

House Republican Press Release

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PAYING OUR SHARE, AND THEN SOME?



By State Representative John J. Ryan

If you are a long-time reader of this column, you might recall that I have lamented over the years how the quality of press coverage at our State Capitol has slowly and steadily deteriorated. Not only are there fewer reporters actually covering the happenings in Hartford, I have increasingly wondered if they can do more than lift and modify sentences from the various press releases that are churned out by assorted governmental officials and entities. And I assume that if you took the time to scan several of the state's daily newspapers, you would note that often the same stories appear word-for-word in various papers.

Accordingly, you can understand my shock when the Hartford Courant ran a story on the Sunday before last "We'll All Feel Greenwich's Financial Pain in Our State Budget" which tosses out a few statistics like the "town contributed nearly \$600 million in state income taxes in 2006 - more than 3 times the income taxes paid by the combined populations of Hartford, Bridgeport, New Haven and Waterbury." You can hunt down the story online at courant.com for other similarly interesting points; so the Hartford newspaper has finally figured out where the \$\$ comes from? If you have perused this column in the past, that is hardly a revelation to you.

And then, to my further shock, on Saturday, another media revelation! Chris Powell's column in the upstate Journal Inquirer (see journalinquirer.com) "Maybe huge deficits will make state serious", which also makes several good observations. But the broader points, of course, never addressed, are the ones the media and the editors should be focusing on. For example, does anyone recall the points made in favor of the income tax in Connecticut when debated and adopted now a decade and a half ago that it was 'a much more dependable and predictable revenue stream'? Odd how no one is bringing that thought up now that an "adjustment" on Wall Street will put a major dent in Connecticut's tax revenues. Is it wise to have such a large portion of the State's budget dependent on the bonuses of a relatively few financial industry folks?

Wouldn't it be interesting if just a few other towns were added into this bean counting exercise, say Darien, New Canaan, Westport, Wilton, Weston to name only a few? Why doesn't the media hunt down (the readily available) numbers on the income tax revenue generated by those few towns as a percentage of the total pie? And while we are at it,

let's add, say, the conveyance tax revenue, and the estate tax revenue from this handful of towns? Imagine if we compared the numbers generated to send to Hartford with the benefits from the programs that come back! Do you have any doubt how widely skewed the amounts of revenue redistribution are?

Can you recall any media interest in things such as productivity in State government, or analysis of where government dollars go, and the effectiveness of the various State programs that receive 100's of millions of State funding? Is there potential for any savings anywhere, or better delivery of the State's services in a budget north of \$17 billion? Will anyone look at combining, eliminating or developing completely new ways of the government serving its needs?

Further, might we ever see a news analysis of how State government confronted similar issues in the past? ("Those who do not learn the lessons of history...") Are our daily papers likely to reference the history and circumstances of how new taxes came into existence (e.g. that State income tax ?) or what has happened to our state's Rainy Day fund balances in the past ? Would you care to make some projections on what may lie ahead for the budget discussions in next year's session? Will the state's dailies actually remember to look up what legislation our Democrat majority has proposed and voted on in the past?

If ESPN can keep track of the statistics and history of seemingly every athlete in every sport and rehash how so-and-so performed in the playoffs and pennant races, why is our media clueless on what government did last time, and the time before that? Do you, as the voter, and the consumer of governmental services, pay any attention?

As always please feel free to contact me with your concerns and issues. As your state representative, it is my job, and my priority to represent you and to make sure that your needs and concerns are addressed at the capitol. You can write to me at Room 4200, Legislative Office Building, and Hartford, CT 06106-1591, send me e-mail at John.Ryan@housegop.ct.gov or call my office toll-free at 1-800-842-1423.