

House Republican Press Release

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A VIEW FROM THE INSIDE State Representative Ruth Fahrbach



Spending surplus money not always the best decision

At the behest of Gov. Jodi Rell, the legislature met in a special session on Friday, Aug. 22 to discuss energy-related proposals. The reason for the special session being called was the determination by the state comptroller that the state would end the year with a surplus of approximately \$75 million and to allocate that surplus for energy related matters.

We have all seen the increases in prices of mostly everything over the last 12 months, and we can surmise that the number of people seeking heating assistance this winter, for example, will likely increase. So then, why not “spend” the surplus money?

For starters, we know now that we are already facing a deficit of approximately \$150 million in the state budget for the current fiscal year which ends June 30, 2009. That number may come down, or, even worse, go higher and, current projections are that it will go much, much higher. Knowing there is a looming deficit should be enough to make legislators cautious when looking at spending any surplus.

Even if we create more assistance as a one-shot deal (and I’ve been around long enough to know that that’s unlikely), we are creating the expectation for those struggling that state funding will be there for them again next year. If heating assistance is a priority, the legislature and the Governor should find the money in the budget and re-direct it to Operation Fuel and other means of providing assistance. Remember, the Democrats and the Governor chose not to do budget adjustments during the past legislative session. Instead, we are now budgeting piecemeal, potentially adding to the projected deficit, when we should be setting spending priorities.

Without question, people are hurting in these uneasy economic times, but how do we define those who are in real need? How can we ensure that our tax dollars have the desired impact of helping those most in need? After Hurricane Katrina, the federal government dumped millions of dollars in relief into the region. Now there are investigations underway looking into allegations that many of those federal funds went to individuals and businesses which had no connection to New Orleans or the devastation that took place.

Look at the federal mortgage bailout by Congress. I can't help but wonder if that funding is going to help people who probably shouldn't have applied for and received such a large mortgage in the first place.

Rather than the state deciding who is in need of energy assistance this winter, we'd be better off cutting taxes on everybody allowing them more capacity to make ends meet. At least then Connecticut residents would have the ultimate say in how to use the additional funding for themselves and their families.

State Rep. Ruth Fahrbach represents the 61st District, including Suffield, and parts of Windsor and East Granby, in the General Assembly.