

House Republican Press Release

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Alternative Budget Would Keep Taxes, Spending In Check



Capitol Commentary *By State Rep. Mary Ann Carson*

We have reached the time in the legislative session when much attention will focus on making adjustments to the 2008-2009 state budget. Much has changed regarding the state's finances since the session began in February, when a surplus in excess of \$200 million was projected.

House Speaker James Amann, D-Milford, Senate President Pro Tempore Donald Williams, D-Brooklyn, and Appropriations Committee House Chair Denise Merrill, D-Mansfield, recently stated that it might be better to do nothing regarding budget adjustments for the next fiscal year. I believe doing so would be a band-aid solution. The non-partisan Office of Fiscal Analysis now projects a deficit of \$139 million. If the Legislature does not take a more serious course, we could easily see a much higher figure later this year. I support addressing this fiscal shortfall through the budget plan unveiled on April 28 by House and Senate Republicans.

Some details of this proposal include measures that:

- Cut gas prices by 10 cents through a summer state tax moratorium and a roll back the scheduled gross receipts tax increase of .5 percent on July 1. Those roll backs will save consumers \$50 million. One issue I have consistently heard about from constituents is the skyrocketing price of gasoline. While we would like offer more relief, this measure would directly provide consumers a break within existing revenues.
- Allow hundreds of seniors to receive home care for a savings of \$17 million. (Money Follows the Person.) This would help people receive long-term health care at home rather than in a nursing home. It would allow individuals to use their Medicaid benefits to cover long-term health care at their homes instead of at nursing home facilities
- Offer up to 11,600 eligible state workers an early retirement incentive program, or ERIP, to save a projected \$163 million in the next fiscal year. The ERIP offered in 2003, in the midst of the last state fiscal crisis, saw more than 4,000

workers retire and cut the state payroll by more than \$155 million. It is important to note that no state workers would lose their jobs because of the ERIP.

On Friday, April 25, the House of Representatives held a lengthy debate over the high-profile 'three-strikes' issue that involves statutes impacting persistent felony offenders. Since the Cheshire tragedy that occurred in July 2007, the Legislature has debated this issue. A Republican amendment that was defeated would have amended the Persistent Dangerous Felony Offender Statutes by requiring that persons convicted of three dangerous felonies serve life in prison without the possibility of release.

It would also have required prosecutors to pursue a third conviction under persistent dangerous felony offender provisions for repeat violent offenders who can be sentenced to life in prison without eligibility for parole or publicly state why they are not doing so. Many times, prosecutors can use the current persistent dangerous felony offender provisions but fail to do so.

The bill (Senate Bill 671) that was passed would authorize a judge to double the penalties for certain violent felony offenses following a second violent crime and triple the penalty after a third offense - up to a maximum of life in prison for a violent felon. The measure, which passed the state Senate early Thursday morning, received final legislative approval by the House late Friday and was sent to Governor Rell for final approval.

Finally, the House of Representatives debated on bill on climate change for several hours on Monday April 28. House Bill 6800 would require the state to reduce its emissions of CO2 to 10% below 1990 levels and 85% below 2001 levels. It would require state agencies to identify and report to the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Office of Policy and Management (OPM) and the Legislature policies and regulations to be adopted to reach these emission caps. The bill would also direct the DEP to to inventory the state Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions and recommend strategies to meet the emission caps. In addition, it would require: the DEP to monitor the development of low-carbon fuel standards; the Department of Transportation (DOT) to investigate expanding high-speed and light rail train service; and authorizes the DEP to investigate cap and trade compliance mechanisms to achieve GHG emissions.

Debate on this bill focused on whether the state could have a significant impact on climate change and the bill's impact on businesses. I look forward to additional updates on legislation that moves through the process in the final week of the session.

Editors Note: State Representative Mary Ann Carson represents Kent, New Fairfield, New Milford and Sherman in the Connecticut General Assembly.