

Forging Major Progress For Connecticut and North Haven

When the General Assembly convened in January, we believed that we needed to create immediate property tax relief and lay the groundwork for long-term property tax reform. In February, however, the Governor proposed a budget that, while appearing to offer new education funding, shorted other services and contained no meaningful property tax relief measures.

Since the Governor's ideas failed to address satisfactorily the concerns of ordinary citizens, we responded more directly to those concerns through our budget. In April, we substantially increased local education aid without underfunding other services. We also reversed chronic health care underinvestment, and enhanced fiscal responsibility by paying down long-term debt and increasing our "rainy day" reserve fund. Finally, we provided income tax relief for most taxpayers by cutting their personal income taxes and doubling the income tax property tax credit to \$1,000.

Unfortunately, the Governor rejected many of our initiatives, including our income tax relief initiatives. Over several weeks, we nevertheless hammered out a budget with her that, for instance, preserved most of our municipal aid increase, extended health care funding for uninsured children, and permanently funded our teachers' retirement system.

Despite the disappointments, the budget was a major victory for North Haven. Through the budget, we raised the basic per-student grant and eliminated an existing cap on municipal education aid, two long-standing problems. As a result, North Haven will receive roughly \$940,000 more in total annual state aid this coming year (a 36% increase), and is scheduled to get an additional \$154,000 increase the following year. The town also will benefit, for at least another year, from a real estate conveyance tax, which annually brings North Haven a couple hundred thousand dollars in additional revenue.

2007 Legislative Bulletin



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State Representative **STEVE FONTANA** Serving North Haven



Dear Friends:

This year, House Democrats resumed work on trying to move Connecticut forward on the issues that ordinary citizens have told us matter most: property tax relief, municipal aid, health care, and energy. Building on our past accomplishments, in February we unveiled our "Foundation for Connecticut's Future," a comprehensive vision to foster future growth and prosperity by focusing on creating healthy citizens and a healthy economy.

Our vision addressed each of these critical issues by promoting innovation, investment, and accountability. While the Governor rejected our proposal to provide additional property tax relief to most taxpayers, a proposal that formed the centerpiece of our agenda, we did make significant progress in several important areas, from expanding health insurance coverage to increasing municipal aid, especially for education.

This newsletter discusses many of our noteworthy achievements. If you would like more information on these or 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 anytime, or visit me at www.stevefontana.com, if you need help with any state issue. Enjoy the summer and fall!

Best wishes,

Steve Fontana

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

PROTECTING OUR HEALTH AND FAMILIES

PREVENTING INSURANCE DISCRIMINATION

The General Assembly passed legislation to prevent health insurers offering individual health insurance policies from rescinding, limiting, or canceling health coverage based on a pre-existing condition unless

they demonstrate to the Insurance Department within a policy's first two years that a customer intentionally misrepresented his or her health status on the policy's application.

EXPANDING HUSKY HEALTH INSURANCE

This session, the General Assembly made several improvements to our HUSKY health insurance plan for children and their families. Under the bill:

- pregnant women who earn up to 250% of the federal poverty level will receive prenatal care
- uninsured newborns automatically will get HUSKY at birth and for their first four months
- parents of HUSKY children who earn up to 185% of the federal poverty level will be eligible

CARE FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT VICTIMS

The General Assembly passed a law to ensure that all women who are victims of sexual assault get the highest standard of care from every licensed Connecticut health care facility providing emergency treatment to female sexual assault victims. Under the law, every medical facility must provide a victim with accurate, objective information about emergency contraception; inform

her of emergency contraception's availability, use, and efficacy; and give her emergency contraception on request, unless she is pregnant as determined by an approved pregnancy test. If a medical facility chooses not to provide emergency contraception to rape victims directly, the facility may contract with an independent provider to comply with these care requirements.

RECYCLING ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Electronic waste, such as discarded computers and televisions, can contain lead, mercury, and other chemicals that can damage internal organs and cause developmental problems. This session, we required manufacturers to establish, run, and finance the collection, transportation, and

recycling of electronic devices such as computers and televisions. We also prohibited retailers from selling equipment from non-compliant manufacturers, and from knowingly discarding these devices at a solid waste disposal facility other than a transfer station.



PROMOTING ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND RENEWABLE ENERGY

After electricity prices soared over the past two years, I heard from many colleagues, businesses, and residents that the General Assembly needed to do something to lower electricity rates. To that end, as Chairman of the Energy & Technology Committee, I spent hundreds of hours attending public hearings, reviewing testimony, and meeting with stakeholders, in an effort to write a comprehensive bill that, first and foremost, would stabilize and lower electricity costs, yet also invest in energy efficiency and renewable energy and reduce our reliance on fossil fuels.

This session, the General Assembly passed an energy bill that contained many initiatives to promote energy efficiency and renewable energy. Among its provisions, the bill:

- restores ratepayer funds devoted to energy efficiency and renewable energy
- extends and expands sales tax exemptions for energy efficient products
- creates a "Summer Saver Rewards" program to encourage conservation
- expands "green building" requirements for new construction projects
- increases the proportion of electricity that must come from renewable sources

- exempts solar and geothermal energy technologies from sales taxes and property taxes

Unfortunately, while the bill contained many innovative provisions that will move us toward a cleaner, more sustainable energy future, it failed to address the single most urgent problem: remedying the root cause of our high electric rates (now the highest in the continental U.S.).

Currently, our deregulated electricity system relies on private, for-profit companies and market forces to produce the electricity we need. These companies, whose purpose is to maximize their profits, have no reason to create more supply or charge us anything less than what the market will bear. Based on my research, I found that, to bring down prices, we needed both to reassert some control over existing electricity sources, and to create and pay for new electricity supplies based on the reasonable costs to produce those supplies, rather than the going market price.

I therefore told my colleagues that, until and unless we addressed our high electricity rates in this way, we would continue to pay far more for electricity than we should, and that businesses and residents would continue to leave our state. Sadly, although I found many colleagues who agreed with me, vested interests

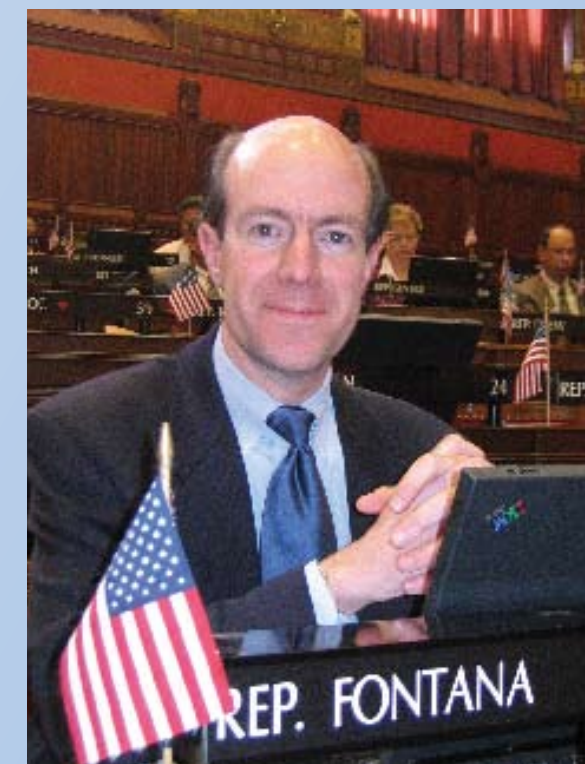
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Energy continued

prevented me from fixing the central problem.

As if failing to fix the problem wasn't bad enough, however, the bill actually made things worse for consumers by forcing them, through higher rates, to pay for expensive and unproven energy technologies.

For these reasons I tried to fix the bill in the House. When I was prevented from fixing it, I could not support it, despite its worthwhile provisions, and therefore voted against it.



BALANCING JUSTICE AND RIGHTS

ADDRESSING EMINENT DOMAIN

The General Assembly reformed eminent domain this year by tightening the rules for taking property for redevelopment. All redevelopment plans now must receive a public hearing, and must be approved by a municipality's legislative body by a two-thirds vote. Approved plans will be subject to a ten-year deadline and, if a plan is not completed in time, any takings must go through the approval process again. Property own-

ers will be able to appeal proposed takings to court, and courts will be able to prohibit takings if statutory procedures are not followed. Finally, if properties are not used as a part of a plan, or if the timetable for a plan expires, a property's former owner will be given the first opportunity to buy back the property.

REPORTING LOST OR STOLEN FIREARMS

A recent national stolen firearms study found that more than ten thousand firearms were stolen in Connecticut from 1993 through 2002, that the vast majority of these firearms were taken from private homes and motor vehicles, and that only half of these firearms were ever recovered. As a result, the General Assembly this year passed legislation to require that anyone who lawfully

owns a firearm (other than a shotgun, rifle, or antique firearm) that is lost or stolen must file a police report within seventy-two hours of when he or she discovers or should have discovered that loss or theft. Persons who fail to report such loss or theft within seventy-two hours will be charged with an infraction and fined not more than ninety dollars.