

## What's New with Jon

April 7, 2008

Dear Constituents:

Here is my report for the week ending April 4, 2008:

1. PILOT – The 2008 budget passed by the House includes about \$132,000 in increased payments for Montpelier from the State of Vermont for a total of about \$780,000 per year. This equates to more than 2 ½ cents off Montpelier's tax bill. This number will increase still more if other towns adopt local option taxes before the Legislature adjourns. This is one of the largest increases in PILOT ever.
2. The Budget Bill – With the leadership of Chairperson Martha Heath, the Appropriations Committee found ways to at least keep our promises in this tough budget year even if we are not making new ones as, for example, for health care and transportation. Almost every request about which I received e-mails was honored probably because other legislators received e-mails asking for the same relief. Attached are the budget highlights.
3. Transportation Funding – Attached are highlights of the Transportation Bill and a description of "Vermont's Transportation Dilemma." Although we did not raise transportation taxes this year, we will have to do so soon. One projection indicates that we may need to increase transportation funding by about \$180 million per year simply to keep up with required maintenance. I am in the process of posting this study at my web site ([www.jonformontpelier.com](http://www.jonformontpelier.com)). If the gas tax were increased to meet all of this need, the increase could be 60¢ per gallon. A possible remedy would be for the federal government to increase highway taxes and therefore spending. Vermont receives more in federal money than is collected from gas taxes paid in this state so I believe the cost for Vermont could be reduced substantially.

4. Groundwater – I found time during House floor debates to study further the groundwater bill, which is needed to address two problems. First, spring water withdrawals are at best poorly regulated if, and only if, Act 250 is triggered. Homeowners downstream from a surfacing spring have little recourse if the water from the spring is directed elsewhere. Large groundwater withdrawals are regulated more to protect the quality of the withdrawn water rather than to protect wells of residents living nearby.

We need to define clearly reasonable uses for subsurface water so as to protect investments of current landowners benefiting from this resource. This should be done by clearly defining a legal cause of action for such property owners and second by adopting clear standards for a revised groundwater permit system expanded to cover spring water. Even then, if the studies supporting permitting are wrong, a new cause of action provides precious little protection for a homeowner losing his well. It is usually more cost effective for individuals—especially those with the least resources—to improve the well for, say, \$5000 than to hire a lawyer to sue a large, possibly well heeled water withdrawer to pay this cost. So I have floated the idea that large withdrawers would pay a small “insurance” fee into a fund that would be used to reimburse homeowners for repairing wells actually affected by large water withdrawals.

5. Earth Hour Follow Up – Several people e-mailed me asking if we could reduce outdoor lighting at the State House. We light the State House mostly to draw and hold tourists in Montpelier. Where few tourists enjoy the view after, say, 9 or 10 p.m., we leave the lights on all night, unnecessarily increasing carbon footprints and wasting money. I believe the State Buildings Office will consider any request made by an appropriate spokesperson for the City. I suppose this could be Warren or me, but I think the best process would be for the City Manager to make the request after a hearing for public input to the City Council. I will start this process. Please call or write me as to when at night you feel the State should stop lighting the State House if the Legislature is not then in session.

## Jon for Montpelier News April, 2008

As always, thanks for giving me the chance to serve.

Very truly yours,

Jon Anderson

### Attachments

*This message is intended to reflect my personal view of issues facing the Legislature. It is NOT intended to be a comprehensive or thorough discussion of any topic, just a few lines to stimulate thought. If you would like to be added to my subscriber list (or removed from it), please send an email to: [janderson@vtlaw1.com](mailto:janderson@vtlaw1.com). Please feel free to contact me if there is anything I can do to assist you in dealing with Vermont Government.*