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Nancy Carbonneau Morrison: Gov. Sununu can be NH's clean water champion

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Nancy Carbonneau Morrison

"WE ARE not complacent as a state. New Hampshire is a purple state and I was hired to get things done," said Gov. Chris Sununu in his February 2022 State of the State Address. He has also said that PFAS, the dangerous toxic blend of "forever chemicals" found alarmingly often in New Hampshire waters, is "the biggest environmental challenge the state has ever seen."

I'm heartened reflecting on Gov. Sununu's words. Our state's elected House and Senate members have sent the governor their bipartisan seal of approval on **HB 1454**. This bill to protect waters statewide passed with strong majority votes in both legislative bodies. It is a smart "purple bill" that is headed to the governor's desk for his signature.

HB 1454 is essential to safeguard our rivers, lakes and coastal waters from landfill leachate. Thousands of gallons of this liquid are generated daily by landfills – all of which the EPA has told us will eventually leak. When leaks and spills happen, they can carry PFAS and other toxic

contaminants to waterbodies even at a distance.

This bill will be a huge step forward for New Hampshire, implementing a site evaluation and science-based setback distance from our waterbodies for any new landfill. It will replace the current, arbitrary 200-foot setback. This regulation will cost the state nothing and is an insignificant expense to potential landfill developers. Understand that HB 1454 does not stop new landfills in the state, but instead sites them appropriately to protect our water from foreseeable pollution.

Let's think about water contamination in New Hampshire. Google Saint-Gobain in Merrimack or the Coakley Landfill in Greenland and North Hampton, to be reminded what is at stake when we cannot safely drink, bathe, cook, garden or sell our homes because of water contamination. Life takes a very grim turn when that happens. HB 1454 is a way to prevent such personal and community disasters and the millions of dollars spent on attempted remediation. Ruining our waters is enormously costly in both neighborhood grief and taxation.

Right now, Gov. Sununu is deciding whether to sign House Bill 1454 into law. The governor has expressed concern that HB 1454 could cause property taxes to go up, perhaps imagining a landfill capacity shortfall. Yet, the state Department of Environmental Services has testified that there is plenty of landfill capacity from north to south for decades and that there is no capacity shortfall ahead. Significant increases to property taxes sounds a lot more like industry spin than calculable actualities.

HB 1454 is an opportunity for our governor to be the clean water champion of the Granite State. By signing the bill and completing the earnest work of the Legislature — the work of being a purple state — he will mark a turning point in protecting our priceless environment and drinking water.

Let's all applaud the exemplary bipartisan collaboration we have seen in Concord and urge the governor to sign HB 1454 promptly — and with his kudos to the House and Senate.

Nancy Carbonneau Morrison lives in Mont Vernon.