

STATE REPRESENTATIVE
SUSAN JOHNSON
49TH DISTRICT | PROUDLY SERVING WINDHAM



CONSUMER PROTECTION

PROTECTION FROM PREDATORY ENERGY RATES This law responds to complaints regarding third party energy providers and confusing energy bills. Many consumers who expected to save money on introductory rates from suppliers soon discovered that their rates jumped. This legislation prevents energy suppliers from offering consumers short-term “teaser” energy contracts with low rates, then switching to much higher variable rates. Termination fees will be capped at \$50 and a consumer could switch back to the standard rate charged by CL&P within 72 hours. This new law also requires more transparent billing and prohibits deceptive sales practices. Complaints: <http://www.ct.gov/pura> or 1-800-382-4586

STRENGTHENING THE DO NOT CALL LIST

While we have already created a Do Not Call List to address unwanted sales pitches at home and on our cell phones, some companies continue to make unwanted calls. This law increases the penalty for violating the do not call list to \$20,000. We also added text messages to the Do Not Call List. To find out more about the Do Not Call List please call 1-888-382-1222.

TREE TRIMMING BY UTILITY COMPANIES In response to concerns expressed about tree-trimming, we passed legislation that gives homeowners more say over whether trees on their property can be trimmed or removed by utility companies. The utilities will need to work more closely with town residents and tree wardens to make these decisions together. The burden will be on utility companies to show the need to trim or remove trees they believe threaten the electricity supply. Now utilities must obtain written consent from the property owner and provide notice to property owners abutting public rights of way.



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
SUSAN JOHNSON
49TH DISTRICT | PROUDLY SERVING WINDHAM

CAPITOL UPDATE 2014

PRSR STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
HARTFORD, CT
Permit No. 3937



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
SUSAN JOHNSON

49TH DISTRICT
PROUDLY SERVING WINDHAM



CAPITOL UPDATE 2014

Dear Friends and Neighbors:

When the 2014 legislative session convened in February our mission was to encourage economic growth, help working families, invest in our children, and adopt a balanced budget with no new taxes. When we adjourned May 7th we achieved these goals.

THE BUDGET - GOOD NEWS FOR WINDHAM

By balancing the budget without raising taxes and staying under the spending cap, our state was still able to make many investments and provide additional funding to our municipalities. Cities and towns get an additional \$70 million in education aid, Payments In Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) and other grants in aid. This will help provide property tax relief to taxpayers in **Windham**, who will benefit from approximately **\$33 million in state aid**, including an additional **\$1,146,993** in grants in aid I worked hard for this year as your State Representative.

WALNUT STREET PARKING GARAGE

Windham received more good news in the form of funding approved for a four-level parking garage on Walnut Street. A total of **\$8 million** in state funds will mean help with the parking situation in downtown is on the way. The garage will have 270 parking spaces and a facade making it look more like a building than just a concrete structure, and will be built on the location of an existing surface lot.

OTHER LEGISLATION

We also passed legislation that makes strong commitments to education, protects the environment, and improves our transportation infrastructure by increasing funding for state roads and bridges. To spur economic development we increased the minimum wage to \$10.10 by 2017, and passed several other job creation initiatives. Details of this legislation are contained in this newsletter.

Thank you all for your e-mails, letters and phone calls during the 2014 Legislative Session. It continues to be a great honor and privilege to serve as your state representative.

Sincerely,

EDUCATION

MAKING OUR SCHOOLS SAFER

We authorized \$22 million for another round of school security grants. This program helped many schools, including Windham, add additional security infrastructure last year. Technical schools, charter schools, private schools, and endowed schools will be allowed to access the funds.

HIGHER EDUCATION

The number of Connecticut students whose first language is something other than English continues to grow. A law passed this session hopes to attract more English language learner teachers by expanding the incentive program. The law reduces educators’ costs by allowing students pursuing a bilingual education certificate to apply for a grant.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO UNIVERSAL PRE-K

The newly established Office of Early Childhood will develop a plan to improve access to preschool programs and achieve universal Pre-K in Connecticut. In the meantime, we have increased school readiness reimbursements and added 1,020 new preschool slots. Recently it was announced that under this new funding, Windham will receive 31 new Pre-K slots in the Priority School District category.

SMART START

This competitive grant program will target communities like ours with a need for additional preschool slots. School districts will be able to receive a capital grant of up to \$75,000 per classroom for renovation or expansion and up to \$5,000 per child (up to \$75,000 per classroom) for expenses directly related to learning. These classes must be nationally accredited and serve a majority of students from low-income families.



Rep. Johnson speaks in support of a Smart Start Initiative to move towards universal pre-K and create new early education slots for needy school districts like Windham.

JOB CREATION, TRAINING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

HELPING TO PROMOTE CONNECTICUT BREWERIES

The beer brewing industry has flourished in Connecticut towns like ours, but breweries that also serve food have not been allowed to offer catering services. Breweries that are also restaurants may now offer the same catering services as a traditional restaurant. We also passed legislation to help promote of our state’s breweries and vineyards, with signs marking the “Connecticut Brewery Trail” and “Connecticut Wine Trail.”

SUPPORTING BUSINESS TO GROW AND TRAIN WORKERS

Small manufacturers in Connecticut are an important source of jobs and engine of economic growth. We work hard to provide support to these businesses through programs like the Manufacturing Reinvestment Account program (MRA). The MRA is designed to help small manufacturers fund capital investments and train their workers. This year, we made it easier for businesses to take advantage of the program by increasing the number of employees an employer may have to be eligible for the program from 50 to 150.

GO BACK TO GET AHEAD

Establishes the Go Back to Get Ahead initiative which will encourage Connecticut residents who have some college credits to return to the state’s universities, community technical colleges or Charter Oak State College to complete their degrees. Students who are eligible for the program will be able to receive up to 3 free college courses.

CLEANING CONTAMINATED PROPERTIES

Many Connecticut towns have vacant properties that are contaminated or polluted by previous use. These sites need remediation, to protect our residents from pollution and to allow them to be used again. We acted to implement recommendations from the State of Connecticut Brownfield Working Group, which will make it easier to clean up and develop contaminated properties, especially those acquired by towns, and those where hazardous building materials were removed or abated.



Rep. Johnson with Secretary of the State Denise Merrill whose agency is responsible for registering businesses in the state.



A picture of the Main Street Cafe and Willimantic Brewing Company, which is one of the in-state breweries Connecticut is promoting for purposes of economic development.

VETERANS

HELPING OUR VETS FIND WORK AND HOUSING

The Veterans’ Opportunity Pilot Program will utilize specialists in veterans employment and homelessness to help non-profit agencies secure work and housing for our vets. Our Department of Labor will manage a statewide network of employment services for veterans and utilize federal grants to lower the number of homeless veterans in our state.

HELP FOR JOBLESS VETERANS

This session we worked to streamline the state licensing process for our job-seeking veterans. Connecticut veterans can now apply their military training toward occupational licenses, including public safety positions and a variety of trades. In addition, college credits can be awarded for specialty training and apprenticeship credits applied to specific trades.

SENIORS & HEALTHCARE

RENTERS REBATE PROGRAM

This measure will re-open the Renters Rebate program to eligible seniors and individuals with permanent disabilities to receive partial reimbursements related to rental payments. Previously, those who had not applied in the last calendar year were not eligible.

PREVENTING AND TREATING CHRONIC DISEASE

Chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease, cancer, stroke, lupus and diabetes, are major causes of illness, death, and poor quality of life in our state. They are also major drivers of health care costs. With proper treatment, many chronic diseases can be prevented or managed. The Department of Public Health (DPH) will develop and implement a plan that will reduce the incidence of chronic disease, improve care coordination, and improve outcomes. This plan will be consistent with DPH’s Healthy Connecticut 2020 plan, the Office of the Healthcare Advocate and the State Innovation Model project to improve health-care quality and control costs.

As Chairwoman of the Public Health Committee, Rep. Johnson meets with her Committee Ranking member Rep. Srinivasan and Department of Public Health Staff.

