



## **THE PARKER REPORT**

**CANNON FODDER...**If some state legislators get their way, Cannon Mountain ski area will be put on the auction block. Supporters of SB 101 are hoping that the state will seek leasing bids for the ski facility. The proposal would be similar to the Mount Sunapee agreement approved a decade ago. Backers of the bill say that the state cannot make the ski operation as profitable as the private sector. However, opponents disagree citing recent profits at the state run ski area and the critical relationship, which the facility has with entire State Park. Cannon ranked in SKI and SnowEast magazines' reader poll of top 10 ski areas for the past two years in a variety of areas, including value, snow conditions, and classic resort locations.

**NOT IN MY BACKYARD...**Governor John Lynch said he will seek legislation preventing New Hampshire businesses from being forced to collect Massachusetts sales taxes. Bay State officials say the case before its Supreme Judicial Court applies only to one set of circumstances and only to Connecticut-based Town Fair Tire Centers Inc. However, that is not how the governor and the NH Attorney General see the situation. Lynch called the court challenge "outrageous" and has directed the State's AG to file a brief with the Massachusetts high court protesting efforts to force the company to pay more than \$108,000 in back taxes on tire sales to Massachusetts residents at its New Hampshire stores. In past years, Massachusetts has spied at state run liquor stores and recorded Bay State license plate numbers before being shoed off state property by New Hampshire law enforcement personnel.

**IT AIN'T OVER 'TILL IT'S OVER...**Legislation has been filed again to raise the retirement age of newly hired police officers, firefighters, and others in the law enforcement community. HB 590 would require all Group II members of the NH Retirement System hired after July 1, 2009 to work at least 25 years and to age 50 before qualifying for a pension. Currently, they must work a minimum of 20 years and be age 45 to receive benefits. Last year, the House passed legislation to raise the retirement age as part of an omnibus bill, but it was rejected by the State Senate. Supporters of raising the age noted that the average retirement age is now close to 53 years. Opponents objected saying that the jobs are stressful and physically demanding and require the earlier retirement age. The NH Retirement System covers over 70,000 current and retired public employees.

**ONE DOWN AND ONE TWO GO...**The NH House gave thumbs up to Governor John Lynch's \$16 million in spending cuts. The House voted 321-54 this week to send HB 30 to the State Senate. The bill is being fast-tracked to get it to the governor's desk quickly in order to maximize the savings. Once signed into law, it would still leave the state at least \$65 million in the red at the end of the fiscal year on June 30, 2009. The

Senate Finance Committee is expected to take action on the legislation this week. Administration officials say disappointing revenues for the month of January will mean state revenues will be off \$250 million to \$300 by the end of this fiscal year. Governor Lynch will be presenting his two-year state budget plan this Thursday to a Joint Session of the Legislature. It is expected to include state employee layoffs and possible cuts in state aid to cities and towns.

**BOOZING IT UP**...State Liquor officials are taking advantage of the down economy by aggressively marketing less-expensive liquor to out-of-state customers. State liquor sales are 4% higher and profits are up 8% over last year, in part because of bargain-hunting customers from other states. Though sales of wine priced above \$25 a bottle are off, the state is seeing strong sales of cheaper boxed wine and larger size bottles. Beer sales are also up after being flat for about five years.

**OUNCE OF PREVENTION**...HB 555, if passed, would decriminalize possession of up to an ounce of marijuana. The bill would impose a maximum fine of \$100 on those caught with an ounce or less of marijuana. Minors would have to complete a drug treatment program and community service, or face an additional fine of \$1,000. Under current law, possession of an ounce or less is a misdemeanor with a possible prison sentence of up to one year. Opponents of the bill testified that passage could provide loopholes for drug dealers many of whom sell marijuana in small amounts. Voters in Massachusetts approved a ballot question decriminalizing possession of up to an ounce of marijuana in November. A bill to decriminalize one quarter of an ounce passed in the NH House last session, but died in the State Senate after Governor Lynch threatened to veto the bill.

**WE'RE NUMBER ONE**...Making sure New Hampshire keeps its first-in-the-nation status is the goal of a bill filed by Representative Jim Splaine of Portsmouth. The seacoast Democrat filed legislation that would guarantee that New Hampshire voters would go to the polls before every other state. Splaine called HB 341 an important message to other states. State law requires New Hampshire to hold the first primary but does not specifically mention caucuses. Splaine's bill would require the Granite State primary to be held before every other primary and caucus, except Iowa's caucus.

### **THEY SAID IT...**

***“There is a unique political culture in this state that is embedded within the citizenry here.”*** Secretary of State William Gardner commenting on the status the NH's Presidential Primary. (AP)

***“Police and firefighting is a young man's job.”*** Arthur Beaudry speaking for the NH Permanent Retired Firefighters Association, in opposition to changes in the retirement age of police and firefighters. (AP)

***“It's one of a number of prudent steps we've taken to address the recession and its impacts on the state budget.”*** Governor John Lynch praising passage of HB 30. (Nashua Telegraph)

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