

Local rep. splits from Democrats

Brenda Ferland won't join
GOP, remains undeclared

By **MATTHEW McCORMICK**
Staff Writer

Concord's Democratic majority is a little smaller than it was after regaining control of the House in November.

After being passed over for chairmanship of the House Transportation Committee, on which she has served for eight years, Rep. Brenda Ferland of Charlestown decided to leave the party and re-register as undeclared in December.

"After the election, everyone said 'everything is going to be different,'" Ferland said Friday. "I found out it's not so. No matter what party you belong to, it's the buddy system."

The move, which Ferland confirmed Friday, reduced the House majority Democrats won in November from 74 to 73. It does not, though, rep-

See **FERLAND** - Page A2

resent a shift in Ferland's political philosophy, she said.

Ferland said she was drawn to the Democrats when she first registered to vote because of their stance on social issues, though she said that always has been tempered by a belief that more money and bigger government are not always the solution.

Finding solutions to benefit the people of Sullivan County District 5 is what Ferland said always has been her first priority in Concord.

"My first job is to the people I represent," she said.

It is a position that has, at times, led her to cross party lines.

During the 2005 session, she said she voted against a party-sponsored bill that fines minors for not wearing a helmet while riding a bicycle, and last year, opposed a bill that would have banned smoking in restaurants.

In the end, Ferland said those political transgressions mattered more than eight years of party membership and service when it came time for House Speaker state Rep. Terie Norelli, D-Portsmouth, to hand out committee leadership assignments.

Though Ferland was offered a vice chair position, she said that after nearly a decade on the transportation committee and two years as clerk of the body, anything less than the chair was an insult.

That was especially true after Ferland, who does not plan to run for re-election in 2008, learned that the representative who received the job, state Rep. Jim Ryan, D-Franklin, had only one term

under his belt.

"They were telling me I was a good enough Democrat to be vice chairman but not a good enough Democrat to be chairman," she said. "At that point, I said, 'for a long time, I've been voting independently, so I'll file as an independent.'"

A message left at the speaker's office on Friday was not returned.

Though the new designation is not likely to change much for Ferland in her last term — she has turned down offers to join the Republicans — she said it

would free her to vote against some of her former colleagues' more fatuous bills.

"They were telling me I was a good enough Democrat to be vice chairman but not a good enough Democrat to be chairman. At that point, I said, 'for a long time, I've been voting independently, so I'll file as an independent.'"

Brenda Ferland

I-Charlestown

"If it's a really stupid bill, I get to vote 'no' regardless of where it came from," she said. "I won't have to think about party."

Other than that, though, Ferland said her time in Concord will be business as usual.

"I will show up and study the bills and do my job just as I've always done," she said.

Matthew McCormick can be reached at mccormick@eagletimes.com or (603) 543-3100, ext. 104.