

# Capitol Update 2012

## Leading by Example

One of the most significant legislative acts of the 2011 session was the passage of the landmark energy bill. I worked on a section of the bill intended to reduce the state’s carbon footprint through energy conservation projects in state and municipal buildings. In less than a year since implementation, the “Leading by Example” program has initiated 39 projects involving over \$10 million in capital investment, with an expected payback of just over five years – impressively short for conservation projects -- and with energy savings benefits for decades to come.

The program is establishing best practices for energy efficiency renovations and qualifying a cadre of experienced energy service companies (ESCOs) which handle both the initial energy audits and the subsequent project management. As the program grows, we are both adding long-term jobs and setting the stage to extend the initiative to residential and commercial buildings across the state. The net result: more and more energy inefficient buildings will be renovated, reducing energy costs for property owners and reducing our dependence on foreign oil.

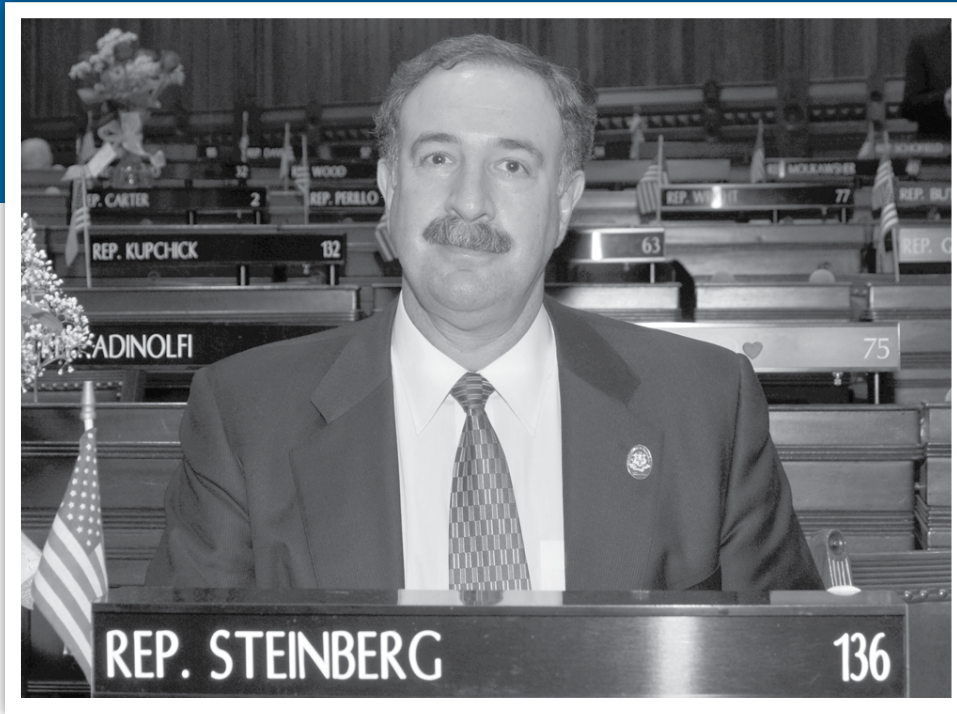
## Siting of Cell Towers

There seems to be an ever-increasing demand for instant wireless connections, which has led to the need for more and more cellular towers across the landscape. The telecommunications companies have often sought to expand the siting of cell towers into residential areas close to schools and protected environments.

I co-sponsored legislation which modifies the process developers must follow when applying for cell tower permits. They must now contact the municipality involved to discuss options – 90 days before even applying to the Siting Council to install a new tower. Additionally, towers are prohibited from installation within 250 feet of a school or commercial day care center, unless both the municipality and the Siting Council agree that the tower’s location will not have adverse impacts.



Rep. Steinberg testifying in opposition to a bill which would have rolled back the ban on the use of pesticides on school playing fields. The bill was defeated.



Dear Neighbor:

Connecticut continues to confront many challenges as we recover from the recession, and I’ll stay focused on ways to strengthen the economy and the state’s fiscal stability. As a legislator, this will mean making many hard choices, balancing the imperative of controlling spending with the promise we make to those at greatest risk in our society. I’m committed to “results based accountability” for every state program and agency, so that one day we’ll say with confidence that taxpayer dollars are efficiently utilized.

In my first term in the Legislature, I’ve represented Westport through hard work and consistent communication. I’ve done my homework, researching bills and issues, while always considering the varying viewpoints of Westporters. But I’ve still had wrenching decisions on some votes, wrestling with whether well-intentioned bills will have their intended effect. I appreciate the trust you’ve put in me, and I resolve to redouble my efforts to become an even more effective legislator and advocate on your behalf. Thank you for the opportunity to serve.

Sincerely,

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**2012 Legislative Session**

**The biennial “short session,” is supposed to focus primarily on budget considerations. Thanks to the bold leadership of the Governor and a motivated Legislature, the session turned out to be an unusually productive one.**

**Here is just a sampling of some of the more notable legislative acts:**

**Creating Jobs**

Last October, the Legislature met in special session to pass a bipartisan jobs bill designed to help small businesses expand and hire new employees. It was a great start, but we all agreed that there was more to be done.

That’s why I supported the 2012 jobs bill passed during the recent special session, which expands some of those programs and introduces some new initiatives, including:

- Expanding access to the “Small Business Express” and “STEP UP” programs, which allow small businesses to access much-needed funding for capital investments, hiring and training
- Creating the “Connecticut Made” and “Connecticut Treasures” programs to promote products made in state and the state’s many attractions
- Seeking to bring jobs to Connecticut by giving preference under the “First Five Plus” program to companies that relocate jobs here from overseas
- Establishing the “STEP-UP for Veterans” Program to help unemployed post 9/11 veterans find jobs, who suffer from an unemployment rate as high as 30%

**Sunday Sales**

Connecticut stores may now sell alcohol on Sundays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., as well as on Memorial, Independence and Labor Days. I supported ending the Blue Laws, but I also supported small retailers in their resistance to other proposed changes which would have threatened their businesses. A task force will be created to study Connecticut’s liquor taxes and prices.

**Shoreline Preservation Task Force**

I was appointed to the newly created Shoreline Preservation Task Force, a bipartisan group of lawmakers, climate specialists and land use experts, charged with studying the impact of storms and climate change on property owners and ecosystems in coastal communities. We will be making policy recommendations addressing the special needs of shoreline residents and businesses with respect to beach erosion, rising sea levels and future storm planning, while keeping in mind environmental impacts.



Rep. Steinberg joined a bipartisan legislative group, working together on all issues impacting Long Island Sound and it’s coastal communities.

**Storm Response**

In the aftermath of the October Nor’easter and Hurricane Irene, we passed sweeping reforms to better prepare for future events and avoid widespread and lengthy loss of utility service. Utilities will be held to minimum performance standards for emergency preparation and response with penalties of up to 2.5 percent of an electric or gas company’s annual distribution revenue, approximately \$25 million in the case of Connecticut Light & Power. Yes, we’ll end up chopping down a lot of trees! But we’ve also embarked upon studies to determine other ways to maintain critical services after major storms, from “microgrids” to more localized, energy generation.

**Improving Westport Senior Housing**

Although Westporters pay significant Connecticut taxes, it’s rare that we get back money from the state. After years of effort – dating back to Joe Mioli – we secured \$300,000 in state aid to replace the slate roof at Westport’s Saugatuck Apartments. The current roof dates back to the 1930s. Replacement will begin this summer.

*There were few issues more controversial this session that the debate on fundamental education reform. I’m pleased that we passed an education reform package that reflects much of what I heard Westport teachers and parents say at town hall meetings about education reform earlier this year. The legislation represents a compromise that may leave all parties slightly disappointed, but it avoids some of the risks of the original bill. Among the steps we are taking to turn around schools that have failed to support students in their academic growth are:*

- **Adding 1,000 new school readiness slots for preschoolers** – it’s far from universal preschool (which we simply couldn’t afford), but it will help many students in our most challenged communities
- **Increasing the number of school-based health centers and family resource centers** – to help disadvantaged students to be ready to learn
- **Focusing on ways to improve reading for students in kindergarten through third grade** – everyone knows that reading-readiness by third grade is essential for future academic success, so we’re pursuing methods to remediate students who are behind their cohort
- **Reforming the teacher tenure system** by increasing the frequency of teacher evaluations and linking tenure to evaluations – I advocated for forbearance in linking evaluations to tenure, certification and compensation too quickly (we’re going to study the evaluative criteria and weighting) and pushed for greater emphasis on professional development as a means of developing personalized improvement plans for every teacher and administrator
- **Establishing the Commissioner’s Network**, which provides the intensive supports and interventions needed to turn around 25 of the most chronically low-performing schools in Connecticut – without imposing new mandates on school districts which are performing well

