

**CAPITOL LETTER, Rep. Kathy Pellett
Chester, Andover, Baltimore, N. Springfield**

This past week the House passed a new Transportation Bill, H. 896, authorizing a special program to deal with the impact of the harsh winter weather on the state's deteriorating state and town highways and reallocates funds from the Governor proposed "Operation Smooth Ride." The House Transportation Committee looked at this proposal and felt that since 80% of roads are the responsibility of towns, the \$3 million should be reapportioned appropriately to town and state roads -- \$2 million to towns and \$1 million for state road. The only way towns can raise the money for maintenance of their roads is through property taxes and this additional \$2 million will help municipalities from having to raise property taxes.

Also passed this week was S. 345, Workers' Compensation. The purpose of this bill is to reduce the cost of workers' compensation insurance by rewarding employers who have safe and healthy workplaces by reducing premiums. It requires insurers to offer small deductible workers' compensation insurance policies to all employers and permitting employers to pay single-visit, medical only claims out of pocket. The bill also has provisions to improve enforcement of workers' compensation fraud.

S.304 - Groundwater Withdrawal Permit Program was also passed this week, which protects our water supply. The state currently lacks a comprehensive groundwater withdrawal program and does not significantly regulate groundwater withdrawal for commercial or industrial purposes. This bill amends the groundwater policy of the state by declaring groundwater to be a public trust resource. Vermont abolished the common law doctrine of absolute ownership of groundwater in 1985. Two esteemed law professors and the attorney general's office have noted that designating groundwater as a public trust resources will not result in a taking of property. There are 24 states that have declared groundwater a public trust. All but 3 of the rest of the states have permitting programs for their ground water. Making ground water a public trust increases the idea that we are stewards of this precious resource and will "ensure that water is managed and used in the public interest to benefit all Vermonters" (from the Report of the Legislature Study Committee of Groundwater Regulation and Funding, January 2008).

We only have one or two more weeks left in this session and I will keep you informed as best. You can read previous "Capitol Letters" on my website, www.kathypellett.org. where there is also a link to the Vermont Legislature (you can check the status of all bills here). As always you can contact me in Montpelier Tuesday to Friday at 1-800-322-5616 or kpellett@leg.state.vt.us. On weekends and Monday I can be reached at 875-1372 or kathy4house@vermontel.net.