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★ State Senator Middlesex & Worcester District ★

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Dear Constituent,

It's my pleasure to present you with my Summer 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. The months of April, May and June were occupied by the drafting, reviewing, amending and finalizing of the FY10 budget. This annual routine, never an easy process, has become even more complicated this year, thanks to rapidly changing revenue predictions -- including a \$3 billion drop in revenues from last year -- and the economic crisis we face. As a result, we are looking at one of the toughest, leanest budgets we've seen in a long time -- and the effect of these dramatic budget cuts will, unfortunately, impact every member of the Commonwealth.

Balancing the budget this year has required a mixed approach of budget cuts, new revenue, and major reforms, which you can learn more about on the back of this newsletter.

I'm also proud to say the Senate has passed several strong reform bills this session, including a pension reform bill that will eliminate the worst offenses in the state pension system, a transportation reform bill that will help overhaul our transportation system to reduce waste and promote efficiencies, and an ethics reform bill that will, I hope, go a long way towards restoring public confidence in our democratic system.

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,

SUMMER 2009 NEWSLETTER

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Legislative Update

This spring, the Legislature focused 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 early June, the Massachusetts State Senate passed final 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

Also in early June, the Senate 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 final legislation included common-sense reforms of our public pension system to close these loopholes and reduce abuses of the system.

Ethics Reform

In mid-May, the Massachusetts Senate passed ethics and lobbying reform legislation that will improve the lobbying and campaign finance laws and enhance penalties for violations of the law. A final bill – incorporating the best elements of the House and Senate ethics bill — will be taken up by the Legislature and, presumably, passed this week.

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

Closing the \$3 billion+ gap in the budget this year has required a mixed approach of cuts and new revenue, in addition to the reforms described above.

Cuts: We have made dramatic cuts in every area of our budget -- including education, health care, local aid, home care for seniors, public safety, services for the disabled, homeless shelters and emergency assistance, and much more -- with many worthy programs deeply cut or even eliminated.

Revenue: As deep as these cuts are, however, without new revenue they would have been far worse. To preserve core services and prevent the worst of cuts, I supported amendments to increase our state's sales tax, while eliminating the sales tax exemption for alcohol and giving local cities and towns the option to raise the local meals tax. I also supported an amendment that will close the telecom corporate tax loophole, which will provide revenue that stays within each town or city. None of these were easy votes, but I supported the increases because we need this additional revenue to adequately fund the services we value -- our schools, our police and fire departments, our transportation systems, and services to protect children, the disabled, and the elderly.

This was a difficult budget to put together, and there were no easy choices. But it is a responsible budget, one that prioritizes critical funding for core government services, particularly those for our most vulnerable citizens, and makes the most out of the revenue we have to work with.