

Representative Kimberly Jessup's January 10, 2021 FPF Post:

The Vermont legislature gaveled in the 2021-22 biennium on January 6th. In sharp contrast to the chaos in Washington, the Vermont House calmly conducted its opening business under new Speaker Jill Krowinski. On January 7th, I joined colleagues in passing J.R.H. 1, a joint resolution condemning the storming of the U.S. Capitol as an attack on democracy.

In terms of committee assignments, I will be returning to the House Appropriations Committee as Ranking Member. I expect the financial pressures faced by so many Vermonters to be paralleled by challenges in crafting our state budget and the year ahead to again be heavily influenced by federal stimulus spending decisions.

On January 12, the House is scheduled to take up H. 48, authorizing alternative procedures for 2021 annual municipal meetings in response to COVID-19. Passed by unanimous vote in the House Government Operations Committee on January 7, this high-priority bill was developed in December and January with Vermont municipal leaders who expressed concern early on that the COVID-19 pandemic may make it unsafe to meet in person for annual Town Meetings in March.

The bill proposes the following changes to current law for 2021 only:

- authorizes municipalities to move the date of their 2021 annual Town Meeting;**
- authorizes municipalities to mail Australian ballots for use in their 2021 annual Town Meeting;**
- specifies that the terms of elected board members will continue until a successor is chosen (only applies to towns with charters); and**
- permits the Secretary of State to issue supplemental elections procedures to protect the health and safety of voters, elections workers, and candidates.**

Additionally, on January 5th, the legislature's Joint Fiscal Committee approved up to \$2,000,000 for the Secretary of State's office to account for expenses incurred above and beyond normal already-budgeted election expenses for towns and entities choosing to take advantage of options in H. 48.

As always, please know that I welcome your thoughts and questions. I can be reached at kjessup@leg.state.vt.us or (802) 249-9306.