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Tuesday, March 2, 2021

Vol. 158, No. 283 • 20 Pages

LEGISLATURE

Both parties find fault with governor's emergency orders

■ Opposition is likely to coalesce around one bill and hold another if needed for 2022.

By Kevin Landrigan
New Hampshire Union Leader

CONCORD — A pair of House committees debated Monday over whether to alter the powers of the governor and Legislature to deal with post-pandemic emergencies.

State Rep. Terry Roy, R-Deer-

field, authored a few of the 10 bills packaged for the public hearings. One that several colleagues said they liked would require the Legislature to vote to extend beyond six weeks any emergency declared by the governor (HB 433).

"Between 400 of us, we have broad shoulders instead of one person having all the accountabil-

ity," Roy said. "It is not only about reining in power; it is about sharing responsibility."

A resolution from Rep. Melissa Blasek, R-Merrimack, (HCR 2) that would terminate the current state of emergency was the most dramatic before the House Executive Departments and Administration and Legislative Administration Committees.

"This was intended for war, a natural disaster or a terrorist attack. This was not intended to

deal with a disease or pandemic," Blasek said.

Last March, Gov. Chris Sununu declared a state of emergency to deal with COVID-19, and has renewed that status every three weeks since, when it was due to expire.

Sununu has issued 85 executive orders that early on shut down bars and restaurants and imposed other restrictions on business



"Executive orders for a year are excessive. I feel there has been quite a bit of overreach."

REP. KRIS SCHULTZ
D-Concord

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SCOUTING

This Eagle flies through glass ceilings

■ Thornton Scout said she had to prove herself, and received exceptional support.

By John Koziol
Union Leader Correspondent

Valerie Ann Johnston of Thornton is blazing a new trail as a member of the first class of female Eagle Scouts.

The 19-year-old said scouting has allowed her to do "a bunch of things I wouldn't have," including — through five-years' worth of leadership training — providing her with an insight into "what it's like in a male-dominated organization."

"I had to prove myself" on several occasions, the 2020 graduate of Plymouth Regional High School said, but always received "exceptional support."

That support includes that of her brother, Shane, who has also earned Scouting's highest honor.

At 14, Valerie Johnston joined the Venturing program run by the then-Boy Scouts of America. In 2019, the BSA changed its name to Scouts BSA and said it would allow girls to earn the rank of Eagle Scout. It was then Johnston joined Troop 58 Campton/Thornton/Waterville Valley, where her father Dean Johnston is scoutmaster.



PROVIDED BY DANIEL WEBSTER COUNCIL

Valerie Ann Johnston of Thornton is a member of the first class of female Eagle Scouts.

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THE BUBBLE SHOULD BE BUSY



DAVID LANE/UNION LEADER

Co-owner Joel Hatlin, left, gives a tour to Gov. Chris Sununu at the opening ceremony for the NH Sportsdome in Hooksett on Monday.



DAVID LANE/UNION LEADER

Gov. Chris Sununu speaks to the grand-opening gathering under the translucent 72-foot-high center of the NH Sportsdome.

NH Sportsdome opens in Hooksett; another coming soon to Goffstown

By Jonathan Phelps
New Hampshire Union Leader

HOOKSETT — Teams were itching to hit the field immediately after the NH Sportsdome received its certificate of occupancy, the owners of the bubble-like sports complex say.

The air-supported structure on Benton Road, just off Route 3, is limited to practices, scrimmages and training sessions for now. On Monday morning, the business celebrated the

grand opening of the \$6.3 million facility with a visit from Gov. Chris Sununu. Owner Joel Hatlin and other partners plan to open a second location in Goffstown later this year, hoping to capitalize on heavy demand when pandemic restrictions ease.

"We realized our region lacks the necessary facilities to provide a state-of-the-art training location for youth, young adults and

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DAVID LANE/UNION LEADER

The giant scissors are ready for the ribbon cutting as guests mingle at Monday's grand opening at the NH Sportsdome .

Dome

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adults programs alike," he said. "The result is many programs are left with little choice with respect to finding adequate space to train with their teams."

The bubble covers a collegiate-sized artificial-turf soccer field without a need for support beams. The air cycles through the facility every two hours.

The space can be used for all sports, but so far it has mostly been used for flag football, soccer, lacrosse and field hockey. The structure will be inflated year-round and features both heating and air conditioning systems.

The Goffstown location will open at 376 Goffstown Back Road, where radio towers once stood.

"We know after COVID the amount of usage is going to go up and up and up," Hatin said. A lot of groups have scaled back practices or training to limit their exposure to the virus, he said.

"We know next year when we get back to some level of normalcy they are not going to have enough training space," he said.

The opening in Hooksett came after a year and half of contentious planning board meetings. The facility is not allowed to host games as part of its approval because of concerns about traffic, but the owners plan to ask the board to reconsider in the future by proving games will not significantly increase the number of cars entering and exiting the property.

The facility opened on Feb. 18 with groups starting that evening.

Town Administrator Andre Garron said he was "blown away" after walking through a vestibule and into the inflatable structure.

“Look at what this is about. This is about having kids come back, socializing and interacting and getting back to normal.”

GOV. CHRIS SUNUNU

"I know it took a lot of hard work and perseverance," he said.

The structure, manufactured by Ontario-based Farley Group, is 72 feet tall — approximately the distance to the bottom of the massive video screen above the field at Cowboys Stadium in Texas.

"We aren't worried about anyone hitting the lights," Hatin said during a tour of the facility. "I tried, but I can't do it."

The owners say the dome structure is different from the Hampshire Dome complex in Milford, which was closed for nearly six months after collapsing in March 2017.

The field features 2½ miles of artificial turf rolled out across the field, which can be broken down into two smaller fields.

"Our rental model is either the full field or half a field and that gives teams plenty of space to practice," Hatin said.

The business opened with a partnership with Hatin and his wife, Ronda, Frank and Meg Bizzarro and Alden Moore.

The financing came through a

combination of Small Business Administration and direct loans with the support of the Capital Regional Development Council and Merrimack County Savings Bank.

"We've had such a great response to (Hooksett) and to prospective customers who want to go to Goffstown," said Frank Bizzarro, chief financial officer. "I don't think we're done."

Stephen Heavener, executive director of Capital Regional Development Council, said the project was proposed before the pandemic and ended up being built in the middle of it.

"Now it's opening hopefully at the near end of COVID," he said.

Jennifer Boulanger, CRDC loan officer, said the project was appealing because of its different uses, including youth traveling sports teams.

"The minute they announced it, I knew we had to make it happen," she said. "There is nothing like it in New Hampshire, and there are very few like it even outside of New Hampshire. It is just remarkable."

During brief remarks, Sununu called the project "awesome, downright awesome."

"The last year has been tough and has been tough for a lot of folks in a lot of different ways," he said.

He said New Hampshire businesses have remained resilient through the pandemic. Sununu called the timing symbolic as many say normalcy is nearing as more COVID-19 vaccines are administered daily.

"This isn't just another building," Sununu said. "Look at what this is about. This is about having kids come back, socializing and interacting and getting back to normal."

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