



Jamie Eldridge

★ State Senator Middlesex & Worcester District ★

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Dear Constituent,

It's my pleasure to present you with my Spring 2009 District Newsletter, a quarterly publication designed to keep the residents of the Middlesex & Worcester District informed about what's happening at the State House.

As the State Senator for 14 communities and over 160,000 people, there are dozens of things that I'm working on now for the people of the Middlesex & Worcester District, and I look forward to talking more about them in this newsletter. I feel incredibly blessed to be an elected official, and am excited to help move the district forward over the next two years.

The last few months have been busy ones on Beacon Hill. In January, the Legislature filed its bills for the session. This year I've filed over 60 pieces of legislation on a variety of issues of importance to our community. Included are bills that would provide greater support for low-to-moderate income families, protect our environment and promote recycling, provide for greater consumer protections, reform our ethics and election systems, and support affordable housing efforts, to name a few.

In February, I was appointed the Senate Chair of the Municipalities & Regional Government Committee, and Vice Chair of the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture. I was also named to the Joint Committees on Housing, Community Development & Small Businesses, and Elder Affairs.

And in March, the Massachusetts Senate passed sweeping transportation and pension reform legislation, more details on which are included in this newsletter. In the upcoming months, the Senate will debate and approve the FY10 budget, as well as continue working to pass important pieces of legislation, including ethics reform.

I hope that you find this newsletter useful and informative, and I encourage you to continue to contact me about how you feel about local and state issues, as well as anything that I may do to help you personally.

As your State Senator, I'm here to make sure that our state government is working for you. If there's anything we can help you with, I invite you to please contact my office. We'll work to make sure your needs are responded to in a timely fashion.

Very Truly Yours,

Jamie Eldridge

SPRING 2009 NEWSLETTER

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Check out my new website!



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Legislative Update

This spring, the Legislature is focusing on a number of critical reforms to improve the efficiency of government agencies and strengthen public confidence in our overall system. Here are updates on some of the issues we've been tackling over the last few months:

Transportation Reform

In late March, the Massachusetts State Senate passed comprehensive transportation reform legislation consolidating multiple agencies into an independent authority and eliminating the MBTA's "23 and out" retirement policy. I supported this legislation because it will create a more efficient, more transparent transportation system to address the pressing infrastructure needs of our Commonwealth, potentially saving up to \$6.5 billion over 20 years.

I was also part of a group of legislators advocating for greater toll equity to be included in the legislation, and I'm proud to say we were able to win some important concessions, adding amendments that will reduce our overreliance on tolls as a source of funding going forward.

Pension Reform

At the end of March, the Senate unanimously approved a bill that will tie off loopholes in current pension laws to end abuses and save taxpayer money, and I was proud to vote for it.

The state's pension system is an important benefit for state workers who chose generally low-paying careers in public service over the private sector. The average pension for Massachusetts public employees is approximately \$24,000 a year. There are examples, however, of individuals who exploit loopholes to increase pension payments at a high cost to the state. The Senate legislation includes common-sense reforms of our public pension system to close these loopholes and reduce abuses of the system.

Ethics Reform

In April, the Massachusetts House passed ethics and lobbying reform legislation that will strengthen investigative and enforcement authority, improve the lobbying laws, and enhance penalties for violations of the law. The Senate should take up this legislation sometime later this spring, and I look forward to voting for it.

I've been a strong advocate for substantial ethics and campaign finance reform for many years, and this year is no different. I believe our government cannot function effectively until we have given the public reason to be confident that we, their elected officials, are making our decisions based on what is best for the people – and not ourselves.

This is why I've proposed additional legislation this session to regulate campaign contributions from lobbyists and those seeking government contracts. This legislation – the "Anti-Pay-to-Play Bill" — would limit the influence of moneyed interests and the impact they have on legislative deliberations, eliminating "pay-to-play" opportunities in the campaign finance system and, hopefully, increasing public confidence in the integrity of our system as a result.

Budget Update

Our state government has started the yearly process of creating the annual budget, and this year is looking like it will be one of the most difficult in recent memory. With our economy in recession, Massachusetts is facing the same problem as states all across the country: revenue is decreasing, costs are going up, and people are in need of more and more help from their state government.

The budget cuts we are about to see will be devastating, across every part of our government. Rather than reducing local aid any further or cutting vital state services more than we already have, I believe we have to look for new sources of revenue for our state. For that reason, I support Governor Patrick's proposal to raise revenue through closing the telecommunications tax loopholes, giving local communities the option to levy a modest meal and hotel tax, and expanding the Bottle Bill to cover non-carbonated beverages – and I'm asking you to do the same.

No elected official likes to talk about increasing taxes. But as legislators, we are faced with choices every day – and we owe it to you, our constituents, to be honest about the choices facing us. In this situation, the choice to me is clear: we need to do whatever we have to do to protect funding for our highest priorities, such as education, health care, infrastructure, and public safety.

As the Legislature moves through the budget process, I encourage you to contact my office any time with your thoughts and questions, or to talk to me about the programs that are most important to you and your family.