

When you call the Sergeant-at-Arms: Please leave your ***name & phone number***

Say, "I'd like to leave a message for ___," Leave a clear message, such as:

"I do **not** support..." **OR** I am asking for your vote on ___"

Please refer to a bill number or name whenever possible.



THIS IS FOR THE USE OF FARM BUREAU MEMBERS ONLY!!

FOR THE WEEK ENDING MAY 6, 2022

In this edition: changes in government, prime ag soil on airport lands, water withdrawal, pollinator health, Act 250, broadband, when will they go home?

BIG CHANGES IN NEXT YEAR'S GOVERNMENT!!

It's hard to imagine all the differences at many levels of Vermont leadership next year; our latest count indicates the offices of Secretary of State, Attorney General, Treasurer and Lt. Governor will be occupied by new faces. That doesn't even count Senator Leahy retiring at the Federal level and Congressman Welch giving up his seat to run for Senate in D.C.

Closer to home, there will be new senators with the departure of Becca Balint (running for Congress), Joe Benning (running for Lt. Governor), Cheryl Hooker, Dick McCormack, Anthony Pollina and Josh Terenzini.

On the House side, representatives retiring include Janet Ancel (chair of Ways and Means), Tom Bock, Sara Copeland-Hanzas (running for Secretary of State), Charlie Kimbell (running for Lt. Governor), Marcia Martel, Leland Morgan (running for a newly mapped senate seat), Terry Norris, Kate Webb (chair of Education), Tommy Walz, and Tanya Vyhovsky (also running for a newly mapped senate seat). We have heard whispers of other Representatives who may not run again but have not announced as yet.

In case you are counting, that is two gone from House Agriculture (Bock and Norris) and one from Senate Agriculture (Pollina).

With all this movement, it's really important for farmers and foresters to get involved in

meeting candidates and sharing your concerns and thoughts for the future! Vermont Farm Bureau is urging the counties to step up and host on-farm events after the primary in June. Relationship building is the key to success under the Golden Dome and your Farm Bureau advocates will be preparing information on how to host an event and how to connect with candidates. Let's step up and get involved this summer!

PRIME AG SOIL MITIGATION AND VTRANS – H.709

The language requested by VTrans to exempt prime ag soil mitigation from regional airports – which was eventually pared down to only the Franklin County Airport in Highgate due to lack of support in both the House and the Senate) – was discussed again in Senate Finance with Trini Brassard from VTrans. In the end, a major deal was announced – brokered by Senator Kitchel and Representative Hooper (chairs of House and Senate Appropriations), that will add between \$375,000 to \$500,000 to the VTrans budget for FY23. These funds will go towards paying prime ag soil mitigation fees (as well as engineering fees and other permits) for developers at the Franklin Airport. The dollars will go into the Vermont Housing and Conservation Fund for purchasing prime ag soil elsewhere in the State. There was much pushback in Senate Finance on the exemption language, particularly because members were afraid of setting precedent for future requests for airport exemptions. It's unclear whether they thought adding money to VTrans budget was a precedent. It has been indicated by VTrans that they will be coming back to the Legislature to resolve this problem, because there are several airports also looking at development (although it is unclear whether prime ag soil is involved at those sites.)

Consequently, Senate Finance moved to amend H.709 by striking the exemption and voting the bill out of committee.

ONE LAST HURDLE IN THE SENATE FOR WATER WITHDRAWAL – H.466

This language is up for 3rd reading today on the floor of the Senate, after a continual back and forth between Senate Agriculture and Senate Natural Resources. A straw poll taken again in SNR supported the changes to the bill on behalf of agriculture but an amendment may be offered today by Senator McCormack to return the Rulemaking implementation (which was removed by Agriculture). This would require the Agency of Natural Resources to conduct public input and outreach with interested parties prior to beginning formal rulemaking. VTFB is trying to find out – if the amendment is approved – how it will affect agriculture. Stay tuned!! We are hoping the bill will be passed out as amended by Senate Agriculture and move back to the House.

NEONICOTINOID LANGUAGE IS AMENDED – H.626

Within this bill, a section for monitoring pollinator health was included which requires the Agency of Agriculture to monitor managed pollinator health to establish benchmarks, including presence of pesticides in hives; mite pressure; disease pressure; mite control methods; genetic influence on arrival; winter survival rate and forage availability. Senator Pearson was concerned there would be no pressure on VAAFm to complete this task and so amended the bill to include that VAAFm shall NOT file the final proposal of the rules until they have submitted the proposed rules to the General Assembly. Within 90 days of reviewing the rules or by July 1, 2024, they shall become finalized. This was termed a “check-back” to ensure rules have been completed and stakeholders have been involved in the process.

ACT 250 LANGUAGE – S.234

On Wednesday, the House passed S.234 as written despite an amendment to strike sections referencing forest fragmentation, forest blocks and connecting habitats as well as the restructuring of the Natural Resources Board (which was defeated by a vote of 44-97); the bill now heads to the governor.

BROADBAND LANGUAGE – S.166

Vermont Farm Bureau championed this bill early in the session to ensure Communication Union Districts would maintain more oversight on contracts signed with any contractor or subcontractor doing broadband work on private property. The language was voted out with unanimous support from Senate Judiciary but met resistance in Senate Finance. Ultimately, the lobbyists for the insurance industries were able to sink the language as written. Senator Ruth Hardy worked to provide an amendment to the Insurance Housekeeping bill (H.515), which states the Department of Financial Regulation (in consultation with the Public Utility Commission) SHALL develop a guidance document to include recommendations related to standard insurance requirements and measures to ensure adequate coverage is in force for the duration of broadband construction projects. This will be posted on the PUC website and distributed by the Commission to every broadband service provider registered with the State. It will also go to the Vermont Community Broadband Board for distribution to all recipients of State broadband construction grants. As noted in an earlier UTGD, Farm Bureau has contacted the staff at the Department of Financial Regulation, offering to assist with the development of the guidance document.

This information may include recommendations for mitigating liability risk through safe cleanup practices on a broadband construction worksite and may include notification of

requirements pertaining to the proper disposal of solid waste.

While it is very disappointing we were unable to require CUDs to enforce their contracts, we know the discussion in several committees as well as with the Broadband Council will keep this issue in the forefront. Many thanks to Amber and Scott Hoyt, who gave up much of their worktime to testify on the problems which have occurred on their farm due to sloppy work by subcontractors. We sincerely hope no other farmer or private property owner has to deal with these circumstances. If you do have problems with any broadband contractor or subcontractor leaving waste on your property, please contact Vermont Farm Bureau.

Both the House and Senate have full floor schedules today, and several conference committees are also meeting. Current plans are for adjournment next Tuesday; all members have been told to be prepared to meet on Monday, which is unusual for the General Assembly. And we are still waiting to hear which bills – if any – the Governor may veto and whether leadership will call a veto session in late May to attempt to over-ride.

We are all on “wait and see” mode, listening to the floor debates on bills important to our members. Hopefully, we can begin wrap-up of the 2022 session next Friday in our report.

Thanks for supporting Vermont Farm Bureau!

From the team – Michael, Jill, Jackie, Joe and Bridget