

Wednesday, March 19, 2008

House: Text or drive, but don't do both

By KEVIN LANDRIGAN, Telegraph Staff

CONCORD – Rep. David Campbell, D-Nashua, convinced the House of Representatives on Tuesday that it's far more dangerous to text message while driving than it is to eat a fast-food hamburger.

Motorists who use both hands to text message with a handheld device would face \$100 fines under legislation that cleared the House on Tuesday.

Campbell said this form of wireless communication is becoming a growing occurrence on the road, especially among young people.

“Pushing small buttons and reading small letters is very dangerous behavior behind the wheel,” Campbell said. “There is no way to do it safely.”

The House took an unrecorded vote of 176-149 to pass the measure over to the state Senate. A car traveling 55 miles per hour goes 80 feet per second, so the person taking four seconds to type the word “yes” travels the length of a football field without looking at the road, Campbell said.

“A lot of things can happen in the length of a football field. Ask the Patriots,” Campbell said.

“You can eat a Whopper and glance back and forth. You cannot text message and keep your eye on the road while you are texting.”

The four-year-old negligent driving statute is general in nature, and Brown said that's appropriate because it allows law enforcement to go after motorists using new technology.

“The beauty of this law is whatever comes along will be included if you are caught not paying attention to your driving,” Brown said.

But Campbell said he could not find a single example of a motorist being cited for the offense.

“I think it's a very weak law; I think it's a very vague law,” Campbell said.

The bill specifically permits drivers to use a cell phone to make a call or to use a GPS navigation program on the dashboard. Partially for this reason, several telecommunication companies supported the bill.