

## COMBATING HIGHER GAS PRICES

The legislature took action to provide consumers relief at the gas pumps through two significant policy changes. First, we eliminated the scheduled July 1, 2008, 0.5% increase on the wholesale price of gasoline, saving consumers approximately \$0.03 per gallon of gasoline. Second, the legislation paves the way for discounts for cash purchases at gasoline franchises by prohibiting franchise contracts from not allowing dealers and distributors to offer discounts based on payment type. The goal is to reduce the per gallon price by eliminating the credit card processing fee for consumers who pay with cash.

In addition, the General Assembly established the Buses For 21st Century Mobility Program designed to expand the use of commuter buses to combat ever-increasing gasoline prices by making it more attractive for commuters to get out of their cars and into mass transit. Using \$5 million already available in the budget, the expansion will include increases in the frequency of service, expanded hours of service during nights and weekends, new commuter connections, and improved web trip planning and marketing.

## MOTOR VEHICLE REPAIRS

Automobile repair shops must post a notice informing customers they have the right to choose any licensed repair shop to repair accident damage to their vehicle. Insurance companies are prohibited from requiring that a person use a specific repair shop unless the consumer agrees. (PA 08-146)



(Right to Left) Plainville Councilman Jason Rapaka, Representative Boukus, Governor M. Jodi Rell, Jan Marineau, Water Pollution Control Superintendent Ray Johnson, Consultant to CDM, and Pat Ringrose, at State Bond Commission Meeting. Millions of dollars were appropriated for clean water funding. (Approximately \$2.4 million will go to the Plainville Water Pollution Authority.)



## HELP FOR LOW AND MIDDLE INCOME WAGE EARNERS

Because the escalating costs of fuel, food, and many other necessities are placing a heavier burden than ever on low and middle income wage earners, the General Assembly approved an increase in the state's minimum wage from the current \$7.65 an hour to \$8.00, effective January 1, 2009. A further increase to \$8.25 an hour would take effect January 1, 2010. Companion legislation also provides a tip credit for restaurants and bars whose employees earn tips.



# 2008 Legislative Report



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*Representative Betty Boukus*

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State Representative  
**BETTY BOUKUS**  
Serving Plainville, Bristol, New Britain



Dear Friend:

*This year, the Connecticut General Assembly made hard decisions in the face of the declining state and national economy. However, we were able to keep the promises we made in the biennial budget we adopted in 2007.*

*In addition, the legislature took a number of important initiatives to reduce highway accidents involving teenage drivers, increase penalties for repeat violent lawbreakers, provide assistance to hard-pressed homeowners caught in the mortgage/credit crunch, and enhance the health and safety of our children.*

*In this newsletter, I have provided you with summaries of these and many other laws that will have a positive effect for all the citizens of our state. If you have any questions or need further information on any of the matters we dealt with in the 2008 session, please contact me, or my Legislative Assistant, Mary Anderson, at 1-800-842-8267.*

Sincerely,

*Betty Boukus*

Representative Betty Boukus  
Assistant Majority Whip

## NEW VOTING RIGHTS



An unprecedented spike in the number of young people registering to vote in this year's Presidential primaries was a major factor in a decision by the General Assembly to correct a perceived inequity in the state's voting laws. Under a proposed amendment to the State Constitution to be submitted to voters on November 4th, the right to vote in a primary would be extended to 17-year-old citizens who will turn 18 on or before the day of a regular election between candidates to be chosen in the primary.

## REPEAT FELONY OFFENDERS FACE ADDED PRISON TIME

Anyone arrested for manslaughter, arson, kidnapping, robbery, assault, home invasion, burglary, or sexual assault, who has already once been convicted of and served time for committing one of these crimes, may now be charged as a persistent-dangerous-felony offender. Under newly passed legislation a progressive penalty system has been adopted: those with one previous conviction will receive a range of twice the minimum penalty to twice the maximum penalty or 40 years, whichever is longer (two strikes); those with two previous convictions will

receive a range of three times the minimum penalty to three times the maximum penalty or life in prison (three strikes). As an example: A persistent-dangerous-felony offender convicted of home invasion for the 1st time will get up to 40 years (10 year minimum), 2nd time 20 to 50 years (20 year minimum), 3rd time 30 to life (30 years being the minimum). Funding was also appropriated to upgrade all associated enforcement and support services.



## CHILDREN'S SAFETY AND HEALTH A PRIORITY

Protecting the health and safety of Connecticut's children is a priority for state government. That's why the legislature voted to tighten the laws covering lead in products designed primarily for children. The new law limits the amount of lead in children's products and increases related criminal and civil penalties for violations. It also requires stores to post notices when the Department of Consumer Protection designates an article as a banned hazardous substance. Further, the new State Child Protection Act bans the sale of toys or other articles marketed for children under age 16 that contain asbestos.

The treatment of autism is gaining more attention with each passing year. This year, the legislature addressed the problem created by many insurance companies that do not cover many of the critical therapies used to treat children diagnosed with autism disorders. Effective January 1, 2009, health insurance policies delivered, issued, re-



newed, amended, or continued in Connecticut on or after this date must cover these therapies for treatment of autism if the policies cover these treatments for other diseases and conditions.

Raising a child is one of the most challenging jobs an adult must tackle, and it becomes even more challenging when parents are not in the picture. The General Assembly moved to fill in a financial assistance gap to grandparents and other family members appointed by the Superior Court to raise children. When these family members are not receiving guardianship or foster care payments from the Department of Children and Youth Services, they will now be able to apply through Probate Court for grants available through a new Kinship Fund and Grandparents and Relatives Respite Fund.



### Unemployment Benefits for Military Spouses

Too often, we forget the financial sacrifices that a call to active duty imposes on our veterans and their families. When military families are forced to relocate, military spouses, through no fault of their own, find themselves unemployed. We recognized the burden this creates, and we extended unemployment compensation benefits to military spouses who were forced to relocate under these circumstances.

### Gold Star License Plate Fee Waiver

Last year legislation was adopted that allowed immediate relatives of state residents killed in active duty to be eligible to apply for the Gold Star Family license plate for a minimal fee. This year, I am happy to report that we eliminated the additional \$10 plate fee that was added to the normal registration fee.



## MONEY FOLLOWS THE PERSON



In our effort to move people out of nursing homes or other institutional settings into less restrictive, community based settings, we expanded the Money Follows the Person program from 700 to 5,000 people. This program assists Connecticut in our efforts to reduce reliance on institutional settings and supports those who want their loved ones in their community. The program not only saves money for the state but is a quality of life issue for many people.

## A WIN FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS



For several years, many of my colleagues in the General Assembly who represent towns with Volunteer Fire Departments and I have been fighting for legislation to protect the volunteers and the towns they so valiantly serve. This year, we won! The legislature passed a bill that prohibits municipalities with paid departments from banning their firefighters or paid emergency personnel from serving as active members of a volunteer department in the town where they live. The spirit of volunteerism continues to be alive and well.

## BETTER EDUCATION FOR TEEN DRIVERS

The General Assembly was confronted this year with the need to cope with a series of tragic auto accidents that took the lives of as many as four young people at a time. After hearing from the families of victims and experts in the field, we crafted legislation – some called it “tough love” – to try to keep young people alive longer by changing the way motor vehicle laws deal with teen drivers.



Among other things the new law doubles required behind-the-wheel driver training to 40 hours, establishes a new curfew of 11 PM for teen drivers, places new passenger restrictions on teen drivers for up to one year, increases to one year the time of a license suspension for conviction on serious motor vehicle offenses, enables a police officer to confiscate a teen driver's license for 48 hours and remove the car for such offenses as excessive speeding, driving under the influence, reckless driving, and street racing. Further, the law requires that parents must attend at least two hours of the classroom training teens are required to attend. And if a police officer seizes a teen's license for 48 hours and removes the car, a parent must accompany the teen to retrieve the license and the car. All these changes are effective August 1st, 2008.

## CREATING A GREENER CONNECTICUT

Connecticut has become just the fifth state in the nation to enact landmark legislation to reduce global warming and to combat the environmental challenge posed by climate change. The key to this legislation is achieving short-term and long-term goals in the reduction of emissions that add dangerous greenhouse gases to the earth's atmosphere. Specifically, the bill calls for a cut in emissions by 10 percent of their 1990 levels by the year 2020 and an 80 percent reduction of 2001 levels by the year 2050.



*Representative Boukus presents Brigid Guertin of the Danbury Museum and Historical Society (Marian Anderson Studio) with the 2007/2008 Hall of Fame Award. This award is given annually to individuals from Connecticut who have distinguished themselves in their professions, nationally or internationally.*