

## INCREASING THE MINIMUM WAGE

We recently increased the minimum wage to \$10.10, effective by 2017. This boost in income will appear gradually in three stages with the minimum wage rising to \$9.15 on January 1, 2015, \$9.60 on January 2, 2016, and finally to \$10.10 on January 1, 2017. The increase will raise the standard of living for thousands of hard-working families in Connecticut struggling to make ends meet and put those dollars back into our local economy, helping small businesses in our neighborhoods. Studies show that workers earning the minimum wage spend nearly their entire pay-check with local businesses on basic living expenses, including groceries. Connecticut was the first state in the nation to pass a law to raise the minimum wage above \$10 an hour.

## MORE MONEY FOR CITIES AND TOWNS

The state was able to make valuable investments and provide additional funding to our municipalities without raising taxes, while remaining under the spending cap. Cities and towns will see an additional \$80 million in funding for education costs, Payments In Lieu of Taxes (PILOT), and other costs. By saving our municipalities money, we enable them to provide tax relief and make local capital investments.



Rep. Rick Lopes on the floor of the House Chamber

## A BALANCED BUDGET WITH NO NEW TAXES

Our state budget protects us from future financial downfalls by depositing the full 2014 budget surplus of \$43.4 million into our Rainy Day Fund. By spending responsibly now and investing in our future we provide for a more financially stable economy.



New Britain Museum of American Art

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
**RICK LOPES**

PROUDLY SERVING THE 24TH DISTRICT | NEW BRITAIN AND NEWINGTON



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

# RICK LOPES

PROUDLY SERVING THE 24TH DISTRICT | NEW BRITAIN AND NEWINGTON



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Dear Neighbor:

I am pleased to share with you this update on the recently concluded legislative session. Each year brings a new set of challenges, and the 2014 session was no different. The need to encourage economic growth, help working families, and make critical investments in the future of our children, as well as our state, was clear.

Meeting these priorities while also adopting a balanced budget with no new taxes took a lot of hard work, but I am happy to report to you that my colleagues and I were able to achieve our goals.

Working in a bipartisan manner, we were able to increase funding for education and enable more children to attend pre-school. We also made additional investments in job creation programs such as STEP-UP, which encourages employers to hire veterans and the unemployed, and will help our economy grow.

I hope you find the enclosed information helpful and will feel free to call or email me for any reason — legislative or otherwise. It is my pleasure and honor to serve as your state representative.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature of Rick Lopes in black ink.



# CAPITOL UPDATE 2014

## ELECTRIC CUSTOMER CONSUMER PROTECTION

This year we added much-needed transparency to an issue that we heard about from many state residents regarding predatory energy providers and confusing energy bills.

A state market analysis released in March by the Office of Consumer Counsel estimated Connecticut consumers were overpaying for electricity by an estimated \$13.7 million a month. Many consumers, who counted on paying less for energy after signing up for low introductory rates from suppliers, soon discovered that their rates jumped and they were paying more.

Energy suppliers will now be prohibited from offering consumers short-term “teaser” energy contracts with low rates, then switching to much higher variable rate contracts within weeks. Termination fees would be capped at \$50 under the law, and a consumer could switch back to the standard rate charged by UI or CL&P within 72 hours.

More transparent billing practices and faster switching, so a customer can fire a company quickly and easily, and prohibitions of coercive and deceptive sales practices, will empower consumers.



Rep. Rick Lopes at Lincoln School for Comcast Cares Day



Rep. Rick Lopes discussing legislation with Rep. Tony Guerrero

## REDUCING FEES CHARGED FOR SERVICES AT HOSPITAL-BASED FACILITIES

Increasingly, hospitals have been acquiring doctors’ private practices. One result of this is an increased number of facility fees being charged to patients. In many instances nothing may have changed about your doctor’s office location but you still find yourself being charged an extra fee that may or may not be covered by insurance.

This year we took steps to require that physicians notify their patients in writing at least 10 days before their appointment that they are going to be charged a new facility fee, in order to give the patient time to find out if their insurance will cover the fee or to find a new doctor. If the patient makes the appointment less than 10 days in advance, a written notice must be given to them when they arrive for the appointment. Doctors are also required to display signs that clearly explain this fee in their offices.

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## INCREASING ACCESS TO VO-TECH SCHOOLS

In order to increase access to agriculture, science, and technology schools, we increased tuition reimbursements the state will pay to vo-tech schools by \$500 per student.

## 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. We also created a floor rather than a ceiling for Competitive School Districts, allowing these districts to receive more than the \$107,000 grant to accommodate additional preschool spaces.



Rep. Rick Lopes with Rep. Andy Fleischmann

## STRENGTHENING THE DO NOT CALL REGISTRY

Although technology makes many aspects of our lives easier, it also can lead to new frustrations. Even though we created a Do Not Call List to address unwanted sales pitches at home and on our cell phones, some companies continue to call. We increased the penalty for violating the Do Not Call List to \$20,000 from \$11,000. In addition, we added text messages to the Do Not Call List.

## HELPING SENIORS PAY THEIR RENT

This year we reopened the Renters Rebate program to eligible seniors and individuals with permanent disabilities to receive partial reimbursements related to rental payments. \$6.5 million in rental relief will be available, allowing an additional 12,700 seniors to receive a rebate.



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## HELPING OUR VETS FIND JOBS AND HOUSING

### 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.

### SECURITY DEPOSIT GUARANTEE FOR VETS

The Veterans Housing Program will pave the way for enrollees to receive a security deposit for a rental apartment equal to two months’ rent.



Iwo Jima Memorial

## STRENGTHENING LAWS AGAINST PERSISTENT OFFENDERS

This year we provided more protection to victims of repeat offenders. If, in addition to violating a protective or restraining order, an offender has a prior conviction for certain crimes, he or she may be sentenced to the next more serious degree of the crime. Importantly, a violation of a protective order is now on the list of prior convictions that can subject an offender to this enhanced penalty.



Rep. Rick Lopes with Rep. Bobby Sanchez



New Britain, CT