

BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS



- ✓ Provides \$39 million to nursing homes for a 2.9% rate increase for next fiscal year.
- ✓ Increases the Educational Cost Sharing grant by \$442 million over the next two years.
- ✓ Creates a Division of Autism Spectrum Disorders under the newly named state Department of Developmental Services (DDS).
- ✓ Sets aside \$136 million of this year's nearly \$1 billion surplus for the state's Rainy Day Fund.
- ✓ Exempts vehicles that get greater than 40 miles per gallon from the state's sales tax.
- ✓ Provides \$94 million in fiscal year 2008 and \$121 million in fiscal year 2009 to increase reimbursement rates to doctors, hospitals, clinics, dentists and ophthalmologists that treat patients covered by Medicaid.
- ✓ Sets aside \$27.2 million over two years for grants to students attending public colleges and \$16.2 million over two years for students attending private colleges.
- ✓ Fully funds all 270 students who are clients of the Department of Developmental Services who will graduate from high school and need supportive adult services.
- ✓ Makes permanent a sales tax exemption on: fluorescent light bulbs, programmable thermostats, energy efficient windows and doors, energy efficient water heaters, furnaces, and boilers.
- ✓ Provides a sales tax exemption on hybrid or other fuel efficient cars and an option for towns to eliminate property tax on fuel efficient cars.
- ✓ Expands after school programs with over \$2 million in new funding over the next two years.

Regional Performance Incentive Program Property Tax Relief

This bill encourages shared services and reduced duplication of services for towns. PA 07-239 calls for proposals to share services by a region or municipality. These proposals target services that increase municipalities' purchasing power or provides a cost savings that lowers property taxes.

2007 Legislative Report



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State Representative
BETTY BOUKUS



Dear Friend:

The 2007 session of the General Assembly helped build a strong foundation for Connecticut's future, using property tax relief, increased funding for education and health care, energy reforms, support for job-creating economic development, and strengthened public safety as the building blocks.

In addition, the legislature committed necessary funds to continue paying down state debt, put millions away for future rainy days, and to protect pensions of retired teachers.

You will find in this newsletter a summary of some of the important legislation we approved. If you have any questions or need further information, please feel free to contact me, and I'll respond as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,

Representative Betty Boukus
Deputy Majority Whip
22nd Assembly District

A MAJOR CHANGE IN PRESIDENTIAL POLITICS

Connecticut's Presidential Preference Primary is moving from the first Tuesday in March to the first Tuesday in February, beginning next year. The change will put Connecticut in step with 40 other states, including the majority of New England states, that are getting an earlier start on choosing candidates for the Presidential election.



OUR COMMITMENT TO EXPAND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY



The State of Connecticut this year made an unprecedented commitment to expanded educational opportunity for all its students in grades kindergarten

through 12. The keystone of this commitment was the addition of nearly \$182 million in the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grant to cities and towns, up to a total of \$1.81 billion for the fiscal year that began July 1, 2007. Just as important, the General Assembly approved an increase in the ECS foundation from \$5,891 to \$9,687 per student.

In addition to increased ECS funding, additional dollars were provided for many vital educational programs and services.

The totals in these areas include:

- \$10.2 million for school readiness programs;
- \$9.2 million for magnet schools;
- \$4.4 million for OPEN Choice programs;
- \$3.3 million for charter schools;
- \$2.2 million for after-school programs;
- \$2.2 million for head start/early childhood links;
- \$2 million for support of vocational agriculture programs.

These commitments are evidence of the General Assembly's determination to provide our young people with the highest-quality instruction to help prepare them for higher education and the ability to be successful in an increasingly competitive national and international workplace.

Highlighted at the recent After School Program Summit, held at the State Capitol, were discussions on expanded after school services and programs. Featured speakers at the event were: (l to r) Michelle Cunningham, State Representative Denise Merrill and Representative Betty Boukus, long time advocates for after school programming and funding.



PROTECTING OUR SCHOOLCHILDREN

Prompted by a fatal accident in West Hartford involving an unqualified school bus driver, the Transportation Committee moved quickly to draft a bill strengthening control over those responsible for transporting schoolchildren. The legislation requires the Department of Motor Vehicles to notify public transportation providers about any driver whose commercial license or passenger endorsement has been suspended, withdrawn, or re-

voked, and requires expanded drug testing, with automatic disqualification for those who test positive. The legislation also bars the department from issuing temporary licenses. In addition, school districts applying for a state school construction grant on or after July 1, 2008 have to submit project plans for the school's security infrastructure.



NEW AND EXPANDED ENERGY INITIATIVES

The General Assembly approved a number of bills that provide new and expanded programs and initiatives aimed at controlling energy costs for all the state's citizens.

New legislation allows municipalities to create Energy Improvement Districts that could create their own power to support local government and businesses by developing and operating their own small generating plants that would be controlled by local Energy Improvement District Boards. Revenue bonds will be available to public and private investors; the Districts will be exempt from local taxes; and the Boards will be exempt from local and state taxes.

- The budget includes \$85 million, which will be used for the Energy Conservation Fund and the Clean Energy Fund.
- Connecticut Innovations, Inc., will provide \$50 million in grants to municipalities for renewable energy sources and cogeneration facilities.
- A \$50 million grant program will fund small-scale generation projects in businesses and state buildings powered by solar energy, fuel cells, and other forms of renewable energy.



INCREASED HEALTH CARE A LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY

The General Assembly allocated a nearly \$184 million increase to upgrade health care for all our citizens, fulfilling a pledge made by the majority leadership prior to the beginning of the 2007 session. Almost half the increase, more than \$94 million, was directed to increasing Medicaid reimbursements to health care providers and institutions throughout the state, an area that had been restricted in previous years by tight revenues. Included in the total was \$30 million from the state's Fiscal Year 2007 surplus as a first step in essential assistance to distressed hospitals around the state. Among the other significant increases in health care were:



- \$20 million to increase managed care dental rates;

- \$7.7 million for a cost-of-living increase in home care services;
- \$2.5 million for school-based health clinics;
- \$2.5 million for community health centers;
- \$1.4 million for asthma management programs;
- \$1.3 million to treat children's behavioral health problems;
- \$1 million for healthy lifestyle initiatives and childhood obesity prevention;
- \$49 million to expand Connecticut's innovative HUSKY program.

In addition to these programs, the General Assembly approved a \$39 million cost-of-living increase for private providers which offer valuable services to supplement state programs in such areas as mental health, mental retardation, children and families, social services, and public health.

HOLLYWOOD EAST CONTINUES TO GROW



The General Assembly expanded legislation, approved last year, that created a 30 percent tax credit for film productions done within the state. New legislation adds other media including sound recordings, music videos, digital media productions, interactive web sites, and video games to the list of projects now able to apply for similar tax credits. The legislation also offers tax-credit packages to media businesses that come to Connecticut to build infrastructure in the state and to leased and purchased properties used solely for media production. In addition, five state agencies will combine their resources to develop a trained media workforce, including an unpaid intern training program for high school and college students, a production assistant training program, and an on-set training and mentoring program.

COMMITTEES REVIEW CONSTRUCTION FAILURES ON I-84

The legislature's Transportation and Public Safety Committees held two days of oversight hearings in July to determine what went wrong on the major construction project to upgrade I-84 in the Waterbury and Cheshire areas. The companies involved in the project reportedly were responsible for, among other things, installing a drainage system that does not work properly, insufficiently anchored guardrails, poorly welded light poles, incorrectly built bridges, and substandard concrete median barriers. The committees plan to review the testimony and documents that have been submitted to the lawmakers and use the review as the basis for possible legislative proposals to be placed before the 2008 session of the General Assembly. The committees also indicated support for legislative enactment of a "clean contracting" bill and adequate Department of Transportation staffing to provide essential state oversight of transportation projects.

HOMEOWNERS' RIGHTS STRENGTHENED IN EMINENT DOMAIN PROCEEDINGS

The General Assembly reformed eminent domain this year by tightening the rules for taking property for redevelopment. All redevelopment plans now must receive a public hearing, and must be approved by a municipality's legislative body by a two-thirds vote. Approved plans will be subject to a ten-year deadline and, if a plan is not completed in time, any takings must go through the approval process again. Property owners will be able to ap-

peal proposed takings to court, and courts will be able to prohibit takings if statutory procedures are not followed. If properties are not used as a part of a plan, or if the timetable for a plan expires, a property's former owner will be given the first opportunity to buy back the property. Finally, the bill provides that homeowners be compensated 125% of their property's fair market value as determined by an average of two independent appraisers.