

## Preserving Investments in Connecticut and North Haven

When the General Assembly reconvened in February, we initially hoped that this year's state revenues would allow us to provide additional municipal aid or make other worthwhile changes to our biennial budget. Unfortunately, the Governor, in her budget address, took a hard line on making any budget adjustments for this coming fiscal year for any reason. When we subsequently received flattening or declining revenue projections in late spring, we determined that we could not afford to make any positive revisions to our budget.

Given this sobering fiscal news, we focused instead on preserving the historic investments, particularly in health care and municipal aid, that we made last session. As you may recall, last year's biennial budget was a major victory for North Haven, in that it dramatically increased North Haven's state education funding. According to our financial analysts, that budget raised our state education aid by more than \$1.4 million a year! This improvement in state

education funding represents an 81% increase in our state education aid over the past two years, and puts us near the top of the list of towns with the highest percentage increase in education aid over that same period. This increase, of course, comes on top of an expected extension of a special real estate conveyance tax that annually brings North Haven roughly a couple hundred thousand dollars in additional revenue.

Finally, we made some progress on accessing other state funds for the town. Working with Senator Fasano, I helped to secure a \$15,000 grant for playground equipment at Ridge Road School, and supported the town's successful application for a \$350,000 STEAP grant to renovate our public works facility on Elm Street. In addition, I continue to work with town officials to pursue a couple of other state grants, about which we hope to receive positive word over the course of the summer and fall.

# 2008 Legislative Bulletin



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## State Representative Steve Fontana

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## State Representative Steve Fontana

Serving North Haven

Dear Friends:


This year, House Democrats built on last year's achievements by dismissing irresponsible gimmickry and preserving our budget's historic investments in health care and municipal aid. Just as Connecticut families are tightening their belts during this economic downturn, we supported ongoing efforts to make state government more efficient but maintained our commitment to the budget that we passed last year.

Despite our fiscal challenges, we responded to municipalities, nonprofits, and small businesses on the subject of health care by proposing to open the state employee plan to them through a new Connecticut Healthcare Partnership. This initiative, if the Governor signs it into law, will provide towns, nonprofits, and small employers with another option for quality health care that may cost less than what they have now. We also addressed several other concerns, from public safety, to global warming, to teenage driving, to the foreclosure crisis.

This newsletter discusses some of our noteworthy accomplishments in these and other areas. If you would like more information on any of our efforts, please call me at 1-800-842-8267 ext. 8709.

As always, I am proud and privileged to serve as your State Representative. Please call me at 234-2240, or visit me at [www.stevefontana.com](http://www.stevefontana.com), if you need help with any state issue. Enjoy the summer and fall!

Best wishes,

  
Steve Fontana

P.S. For interviews with state legislators and other public figures, please look for my cable TV show "Politics & People" on NHTV!

## PROTECTING OUR HEALTH AND FAMILIES

### CREATING A HEALTH CARE PARTNERSHIP

This year, the legislature took a historic step to address the high cost of health insurance by leveraging the state employee plan to help municipal, nonprofit, and small business employees. If the Governor signs this bill, municipalities, nonprofits, and small businesses may take advantage of the increased bargaining power, comprehensive benefit coverage, and reduced administrative costs of the state plan.

### HELPING GRANDPARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Court-appointed grandparents or other caregivers with child custodial rights who do not get subsidized guardianship or foster care payments now will be able to apply for probate court-administered grants.

### ENHANCING SCHOOL SAFETY

Since a safe learning environment is crucial to student development and achievement, the General Assembly clarified in-school suspension policy and bolstered bullying policy.

First, the bill permits boards of education to make out-of-school suspensions only after a hearing and a finding that a student is a danger or too disruptive. It also clarifies that they may use any building under their control for in-school suspensions, and sets in-school suspension maximum lengths at ten days.

Second, the bill requires boards of education actually to implement a policy on bullying. It also requires written reports of acts of bullying, that each school develop a prevention strategy to address bullying, and that it annually report all verified acts of bullying to the Department of Education.

### INCREASING CHILD PRODUCT SAFETY

To address a serious health risk to children, the General Assembly passed legislation to regulate lead in children's products. The bill establishes limits for lead in children's products, and prohibits the sale of toys or other articles marketed for children that contain asbestos. It also gives the state the authority to require certain consumer products to have warning labels if they contain lead.

### REQUIRING PRODUCT LAST SALE DATES

To protect consumers, the General Assembly this year required the consumer protection commissioner to adopt regulations providing for clear expiration dates on food by incorporating a calendar date, instead of a code stamped on a product's package, to determine how long to display a product for sale.

### ASSISTING AUTO INSURANCE DISCOUNTS

New legislation allows people over age 60 to qualify for auto insurance discounts due to completion of a safe driver course by eliminating the in-person final exam requirement for Internet safe driver courses.

## ENHANCING PUBLIC SAFETY AND SECURITY

### IMPROVING OUR CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

In January, the General Assembly began reforming our criminal justice system by creating the new crime of "home invasion," increasing the penalties for burglary of a dwelling at night, and increasing the amount of time that criminals must serve for other burglary convictions.

This spring, we made more reforms by revising our persistent dangerous felony offender law. Prosecutors may charge people arrested for

manslaughter, arson, kidnapping, robbery, assault, home invasion, burglary, or sexual assault, who have already been convicted of and served time for one of these crimes, as persistent dangerous felony offenders. Penalties for people who qualify as persistent dangerous felony offenders will range from twice the minimum penalty for the second offense, to three times the minimum penalty for the third offense, with the maximum sentence being life imprisonment.

### SUPPORTING FIREFIGHTERS AND POLICE OFFICERS

This year, the General Assembly helped public safety personnel in the line of duty by giving an on-duty firefighter or police officer who has a heart attack the benefit of the doubt that physical job stresses caused the attack. If a town or its insurer believes that some reason unrelated to the job caused that public safety officer's heart attack, it may seek to disprove his or her workers' compensation claim.

The General Assembly also helped paid full-time firefighters who volunteer in their communities by prohibiting towns from banning them from serving as volunteer fire department members where they live.

### ENCOURAGING SAFER TEEN DRIVING

To try to reduce teen driving accidents, the General Assembly established new driving requirements for 16- and 17-year-olds that establishes an 11 PM curfew for teen drivers, requires all passengers in a car operated by a teen

driver to wear seat belts, increases the number of behind-the-wheel training hours for teens, and toughens penalties for speeding, DUI, reckless driving, and graduated license violations.

### PRESERVING HOME OWNERSHIP

The General Assembly took action to keep families in their homes by passing a bill to provide mediation and financial assistance to people whose homes are at risk of foreclosure, and to fix certain lending practices. First, it establishes a mediation and multi-tiered mortgage refinancing and emergency mortgage assistance program. This program will help

homeowners who took out a subprime loan and can't make their monthly payments, or who owe more on their home than its appraised value, or who have fallen behind in mortgage payments because of hardships like unemployment, illness, or divorce. Second, it prohibits lenders from engaging in misleading or deceptive practices.

## PROMOTING CLEANER ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

### PURSUING ENERGY SUSTAINABILITY

This year, we made progress on shifting to a cleaner, sustainable energy system by passing comprehensive planning legislation. First, the bill requires state government to evaluate its dependence on oil, and to study the impact of long-term fossil fuel scarcity, price increases, and supply disruptions on our economy, food supply, transportation, and emergency response.

Second, the bill requires the state to analyze how other states promote clean energy, and how creating a de-

partment of clean energy could maximize economic opportunities for state workers in emerging clean energy industries, reduce carbon emissions, and promote energy independence.

Finally, the bill requires the state to develop a plan to maximize the use of solar energy and foster a self-sustaining solar energy industry. The plan must assess the benefits and costs of achieving that self-sustaining solar industry, identify a target solar energy goal, and set a timeline for achieving that goal.

### EXPANDING ELECTRONIC RECYCLING

This year, the General Assembly passed improved recycling legislation to make it easier to collect old electronic devices and ensure that we recycle them rather than put them in landfills.

### ADDRESSING GLOBAL WARMING

The General Assembly enacted landmark global warming legislation this session to combat the environmental impact of climate change. The bill lays out short-term and long-term emission-curbing benchmarks for the state over the next several decades, by establishing mandatory greenhouse gas emission caps of 10% below 1990 levels by 2020 and 80% below 2001 levels by 2050. It also requires the state to evaluate the best way to reduce the level of greenhouse gases.



Rep. Fontana with Secretary of State Susan Bysiewicz (left) and other legislative leaders.