADA's scaled back proposed dealer franchise law](#) amendments on Friday morning. The VADA Board scaled back its original proposal at the request of some of the STC members. Lobbyists for the Alliance of Automotive Innovation and GM claimed VADA's proposal would increase costs to consumers and were asked to provide information to support that. There was plenty of discussion about consumer protection and dealership practices. The committee was not ready to move the bill without taking more testimony. As today is the crossover deadline the chance of getting a bill passed seems less likely. There was also discussion about dealership practices unrelated to the bill such as selling vehicles over MSRP. VADA members may be interested in watching this morning's [STC hearing](#) starting at minute 22:39 because there is discussion of dealers and dealership practices.

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## HYDROFLUOROCARBONS EMISSIONS

This week, Marilyn Miller provided a letter of support and testified in favor of [H.523](#), an act relating to reducing hydrofluorocarbons emissions. Marilyn worked with Representative Curt McCormack to remove new car and truck section sale requirements that were problematic so VADA was able to support the bill.

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## TRANSPORTATION BILL

The House Transportation Committee continued its work on [a draft Transportation Bill](#) this week. The committee was very close to voting the bill as of the writing of this report on Friday afternoon.