

House Republican Press Release

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Outlook 2009 in Hartford



By John H. Frey

On Nov. 4, the voters of Ridgefield permitted me the opportunity to serve again as our community's voice in the State House of Representatives. During this past election season, I was honored and privileged to speak with so many Ridgefielders and hear their thoughts and suggestions on issues before our state government.

I am extremely grateful for the trust and confidence voters have placed in me these past ten years and the chance to continue bringing your concerns and issues to Hartford. Serving in the Legislature and helping citizens navigate the bureaucracy of state government has been the most rewarding experience I have ever known.

I very much look forward to working on the challenges facing the Legislature during the next two years. A number of serious issues await us.

Budgetary challenges will be the major focus the next two years. Looking to the next two years, the state anticipates a combined \$6 billion gap between revenues and expenses for the fiscal years ending in June 2010 and June 2011. These are estimates of nonpartisan analysts from both the legislature and the governor's administration. To solve this enormous problem, there is no magic bullet or quick fix. State government needs to change the way it operates fundamentally. That state cannot rely on \$1.4 billion in its Rainy Day Fund, as that would be wiped out in matter of months.

People in Ridgefield are facing tough times. As a concerned legislator and member of the Revenue, Bonding and Finance Committee, I am unwilling to ask citizens to pay more for state government in these tough times.

What can be done? Bolder steps are necessary to close a spending gap greater than any other in recent state history. We need state agencies to come to the table and discuss ways to change the way they do business. Legislators simply have to hold the line on spending.

We need to reinvent public institutions so they provide better results with less money. That can be done by focusing on core purposes, creating consequences for performance, demanding accountability to customers and creating continuous improvement.

The question remains, can Connecticut continue to support a state employee workforce that grows and grows while other private sector employment shrinks? Between health benefits and retirement payments it cost the state twice as much to do a job as opposed to a private company. Any substantive change in the way state government works will have to include some state employee union concessions, as we must all tight our belts.

Other states have done this, most notably the state of Washington. Connecticut can do likewise if leaders and citizens demand a sense of urgency.

This time, the problems in Connecticut and other states cannot be solved by tinkering around the edges and hoping to muddle through year by year. State economists have said Connecticut is facing not only a cyclical downturn, but also structural changes in the region's economy. The state can expect to lose 60,000 to 80,000 jobs, many of them from the financial services sector important in Hartford and Fairfield counties.

Connecticut has been successful in bringing the film industry to the state with tax incentives but why stop with film why not other industry. We need to not only keep jobs in state but bring more jobs in, especially high-paying skilled jobs.

I, along with my House Republican colleagues have for two years proposed legislation to promote fuel cell industry in Connecticut by supporting the buying of hydrogen-electric hybrid buses and convert Bradley International Airport to the world's first airport to run on fuel cells. Connecticut is already one of the nation's largest hub for companies that produce fuel cells, supporting an estimated 2100 related jobs.

It will take creative, innovative leadership and I look forward to being put of the solution.

Finally, as we start the New Year let us remember that the government you have graciously re-elected me to, is the peoples' government and I always enjoy hearing from you — if you have thoughts on issues before the legislature, have a local issue of concern or just don't know where to turn, please call me (toll free Hartford number is 800-842-1423 or at my home 431-6799).