

House Republican Press Release

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2007 State Legislature: Tax Hikes Blocked; Bristol Grants Ok'd; Repeat Offender, Elderly Pension Bills Stalled



Bristol residents – and citizens across the state – breathed a sigh of relief earlier this year when the state legislature passed a budget that avoided major tax hikes, thanks largely to the efforts of House Republican legislators.

On April 24th, responding to the original budget proposed by the majority Democrats that called for a \$1.7 billion overall tax hike to pay for the 13.4 percent increase in state spending they were demanding, we offered an alternative ‘No Tax Increase’ package that showed it not only was possible to maintain current services and increase spending in a few selected areas without raising taxes, but also was responsible and fiscally sound.

Their proposal would have stunted economic growth, chased more employers out of Connecticut, dried up the job market and forced more people to move to low tax states in the south and southwest.

After a Quinnipiac University poll that came out about two weeks after we unveiled our alternative budget found that 42 percent of the respondents supported our alternative budget, that 33 percent favored the Democrats’ proposal, and only 16 percent liked the budget proposed by the governor in February, the debate at the capitol changed completely.

We went from arguing about how much the budget and taxes should be increased to whether taxes should be increased at all. Although the final two-year budget approved June 23rd called for more spending than we would have preferred as well as a hike in the cigarette tax, it does not increase the burden on Connecticut taxpayers and businesses and will not be a drag on economic growth and job creation.

Bristol Benefits

The 2008-09 budget also increased Bristol’s Education Cost Sharing grant from \$35,390,494 in 2007 to \$39,942,411 in 2008; and to \$41,699,977 in 2009 for an overall increase of \$6,309,383.

The State Bond Commission approved funding in the amount of \$10.7 million for the Route 72 extension project in Bristol and Plainville at its regular monthly meeting in June. The project will help ease rush-hour bottlenecks in Forestville and provide easy access to I-84 from the industrial and business parks along Route 229. It will lead to business growth and expansion and help create more jobs in the Greater Bristol area.

On December 12th, the Bond Commission approved a \$375,000 grant for the purchase and renovation of a Head Start facility in Bristol. The funding will reimburse the Bristol Community Organization (BCO) \$290,000 for the purchase of the facility, located at 254 Lake Avenue, and provide \$85,000 for renovations to the building. BCO, which has operated two head start classrooms as a tenant at the property for the past 10 years, purchased the building in September after it was placed on the market.

Unfinished Business

Although taxpayers in Bristol and elsewhere in Connecticut dodged a tax hike bullet and the city will benefit because of some actions taken in Hartford in 2007, important business remains undone.

Shortly after last July's home invasion murders in Cheshire, we called for a special session of the General Assembly to act on tough anti-crime measures targeting repeat violent offenders and to correct flaws in our criminal justice and parole systems that enabled the outrages in Cheshire to take place.

Unfortunately, the legislature's majority Democrats refused to go along with our recommendations for prompt action on those proposals. The special session is now expected to take place in January, although no specific date has been set.

It is our hope that we can enact this important legislation before the 2008 session gets underway February 6th. It is the least we can do to help prevent tragedies similar to the one in Cheshire from occurring in the months and years ahead – and to honor the memory of Doctor William Petit's wife and two daughters, who were brutally murdered in the Cheshire home invasion.

The majority Democrats also blocked several other House Republican initiatives of importance to taxpayers, seniors, motorists and recent college graduates that we will be working to enact during the 2008 session, including:

- Pension protection for the elderly, which would phase out the state tax on pension and Social Security income. Our seniors worked hard all their lives and deserve a secure retirement. Connecticut is one of only four states that taxes pension income.
- Suspending collection of the state's 25 cent per gallon tax on gasoline between Memorial Day and Labor Day. With gasoline prices once again above \$3 a gallon and likely to stay there or go even higher this summer, Connecticut families deserve some relief at the pump during the peak vacation driving months.
- Allowing recent graduates of state institutions of higher learning to deposit their state income tax payments into interest-earning special accounts within a 'First Time Home Buyer Trust Fund.' Participants in the program would have 10 years to access their accounts to assist them with the purchase of their first home. Our proposal would encourage more young people to live and work in Connecticut, help alleviate our state's brain drain, and build a better economic future for our citizens.