

## House Republican Press Release

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### 2008 Session Provides Mixed Results For Citizens



*An Op-Ed By State Representative DebraLee Hovey*

The 2008 Session of the General Assembly began in February with tremendous potential. However, with the conclusion of a one-day session for unfinished businesses this week, the Legislature's accomplishments were clearly mixed.

The primary focus of even-year legislative sessions is to make adjustments to the biennial budget. For the first time since the early 1990s, the Legislature did not make these adjustments this year. Governor M. Jodi Rell and Democrat leaders chose to do nothing in this regard.

When the session began, the state had a projected surplus of more than \$200 million. At its end, we were faced with a projected \$67 deficit. I joined with my House Republican colleagues in introducing a budget package that would have offered up to 11,600 eligible state workers an early retirement incentive program, or ERIP. Similar measures were enacted in 2002 and 1992 when the state faced serious fiscal issues. Ultimately, this proposal would have saved state taxpayers \$163 million (according the non-partisan Office of Legislative Research) and helped prevent future tax increases.

At press time, a health care plan touted as Connecticut Health Care Partnership that would allow municipalities, nonprofits and small businesses to join the state employees' health insurance plan awaits final approval from Governor Rell. Proponents claim it would new health care options for cities and towns. However, the majority of insurance companies that administer the plans for the state have indicated they would re-rate their bids if the state forced them to expand their pools to include more people and possibly more risk. For small towns this is not good news. While local officials may be tempted to buy into the state plan, doing so would actually cost taxpayers more. The state's healthcare plan is often referred to as the "Cadillac" of plans, and carries a corresponding cost.

Positive initiatives passed during the session include the "Money Follows The Person" legislation, which allows additional use of federal Medicaid funds to provide care that allows people to remain in their own homes, rather than receive care in a nursing home.

Also, we postponed the flawed 2007 'In School Suspension' law, which was scheduled to go into effect this year. Many education officials have expressed concerns

over this legislation, particularly the additional cost associated with hiring staff to monitor students serving their suspensions on school property.

Legislation I prepared to address this issue would have targeted Connecticut school systems that abuse the use of out of school suspensions. It resulted in co-chairs of the Education Committee seeking the compromise to delay implementation of the law and I look forward to reworking this legislation in the future.

Finally, the focus of the June 11 special session was to continue an increase in the state's conveyance tax, which 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. During the special session, I supported amendments that 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. Unfortunately, these measures were defeated largely along party lines, with Democrats voting to approve the tax increase without the exemptions.

In addition, Democrat leaders used parliamentary procedure to block debate on a proposal to amend the state budget to provide: \$20 million for the Early Reading Success program for 15 towns and cities; \$2 million for added security at battered women shelters and \$27 million more struggling nursing homes and other service providers. While House Speaker James Amann is retiring this year, the way these measures and the conveyance tax exemptions were not even allowed to be debated is evidence incoming majority party leaders are far from open-minded regarding ways state government can help its citizens.