

House Republican Press Release

February 21, 2007
Press Office: 860-240-8700

Clean Water Fund



By Lile Gibbons

One of my priorities as the session goes forward is insuring the State Of Connecticut re-invests in the Clean Water Fund. The Clean Water Fund is a cleanup agreement established in 1998 between Connecticut, New York and federal officials in 1998, who pledged to work together to provide cities and towns with grants and loans to plan and construct modern day wastewater treatment facilities as well as upgrade older sewage treatment plants that would protect streams, rivers and our treasured Long Island Sound.

The Clean Water Fund is financed through a combination of federal funding, state General Obligation (GO) bonds for the grant portion, and state revenue bonds for the loan portion. Connecticut participated in this fund initially but during the tight budget years of 2001-2, our state's funding dropped way off and in 2005 the legislature did not authorize any bonding for this fund.

In a September 3, 2006 opinion editorial (op-ed) in the New York Times, "Who Is Killing Long Island Sound?" by Tom Andersen, the author makes note that Connecticut cuts to the Clean Water Fund have jeopardized efforts to reduce the amount of nitrogen that municipal sewage treatment plants discharge into the Sound. Nitrogen encourages the growth of algae and while some algae is necessary to maintain the balance of life in the Sound, too much starves the fish and other salt water inhabitants of oxygen critical to their continued existence. Mr. Andersen called upon the legislature and governor to restore the funding and reverse this trend.

Not only does the Clean Water Fund help local municipalities and taxpayers so they do not bear the entire cost of installing new and upgrading existing waste treatment plants, it insures that the state as a whole is committed to keeping Long Island Sound waters clean and healthy.

Governor Rell last week proposed increasing the funding for the Clean Water Fund to \$245 million a year. I commend her initiative and agree with the Governor's decision to put more money into the Clean Water Fund. This would restore our funding of the \$144 million and \$120 million requested for fiscal years 2006 and 2007 by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), plus insure an adequate funding stream into the future.

The lack of funding is unconscionable and has left municipalities waiting for clean water dollars. As of May 2006, there were 29 facilities waiting to be funded. According to DEP's funding priority list, only 12 of these projects, with an estimated project cost of \$107 million, would be partially funded. Work on the remaining 17 projects and the non-funded portion of three projects cannot proceed because of the limited funding. Yet these projects must be built to meet the August 2009 discharge limit. Who's to pay?

We must continue to maintain, restore and preserve our most significant environmental treasure, Long Island Sound. This proposed funding increase can reverse the trend of unfunded sewage and water treatment plants and provide significant progress towards keeping our sound waters safe and clean for generations to come.

As always, please feel free to send me your thoughts and suggestions on these or other issues before the legislature. Call me (toll free Hartford number is (1-800-842-1423) or email me at Lile.Gibbons@cga.ct.gov.