

CAPITOL UPDATE 2008

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Dear Neighbor,

As always, I have been focusing my efforts in Hartford on issues of importance to our working families:

Results Based Accountability in budgets to assure that our tax dollars are used wisely, small businesses and farms to keep dollars circulating in our communities, a clean and healthy environment for our children, and affordable health care and housing.

I have a lot of good news to report to you from this session but I also recognize that our families are having difficulty with the impacts of the economic slow down particularly in the areas of energy prices and food costs.

I believe that crisis can offer opportunity, and I will be using this opportunity to expand Results Based Accountability in order to preserve the most important components of our Quality of Life in Connecticut and to bring serious reform to our tax structure.

I know that our towns and our state exemplify that indomitable American Spirit, and with hard work and perseverance together we will weather this economic storm and emerge stronger with new directions in energy technology and a tighter, more comprehensive economic web to support our working families.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at home at 535-4868 or in Hartford at 1-800-842-8267.

Diana



Rep. Urban with James Trant, a World War II veteran, at a medal ceremony in Mystic.

State Representative Diana S. Urban

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Photo by Mark Donahue

Ethics Bill Finally Passed!!!
"Key to the General Assembly's finally crossing the ethics goal line was the behind the scenes work of Rep. Diana Urban of North Stonington and Sen. Gayle Slossberg of Milford, who negotiated a compromise."

Hartford Courant June 13, 2008

STATE REPRESENTATIVE Diana Urban



PROUDLY SERVING
Stonington and North Stonington
43rd DISTRICT

INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE



Highlights of the 2008 Session

PLEASE CONTACT DIANA URBAN WITH ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS
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Results Based Accountability (RBA)

I have been working on RBA since becoming your Representative and am now the Chair of the RBA Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee.

RBA is a methodology that focuses on identifying Quality of Life results for the people of our state and then drilling down into programs to see if each program is actually contributing to the desired end result. If not, resources are then re-allocated to programs that do make a positive contribution maximizing the efficiency of taxpayers' dollars.

We are impacting a considerable piece of the budget through RBA, and are integrating RBA into the whole budget process in partnership with our Office of Fiscal Analysis. We expect that all agencies will be reporting to us in terms of Quality of Life results and Performance Measures for the 2009 budget.

One recent example of RBA is we cut \$20 million from Early Reading Success programs because our reading scores were going down!! The commissioner of the State Department of Education as well as relevant partners then examined programs that actually do help children to read, reported back to us and we are working on returning that money to the budget tied to performance results.

I will be working to continue to expand the use of RBA.

Environment

I have always worked toward the Quality of Life result of a clean and healthy environment for all of us. This session we were able to expand the "Face of Connecticut" initiative to increase the preservation of farmland and encourage the participation of non-profits, including land trusts, by providing a property tax exemption when they step up to preserve land for open space.

I want to build on this in the next session and work on eliminating onerous regulations that block our small farmers from producing food. The average distance that food travels from farm to plate is between 1500 and 3000 miles, and we are leading the nation in the percentage of farm land lost to development each year (9000 acres). By producing locally grown food crops, we can address food security, food safety and the impact of rising fuel costs on the price of food.

Please take time to visit one of our excellent Farmer's Markets and support our local farmers. For a Farmer's Market guide, go to <http://www.ctfarmersmarkets.com/find/index.shtml>.

Health Care (Governor Vetoed)

We must pass universal affordable health care for all our citizens and have moved closer to that goal by passing the Connecticut Healthcare Partnership which opens up the State Employee Healthcare Plan to municipal employees, non-profit groups and small businesses on a voluntary basis. This is an excellent health care plan, covering illness as well as prevention and wellness.



I am particularly pleased as I know that many small businesses lose their best employees because they are unable to offer a really comprehensive health care plan. Now they will be able to compete with larger firms by offering this excellent pooling opportunity.

There is also the opportunity for our municipalities to save money on health care which can act as an offset to the property tax.

Twenty-four other states have opened their state employees' plans to local governments but I am proud to say that Connecticut is the first to open it to private employers.

Housing

The subprime mortgage crisis continues to work its negative impact on the economy. There are many underlying reasons that lead to this crisis. We must help responsible people keep their homes while also insisting on industry accountability through re-regulation.

We passed legislation this session that begins the reform process, and provides a \$140 million multi-tiered emergency mortgage assistance program (EMAP).

Generally, homeowners may apply for EMAP if they have fallen behind in their mortgage payments because of hardships and they are likely to resume payments in three years. EMAP requires participating homeowners to pay 35% of their income to Connecticut Housing Finance Authority who will make the full mortgage payment.

For a complete explanation of the bill, please call me in Hartford!

The Power of Team Work

By working together, Senator Maynard and I were able to get bonding money for important projects in our district.

I was so happy to finally be able to get the \$143,000 to complete Donahue Park and Boat Launch. The park is an important resource for all our families.

The Stonington Fishing Fleet is trying to produce ice with an antiquated energy eating ice machine that is continually breaking down. I am thrilled that we were able to get \$300,000 seed money for a new machine and we will continue to work with CL&P's Foundation to get some matching funds. It is critical to preserve the last fishing fleet in the State of Connecticut. Many thanks also to Arthur Mederios for his devotion to the fishermen's cause and his endless willingness to help.

The \$250,000 for the Amistad speaks to recognizing a significant period in our heritage as well as attracting people to our region to appreciate the Seaport and other area attractions (and spend money to help our economic web!).

And finally, the \$50,000 for Mystic Area Shelter and Hospitality to enable them to help more families that find themselves in crisis with no place to live as they struggle to get back on their feet.

We are also breaking ground on the new Senior Center (funded through our local and state team request to the Department of Economic and Community Development and the Small Cities Grant Program) which will be named in memory of Robert Granato whose hard work, tenacity, and leadership is an example for all to follow.

The list of requests was long, and we wish we could get money for every single one, but in these tough economic times we felt lucky to be able to help some important activities in our community.

Gas Prices

I know that everyone is struggling with the price of gas and looking to the state for some relief. Fundamental reform clearly requires a change in our tax structure as well as meaningful action on the Federal level (CAFÉ standards immediately come to mind) both of which I have long advocated for as dependence on gas taxes is regressive and impacts most severely our families that are least able to afford it.

While I continue to push for that fundamental reform, I have been mindful of offering legislation aimed at bringing some immediate relief. Sen. Prague and I have consistently offered legislation to re-introduce tolls, and Rep. Nardello and I have offered bills and amendments for a windfall profit tax on the power companies with the revenue to be used to offset energy prices and build our mass transit system. Unfortunately, there is significant opposition to any change.

For environmental reasons, we require ethanol instead of MTBE which also adds to the price of gas in Connecticut.

Also, remember that the industry is an oligopoly which translates into huge market power (look at the \$10 billion record quarterly profits of the oil companies!).

It is the political will to change our tax structure that we need. I have an op-ed on the subject available if you call my office!