



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

**ERNEST HEWETT**

### **THE BUDGET: TAX RELIEF FOR WORKING FAMILIES**

The legislature passed a bill that caps the car tax mill rate statewide at 32 mills for 2016 and 29.36 mills for 2017. No one's car tax will surpass these rates under this plan. Effective July 1, 2016, certain residential properties owned by larger non-profit hospitals or private colleges will be subject to a town's tax roll which will help pay for services they use such as police, fire and public works departments. This lessens the property tax burden borne solely by families and small businesses in our communities.

In addition, military veterans' retirement pay will now be 100% exempt from the state income tax, and towns with a larger number of tax-exempt properties will receive additional aid for further property tax relief.

As a result of the recently passed state budget, New London will receive \$73,197,753 for Fiscal Years 2016 & 2017 – an increase of over \$2 million compared to FY 2015.

### **BANNING VARIABLE ELECTRIC RATES**

This year Connecticut became the first state in the nation to protect residents from predatory electricity providers who offer a low introductory rate that increases rapidly afterwards. The protections enacted requires competitive electric suppliers to give their customers a 60-day notice before the end of their contract. Suppliers cannot charge these customers a termination or early cancellation fee and must allow customers who want to switch to standard service the ability to do so within 72 hours.

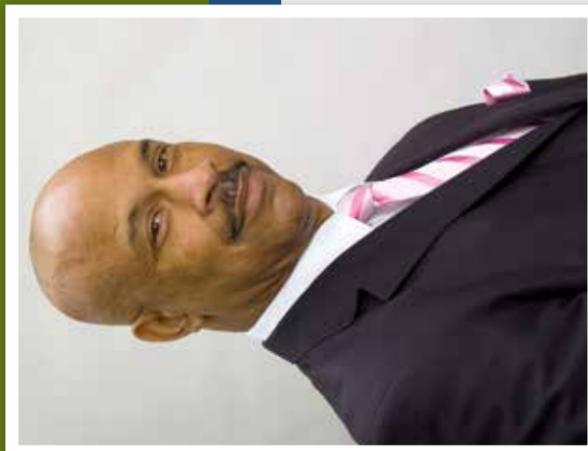
### **HELP TO REDUCE LONG-TERM DISABILITY COSTS**

The costs of long-term disability can be astronomical, and many who suffer from these disabilities end up on state or federal assistance. A new state law helps eligible individuals and families set up a tax-free savings account to pay for qualifying expenses related to disability or blindness. Anyone can contribute to this account. Under this new law, money set aside in these accounts for critical expenses like education, housing, and transportation will not be considered when applying for various programs such as Medicaid or need-based financial aid for college. This new program helps individuals and families save money to support relatives with disabilities and to maintain their health, independence, and quality of life.

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# CAPITOL UPDATE 2015

Dear Neighbor,

Each year brings a new set of challenges, and the 2015 session was no different. Despite a serious budget deficit and the need to encourage economic growth, my colleagues and I passed a balanced budget that provides property and car tax relief for middle-class families and small businesses, in addition to consumer protections and programs that empower Connecticut families.

We also created the framework for a once-in-a-generation investment in our transportation infrastructure, which will spur more growth in our economy and create thousands of jobs. The result of all this will improve quality of life for residents who use our road and rail systems.

We passed legislation that protects seniors and brought transparency to the rapidly changing health care landscape. And in the aftermath of the largest data breach in state history, we set new cybersecurity standards for companies handling residents' personal data. We stood up for military veterans, students and Connecticut workers whose jobs and livelihoods are under threat from out-of-state competition.

I also fought hard to put New London's magnet school project back on the state's priority list and was successful in increasing reimbursement rates for our school's renovations project. I hope you find the enclosed information helpful. Please feel free to call or email me for any reason. It is my pleasure and honor to serve as your state representative.

Ernest Hewett



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## A SECOND CHANCE SOCIETY

For years, Connecticut's drug policies have swelled our prisons with nonviolent drug offenders who struggle to reintegrate into society upon release. "A Second Chance Society" will reverse these policies largely by reducing jail time for such offenders. Penalties for possession of small amounts of illegal drugs will be reduced from a felony to a Class A misdemeanor; a drug-dependent offender may complete a substance abuse treatment program on a second offense; the 1,500 foot drug free school zones is maintained, but instead of an offender receiving a mandatory 2-year minimum sentence for possession the penalty will now require a sentence that includes prison and probation. During probation, the offender must perform community service. We also ensured victims are notified of a parole hearing and have access to the inmate's complete file prior to the hearing. The expedited pardon review process for nonviolent crimes will also be streamlined; now offenders must receive a "pardon eligibility notice." These provisions will give ex-offenders a better chance to get back into the workforce – and also save millions in taxpayer dollars.



## RESTORING TRUST BETWEEN LAW ENFORCEMENT AND MINORITY COMMUNITIES

This year we took a look at the critical issue of restoring trust between law enforcement and minority communities. Among some of the most key provisions of the new law: Police will now receive training in 1) the proper use of physical force; 2) using and retaining the records of body-worn recording equipment (body cameras); and 3) cultural competency, sensitivity, and bias-free policing. By January 1, 2016, law enforcement units will be required to implement guidelines to recruit, retain, and promote more minority police officers. Other key components of the bill include assigning an independent prosecutor to investigate allegations that an officer's physical force resulted in the death of a person; requiring law enforcement units to document incidents in which a police officer discharges a firearm or uses physical force that likely caused serious physical injury or death; and providing more grant money for municipal police departments to purchase body cameras. Finally, we have strengthened protections for onlookers recording an officer performing his or her duties.



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### IMPROVING SAFETY ON COMMUTER RAIL LINES

Connecticut's rail lines are a vital part of our transportation infrastructure and there is much that we can do to ensure they are operating safely and efficiently. The Department of Transportation will begin a study of the options the state has for operating its rail lines. It will allow operators and contracting agencies to come to the table with their ideas to improve how we operate our state's rail lines.

### REDUCING PESTICIDE USE AROUND CHILDREN

Children are particularly vulnerable to the health risks of pesticides. Connecticut has taken a proactive approach in dealing with these harmful chemicals by banning the use of pesticides on many municipal spaces. School websites and social media will be used to notify parents and students of an application of pesticides at least 24 hours before it's applied. Safer alternatives to using pesticides will be encouraged as well as the implementation of integrated pest management solutions.

### HELPING SMALL BUSINESSES

This year we allocated more funds for the highly successful Small Business Express Program. We are also requiring the Department of Economic and Community Development to dedicate funds to develop a program for construction projects for minority business enterprises. These measures will create jobs and improve economic opportunities for Connecticut families.

### CRACKING DOWN ON DIRT BIKES AND ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLES

There has been growing concern about the improper use of dirt bikes and all-terrain vehicles (ATV's) in many municipalities. Complaints about speeding, extremely loud noise and trespassing on state and private property have led to a need to properly manage the use of these vehicles. Beginning October 1, municipalities may fine first-time violators of a dirt bike or ATV ordinance without providing an initial warning. Municipalities may set fines of up to \$1,000 for the first violation, \$1,500 for the second violation, and \$2,000 for subsequent violations.

### EXTENDING THE FORECLOSURE MEDIATION PROGRAM

The Foreclosure Mediation Program has provided vital services to consumers facing foreclosure, helping many families avoid foreclosure. This year we extended the sunset date of the Foreclosure Mediation program to July 2019, ensuring that this essential program can continue to function and serve more Connecticut residents.

### HELP FOR OUR VETERANS

The Legislature recognizes the important sacrifices veterans have made. We established the Women Veterans' Program to help connect female veterans to services, and the Veterans to Agriculture Program to give tax credits to vets working in agricultural production. We also created the Incarcerated Veterans Reintegration Council to help incarcerated vets reintegrate back into their community.