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## State House Dome: Packard: Sununu veto overrides will wait until early 2024

By Kevin Landrigan Union Leader Staff  
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HOUSE SPEAKER **Sherman Packard**, R-Londonderry, decided none of Gov. **Chris Sununu**'s vetoes justifies bringing back lawmakers into session this fall.

Packard announced the House would take up those vetoes when members return in January for the start of the 2024 session.

The House leader told lawmakers to set aside next Jan. 3-4 as session days, no doubt in part to help the House get an early start on the more than 200 bills retained for more review this fall.

Traditionally, the House comes back for a day in September or October every year to take up vetoes, but this move makes sense.

Despite having the most closely divided body in 150 years, the House finished its work in bipartisan fashion.

Packard sees no good reason to ruin that era of good feeling with intramural squabbles over minor bills rejected by Sununu.

The only exception would be if the governor also vetoes the subsidy relief (**HB 142**) for the owners of the Burgess Power Plant in Berlin.

Proponents say without the assurance the bill would provide, the plant could face financial consequences as early as January.



Legislative leaders acknowledge the bill is important, but they say postponing final action on it until early January won't put the plant in jeopardy.

## Ayotte plans big fundraiser

Republican candidate for governor **Kelly Ayotte** has assembled a star-studded team of hosts for her first big fundraiser since she officially became a candidate.

The event will be in Derry on Aug. 23, the same night as the first GOP presidential debate.

The welcoming team includes ex-Gov. **Craig Benson**, finance chair **Andy Crews**, Manchester housing developer **Dick Anagnost**, former State Chairman **Steve Duprey**, Manchester tech exec **Jeremy Hitchcock**, auto dealer **Steve Talarico** and former Health and Human Services Commissioner **Nick Vailas**.

Significantly, this group includes some past financial front men and women for former Senate President **Chuck Morse**, Ayotte's rival for the nomination for governor.

The campaign says it will go down as one of the biggest fundraisers in New Hampshire history. Prices are \$1,000 a ticket, \$5,000 to sponsor and \$15,000 to host.

## Not a lost cause

Three-term state Rep. **Josh Yokela**, R-Fremont, doesn't shy away even if a cause appears lost.

He is often in the well of the House arguing passionately for a conservative bill even after a House committee has overwhelmingly rejected it.

The fiscally conservative New Hampshire Liberty Alliance has noticed and made Yokela, 36, its Legislator of the Year for 2023.

Yokela serves on the House Municipal and County Government Committee and the Special Committee on Housing.

Since first winning a seat in 2018, he has gotten a score of A or higher from the liberty group every year.

In 2023, he was one of only five with a perfect score.

The others scoring 100% were GOP Reps. **Matthew Santonastaso** of Jaffrey, **Alicia Lekas** of Hudson, **Emily Phillips** of Fremont and **Michael Granger** of Milton.

According to the **ratings**, 28 others scored 90% or better. The highest-rated Democrat, Manchester Rep. **Ben Baroody**, came in at 34%.

As one would expect, the group gave most House Democrats a score of 20% or lower.

The highest-scoring state senators were Sen. **Keith Murphy**, R-Manchester with a 69% score, **Kevin Avard**, R-Nashua, at 55%, and **Bill Gannon**, R-Sandown, at 52%.

The group named **Stephen Nass** as its Activist of the Year. Nass is a founder of the Free State Food Network and runs a monthly Seacoast preparedness group.

Nass organized 53 people who testified in support of **HB 119** to expand options for homestead food operations and not require those with elk and red deer to take their dead animals to a slaughterhouse.

## Black jurist honored

The legal elite and civil rights community celebrated the unveiling of a portrait honoring **Ivorey Cobb**, the first Black jurist in New Hampshire during a Supreme Court ceremony last Friday afternoon.

Born in Andalusia, Alabama in 1911, Cobb graduated from Suffolk University Law School. After an early career in newspaper publishing, Cobb opened a law practice in Colebrook in 1962.

He was elected president of the Coos County Bar Association in 1965 and in the same year was named an associate justice of the Colebrook Municipal Court. Three years later, he became the full-time justice of the Colebrook District Court.

Cobb was the first and only Black judge in the state, serving until his retirement in 1981.

## Crackdown vet-scammers

U.S. Rep. **Chris Pappas**, D-N.H., has spent two years working on legislation to go after those who try to financially scam vets seeking benefits. It's paying off.

Last week, Attorney General **John Formella** joined a coalition of 48 state prosecutors supporting Pappas' bill, known as the **Guard VA Benefits Act**.

The Military Officers Association of America and VFW are on board with the legislation, which has 118 co-sponsors.

Pappas chaired a subcommittee **hearing** on the issue last year.

## Big endorsements for Prescott

Former state Sen. and Executive Councilor **Russell Prescott** unveiled an impressive list of initial endorsements of his 2024 GOP bid for the First Congressional District seat.

Prescott finished fifth in the 2022 primary won by **Karoline Leavitt** of Hampton.

Leavitt, the chief spokesperson for Trump's Super PAC, is sitting out 2024.

Prescott's team runs the GOP spectrum, from former Rep. and Trump insider **Al Baldasaro** of Londonderry to former moderate House Speaker **Doug Scamman** and ex-Rep. **Stella Scamman** of Stratham, Rep. and House Labor Chairman **Will Infantine** of Manchester, House Finance Chairman **Ken Weyler** of Kingston, House Majority Whip **Jeanine Notter** of Merrimack, Child and Family Law Chair **Mark Pearson** of Hampstead, GOP operative **Paul Young** of Portsmouth and ex-State Police Director **Lynn Presby**.

In 2018, Presby crossed party lines to back Pappas.

## VA mess hurts NH bid

Sen. **Maggie Hassan**, D-N.H., said the biggest obstacle to New Hampshire getting a full-service veterans hospital built is that the last new facility, built in a suburb of Denver, Colorado, was a debacle.

The **project** took more than 14 years to complete and was more than \$1.3 billion over budget.

The new VA budget requiring the agency to sell out new infrastructure projects is encouraging, Hassan said.

“We have to make our fight for some of that money. The Denver site was way behind schedule and over budget and people are skeptical about approving new things,” Hassan said.

## Jay Kahn is back

You knew that when Keene Democrat **Jay Kahn** left the State Senate on top in 2022, he wasn't gone for good. Last week, Kahn said he will run for mayor of his home city to replace Republican **George Hansel**, who will not seek a third term this fall. A former Keene State College administrator, Kahn has several prominent citizens on his side, including independent and former Keene Mayor **Kendall Lane**.

## Gaming group kicks off

A new 13-person commission meets for the first time Monday morning to study the state's charitable gaming laws.

The budget trailer bill's Section 583 created this group, which includes seven lawmakers, the lottery executive director, the attorney general, one charity gaming operator, two charity representatives and a member of the public.

The committee was a tradeoff for legislators like Senate Ways and Means Chairman **Tim Lang**, R-Sanbornton, and Senate dean **Lou D'Allesandro**, D-Manchester, who wanted a wholesale review of how charitable gaming has exploded.

They agreed to greenlight a new law (**SB 120**) approving a five-fold jump in the maximum bet (from \$10 to \$50) at these charity casinos in exchange for this commission.

This study will explore the exclusive monopoly the charitable gaming operators have on historic horse racing gambling machines.

The commission has \$150,000 devoted to the effort. A report containing recommendations for legislation is to come by Nov. 1, 2024.

This same law eliminates this commission on July 1, 2025.

## Now that's a grudge

Cornerstone Action, the most powerful socially conservative interest group, is not backing off its crusade against two-time Republican candidate for governor **Karen Testerman** and her husband, Rep. **Dave Testerman**, R-Franklin.

The group bought a digital ad on Facebook last week that attacked Rep. Testerman for opposing parental rights and anti-transgender legislation.

“When conservatives rallied to protect female prisoners, Rep. Dave Testerman single-handedly destroyed their efforts, colluding with Democrats to block New Hampshire from recognizing biological sex,” they wrote. “Karen Testerman then spun a web of falsehoods to defend Dave Testerman’s actions.

“Read our **analysis** responding to each of Karen Testerman’s false claims and exposing her real agenda.”

This links to a commentary Cornerstone published last March.

## Education funding suits

Rockingham County Superior Court Judge **David Ruoff** made an important incremental decision last week, putting off the trial of a second education funding lawsuit, **Steven Rand** v. State of N.H. until he can complete an order on the trial of the first suit, brought by the ConVal and other school districts.

Lawyers for Rand have proposed a settlement offer to end statewide property tax benefits for property-rich towns by next April. Lawyers for the state have not responded.

## It’s all about Trump

Few political observers think former President **Donald Trump** can hold onto the massive lead he enjoys over all his GOP rivals in New Hampshire and other key early states.

But any movement right now in New Hampshire still goes back to The Donald.

According to recent independent polling, the two GOP candidates enjoying a minor move upward are:

- **Vivek Ramaswamy**: The Ohio biotech millionaire and crusader against “woke” politics is also Trump’s biggest defender in the field, vowing to pardon Trump of any and all crimes if he’s elected president and,

• **Chris Christie**: The former New Jersey governor's claim to fame in this race is his dogged attack against Trump, which earned him praise and a glowing introduction from Gov. Sununu last week.

## GOP loyalists: Check mailbox

If you are one of the 30,000 most devoted New Hampshire voters in NH Republican presidential primaries, watch your mailbox for a free copy of "Two Cents to Save America."

That's the manifesto of Republican presidential candidate and qualify performance executive **Perry Johnson**. While Johnson was at the Iowa State Fair at the end of last week, the books started to arrive at New Hampshire homes and will continue to do so over the coming days.

## Super PACs mail it in

It's the summer before our first-in-the-nation primary, and that means when candidates are not attending barbecues or marching in parades, their Super PACs are using direct mail to acquaint New Hampshire voters during their absence.

Never Back Down, the front group for Florida Gov. **Ron DeSantis'** campaign, dropped a flyer that told the "uniquely American" story of the governor who wore the uniforms of an electrician's assistant, Yale baseball player and JAG officer assigned to the Navy Seals during the Iraq War.

"Uniforms don't define a person, but they do tell a story," the mailer said.

The American Exceptionalism PAC came through with a two-pager for Ramaswamy, promoting his pledge to move 75% of federal workers out of D.C. and back to the states.

## Environment activism day

**Jon Swan**, founder of the Save Forest Lake movement to block siting a landfill near the pristine Dalton state park, organized a day for activists to brainstorm about future challenges on the environment.

The New Hampshire Network: Environment-Energy-Climate, a volunteer, nonpartisan group, assisted with the "Keep NH Green Environmental Summit" event Saturday at the Prescott Farm Environmental Education Center in Laconia.

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