

AFT-NH Legislative Bulletin

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The NH House met briefly yesterday, primarily to pass an emergency bridge appropriation to keep the Dept. of Health and Human Services functioning until the end of the budget year on June 30. While there was the usual vocal opposition from those who oppose virtually any governmental spending, the bill passed easily.

The most intriguing moments centered around the Robert Fisher case. As you may know, the committee investigating Robert Fisher (the apparent founder and contributor to the anti-feminist, misogynistic website “The Red Pill”) concluded on a strict party-line vote to recommend no action be taken against Representative Fisher, nor against Sherry Frost. Frost is the representative brought before the committee in a vain attempt by Republicans to muddy the waters charging her with uncivil conduct for tweets made months ago and for which she had already apologized. What is truly irksome is the claim that Fisher’s odious comments and postings, all posted anonymously or veiled behind user-names, are protected by free speech and therefore not subject to House action. Yes, his online rants on rape, women as intellectual inferiors and other such topics ARE protected by the First Amendment, BUT the House does have rules and limits on free speech that its members must follow. For example, a member speaking in the House may not refer to another representative by name, and there are other restrictions regarding references to the NH Senate and general rules regarding civil discourse. So for Republicans to suddenly hide behind the First Amendment is truly disingenuous, and to draw any comparison between Fisher and Frost is ludicrous, since none of her comments were anonymous but were openly acknowledged by her and she took full responsibility for her words.

In the end, Republicans continue to refuse to take any action in the Fisher case, and just hope it will all go away. Representative Fisher, unrepentant to the end, resigned his seat in the House after the investigative whitewash and in the face of a possible perjury investigation. The committee report, one-sided and written only by the Republican majority, will come before the House on June 1. As for yesterday, that self-same majority voted down a motion to print in the permanent journal the remarks of Representative Debra Altschiller, who gave an impassioned speech on May 4 regarding the Fisher case, misogyny and denigration of women as part of a dominant culture in the NH House. Republicans walked out on her speech two weeks ago and yesterday, refused the usual

courtesy of allowing her remarks to be printed in the permanent journal. Apparently, the hope is that if no record is kept, all will be forgotten. Time will tell.

Voting Rights Elsewhere in the State House, the House Election Law committee narrowly voted to amend and recommend passage of SB 3, the voter suppression bill aimed at curbing non-existent voter fraud (even Governor Sununu now admits he has no evidence of any voter fraud). To solve this non-existent problem, the bill will place new burdens on citizens seeking to register within 30 days of an election. The goal is to discourage such groups as college students from voting, and while same-day registration will continue, the paperwork and the threat of subsequent investigations will likely turn many from bothering to register while doing nothing to curb non-existent voter fraud. It is a solution in search of a problem, but the House is likely to pass the bill.

Edelblut's Croydon Bill The House Education Committee was also active, approving an amendment to SB 8 (the so-called Croydon bill) which completely rewrites the proposed legislation. It is reported that Committee Chair Rick Ladd openly stated that this is Commissioner of Education Frank Edelblut's bill and that he and the Commissioner worked to design the replacement amendment. The new version still permits districts to use public funds to send students to private schools when the district does not have schools for certain grades or any schools at all! In essence, it is another version of vouchers. The private school must be non-sectarian (a bow to the constitutional prohibition of public support of religious schools) but there is no provision preventing private schools from refusing to accept students who need special educational services. There is also pitifully little accountability in place, other than a requirement that the private school administer some sort of annual standardized assessment. In other words, the State would be delegating to the local district its responsibility to provide for adequate education by reneging on accountability requirements and by punting on how districts will provide for students with special needs.

SB 8 will now go to the House with the recommendation to pass the rewritten bill. If it does pass, it will be a victory for Commissioner Frank Edelblut, who has long supported Croydon in seeking to use public monies for private schooling and who is a longstanding proponent of charters, private schools, sectarian schools, and home schooling, everything but public education. Perhaps SB 8 should now be called the Edelblut bill, in honor of the commissioner who in his confirmation hearings claimed he would only be an administrator and not a policymaker. Looks like that stance changed rather quickly!

Kindergarten Funding Setback The Senate Finance committee by a 4-2 vote recommended against including full funding for full-day kindergarten and reverted back to the target formula originally proposed by Governor Sununu. Since the Governor's original proposal he has now supported the position of the House to fully fund full-day kindergarten. However, the committee did support Edelblut's proposal for a spokesperson to the tune of \$83,500 per year. This is not over and we need to make certain members of the House and Senate are reminded of the broad support for funding full-day kindergarten.

Action Needed So, many important votes lie ahead. Please contact your [House Representative](#) and ask her/him to oppose [SB 3](#) (voter suppression), [SB 8](#) (the Edelblut/Croydon bill) and to fully fund full-day kindergarten. And, while doing so, keep your eyes and ears open, as we await the Senate's version of the 2017-2019 NH State budget.

In Solidarity,

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