

LT. GOVERNOR ZUCKERMAN

MAY 2017 NEWSLETTER

The 2017 legislative session ended at midnight on May 18th. The last few weeks of the session were spent negotiating with Gov. Scott regarding collective bargaining and a statewide health care contract for teachers. The Governor attempted to sell this issue as a \$26 million savings for property tax reductions, but as the details emerged, it appeared to be far less certain that tax payers would see a reduction. After multiple proposals, including specified tax reductions, were put forth by the legislature, which Gov. Scott repeatedly rejected, his motives became clear; radically alter collective bargaining or no deal. The legislature decided to pass the budget, previously supported by the Governor, with nearly unanimous tri-partisan support. While the norm each year is to scramble to find money and fill gaps, I would prefer we move to a needs based budgeting process that focuses on our goals and values. Despite the process, I appreciate that this budget met many of our state's priorities without raising any new taxes or fees.

2018 Budget highlights include:

- \$3.8 million increase to support Vermont State Colleges
- Funding for mental health workers to stabilize and improve the services for this community of Vermonters
- Bonding for \$35 million for affordable/workforce housing
- Increased assistance for child care access
- And a short term extension of funding for water quality

I do not think it is the "Vermont way" to introduce radical policy changes and hold up the widely supported budget at the last minute. The legislature included a thoughtful approach to addressing the possibility for saving from a statewide teacher health care contract. **If you support the work of the legislature and this tri-partisan budget, please call Gov. Scott at 802-828-3333 and let him know.**

This session was also extremely difficult due to the uncertainty of federal funds and the politics of Washington. Repeal of the ACA/Obamacare would cost the state approx. \$200 million in premiums support. Despite that difficulty, I've highlighted on the back, some meaningful legislation that passed this year.

UPCOMING EVENTS

May 26

12:00 – Live on Vermont Edition Stations of VPR
6:30PM - Speaking at "Band Aids Won't Fix This Mess! Healthcare Rally"
Bennington Station Parking Lot

June 1 - 7:00AM

Live on Charlie, Ernie, and Lisa in the Morning.
News Talk 620 WVMT

June 6 - 9:00AM

Visit Chittenden County Opioid Alliance
199 Main Street, Burlington

June 8 - 6:30PM

Keynote Speaker at Vermont Adult Learning Graduation
Kirby Hall, Middlebury College

June 12 - Newport Day

(Stay tuned for additional activities)
5:00 – Open Community Conversation. Location TBD
6:30 – Discussion with inmates
Newport Prison

June 20 – 11:00AM

Visit and lunch with seniors
Ethan Allen Residence, Burlington

**For a complete list of events or to invite the Lt. Governor, please visit the calendar on our website:
LTGov.vermont.gov**



2017 LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

Cannabis Reform S.22 – Vermont is now the first in the nation to legislate cannabis reform. This bill will allow individuals 21 and older to grow a small number of plants and possess a small amount. It also creates a commission to study and propose a Vermont-style tax and regulate system in November. Unfortunately, the Governor succumbed to misinformation and vetoed this bill.

Racial Disparities Panel H.308 – This is a positive step toward criminal justice reform in Vermont. An advisory panel will be created to look at race disparities in our criminal and juvenile justice system. This bill is currently waiting for Gov. Scott's signature.

Rights for Pregnant Workers H.136 – It is hard to believe that pregnant workers could be denied simple accommodations such as a seat, extra bathroom breaks, or reduced lifting requirements, but until this bill was signed by the Governor on May 4, 2017 that was true.

Protecting Mental Health of Minors H.230 – This bill allows minors to seek and receive counseling without requiring the consent of their parents. Vermont joins 34 other states in providing this needed mental health access to minors. The Governor signed this bill on May 17, 2017.

Mental Health Parity S.56 – This bill expands Workers' Compensation to cover mental health if it is job related. In the case of emergency responders, workers' compensation is provided for mental health unless the employer can prove it was not related to the job. This bill is currently waiting for Gov. Scott's signature.

Rural Economic Development S.34 – A top priority for me is finding ways to support and grow our rural economies. This bill creates a Rural Economic Development Initiative which would assist local communities in accessing funding. It also provides a tax-exemption for loggers, a traditional Vermont industry, on the purchase of new equipment. This bill is currently waiting for Gov. Scott's signature.

If you support any of the bills that are not yet signed, call Gov. Scott (802-828-3333) and let him know.

2017 LEGISLATIVE LOWLIGHTS

I believe we must attract young families and workers to our state, however, this session we missed three great opportunities to do so. Bills like the ones below are critical to create a welcome and affordable home for families.

Paid Family Leave – This bill made it through the House but only after reducing the benefits and removing any employer contribution.

Minimum Wage – Unfortunately we did not see any movement on this bill but work was done to pave the way for us to increase the minimum wage when we return in January.

Universal Primary Care – Primary care is the most cost effective coverage we could provide and it would address the huge majority of all healthcare needs. Especially with uncertainty at the federal level, we must create a universal system of care in Vermont.

Vermont Lt. Governor David Zuckerman

802-828-2226

www.LtGov.vermont.gov