



GREATER MANCHESTER CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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Last Week to Register for Legislative Dinner

The Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce will be holding its 2006 Annual Legislative Dinner on March 20, 2006.

We are very excited to have U.S. Senator Chuck Hagel as our keynote speaker! Senator Hagel is a ranking member of both the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Senate Intelligence Committee, and will therefore have extremely insightful comments to make regarding our current state of foreign affairs and his perspective on future international developments.

We are close to reaching our seating capacity for this dinner, so please be sure to register quickly if you plan to attend. You may [click here](#) to RSVP on-line for this event.

Details of the dinner are as follows:

Date: Monday, March 20, 2006

Time: VIP reception at 4:45pm (reception will run through part of cocktail hour)
Cocktail hour at 5:00pm
Dinner at 6:00pm

Place: Bedford Village Inn

Price: Tickets for the cocktail hour and dinner are \$65/person
Tickets for the VIP reception and dinner are \$90/person
(VIP reception includes a 45-minute reception with Senator

Hagel and the Chamber Board Directors, in an intimate setting limited to 45 people)

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CROSS-OVER BEGINS

This week, the Senate and House each met in full session and acted on numerous bills that originated in their respective chamber. The House is a bit behind schedule as they approach their self-imposed crossover deadline of March 22nd. This week, the House had three days scheduled for floor debate and only completed two days worth with all yesterday's calendar postponed until March 21st. Once the House has acted on House bills and the Senate has acted on Senate bills, then each body will begin public hearings on the other chambers' bills. At this stage of the process, there are fewer bills to consider but they generally involve more detailed work as they begin to receive a second level of scrutiny. Stay tuned. Below is a recap of some key issue activity this past week.

Rooms & Meals Tax

The Chamber has strongly opposed the attempt to strip away the fee that restaurants, hotels and car rental firms are permitted to keep for collecting the rooms & meals tax in a timely manner on behalf of the state. Earlier, we reported that a sub-committee had modified the amount that could be retained for these collections responsibilities and recommended a significant reduction in the amount that could be retained by a 6-1 vote. However, the full House Ways & Means Committee voted 15-6 against that recommendation and yesterday the full House killed the measure by an overwhelming 231-53 vote. This was a significant victory for NH's hospitality community and was a strong reaffirmation and recognition of the state's partnership with private enterprise providing the infrastructure for tourism in NH.

Trash Tax Talk

The House Ways & Means Committee has voted 11-4 to recommend further study for HB 634, which would establish a new tax on trash. Half of the proceeds from the tax would go to the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, and half would go to non-profit organizations to assist cities and towns with recycling efforts. Varying versions of the bill put increased costs to the City of Manchester between \$50,000 and \$125,000. This cost would be passed on through the local property tax. The full House will likely vote on this bill on March 22.

School Funding - Again?

Outside of the legislative process, the courts have once again weighed in on the issue of school funding. This perennial issue continues to garner headlines in NH and this week found a Superior Court decision ruling that the current method of education funding to be unconstitutional. The decision states that the Legislature "has completely failed" to meet the dictates of the Claremont II Supreme Court decision that was issued in December of 1997. It is likely that the state will appeal the decision to the State Supreme Court. While the Legislature made an effort in the late 1990's to meet the parameters of the Supreme Court's call for more state aid to education, over the last four or five years, such aid has been distributed in a more targeted fashion rather than on a per pupil basis as the Court had instructed. There will not be a legislative initiative in this legislative session but look for this debate to heat up during this Fall's election cycle and when a new Legislature returns in 2007.

Watch Your Water Speed?

You will not likely have to do so this year as a key Senate committee voted 4-1 to kill a House-passed bill that would have set boat speed limits on our lakes and ponds. Based

upon the hallway discussions, it appears that a majority of the Senate is not ready to adopt this measure. Look for a healthy floor debate when the full Senate considers this bill later in the month.

CHAMBER INSIGHT:

Your Chamber of Commerce, being the state's largest business association, took a dramatic step forward in continuing to be a leading voice for the business community in New Hampshire this past week. The Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce held a press conference in Concord this past Wednesday to officially endorse the passage of HB 1177, a bill that would enact a statewide ban on smoking in restaurants and lounges.

Over the past two months, an overwhelming number of our members have told us that they support a statewide smoking ban and believe the Chamber should publicly support it as well. What you may find interesting is the fact that 75% of our restaurant owners who are Chamber members agreed with this school of thought. Due to this tremendous support, our Government Affairs Committee and the Chamber's Executive Committee both voted to throw the Chamber's public support behind HB 1177 this past week.

The Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce supports HB 1177 for the following reasons:

The health of our employees is important to us as business owners

All of us appreciate a work environment in which we can go home each night knowing our physical health is appreciated and protected at the office. This natural desire is shared by those who work in restaurants and lounges, serving us our cocktail drinks and dinners each evening. As restaurant and lounge patrons, many of us have the choice to frequent smoking restaurants or avoid them. However, the employees of these same places often do not have that luxury. Our New Hampshire environment, which takes pride in our rural communities, does not provide a large number of non-smoking restaurants and lounges to which employees can apply for work. Restaurant and lounge employees are traditionally young college students, or career restaurant workers who are limited in their ability to travel long distances to work in the few non-smoking restaurants and lounges dispersed throughout the state. We as business owners, regardless of what that business is, have a responsibility to provide our employees a healthy environment in which to work. No responsible business owner in our Chamber allows smoking within our office buildings or retail stores because we know it is harmful to our employees and staff. This same principle holds true for employees in restaurants and lounges.

The economic health of the restaurant industry will not suffer from a smoking ban

Many critics of a statewide smoking ban continue to allege that restaurants and lounges will suffer from loss of business if forced to ban smoking within their facilities. The facts show otherwise. Eleven other states in the U.S. have already gone smoke-free. Every one of them has seen absolutely no loss in their restaurant revenue and their tax receipts for the hospitality industry. In fact, several states (and even individual communities such as New York City) have actually seen revenue grow in the years immediately following their enactment of a ban. Anecdotally, our Chamber can highlight dozens of restaurants in New Hampshire that have chosen to voluntarily go smoke-free within the last two to ten years. All of them are still operating, and each of their owners will tell you they made the right decision and have seen revenue grow since their decision. We cannot find one restaurant owner who made this same decision, and was subsequently forced to close his or her restaurant as a result of lost business from patrons who decided to go elsewhere.

Additionally, it is important to highlight the fact that each of our surrounding neighbors (Maine, Massachusetts and Vermont) has already gone smoke-free. Our border communities will not suddenly experience a loss of restaurant revenue as a result of a statewide ban, simply because those patrons who decide to find a smoking restaurant will have no alternative options. Very few patrons who insist on smoking in a restaurant will be so dedicated as to drive across the entire northern New England region to find a smoking restaurant in Rhode Island or Connecticut.

Public Health Supersedes "Live Free or Die"

Critics of HB 1177 continue to claim that this issue is about freedom of choice, and that passage of HB 1177 would directly contradict our state motto.

While we fully appreciate the values exemplified in our state motto, we believe this issue does not fall under the umbrella of live free or die.

A person's freedom to do what he or she chooses is perfectly acceptable, as long as his or her decision affects only him or her. That is why our state continues to avoid forcing adults to wear motorcycle helmets, or seat belts, etc. (and in this writer's opinion, this is a wise decision on behalf of our legislators) However, the line is overstepped when one's actions start to affect the health and livelihood of those around him or her. It is for this reason that we do not allow people to drive while intoxicated. We don't have DWI laws because we're worried only about that person killing his self or herself in an accident (although that certainly is a tragedy). We have the laws because we don't want that drunk driver to hurt or kill someone else. When one's actions can potentially harm someone else, the live free or die principle no longer applies. Because we know secondhand smoke is harmful to others, we should act to protect the public health much like we do by enacting DWI laws, asbestos laws, lead paint laws, etc.

Critics also like to say that enacting HB 1177 would set us on a slippery slope toward enacting laws banning the sale of fatty foods, soda, etc. They apply the argument that, if we want to ban smoking because it's scientifically proven to be harmful, then we should also want to ban the use of fatty foods, soda, and other foods that have scientifically been proved as harmful. Since the idea of banning these foods is preposterous and unfriendly toward private sector forces, we should therefore not enact anything that would start us on such a slippery slope. This argument is invalid for one simple reason. Your ingestion of fatty foods or soda will harm only yourself. It will not physically harm the person sitting next to you. Smoking, on the other hand, will certainly harm those around you. Once again, the live free or die principle fails to old water on HB 1177.

A statewide smoking ban will promote our travel & tourism industry

The State of New Hampshire relies heavily on its travel & tourism industry for revenue. We live in the post 9-11 world, in which vacation travel is no longer the luxury it once was. For this reason, New Hampshire must seize every opportunity to promote our state as one that is family-friendly. You will recall the statement made earlier that New Hampshire is the only state in northern New England without a smoking ban. This places us at a disadvantage with our competing neighbors, when it comes to promoting a family-friendly image. We're not claiming that the lack of a smoking ban is going to cause our travel & tourism industry to collapse. Far from it. But having said that, we feel it is critical to take every opportunity out there to promote this image, which includes placing us on an equal footing with our competitors.

HB 1177 will come up for a full House vote on March 21. You can expect to see your Chamber of Commerce fully engaged in this issue, fighting for its passage on your behalf.

We want to thank each of you who took the time to share your thoughts with us pertaining to this issue. Please understand it was your opinions that obliged us to take such strong action. Our Chamber is your direct voice, and we will always seek to represent your opinions on your behalf.

Chris Williams
Vice President
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NH State Legislature www.state.nh.us

The Union Leader www.theunionleader.com/primaryindex.html

Politics NH www.politicsnh.com

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