

House Republican Press Release

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General Assembly Meets In Special Session



Capitol Commentary *By State Rep. Mary Ann Carson*

On Wednesday, June 11, the Legislature held a special session. While initiatives to provide some relief for motorists were the most-high profile issue debated during this lengthy session, a number of other important measures were also approved.

This year, for the first time since the early 1990s, the Legislature did not make adjustments prior to the second year of a biennial budget. Republicans tried to amend the scope of the special session to make a few key revisions to the budget.

These revisions would specifically have: Saved \$155 million in payroll costs through an Early Retirement Incentive Program; restored \$20 million for the Early Reading Success program for 15 towns and cities; provided \$2 million for added security at battered women's shelters and provided \$27 million more for struggling nursing homes and other service providers. In a largely party line vote, Democrats did not even allow for debate on these proposals.

Likewise, parliamentary procedure was used to prevent any debate on Republican proposals regarding the extension of the conveyance tax. This tax is added to the cost of real estate transactions. The increase was enacted when the state hit difficult fiscal times several years ago and designed as a temporary measure. The proposed amendments would have exempted the following groups from the extended tax: people who are selling their homes at a loss, senior citizens who are selling their homes and Veterans who are selling their homes. The conveyance tax extension was approved without such exemptions.

The legislature also approved House Bill 6502, An Act Concerning Comprehensive Ethics Reforms. Several attempts were made during the regular legislative session to pass ethics reforms but no proposal was able to be approved by both the House and Senate chambers. HB 6502 includes measures that: permit state courts to revoke or reduce any retirement or other benefit due to state or municipal officials or employees who commit certain crimes related to their employment; make it a class A misdemeanor for public servants to fail to report a bribe; expand illegal campaign finance practices to cover certain solicitations by chiefs of staff.

Additional provisions in this legislation make several changes to state codes of ethics such as limiting gift exceptions, prohibiting state contractors from hiring certain former public officials and state employees, and requiring the Office of State Ethics to provide mandatory training to legislators on the Code of Ethics for Public Officials.

Finally, an appropriation of \$21.9 million was made to address a deficit at the University of Connecticut Health Center (UCHC). State funding is typically limited to a block grant for the educational portion of the Health Center's budget. However, the UCHC is experiencing a significant overall deficit, primarily due to structural financial problems at the John Dempsey Hospital. The hospital deficiency is primarily due to under-reimbursement for neonatal, maternity and psychiatric beds.

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