

## House Republican Press Release

May 7, 2008

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### Before The Clock Strikes Midnight



#### Capitol Commentary

*By State Rep. Mary Ann Carson*

As we go to press, the Legislature is in the final hours of the 2008 Legislative Session, which will conclude at midnight on May 7. Dozens of bills are passed into law during the final days, often at a breakneck pace. The following are updates on several noteworthy bills moving forward at this time.

A bill approved by the House of Representatives (House Bill 5629 An Act Concerning Workers' Compensation Coverage For Firefighters And Police Officers) would allow police officers and firefighters to receive workers compensation benefits if they suffer a heart attack while on duty. To be covered by the bill, the cardiac emergency must result in lost work time due to total or partial incapacity or death. I did not support this legislation. Elected leaders of the small towns I represent clearly expressed a primary concern that involves the potential impact on local taxpayers. According to the fiscal note for this bill, "These costs may be significant as a single cardiac claim may have a total incurred value of \$500,000 - \$1 million."

The following bills I have cosponsored: Senate Bill 540, An Act Doubling The Fines For Moving Motor Vehicle Violations Occurring In Emergency Response Areas, would address problems related to motorists who do not use proper speed or caution while driving near the scene of an emergency. It would specifically double the fines for 21 specified traffic violations committed at an accident scene designated with flares by public safety, fire, or emergency personnel. State Senator David Cappiello and I introduced this bill through the Legislature's Public Safety Committee after emergency service personnel brought to our attention ongoing safety issues at emergency scenes. At press time, the bill is before the State Senate.

The State Senate and House of Representatives have approved House Bill 5808, An Act Concerning Social Security Numbers On Vital Records, and it now sits before Governor M. Jodi Rell for final approval. The bill is designed to help prevent identity theft. It would specifically tighten access to Social Security numbers (SSNs) on birth and death certificates and on marriage licenses and civil union licenses. It requires the SSNs of parties to a civil union to be recorded in the "administrative purposes" section of the license application and the license and redacted or removed from any copy of a license

given to people not otherwise authorized to obtain the number or to a state or federal agency that requests one.

On Wednesday, April 30, the House of Representatives approved House Bill 5918, An Act Concerning Jurors. Each year approximately 120,000 individuals serve at least one day of jury service, this entitles them to be excused from service for three years. Re-summoning them within that time contributes to a perception that the system unfairly and repeatedly targets certain individuals, who are then inconvenienced by processing an excusal. Processing a summons that will eventually be excused is a waste of state resources.

HB 5918 would add jurors excused from service because they have served within the last three years to the list of persons who are excluded from the summoning process and also clarifies that an employer must allow an employee time off of work to serve as a juror even when working 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> shift. At press time, the bill is before the State Senate.

House Bill 5438, An Act Concerning Making Permanent The Unemployment Benefits For Military Spouses, would establish a permanent eligibility for unemployment compensation of military spouses who voluntarily leave their jobs to accompany a spouse required to relocate for active-duty service in the U. S. Armed Forces. Current law applies to spouses who leave their jobs between July 1, 2007 and June 30, 2008.

House Bill 5044, An Act Concerning Gold Star Family Number Plates, would eliminate the fee for the Gold Star Family license plate, which the legislature authorized in 2007 for immediate relatives of state residents killed in action while performing active military duty with the U.S. Armed Forces. Current law requires the Department of Motor Vehicles to charge a fee to cover the cost of making the plates, in addition to the normal registration fee. The current plate fee is \$10.

Finally, in the final week of the session, there has been discussion and debate over the 2008-2009 state budget. Since the early 1990s, the Legislature has approved biennial (two-year) budgets and did so again last year. However, it has also approved adjustments for the second year each time because revenues and expenses change considerably from year to year.

Sadly, the majority party has chosen not to make adjustments this year and instead, continue with approved figures for the next fiscal year. This is particularly troubling because the state comptroller projects a deficit of more than \$60 million for the current fiscal year. That sum is likely to grow significantly if the budget remains unaltered but that growth could have been minimized by taking action now.

There is much legislation left to detail and I very much look forward to providing details of additional bills that moved through the process in the final hours of the session.

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