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Senate bails Sununu out over landfill siting issue

By Kevin Landrigan Union Leader Staff
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A few hundred supporters for a landfill siting bill protested outside the State House Thursday, urging lawmakers to approve the measure despite Gov. Chris Sununu's veto of it. The House of Representatives overrode Sununu's veto but the State Senate upheld it.

Kevin Landrigan/Union Leader

CONCORD — Gov. Chris Sununu needed the state Senate to avoid the political embarrassment of losing a veto fight Thursday even though his own Republican Party controls both houses of the Legislature

The Senate moved quickly to close ranks behind Sununu after the House of Representatives had voted 256-65 to override his veto on legislation that would have imposed tougher siting requirements for new landfills in New Hampshire (**HB 1454**).

Without any discussion, the Senate voted 12-11 against the override, five votes shy of the two-thirds majority needed to make any legislation law despite Sununu's rejection.

The governor had a much easier time with his other seven vetoes of 2022 bills as none of those came close to reaching the override threshold.

A few hundred supporters of the landfill siting bill rallied outside the State House Thursday morning and dozens of them sat in the House gallery and applauded the veto override vote.

“This is a bill that has enormous support around the state, it’s a bipartisan bill; small groups of people gathered and then grew to larger groups. This is a statewide issue,” said Rep. Edith Tucker, D-Randolph and the bill’s prime author.

The bill required that an independent hydrogeologist certify it would take at least five years for any contamination from a new landfill to flow into a nearby body of water.

As amended, these landfill developers would only have to meet a two-year safety standard if built with protections such as thicker linings that go beyond state requirements.

“We can’t take a chance. Locating landfills on permeable soils without sufficient buffers to deal with failure is not responsible,” said Rep. Walter Stapleton, R-Claremont.

Sununu warned it could raise property taxes

In his veto message last spring, Sununu said the state’s landfill regulations were already “rigorous and robust.”

The intention of those pursuing the bill was good, but Sununu said there was no evidence that lined landfills were adversely affecting state waterways.

“It is extremely likely this bill would curtail landfill development in the state and lead to New Hampshire’s waste to be transported out of state, creating higher costs and property taxes for our citizens,” Sununu wrote in his veto message Friday.

In the past, opponents maintained the bill is targeted at stopping a proposed landfill from Casella Waste Systems in Dalton.

The landfill would be placed near Forest Lake, which along with Ammonoosuc River is a source of drinking water for Littleton, Dalton and other surrounding towns.

But nobody spoke against the bill in either the House or Senate.