

PROTECTING STATE AND LOCAL TAX DEDUCTIONS

In response to President Trump's punitive tax changes, we passed legislation intended to partially protect the state and local tax deduction. Under our new state law, towns can create non-profit charity-type programs that still qualify for federal deductions, as a way to both preserve local services and reduce your federal tax burden. Other states are also using this approach but the IRS is already pushing back on state-based efforts. I will continue to work on this.

PREVENTING ROBO CALLS

You know those annoying robocalls that use a local number and make you think it could be someone you know? We made it a crime to intentionally use such a blocking device or service to get around our caller IDs.

PROTECTING CONSUMERS

In response to multiple recent data breaches at companies like Equifax, we passed legislation forbidding companies from charging a fee for placing or removing a security freeze on a credit report. Also, consumers will now get two free years of credit monitoring after a data breach. Additionally, the Attorney General can now go after companies that jack up costs on consumer products as well as on prescription drugs and medical devices.

STREAMLINING THE DMV

This year we have eliminated the burden of waiting in line to return your license plates and other documents when your motor vehicle registration is not renewed, saving you from those long lines at the DMV.



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STATE REPRESENTATIVE

JONATHAN STEINBERG

PROUDLY SERVING THE 136TH DISTRICT | WESTPORT

CAPITOL UPDATE 2018



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Dear Friends and Neighbors,

For several years, I've devoted this space to focus on the budget. This session is no different, despite this session's anomalous surplus. Don't be misled; we're still in the midst of serial, \$1+ billion annual budget deficits, camouflaged briefly by one-time revenue gains.

But there are small indications of progress. In less than seven months, the Legislature passed two bipartisan budgets. Both sides compromised; we found common ground. It's a reason to believe that we can govern from the middle, instead of yielding to the demands of the extremes. As a self-professed Moderate, I'm eager to build on this opportunity to chart a practical path to a sustainable budget.

Another cause for hope is the imminent kickoff of the Pension Sustainability Commission, a new working group, which I helped create and on which I will now serve. Our mandate will be to identify ways to mitigate the huge, unfunded pension liabilities which are strangling our budget, requiring cuts to programs and services we know are effective and vital. One of the big ideas for bending the deficit curve is to strategically monetize some state assets – assets which can be further optimized in value and generate revenues dedicated to the pension funds. This concept is the best – and only legal – idea I've heard of to address the problem. Abrogating collective bargaining is not the answer.

We will continue to look at alternative revenue sources, although I've never been a fan of expanding state gambling or significantly raising taxes. We will demand agency accountability on the effectiveness and efficiency of their spending – both because we have little choice and because it's the right thing to do!

You can count on me to remain vigilant on budget reform. We all know it's the best way to assure our state's return to economic vitality and the quality of life we all want.

Sincerely,

STATE REPRESENTATIVE JONATHAN STEINBERG

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PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT

Climate change is here. As a means of protecting future generations, current law requires the state to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 80% of its 2001 levels by the year 2050. In an effort to speed our progress, we doubled down with legislation to reduce GHG emissions by 45% of 2001 levels by the year 2030. Under this legislation, the Dept. of Energy and Environmental Protection must work with electric companies to develop a long-term plan for lowering the cost of electricity while meeting this new goal.

In addition, we overhauled a number of our energy programs and here are a few highlights:

- Increased our state targets for use of renewable energy over the next ten years to 40%
- Expanded towns' ability to use renewables under virtual net metering changes
- Better protected and increased energy efficiency funding
- Established a statewide community solar program, focusing on low-income households

PUSHING FOR NATIONAL POPULAR VOTE

I believe in a system of electing the President of the United States by a majority of voters to ensure that every vote counts. In order to do so, I supported legislation to enter Connecticut into the Agreement Among the States to Elect the President by National Popular Vote. This will ensure our state's Electoral College votes go to the presidential candidate that wins the national popular vote.

CURBING GUN VIOLENCE

The tragic mass shooting in Las Vegas last year demonstrated the ability of bump stocks to dramatically increase a gun's destructive power, effectively turning semi-automatic firearms into a weapon that can shoot as fast as a machine gun. We responded by making it a crime to own or sell a bump stock, or similar device, unless you are a licensed military contractor.

SUPPORTING OUR SMALL BUSINESSES

Small businesses are the backbone of our economy. In an effort to provide tax relief so small businesses can put more resources into job creation, we exempted equipment worth less than \$250 that has been owned by the business for more than ten years from property taxes.

ENSURING EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK

In Connecticut, as it is around the country, working women earn less than men. Women would have to work an extra ten years just to make up the disparity in wages over their lifetime. An important new law prohibits employers from asking about your salary in previous jobs which is a major contributor to perpetuating low-paying salaries and the gender pay gap.

PROTECTING WOMEN'S HEALTH CARE

The Affordable Care Act contains ten essential health benefits including maternity and newborn care, prescription drug coverage, preventive and mental health services, and chronic disease management that all Americans are entitled to have covered in their health insurance plans. As Congress and the President attempt to dismantle the ACA, we passed legislation to safeguard these benefits to ensure that no matter what happens in Washington, Connecticut insurance policies must still cover these basic services.

PROMOTING THE BIOSCIENCE SECTOR

We passed legislation that requires CT Innovations to develop a short and long-term strategic plan for the bioscience sector in CT. We also tasked them to create a marketing and social media plan including a website designed to attract researchers, entrepreneurs, venture capitalists, health systems and data companies, and metrics for evaluating the success of the state's promotional efforts.

DEFENDING MENTAL HEALTH FUNDING

From gun violence to opioid addiction to suicide prevention, mental health issues remain critical. Although the Mental Health Parity didn't pass this year, we successfully protected mental health funding in the budget and will continue to push for additional support.

REDUCING PRESCRIPTION DRUG COSTS

Recognizing that prescription drug prices are the number one driver of rising healthcare costs, we passed legislation to hold pharmaceutical companies accountable by increasing transparency and requiring them to explain large price increases for drugs that have a substantial cost to the state. Additionally, insurance companies must now submit information about which drugs are most frequently prescribed and which are provided at the greatest cost. By collecting more data and holding drug companies accountable, we can get closer to lowering drug costs for Connecticut residents.

PROTECTING STUDENTS WITH FOOD ALLERGIES

Under this measure, the State Department of Education will update state guidelines and curriculum standards. Students will be authorized to carry and administer their life-saving medications, and bus drivers will be trained in how to recognize a life-threatening allergic reaction and how to administer vital medication.

FIGHTING THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Over 60,000 of our residents sought treatment for substance abuse in 2016 alone. One of our challenges is providing adequate treatment and recovery services. As House Chair of the Public Health Committee, I advocated for a new program whereby sober homes can register with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services as an indicator of reliability and safety. This new law also establishes marketing and advertising requirements, with the consumer's best interests in mind. Sober homes must have Narcan onsite and residents must be trained in its use.

REGULATING VAPOR PRODUCTS

Electronic cigarettes, 'vape pens,' and other nicotine delivery systems are becoming more popular, particularly with young people. Many of these products come in flavors, do not produce smoke, and at face value, appear to be safer than traditional nicotine products. However, the science still points to harmful side effects. This law aims to treat these products the same as cigarettes by requiring them to only be available behind the counter at retail establishments.

