



Legislative Report

Great Falls Regional Chamber of Commerce

January 13, 2012 - Week 3



The Week's Highlights

A federal ruling in support of the Vermont Yankee power plant, the unveiling of the Administration's health care bill, a special session of the Senate regarding Post Irene property issues, and the issuance of new revenue forecasts all amidst the backdrop of a deadline for the introduction of legislation made for a busy week under the Golden Dome. Rep. Bill Aswad (D-Burlington) was also recognized as he celebrated his 90th birthday!

Entergy Prevails in Federal Court

A U.S. District court judge ruled that federal law prohibits the state from ordering the closure of the Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant in Vernon. The announcement came late Thursday afternoon after statehouse regulars had left the building. According to the Burlington Free Press, the judge also issued an injunction on the Legislature's requirement that Entergy must provide low power prices. The Governor expressed his disappointment with the decision and legislative leaders promised to evaluate the decision in light of a pending Public Service Board decision.

[Top](#)

[Top](#)

The Shumlin Administration's health care bill (H.559) was introduced by Representative Michael Fisher (Chair of the House Health Care Committee and Representative Ann Pugh (Chair of the House Human Services Committee) this week. While the bill contains numerous measures related to the duties of the Green Mountain Care Board, two items of interest to our members include: the size of the Exchange and merging of the individual and small group markets. Under the federal reform law, a health insurance exchange or marketplace will start in January 2014. The federal law indicates that small employers, those with fewer than 50 employees, may begin purchasing through the Exchange at that time. As part of their movement toward single payer health care, the Shumlin Administration's bill would have employers with 100 or fewer employees begin purchasing through the Exchange in 2014. The bill would also merge the individual and small group health insurance markets and expand the role and authority of Green Mountain Care Board.

The Chamber supports a bill introduced by Senators Vince Illuzzi and Hinda Miller, S. 208, which would keep the Exchange limited to employers with fewer than 50 employees for the first two years. Merging employers with 50 to 100 employees into the Exchange with smaller employers could raise costs for this group while decreasing their flexibility to choose plans and invest in wellness. Merging the individual and small group plans into one market could also increase costs for small employers. Does your business have fewer than 100 employees? Want to learn more and get involved? Contact Cathy Davis at cathy@vermont.org.

[Top](#)

The state's economists met with the legislative fiscal leaders this week to review a revised economic and revenue forecast.

The report can be found at <http://bit.ly/wzsOXy>. The economists found that while Vermont is outperforming many other states, minor revenue downgrades are needed from the July 2011 projections. Reasons cited included the European debt crisis, oil prices, domestic political gridlock and a slow start to our winter tourism season.

[Top](#)

The House Appropriations Committee chaired by Rep. Martha Heath (D-Essex/Westford) did not make significant changes to the Governor's Budget Adjustment proposal.

However, it did include language that requires the request for 26 positions in human services to be transferred and converted from existing positions in state government so there will be no growth in the permanent work force. The 21 new transportation positions will be limited service positions that last for only two years.

[Top](#)

Several bills receiving some attention would significantly reorganize the way land use, environmental enforcement, and permit appeals are handled. H.513 (sponsored by Rep. Deen (D-Windham) would replace the Natural Resources Board with an environmental review board that would hear the appeals and enforcement cases related to state environmental permits currently heard by the Environmental Court. Rulemaking for the water resources panel would transfer from the Natural Resources Board to the Agency of Natural Resources. Sen. Ginny Lyons also has a bill (S.28) that would consolidate environmental permitting into a Department of Environmental Quality with a three person environmental council. While our organizations do not support replacing the Environmental Court with a professional lay board, we believe that additional hearing officers would improve the process; we support folding the water resources panel under the umbrella of the Agency; and also support on the record review by District Environmental Commissions. These three changes would go a long way in addressing our concerns with delays that the business community has encountered with appeals at the Environmental