

2019 Town Meeting Report

Representative Kitty Toll

Cabot- Danville - Peacham



It is an honor and a pleasure to serve as your Representative in Montpelier. We are mid-way through the session and included are highlights of legislation that have passed or are being considered.

-Kitty Toll

Visit the Vermont Legislative website at legislature.vermont.gov for online information. This tool enables all Vermonters to follow the work of the legislature, read the status of a bill and research issues of interest.

State Budget

The House Appropriations Committee is currently working on the Fiscal (FY) 2020 budget. This is the budget that will fund the programs of State government from July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020. The House is on target to advance its budget proposal shortly after Town Meeting Day week. The budget will be balanced based on available revenues with a focus to strengthen Vermont, our communities, and families. State law requires the Governor to deliver his Budget Address to a Joint Session of the Legislature in January. The House Appropriations Committee then builds a budget for the Legislature to consider and ultimately pass. Heads of Vermont agencies and Departments testified before Appropriations in January and February to relate details and defend the proposals set forth by the Administration. To involve Vermonters in the process and give community members the opportunity to voice opinions on the Governor's proposals, the Committee held eight public hearings across the state. Over 300 Vermonters shared their thoughts and concerns regarding proposed investments and reductions.

For a summary on the Governor's proposed budget please visit:

<https://ljfo.vermont.gov/assets/Uploads/9387e7a566/FY-2020-Executive-Budget-Summary.pdf>.

Unclaimed Property

The State Treasurer's Office is responsible for reuniting Vermonters with lost financial property. Currently, there is over \$80 million in unclaimed property waiting to be returned. Financial property becomes "unclaimed" after a business or non-profit entity loses contact with a customer for a period of years. Last year, over \$6.7 million was returned to more than 17,000 rightful owners. There is no charge to claim funds through the State Treasurer's Office. Common types of unclaimed property may include:

- Bank accounts and safe deposit boxes
- Uncashed checks and wages
- Utility deposits and escrow accounts

Search at www.MissingMoney.Vermont.gov or call (802) 828-2407

Agriculture

Hemp

The House Agriculture and Forestry Committee has taken extensive testimony on the cultivation of hemp. Now that the federal government has given the green light to the commercial and recreational growing of hemp, all that remains is for the FDA to define and regulate the consumable products of this plant. In Vermont, much of the interest in hemp is focused on CBD (cannabidiol). While CBD can have small amounts of THC in it, it's non-psychoactive and is not to be confused with marijuana. The stakeholders in the hemp industry - farmers, chemists, processors, retailers, investors support the regulation of this product. The success of Vermont hemp, which is seen as potentially our next beer or next cheese, lies in branding a high-quality product.

Pollinator Protection

In recent years, concern has been raised regarding the health of our pollinators, which include domesticated honeybees, as well as our native pollinators like bumblebees, wasps, butterflies, and a host of other species including birds and bats. To some, getting rid of bugs might seem like a good thing, but our pollinators serve a very important function they help produce the food we eat. It is estimated that we have lost 40% of the insect population in recent years. The House Agriculture and Forestry Committee is working on H.205, a bill that would require regulation of the sale and application of neonicotinoid pesticides to protect pollinator populations. The bill also requires the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets to register, as a restricted-use pesticide, any neonicotinoid pesticide labeled as approved for outdoor use that is distributed, sold, or offered for sale in the State. Certain products, including treated article seed and pet products, would be exempt from the requirement to register as a restricted-use pesticide. The increased registration fee for a neonicotinoid pesticide would be used to provide educational services, technical assistance, and increased inspection services related to neonicotinoid pesticides and pollinator health.

Salisbury Fish Hatchery

The Administration's recommended budget did not include funding for the continued operation of the Salisbury Fish Hatchery. The State of Vermont owns and operates five fish hatcheries which produce 1 million fish to stock our rivers and lakes each year. The Salisbury hatchery has been the brood stock hatchery where the eggs are produced and later transported to the other facilities to be raised. Fishing is an important part of Vermont's recreational economy, generating \$36 million annually. It is estimated that closure of the Salisbury facility would have an impact of 25% fewer fish that would take roughly 3-7 years to recover. The Salisbury hatchery and its wastewater functions do not meet new clean water standards. The House Appropriations and the Corrections and Institutions Committees are working to identify a solution to prevent the closure of the Salisbury facility to protect this important State asset and the economic benefit it generates.

Education

Act 46 Flexibility: In January, legislators introduced a number of bills to provide flexibility to Act 46, the 2015 school merger law. With three lawsuits pending and a potential ruling anticipated this winter, the House Education Committee took testimony in January and February to work narrowly on the question of whether it was appropriate to offer a 1-year implementation delay for districts facing forced mergers. The House Education Committee spent many hours taking testimony from stakeholders on both sides of Act 46. Many witnesses made compelling cases for delay, while others argued that a delay would undermine hard-won progress and rekindle community acrimony. The House voted on two options: A one-year delay option for all communities impacted by forced mergers that was defeated and then passed a compromise amendment on a vote of 134-10 that required some districts to meet the original July 2019 deadline while giving other districts an extension. The bill is now in the Senate for consideration.

Ethnic Studies: H.3 - An act relating to the adoption of ethnic studies standards into statewide educational standards and a policy on ethnic and social equity in schools by public schools and approved independent schools. The bill proposes to bring together stakeholders to work with the Agency of Education and education organizations to develop recommendations to improve instruction in our schools. Successful passage of H.3 will start a collaborative process to reduce bias, harassment, disproportionate patterns of discipline of students from nondominant social groups by both students and school staff. It will start the process to provide a fuller and more accurate representation of history for all students.

Contact Information.

kittytoll@live.com
ktoll@leg.state.vt.us

PO Box 192, Danville VT 05828

802.828.2228 (State House) or
1-800-322-5616 (Toll Free)
802.684.3671 (Home)

Facebook: KittyTollForHouse

Please contact me if you have any questions.

E-Cigarettes & Vaping

In December 2018, the Surgeon General declared an epidemic regarding e-cigarette use among teens. This action was prompted by new data showing a 78 percent increase in e-cigarette use among high school students in just one year's time (2017-2018). In that same timeframe, middle school use increased by 48 percent. According to the Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Health, e-cigarettes addicts youth to nicotine while their brains are still forming. Teens who use e-cigs are four times more likely to become regular tobacco users. Companies advertise to teens on social media, market an enormous assortment of flavors, use cool design and packaging to increase appeal, and sell to minors via the Internet. The Vermont House voted to pass a bill (H.47), which places an excise tax on the liquids and delivery devices of e-cigarettes to discourage use among youth who are the most price-sensitive consumers. This mirrors the tax on other tobacco products and is used for prevention purposes. This is an important public health measure that will improve the health of our communities.

Transportation Budget & Revenues

Fuel tax revenue forecasts were recently upgraded. The increase receipts netted over \$6 million in additional funds for FY 2019 over what had been forecasted. The Administration has proposed adding \$1.8 million to district leveling (paving) to restore cuts made last year, \$3 million to maintenance to help with the tough winter plowing/salt conditions this year, and the remaining balance of \$1.6 million to DMV's transition to a new automated system to track and collect commercial fuel tax apportionments.

The administration's FY 2020 budget request calls for approximately \$617 million in paving, road maintenance, rail work, bridge construction, aviation, and public transit - a 1.1% increase over the previous year. The main sources of revenue are \$258 million in State Transportation Funds (State fuel tax and fees) and \$280 million in Federal Highway Funds. The project breakdown includes:

- \$175 million in State Paving & Roadway programs
- \$34 million in Public Transit funding
- \$9.4 million investment in Western Corridor Rail programs
- \$17.2 million for airport improvements
- Funds several CIRC alternative projects
- \$8 million investment to protect Lake Champlain and other waterways
- \$1.4 million for salt cost increase
- \$200K for opioid treatment transportation

Building Communities Grants

The House Corrections and Institutions Committee has been taking testimony regarding the five Building Communities Grant Programs. These programs were established and funded by the Vermont General Assembly to help communities preserve the state's historic buildings, improve ADA accessibility, and fire safety in community cultural, recreational, and educational facilities. These grants are awarded to municipalities, schools and nonprofit groups and enable these entities to often leverage additional investment promoting economic vitality in our communities. This work will continue as the House weighs priorities in its Capital Budget.