

# Republican Review

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## LEGISLATIVE LEADERS UNVEIL PLAN TO COMBAT DRUG CRISIS

**Concord, NH** - Wednesday, legislative leaders announced a multi-faceted approach to tackle the substance abuse epidemic affecting communities statewide.

"We continue to be concerned about the unprecedented substance abuse epidemic in New Hampshire and we all know families and friends that are affected by this. We are prepared to lead the way in combating substance abuse by sponsoring a number of bills as part of a multi-faceted plan that will address various aspects of this complex and widespread problem," said Senate President Chuck Morse (R-Salem).

"The legislation discussed today will be swiftly and properly vetted in public hearings, allowing for necessary public and stakeholder input so that the legislature produces the best solutions possible to break the substance abuse cycle. I am confident that the legislature will come together on these bills so we can take clear and strategic action to reduce the burden of the substance abuse epidemic in our communities," said Senate Majority Leader Jeb Bradley (R-Wolfeboro).

House Speaker Shawn Jasper (R-Hudson) added, "In addition to the initiatives the legislature plans on addressing and fast-tracking in the 2016 session, we're also monitoring the deployment of funds and resources that were included in the legislature's budget, which became law just over a month ago."

"Many departments are just now seeing a new influx of funding, in part, to help their efforts in addressing this very important issue. Had the governor not vetoed the budget, these resources would have become available over the summer and it's quite possible these agencies would have been able to fully utilize them at this point," Jasper said.

"Addressing our state's substance abuse epidemic is a top priority today, as it has been throughout this legislative session and will be in our 2016 business. There is no single bill that can solve the problem, but we are actively engaged on a daily basis on this issue and taking the necessary steps - both large and small - to ensure our state is able to combat and recover from this terrible and tragic situation. This is not about political expediency. It is about working in a coordinated manner with a comprehensive approach to make sure we do it right, with input from all of the stakeholders."

## Union Leader Blasts Hassan Response

In case you missed it, in Friday's edition of the Union Leader, an editorial was published titled, "Hassan in a hurry: Rushed response after months of delay." The editorial said, in part:

*"Senate candidate Maggie Hassan is showing a lot more urgency to address New Hampshire's drug problem than Governor Maggie Hassan ever did."*

*"Hassan blocked a 75 percent increase in state spending on drug and alcohol programs when she vetoed the state budget. That delayed the state's response by nearly three months." They go on to say:*

*"Now, she's in a hurry. Hassan is trying to ram through emergency rules on prescription drugs, and wants the Legislature to come back for a special session over the holidays."*

*"Rather than work with lawmakers to coordinate a broad response to the heroin and opioid epidemic plaguing New Hampshire, Hassan is panicking."*

The editorial springboards off of the House and Senate joint press conference held on Wednesday, where legislative leaders questioned the need for a rushed special session.

## GOVERNOR'S PLAN UNACCEPTABLE, FISCAL COMMITTEE LEADERSHIP FIGHTS FOR RETIREES

**Concord, NH** – The Joint Fiscal Committee met last Tuesday to discuss Governor Hassan's proposal that seeks to increase the premium contributions made by state retirees receiving healthcare benefits. The Governor's proposal comes in response to an estimated shortfall of over \$10 million in the current biennium.

"The Governor's plan is unacceptable because it places a significant and unfair burden on our state's retirees. We have an obligation to protect retirees from the high increase in healthcare related costs while also funding this priority within the current budget," said Senate President Chuck Morse (R-Salem).

"The Governor needs to do her homework on this issue and find a sensible and attainable solution because we need to do better for our state's retirees," said Morse.

"The steps the Fiscal committee took today attempt to minimize the fiscal impact on state retirees and begin the process of minimizing costs to taxpayers by steering us away from a multimillion dollar deficit in the retiree health care program," said Representative Neal Kurk (R-Weare), Joint Fiscal Committee Chairman. "We still have work to do to ensure the system remains solvent, and we are looking forward to completing the necessary plan changes that will provide a long term solution at our next meeting. Our goal is to ensure that retirees can continue to rely on these benefits, and taxpayers aren't sent the bill."

"It is imperative that we develop and implement a long-term solution that addresses the projected retiree healthcare shortfall of approximately \$10 million in the current biennium without unfairly increasing costs for retirees living on a vulnerable fixed income," said Senator Jeanie Forrester (R-Meredith), Joint Fiscal Committee Vice Chair and Senate Finance Chair.

"The Governor lacks leadership and the ability to find and communicate a realistic solution that does not place the burden of higher healthcare costs on our retirees. The Governor's proposal would force seniors to pay higher deductibles, co pays, out of pocket expenses, and premium contributions for healthcare, which they did not expect and likely have not budgeted for. The Governor must continue to work towards a solvent, lasting solution that maintains healthcare benefits at the current cost to retirees, while living within the current state operating budget," Forrester added.

### What health benefit plan changes did the Fiscal committee make last week?

The Fiscal committee voted to change pharmacy plans only. No changes were made to the medical services plan. Under the changes adopted by the Fiscal committee, state retirees both under and over 65 would see their copays for prescriptions rise by \$5-\$10. This will result in savings to taxpayers of \$2 million.

## Facts & Figures: Dept. of Corrections

Last week there were multiple reports of the Dept. of Corrections proposing an unusual procedure.

*"Facing ongoing staffing shortages, the New Hampshire Department of Corrections is considering allowing trained inmates to conduct suicide watches, a model used in federal prisons and some other state facilities, and which has shown at least some success" ~ [Concord Monitor 10/18/2015](#)*

We thought it was important to point out that the budget passed by the legislature that became law when the governor's veto was overridden, increased funding for DoC by more than \$13 million (over 6%) compared to the last budget.



*Photo: In 1953, several flags were transferred and/or placed in new cases in the Hall of Flags at the State House.*

*During that process, an Honor Guard was present, out of solemn respect and admiration for the service and sacrifice of those who served, and those whose blood remains on those flags.*

## 2016 Legislation Preview

Interested in seeing the full list of proposed legislation for 2016? Visit the LSR (Legislative Service Request) page on the General court website at [http://gencourt.state.nh.us/lsr\\_search/LSR\\_Results.aspx](http://gencourt.state.nh.us/lsr_search/LSR_Results.aspx)

LSR's are the first step in the legislative process. The Office of Legislative Services is staffed with several experienced bill drafting attorneys that work with House and Senate members, taking their ideas and concepts for legislation and producing draft bills that contain the necessary language that matched the sponsor's intent.

You'll notice that only the bill titles and sponsors are available on the website. The bill drafts are confidential until they are signed off on by the prime sponsors of the bill. A bill sponsor may choose to share their draft bill prior to final sign off. Once approved, the bills eventually are assigned a bill number - HB1234, as an example, and assigned to the appropriate policy committee.

## LEGISLATURE STEPS IN TO DEFEND EDUCATION FUNDING

Monday, Strafford County Superior Court allowed the Speaker and Senate President to intervene in the lawsuit filed by the City of Dover against the State of New Hampshire. At issue is whether or not the State is violating the state constitution via our current education funding formula, which caps the amount of adequacy aid municipalities can receive each year. The Attorney General's office took the unusual step of publically stating that it would not defend the current law. Therefore, legislative leaders thought it was appropriate to intervene to defend it.

Important to note is that the legislature's budget removes the cap on adequacy grants in FY 17, and provides language to send any surplus dollars in the education trust fund to make capped towns as whole as possible. Despite the governor's call for the legislature to concede immediately and pay Dover and other affected communities, she offered no explanation as to why in both of her proposed budgets as Governor she continued the practice of capping adequacy grants. As the press release states below, towns and cities are far better off under the legislature's proposed budget, which sunsets the cap, than with the governor's cap plan.