



THE PARKER REPORT

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A DAY MAKES...Governor John Lynch now says that he will sign legislation making New Hampshire the sixth state to legalize gay marriage, but only if it's changed to give churches and people affiliated with them more protections. HB 436, as passed would allow churches to decide whether they will conduct religious marriages for same-sex couple. Lynch is looking for corrective language that would be identical to what was passed in Connecticut and Vermont. The language would protect "any individual who is managed, directed or supervised" by a religious organization or affiliate groups under religious control. Critics of same-sex marriage accuse Lynch of flip flopping on the issue and cite his telling voters that a marriage should be between a man and a woman. House and Senate leaders have indicated that they would work with the governor to incorporate the changes in an existing bill pending in the Senate (HB 73).

GETTING DRUGGED UP...Should state retirees be required to pay more for their prescription drugs? According to the Commissioner of Administrative Services rising premium costs demand that retirees pay more towards their prescription drugs. The Fiscal Committee agreed and no action was taken to change their previous action increasing the price retirees will pay for their drugs. Administration officials argued that retirees need to be directed into using cheaper generic drugs through mail-order. They testified that the state's drug costs would rise 18% over the next two years without changes. Opponents of the increase pointed to the fact that the changes don't take into account the higher costs of drugs that have no generic equivalent. The Fiscal Committee decided to leave the matter to the full Legislature to decide in the operating budget discussions whether to change the rules for under age 65 premium drugs for retired state employees.

TEXTING TABOO...The Senate Transportation voted 5-0 to recommend making it illegal to send text messages on cell phones or type on laptop computers or other electronic devices while driving. HB 34, sponsored by Richard Drisko (R-Hollis) would make an exception for entering a number or name in a cell phone to make a call. Violators would face a \$100 fine. A similar bill also passed the House last session, but died in the Senate. A recent trolley accident in Boston, in which 50 people were injured, was blamed on text-messaging. State laws covering negligent and distracted driving don't specifically address text-messaging or typing on computers. Violating the distracted driving law is a secondary offense, which means the driver must commit a more serious violation to be stopped. The proposed ban would a primary offense, allowing police to stop drivers for this offense alone.

SENIORITY FOR SENIORS...The State Senate gave its approval to legislation for a new missing alert to find older adults with mental impairments or anyone with a developmental disability. The Senate voted to delay the implementation of the legislation until July 1, 2010 in order to coincide with pending federal legislation and give the media time to prepare for the new law. The bill was also amended to apply to any mentally-impaired person 55 or older who goes missing. There are at least 12 states which have adopted senior alert laws, and New Hampshire is one of five other states scheduled to take the issue up this year. Studies done for the National Alzheimer's Association concluded that half of those with the condition who go missing for 24 hours suffer severe injury or death.

LIER... LIER FACE ON FIRE...The State Senate gave its approval to HB 430 which would hold people accountable indefinitely for lying about murders. If the bill is signed into law, it would remove the statute of limitations on certain crimes committed in furtherance of murder. It would apply to four misdemeanor crimes which now carry a one-year limit on prosecutions, and to three felonies that have a six-year limit. New Hampshire has no statute of limitations on murder.

ZOOM... ZOOM... ZOOM... A plan to let drivers go full speed through tolls on Interstate 95 received Senate backing. HB 391 passed the Senate on an 18-6 vote and heads back to the House to deal with some amendments. Only drivers with E-ZPass transponders would be able to take advantage of the "open tolling" concept. According to DOT officials the first installation would occur by mid-2010 on Interstate 95 in Hampton, where weekend tourist traffic often leads to lengthy back-ups. Other installations are being considered for the F.E. Everett Turnpike tollbooths in Bedford and Hooksett. Toll increases would pay for the improvements needed to implement high-speed passage through the Hampton Plaza.

STRIKE UP THE BAND...Honorably discharged veterans would get priority in taking Veterans Day off in New Hampshire under HB 90 passed by the House and Senate. The bill would also allow the veterans to take the day off before the holiday without penalty provided that they gave their employers adequate notice. The legislation would not require the employer to pay the veteran. The bill also gives the holiday preference to police, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, 911 operators, and other emergency responders, as long as a substitute employee was available to work.

BOOZING IT UP...The Senate gave its approval to HB 392 which would allow cigar bars to sell liquor under an exception the Senate has approved to the two-year old ban on smoking in public bars and restaurants. The bill now heads back to the House to review the limits the Senate placed on the proposed cigar bar liquor license. The cigar bars could not sell food or allow cigarette smoking on the premises. The Senate version wants job applicants to be presented with a written statement that working in a cigar bar would expose them to secondhand smoke and increase their risk of getting cancer and heart disease.

MY ACHING BACK...Under legislation passed by the Senate, newly hired police and firefighters along with other members of Group II of the NH Retirement System will have to work an extra 5 years before collecting retirement benefits. HB 590 would apply to workers hired after July 1. The new hires would need 25 years on the job instead of

the current 20 years before collecting benefits. The House-passed version would also the minimum retirement age from 45 to 50, but the Senate amended the bill deleting the minimum age requirement. The Senate Finance Committee will next take action on the bill.

THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW...When the federal income tax was first established, in 1913, the tax code was 400 pages. Today the tax code is 70,320 pages. As the saying goes...the best things in life are free, but sooner or later the government will find a way to tax them.

THEY SAID IT...

“If the Legislature passes this language, I will sign the same-sex marriage bill into law.” Governor John Lynch saying that he would sign legislation to legalize same-sex marriages only if it gives protections to employees of religious groups which refuse to take part due to their beliefs. (Nashua Telegraph)

“However the governor wishes to couch his decision on this, the fact remains that by signing this bill he will have broken his trust with New Hampshire voters after repeatedly stating that he opposes gay marriage.” Kevin Smith, Executive Director of Cornerstone Policy Research, speaking in opposition to the gay marriage bill. (Nashua Telegraph)

“The gay marriage bill has been in front of the Legislature for five months, yet we always find ourselves looking at last-minute changes.” Senate Republican Leader Peter Bragdon (R- Milford), citing Governor Lynch’s delay in weighing in on the gay marriage issue pending before the Legislature. (Nashua Telegraph)

“It’s a good idea. It’s time has come.” Senator Peggy Gilmour (D-Hollis) supporting a ban on texting while driving. (AP)

“All of us know of someone who has had Alzheimer’s who’s got lost on their way to somewhere.” Senator Robert Letourneau (R- Derry) supporting a senior alert system in New Hampshire. (Nashua Telegraph)

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