

February 10, 2011

Local legislators busy as session gears up

By Dustin Luca STAFF WRITER

It is only a month into their time in office, but Andover's three home-grown legislators are already off and running with a long list of bills and issues they support.

Last month, Andover Sen. Barry Finegold and Reps. Jim Lyons and Paul Adams, took their oaths. Since then, the three Andover residents have been focusing on a number of efforts, including speaking with their constituents, working on legislation, and adjusting to their committee assignments.

REP. PAUL ADAMS, 17th ESSEX DISTRICT

Adams anticipates that being named to the House Public Health and Revenue committees will allow him to pursue goals of cutting spending and taxes.

"We can't afford the old ways of doing things anymore," Adams said. "We need an institutional shift coming from Beacon Hill."

Part of that institutional shift Adams said he is creating involves providing regulation impact statements to small businesses to inform them of what new regulations mean for them. Adams also aims to create a more predictable business climate with legislation, allowing businesses to become more successful.

At the same time, he said is also putting a large focus on how municipalities handle money.

"We have an over-reliance on property taxes and income taxes," Adams said. "We have to find a way to do more with less."

Part of that involves changing state laws to give towns greater flexibility to choose their employees' health care plans and, on another front, having more unions become involved in solving the budget crisis, he said.

With all of this going on, Adams' campaign financing is also under review from the Office of Campaign and Political Finance, as some members of the state's Democratic Party have called into question the source of \$50,000 to his campaign.

Adams was not willing to talk directly to the review, other than to say that he looks forward to going over its outcome when it is completed, but he said the review hasn't impacted his work on Beacon Hill.

"This is not consuming my time," Adams said. "I am currently 100 percent focused on the business of the people."

REP. JIM LYONS, 18th ESSEX DISTRICT

For Lyons, trips around the many communities he represents has taken up quite a bit of his time, but he said a series of bills he supports have been filed for consideration.

Meanwhile, a court case between him and a family charged with harassment against him moves forward in district court. Lyons declined to comment on the case for this story.

Considering spending reform, Lyons said he has filed three bills looking at insurance reform, pension reform and altering state mandates passed on to local municipalities. In those efforts, Lyons said he aims to raise retirement age to 65, modify how pensions are recalculated to consider an entire career instead of the last three years of work and, to top his pension reform off, knock legislative service off of the list of time eligible for pensions.

"Too often, people would enter government for their own private enrichment instead of public service, and I think we need to change," Lyons said. "It isn't about the people in office. It is about the people we represent."

Lyons also has an eye on how benefits in the state are awarded.

"People who are in the state illegally are receiving benefits," Lyons said. "People are extremely frustrated given the fact that we are cutting and cutting, and the money we are spending is increasing. My sense is that my constituents are not happy with that, and we need to have a discussion on that."

Lyons also said he is moving forward on an effort to reducing meals, sales and income tax all to 5 percent, a platform he ran on in his bid for Beacon Hill last year.

SEN. BARRY FINEGOLD, 2nd ESSEX/MIDDLESEX DISTRICT

For the newly-elected senator, moving from his old representative seat to his current position on the state senate has given him more power.

"You really feel like you can get a lot more done being one in 40," Finegold said.

Part of Finegold's focus right now, he said, is helping businesses.

"I am creating a small business job creation tax credit," Finegold said. "There are a lot of small businesses around Andover. Something I've heard about a lot is how hard it is to be a small business owner, so I think this will be very helpful for them."

While saying that he is working with legislation that will help small businesses control health-care costs, he said his efforts also work to cover another issue he is tackling in office: helping people get back to work.

Finegold said he is working on financial literacy, an effort to bring fiscal responsibility, or at least the awareness of such responsibility, to school children in Massachusetts.

Finegold added he is following a number of local state-level projects very closely, particularly the project to add an interchange to Interstate 93 at Lowell Junction and an MBTA effort to add a second set of railroad tracks in town.

"The commute into Boston has been brutal," Finegold said. "More and more people would ride into Boston if there were more scheduled trains. And with double tracking, I think we would be able to do that."

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