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David Rochefort: A Look At Landfills, Out Of State Trash

David Rochefort

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As you all know, over the past few years the North Country has been fighting against out-of-state trash and building new landfills in our backyards only to have them filled with garbage from Massachusetts and other parts of the Northeast. For the most part, the North Country's representatives in the State House are unified in our opposition. Unfortunately, it has felt like for every one step we've taken forward, we've been shoved two steps backwards with each new attempt. Just when it is starting to look like we're making progress, deals fall apart and the future of our communities remain unclear.

There are several reasons for this. This issue affects the North Country much more directly than the richer, more affluent southern communities. The trash industry and the special interests have coalesced to stop any meaningful legislation from passing. Even our own Department of Environmental Services has recently proposed new landfill rules that some say are the most lax in the country, even weaker than some third world countries. We have open space, and the folks in more densely populated areas want to take advantage of it.

That's the bad news. The good news is that despite these challenges, during the legislative session that is just now coming to end, we came closer than we ever have to finding a comprehensive, bipartisan solution to our trash troubles and our waste worries.

This past year, I sponsored two pieces of legislation to try and stop the import of out-of-state trash into our communities. HB 1620 suspends the issuance of new landfill permits until 2028, and HB 1632 prohibits newly permitted solid waste facilities from accepting more than 15 percent of solid waste transported from out-of-state. For the first time, we had two bills that passed the NH House of Representatives with unanimous bipartisan support.

Why were our efforts different this year than in past years? The major difference was leadership and experience. We brought in the right experts to testify, we found a workable framework for the communities and the stakeholders, and we had messengers that were able to connect with members that were previously unsupportive of our efforts. The overall campaign and the legislation was stronger than it has been in previous years.

Unfortunately, neither of these bills were able to successfully navigate the chambers of the Senate, but the groundwork has been laid for a plan that protects that tranquil beauty of our communities.

Following the procedural defeat of these bills, I was quoted in several papers saying that the Senate was “sitting on their hands” on this issue. It’s true. There simply isn’t a consensus builder on this issue in the Senate - not yet at least, and that’s why I am running for the Senate. The North Country needs to approach the Senate with the right message, the right messenger, and with someone with the know-how to finally get resolution to this challenge..

This issue is complex and there is no easy answer. However, we are getting closer, and I truly believe that with the right leadership we will be able to finally put a roadblock on the I-93 trash superhighway.

David Rochefort is a Republican candidate for State Senate in District 1. He currently represents Grafton-1 in the NH House of Representatives.