

# NJ THIRD DISTRICT

## Newsletter

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**To view a video press  
release announcement  
on the State's Arbitra-  
tion Reform Measure,  
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## **State Legislature Approves Seniors Income Tax Bill Cut**



Senate Bill 2345 was recently passed by both houses of the New Jersey Legislature, and now awaits the signature of Governor Chris Christie. The bill, which expands the exclusion under the gross income tax for pensions, annuities and certain other retirement income for qualified taxpayers, was hailed by the Third District legislators and sponsors of the legislation, as a critical step in allowing New Jersey senior citizens to afford to remain in the state.

"Instead of simply giving the rich all the tax cuts in the hopes it will trickle down, we should be allowing seniors and retirees to keep money in their pockets so they can afford to stay in New Jersey," said Senator Sweeney. "We need to be allowing retirees to stay here for the long-term instead of taking their retirement savings elsewhere. It's a smart move that will help small businesses and downtown New Jersey."

Under the provisions of the bill, seniors whose total income falls under \$100,000 would

be exempt from paying taxes on any income from a pension or deferred compensation plan.

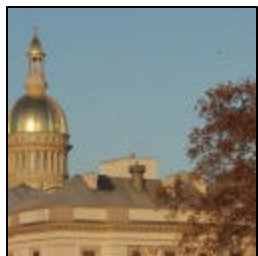
At present, qualified taxpayers who are at least 62 years of age or disabled and who are eligible to receive social security payments and make \$100,000 or less in annual gross income may exclude \$20,000, \$15,000 or \$10,000 of various pension, annuity and retirement benefit income, depending on their tax filing status (i.e. joint, single, and separate).

"The recession has decimated many people's 401k's and other investments," said Assemblywoman Riley. "This measure would help provide a little more peace of mind for those in retirement who are worried about being able to get by."

"This bill will help our most vulnerable plan and save for retirement," said Assemblyman Burzichelli. "For many who have been ravaged by this economy, this extra help in saving is not an added luxury, but a necessity."

The bill enjoyed broad bipartisan support, passing the Senate by a unanimous vote of 39-0 and passing the Assembly 65-3, with eight abstentions.

## **"Back to Work NJ" Economic Package Passes Houses**



During two voting sessions in early January 2011, the New Jersey Legislature passed a package of bills intended to create jobs and boost economic development throughout the state. The "Back to Work NJ" package includes legislation intended to create a friendlier climate for business in New Jersey, by cutting taxes for businesses and creating incentives for them to remain in state. "Putting New Jersey back to work is essential if we are to be success-

ful in tackling the state's other problems," said Senator Sweeney. "People won't be able to pay their property taxes if they don't have a job. Small businesses won't be able to succeed if people don't have money to spend in their stores. All of the broader challenges facing New Jersey circle back to the need to create jobs."

Senator Sweeney introduced legislation to alter the state's corporate business tax formula to remove preferential tax treatment which out-of-state companies that simply offer products and services received, as opposed to benefitting businesses that are actually based in New Jersey. *Article continues on Page 2.*

## Landmark Jobs Legislation Aims to Decrease NJ's Unemployment Rate

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By implementing a "single sales fraction," the bipartisan Senate Bill 1646 would level the playing field for New Jersey businesses by removing consideration of a company's physical in-state assets from its tax liabilities – a system that, under current law, benefits out-of-state companies. "It makes absolutely no sense that our tax laws would actually penalize companies that are based in New Jersey and employ New Jerseyans," said Senator Sweeney. "We need to bring business into the state, not drive them out. Eliminating this disparity will go a long way to having our tax code make common sense for business."

The "Back to Work NJ" legislative

package also included legislation creating workplace training for unemployed residents (A3584), expanding the availability of programs designed to help companies maintain and expand their operations in New Jersey (S2370), and creating incentives for students to seek employment in areas that are currently facing workforce shortages (A3513).

As part of the "Back to Work NJ" package, Deputy Speaker John Burzichelli, a member of the state's Red Tape Review Commission, sponsored five bills which work to streamline burdensome business regulations.

These measures include revising the state permitting process for economic development (A2853) and requiring the

Board of Public Utilities to issue every order in written form to be available on the agency's website (A2849).

"Reducing government bureaucracy goes hand in hand with promoting a more productive and prosperous economic climate," explained Assemblyman Burzichelli. "A healthier business environment paves the way to helping our New Jersey families get back to work."

The landmark "Back to Work NJ" package of bills, passed by both houses of the Legislature on January 6 and January 10, is currently awaiting the signature of Governor Chris Christie.

## Bill to Increase Online Access to Unemployment Benefits is Approved

As part of the "Back to Work NJ" efforts to create jobs and economic development opportunities, Assemblywoman Celeste Riley is a primary sponsor of legislation that would technologically update New Jersey's unemployment benefits system and help struggling out-of-work residents better manage their unemployment benefits.

"Our current system relies too heavily on phoning departmental representatives, creating enormous delays for residents as the call system is overloaded," said Assemblywoman Riley. "Residents are struggling to open and claim benefits, while they lose time in receiving benefits and waste time and energy that is needed in searching for new employment. By switching to a widely accessible online system we will be able to ease the frustration and burden of

our unemployed residents."

The bill would allow for any individual to file, reopen, cancel or close their claim for unemployment insurance (UI) benefits on a website that would be available for use by claimants 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The current UI website allows claimants to file for benefits online only during business hours. It also restricts which day specific claimants can file claims. Meanwhile, many other states have UI websites that are accessible around the clock without restrictions as to what hours or days claimants can file their claims online or close out claims.

The legislation unanimously passed the Legislature and is currently waiting for the Governor's signature.

### New UI Benefits Debit Card

The State of New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development now issues Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits through a prepaid debit card, in place of mailed checks. The debit card is a Visa branded card account, which allows direct deposit of UI benefit payments to those who do not have a traditional bank account or who do not want their payment deposited into their existing bank account.

Direct deposit is also available by visiting:

[www.njuifile.net](http://www.njuifile.net)

## Vacant Urban Sites Legislation Would Reinvigorate Neighborhoods

Legislation co-sponsored by Deputy Speaker Burzichelli and Assemblywoman Riley to help transform vacant urban sites has cleared the Senate and Assembly.

"Towns all across our state have been toiling for many years in an effort to tackle issues that stem from vacant lots that lie within their communities," said Deputy Speaker Burzichelli. "This measure will give the tools needed to convert those empty lots into cultivators of produce and renewed economic development

in these areas."

"Small businesses can nurture these urban gardens, thus creating jobs and turn unproductive properties into centerpieces for an economic boost," said Assemblywoman Riley.

Current statute provides that municipalities and counties can lease or sell public property that is not needed for a public use to nonprofit entities. However, the law does not permit the sale or lease of public property for gardening purposes.

This bill, would add the cultivation and sale of fresh fruits and vegetables to the list of purposes for which local units may lease or sell public land for nominal consideration. This measure would also authorize local units to sell land to nonprofit entities for the provision of gardening services to the general public.

Recognizing that the transformation of excess vacant public lands into vibrant urban farms is a public purpose, the bill would afford these lands exemptions from property taxation.

## Arbitration Reform Passes as Vital Tool for 2% Property Tax Cap

Senate Bill 5 was signed into law on December 21, representing a significant step in the state's efforts to bring real property tax relief. The measure, which was sponsored by Senate President Sweeney, streamlines the procedure for resolving contractual disputes between public employers and their police and fire departments, and imposes a 2 percent cap on arbitration awards under certain circumstances.

Senator Sweeney said that the bill will help New Jersey municipalities to work within the recently enacted cap on property tax increases, and noted that the bill was the result of a compromise between himself, Governor Chris Christie, and Assembly Speaker Sheila

Oliver.

"Reforming the arbitration system is essential if communities are going to be able to live under the property tax cap," said Senator Sweeney. "For too long, the system has been tilted in favor of the public unions and arbitrators have enjoyed too free a hand in crafting contracts that did not even have to consider a town's ability to pay. This compromise legislation will ensure that taxpayers are protected and that workers are treated fairly. It's a revolutionary change for arbitration in general, and especially for New Jersey."

The bill will cap arbitrator awards for police and fire salaries at an average of 2 percent annually over the life of the

contract, and prohibits arbitrators from writing new economic rewards into a new contract that did not exist in the prior agreement. Arbitrators will also be required to rule on disputes within 45 days, and arbitrator compensation will be capped at \$1,000 per day or \$7,500 per case, whichever is lower.

"Today we are delivering on the promise we made to local officials when the property tax cap was signed that we would revolutionize the arbitration process before the end of the year," said Senator Sweeney. "This legislation is the result of hard work, long discussions and real compromise. And those are always the best ways to create policy."

## Gaming Bills Advance in Assembly



Deputy Speaker John Burzichelli's legislation to make Atlantic City's casino industry more competitive by

allowing smaller casinos was signed into law on January 5.

"The gaming industry is changing and we must do the same if we're to remain competitive," said Assemblyman Burzichelli. "If we're to ensure a strong Atlantic City, we need to provide new gaming products like boutique casinos to entice builders to invest, attract visitors, and grow our economy."

The bill will create two new alternative methods for casino licensure by the State's Casino Control Commission. Along with the traditional, 500-room capacity, minimum 60,000 square foot casinos facility, developers will now have the option of building small-scale casino facilities. Hard Rock already has announced plans to build a boutique casino on the boardwalk.

In addition to the boutique casino measure, there are a

number of gaming bills, also sponsored by the Assemblyman, which have advanced in recent weeks. These include:

- A3581 - Establishes the Atlantic City Tourism District and broadens the powers and duties of the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority - signed into law on Feb. 1.
- A3517 - Improves and modernizes casino industry regulation by moving various regulatory matters currently with the Casino Control Commission to the Division of Gaming Enforcement under the Department of Law and Public Safety - signed into law on February 1.
- A2570 - Enables NJ residents to place wagers on Atlantic City casino games via the internet - passed both houses.
- A3580 - Allows casinos and out-of state racetracks to negotiate the amount casinos will pay for simulcast races - passed the Assembly.

Assemblyman Burzichelli serves as the Chair of the Assembly Regulatory and Oversight Committee.

## Member Legislation Updates

### • Bill Cancels ARC Tunnel Toll Increases

S2636/A3736 (Sweeney) ~ Directs the NJ Turnpike Authority to adopt a resolution to scale back toll increases on the state turnpike and the Garden State Parkway that are no longer required for the financing of the cancelled ARC mass transit tunnel between NY and NJ. An additional 90 cent increase for an average trip on the Turnpike would be triggered in 2012. The bill is in the Senate Transportation Committee.

### • Signs for Local Wineries Passes Assembly

A2495 (Riley - Second Prime) ~ This legislation would direct the New Jersey Department of Transportation to allow wineries to erect tourist-oriented directional signs on roads and highways as an inexpensive way to highlight winery locations. The bill passed the Assembly on January 10 and awaits consideration by the Senate budget committee.

### • Assisted Living Facilities Bill is Approved

A3405/S2284 (Riley) ~ Requires Assisted Living Facilities that are closing, despite having contractually agreed to serve Medicaid-eligible residents, to set up escrow accounts to pay for their care at an alternate site. The measure is waiting to be signed by the Governor.

### • Protections for Farming Equipment Advances

A3468/S2490 (Burzichelli/Riley) ~ Helps protect farmers against faulty equipment by extending protections of the state's vehicle lemon law to new motor vehicle farm equipment purchased or leased in New Jersey. The bill is in its second reading in the Assembly.

## District Spotlight: Salem's United Way Serves as Community Resource

For residents in need of tax assistance, the United Way of Salem County, along with its counterparts in Gloucester and Cumberland counties, offers free tax preparation to low to moderate income residents through its Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program. Eligible residents, comprised of single individuals making less than \$30,000 and families making less than \$60,000, are encouraged to contact the United Way to set-up an appointment with trained volunteers and staff to complete their tax income return.

Appointments are also available for the United Way of Salem County's Consumer Credit Counseling, which assists

all individuals in the areas of credit and debt management, budgeting, and mortgage foreclosures.

As one of its newest initiatives, the organization has also recently become a participating site for the NJ Shares program, the only statewide non-profit organization that helps residents in need of temporary energy assistance. NJ Shares offers grants for heating to residents who do not qualify for any other form of public assistance and who have a history of good faith payments.

The United Ways of New Jersey also operate the state's 2-1-1 helpline. The 2-1-1 directory is an excellent first step in locating resources within one's local

community. This may include questions like how to find emergency rental assistance, child care, or volunteer programs. The hotline is confidential and is available 24 hours a day by simply dialing 2-1-1 or accessing the resource database at [www.nj211.org](http://www.nj211.org).

The United Way's mission focuses on a comprehensive community approach of strengthening programs related to education, income, and health, in an effort to help residents be self-sufficient.

The United Way of Salem County may be contacted at 856-935-2538 and is located on East Broadway in the City of Salem.

## Assemblywoman Riley Receives Local "Hometown Hero" Recognition

In honor of her leadership and dedication, Assemblywoman Celeste M. Riley has been named a "Hometown Hero" by Cumberland Regional High School.

The Assemblywoman, a Cumberland Regional High School alumna, was chosen as a recipient for her citizenship, integrity, and her willingness to contribute to her local community.

"It's an honor to be chosen as a Hometown Hero by the youth of my district," said Assemblywoman Riley. "I am thrilled by this honor and chance to interact with the students, but I also realize that many, many New Jerseyans are hometown heroes who give back to

their communities each and every day. That spirit has never been more important, and I would encourage everyone to embrace it."

The Hometown Hero project is a vital part of the high school's freshman seminar and senior mentoring course. As part of the project, students select a "hero" in their community, meet and interview the individual, and examine the person's path to success. The project is capped by a presentation on the hero and a reception.



In the spirit of recognizing local community service heroes, Assemblywoman Riley assists the Rev. Dr. Field in acknowledging Oliver L. Roach at the 20th Annual Dr. Martin Luther King Awards Scholarship Breakfast in Salem. Photo Courtesy of the Today's Sunbeam/Britney Lillya.

## Constituent Resource Corner: Changes to MVC Inspections Program

The Third District legislators would like to remind residents of recent changes made to the state's Vehicle Inspection Program.

As of August 1, 2010, the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission eliminated the mechanical defects portion of the inspection program. The majority of passenger vehicles will now only be tested for emissions on a biennial basis. Inspections will no longer be conducted to check for working lights, turn signals, or any

other previously inspected mechanical safety aspects. Vehicles purchased within five model years will not be required to receive emissions inspection until they are five model years old. Commercial vehicles and buses must receive inspection on an annual basis for both safety and emissions. Motorcycles will now be exempt from inspections all together.

"It is important for motorists to remember the purpose of maintaining a safe vehicle was not simply to pass

an inspection or avoid a traffic ticket," said Assemblywoman Riley. "We encourage residents to occasionally have a friend or family member assist them in performing their own personal inspection."

Vehicles can be inspected at either a Centralized Inspection Facility or a Private Inspection facility. Local inspection facilities, as well as appointment information, can be found at the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission's website.