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Dear Neighbor,

The Connecticut General Assembly has reconvened for its 2007 legislative session, and I am pleased to be a part of it!

There are many important items on the agenda, and I will do my best to be your voice here at the Capitol. As your legislator, I encourage you to contact me if you have any questions or concerns about the issues the legislature will address. I look forward to working with you this year.

Sincerely,

Russell A. Morin

State Representative, 28th District

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State Representative **Russell A. Morin** 28th District **Wethersfield**



2007 Legislative Session Update

A Few Topics Of Interest This Session...

There are literally thousands of bills introduced each year in the Connecticut General Assembly. Here are a few of the big issues we expect to debate this year:

EDUCATION FUNDING

Despite projections of a significant budget deficit, it is imperative this year the legislature re-examine the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula. The ECS formula is how the state determines how much education funding to give each town's public schools. Many towns throughout Connecticut are struggling with rising costs of education, and the unhappy solution of either raising local taxes or cutting services. A fairer and better-funded ECS formula will help address the problem.

PROPERTY TAX RELIEF

Connecticut has one of the highest property tax burdens in the nation. Again, this drives families, seniors, and businesses to consider re-location elsewhere. Property taxes are driven in large part by the state's underfunding of public education costs, which are largely supported through local property taxes. Proposals for property tax relief include better funding of education to enable towns to reduce their mill rates or, conversely, giving income tax credits directly to property tax payers.

HEALTHCARE REFORM

Connecticut has an estimated 400,000 uninsured individuals. We need to ensure that all businesses and individuals have access to affordable benefits and are encouraged to purchase them. Small businesses in particular find the cost of health insurance prohibitive, in spite of their desire to maintain their employees' health and productivity. Healthcare reform must address two major problems: how to reduce costs for those currently insured, and how to encourage and enable the uninsured to obtain coverage.

ENERGY

Connecticut's electric rates are high – indeed, higher than surrounding states. This hurts residential consumers and businesses, by making Connecticut uncompetitive in attracting new businesses. Options for immediate relief appear to be primarily related to better conservation of energy to reduce demand. However, the long-term options relate to construction and ownership of new power plants. Since deregulation, our power vendors have been prohibited from owning their own power generation infrastructure. This is a complicated issue that I hope can be addressed in some manner before this session is over.



ELDERLY TAX FREEZE PROGRAM

Last year the General Assembly allowed each municipality to enact a freeze for their elderly residents. The state felt that this was one way of keeping elderly homeowners in their communities and in their homes; it has been shown to work in other states. The program is the choice of each town's government; the state only gave the town the option of implementing the freeze. This year we are looking at increasing the income limits used

for eligibility for this program, and eliminating the asset test when determining eligibility for the freeze. This bill would also eliminate the lien placement options afforded to municipalities under the program and would allow towns to extend benefits to higher income individuals. The freeze on taxes would be for a household that has as a taxpayer an individual who is seventy years of age or older. The rate would be determined at the year that this individual met the eligibility requirement and must be approved by each municipality. This bill only gives the municipalities the right to freeze the taxes and the guidelines to do so; the local government must still decide if they want to enact this program. This ensures that local control over property taxes stays with the local government body.

VETERANS

A bill to provide license plates for veterans who are serving on active duty in the armed forces was one of the bills submitted this session by the Veteran's Committee. This bill has been voted out of committee and is making its way through the system.

Another Veteran's Committee bill would provide grants for military family relief for disabled veterans. The grants would be provided from the Military Family Relief Fund to be used to make veterans' homes and veterans' organization facilities accessible to disabled veterans.

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