

NJ THIRD DISTRICT

Newsletter

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**To Learn More about
Senator Sweeney's
Health Benefits Pro-
posal, please visit our
website at
www.njlegdistrict3.com
and select Video under
the Media tab for the
February 15 press con-
ference coverage.**

Pension and Benefits Reform Proposals Would Save Taxpayers Millions; Help Mayors Rein in Property Taxes



Senate President Stephen M. Sweeney recently introduced legislation to reform New Jersey's pension and health benefits systems in an effort to save taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars and provide mayors and local officials

the ability to rein in property taxes. Additionally, the legislation would ensure the long-term viability of these systems, while simultaneously protecting the workers depending on them for their retirement.

The Senate President aims to make a number of reforms to the state pension system, including requirements for current employees to contribute greater amounts into the system in order to maintain the 9 percent pension boost given to employees in 2001, and cost of living adjustments upon retirement. Senator Sweeney noted that the legislation (S 2696) is modeled on the private sector, and added that his proposal was made more urgent by the recent release of data that showed the unfunded liability of the public employee pension system grew \$8 billion throughout 2009 and 2010 to roughly \$54 billion.

"This legislation will remove politics from the process and establish a private-sector model for the pension system," said the Senator. "This will be comprehensive reform that will ensure that those who benefit from the pension fund are paying their fair share without adding any additional burden to already overtaxed taxpayers in New Jersey."

Senator Sweeney's proposal for reform of the state health benefits system (S 2718) is based on the fact that while New Jersey public workers enjoy far greater health care coverage than the average state resident, they contribute a much lower amount for coverage. Much like the pen-

sion proposal, the plan would bring contributions more in line with the private sector. The plan would require greater contribution rates from employees, which would be phased in over a seven-year period, with a shorter, four-year phase in for employees with single coverage. Lower-income employees would contribute a smaller percentage, while higher salaried public workers would contribute up to 30 percent of their premiums. Senator Sweeney noted the savings that the plan could be expected to yield hundreds of millions of dollars in annual savings for New Jersey's property taxpayers and local governments.

"Health benefits are a major factor in what drives up property taxes and this plan will finally do something about it," said Senator Sweeney. "We cannot continue with band aid measures for issues that deserve real solutions. It is time for action, not sound bites and meaningless political rhetoric that resolve nothing. Government must be run like a business, and this reform package is a major step in that direction."

"This is about saving local taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars a year when fully phased in, while at the same time not putting such a heavy burden on workers that they can't afford benefits. Moreover, this will provide local elected leaders practical solutions on health care benefits that can be realistically implemented. Simplification, local control and balanced measures to address cost and quality are needed to remedy the issues," added Senator Sweeney.

The pension reform legislation is pending before the Senate State Government, Wagering, Tourism, and Historic Preservation Committee, while the health benefits bill has been referred to the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee.

Video of the Health Benefits press conference can be viewed on the Third District website.

State Red Tape Reform Continues

The first public meeting of the Red Tape Review Commission was held on March 2 at the New Jersey City University. This commission is chaired by the Lieutenant Governor and is charged with streamlining state government with the purpose of boosting New Jersey's economy. Assemblyman John J. Burzichelli is an appointed member.

The agenda for the public meeting consisted of testimony from private and public sector professionals regarding concerns and suggestions on how to improve the process of licensing and permitting by New Jersey

state departments and agencies.

The Commission is reviewing ways to simplify these processes in an effort to make the state more attractive to businesses, without jeopardizing environmental and safety regulations that protect the public. This was the first of three public meetings that will be held this year.

Assemblyman Burzichelli said the scheduled public hearings will be helpful in determining areas of regulation that need the most attention by the Red Tape Review Commission.

Rt. 49 Safety Improvements

Assemblywoman Riley has been instrumental in advocating for the installation of safety upgrades at the deadly Route 49 curve in Hopewell Township, Cumberland County. The Assemblywoman and Hopewell Township officials have received notification from the New Jersey Department of Transportation that flashing warning beacons at two locations along the curve will be installed shortly at no cost to the township.

"Increased visibility and safety at this curve is extremely necessary due to the number of recent accidents, including two fatalities," said Assemblywoman Riley. "Route 49 is an important roadway for our area and improved signage is certainly necessary to warn motorists of this dangerous curve; nothing is more important than protecting the safety of our residents."

Legislation Would Restore Cuts to AIDS Drug Distribution Program



Legislation, sponsored by Assemblywoman Riley, would restore the income eligibility for New Jersey's AIDS Drug Distribution Program to its previous

FY 2010 level in an effort to assist AIDS patients throughout the State.

The FY 2011 budget signed by the Governor in June reduced eligibility for the AIDS Drug Distribution Program from 500 percent of the federal poverty level to 300 percent. The bill (A 3286)

restores income eligibility levels to 500 percent of the federal poverty level retroactive to July 1, 2010.

"No one questions that we are in tough economic times, but the idea of cutting off AIDS patients from their prescription drugs is inconceivable to me," said Assemblywoman Riley, who serves on the Assembly Health and Senior Services Committee. "We must restrain spending, but we also must keep in mind that people's lives and public health are put at risk with unwise spending cuts. We need to restore a sense of compassion and right judgment

to New Jersey's state government."

The Assemblywoman added that the Department of Health and Senior Services should achieve other savings and receive additional rebates for prescription drugs purchased by the program to provide the additional funding needed to restore income eligibility.

The bill was released from the Assembly Appropriations Committee on January 20 and is currently waiting to be posted on the Assembly floor for a vote. The measure was passed by the Senate in November.

Riley Resolution Declares March as "NJ American Red Cross Month"

Assemblywoman Celeste M. Riley recently introduced a resolution (AJR 56) that would designate March of each year as "American Red Cross Month" in New Jersey. While the American Red Cross is a world leader in emergency response, its statewide services include collection, processing and distribution of blood and blood products, community services for needy families, support for military members and their families, and educational programs that promote health and safety.

"The American Red Cross serves an essential role in our state," said Assemblywoman Riley. "When a disaster strikes, the Red Cross is there to

provide life-saving blood, first aid, and the comfort of a helping hand. Setting aside each March as American Red Cross Month will remind us of the truly extraordinary mission and work of this organization."

The American Red Cross was founded in 1881 by Clara Barton. Since 1943, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt first proclaimed March as Red Cross Month, every president has asked Americans to recognize and support the valuable work of the American Red Cross by donating blood, financial contributions, taking a life-saving class, or volunteering to aid in the performance of its mission.

If you would like more informa-

tion or to contribute monetary or volunteer assistance to the Red Cross organization, please contact one of the three locations that serve the Third Legislative District:

- Gloucester County Chapter
3 Parke Place Boulevard
Sewell, NJ 08080
(856) 256-8300
- Salem County Chapter
258 Johnson Street
Carneys Point, NJ 08069
(856) 299-1027
- Southern Shore Chapter - Serving Cumberland
21 East Main Street
Millville, NJ 08332
(856) 413-0909