

2010 LEGISLATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

BUDGET

- The budget contains **no broad-based tax increase**, \$28 million in **pension reform**; restoration of funding to Neighborhood Opportunities Program for **affordable housing**; funding for **community-based hospitals**; and a **subsidized jobs, training and assistance program** that will bring in up to \$47.5 million in federal money. The budget restores **\$48.6 million in property tax relief** by including the third quarter and half of the fourth quarter of the motor vehicle excise tax reimbursements and **allows municipalities new tools for savings**, including flexibility with local contributions to schools, a statewide purchasing program for schools and no increase in municipal tipping fees at the Central Landfill.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- A new law **overhauls Rhode Island's income tax structure**, reducing the number of tax brackets from five to three, increasing standard deductions for a middle-class tax cut, and reducing the highest marginal tax rate from 9.9 to 5.99 percent to make the state more competitive. It is the most comprehensive change to the state's income tax laws in nearly 40 years.
- The Assembly enacted a bill to bolster Rhode Island's **knowledge and technology** sectors by guaranteeing \$125 million in debt for companies in those sectors that want to expand. A Massachusetts video game company is already seeking to utilize the program to bring 400 jobs to Rhode Island.
- Lawmakers expanded a **Rhode Island Industrial Recreational Building Authority (IRBA)** program that allows the state to guarantee up to \$60 million, increased from \$20 million, in loans to help companies get the credit they need from financial institutions for expansion proposals. Some 450 jobs are expected to result from the program.
- Voters will be asked to decide in November if **casino games** should be offered at Twin River in Lincoln and Newport Grand. In addition to a statewide referendum, the question will also be put before the voters in the two host communities.
- Legislation to save the **Block Island wind farm** proposal has been signed into law. The new law establishes an expanded process to review the terms of the proposed contract with National Grid and new protections for ratepayers. The project is set to bring hundreds of construction, manufacturing and green economy jobs to Rhode Island.
- The Assembly passed a bill to authorize the construction and operation of a new **landfill gas-fired electric generation** facility at the Central Landfill in Johnston.

SMALL BUSINESS ASSISTANCE

- The Assembly approved several bills designed to make it **easy to do business** in Rhode Island. Among the measures passed were: \$250,000 in funds in the budget for a statewide master application system to be housed in the Secretary of State's office; reforms in the implementation of the state fire code to achieve speedier approvals and uniform enforcement; a means to allow for concurrent reviews of various permit applications, and creation of an Office of Regulatory Reform within the EDC.
- Legislation modifying the mission of the **Community College of Rhode Island** and establishing a "Career Pathways System" through the Human Resource Investment Council to better align Rhode Island workers' skills with industry needs was approved by the Assembly.
- The budget enacted for FY 2011 includes a funding mechanism to pay for interest on **unemployment insurance borrowing** without raising taxes on employers.

EDUCATION

- The General Assembly passed the first statewide **education funding formula** Rhode Island has had in 15 years. The formula, which takes effect for the 2012 fiscal year, provides a core amount for each student statewide, additional funding to help close the achievement gap between wealthy and poor students, and adjustments for the community's poverty concentration and its ability to support its schools through its property tax base.
- Lawmakers **raised the statewide cap on charter schools** from 20 to 35.
- Legislators agreed to join an interstate compact allowing for the **uniform treatment of military children** transferring between schools and states.
- Public school health curricula will now include **Lyme disease prevention information** under a bill approved by the Assembly.
- The legislature approved a comprehensive **public charter school** bill that will establish an improved structure for the creation, operation and funding of charter schools in the state.
- Legislation was passed to require school committee members to take an annual six-hour **professional development program** conducted by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in cooperation with the RI Association of School Committees.

- The Senate created a special commission to study **funding of vocational schools** in Rhode Island which will report its findings by the end of next March.
- A newly-created legislative commission will study the possibility of bringing **electronic learning – eBooks** – to Rhode Island classrooms.

PUBLIC SAFETY

- The Assembly passed a bill requiring all ships, except those under sail, whose primary cargo is liquefied natural gas (LNG) to have at least 30 feet of clearance under all of **Rhode Island’s bridges**.
- The Department of Education and the Rhode Island Interscholastic League will develop guidelines on educating coaches, student athletes and parents about the risks of head injury and **concussions** in sports under bill signed into law.
- The General Assembly approved “Frank’s Law,” to make it **safer for bicyclists** to share the road with autos, requiring drivers to provide a safe distance between their motor vehicles and bicycle riders.
- Legislation was passed to provide up to 10 years in prison for persons convicted of **distributing a controlled substance** to someone without their knowledge with the intent to commit a crime of violence against that person.
- Out-of-state health care providers will be able to obtain **emergency licensing** in Rhode Island during times of health emergencies that tax the Rhode Island system.
- The Assembly approved a bill to close a loophole in state law dealing with **alcohol and minors**. The bill makes it illegal for anyone between the ages of 18 and 21 to provide alcohol to a minor.
- The Senate created a special Senate commission to study the problem of **cyberthreats, cyberbullying, bullying and sexting** and to make recommendations for legislation to address the issues.
- The Assembly approved a measure to suspend or revoke the license, for up to one year, of any individual convicted of four separate and distinct, specifically-defined **moving violations** within an 18-month period.
- The Assembly passed a bill making it a felony for any person to **drive under the influence** when his or her license is suspended, revoked or canceled as a result of operating under the influence.

- Legislation to strengthen existing **community notification laws for sex offenders** by prohibiting any Level II or III sex offender from delaying community notification, even in the case of a conviction appeal, was approved by the Assembly.
- Legislation to create a **child death review team** within the Office of State Medical Examiners to review all child fatalities in the state has been approved by the General Assembly.

JUSTICE SYSTEM

- The Assembly passed bills calling for the creation of a task force to identify and recommend policies and procedures to improve the **accuracy of eyewitness IDs**.
- Legislation passed to require the **electronic recording of police interrogations** for crimes punishable by life imprisonment.
- A new **parole reform** law allows parole violators who are cleared of the underlying offense to also be cleared of the parole violation.

GOVERNMENT

- A newly signed law sets up a three-step process of state intervention to **assist financially distressed communities** and protect all Rhode Island communities' bond ratings.
- The Assembly voted to change the name of the Department of Mental Health, Retardation and Hospitals to the **Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals**.
- Bidders for state purchases and contracts will submit a copy of their proposal for **public inspection upon the opening of the bids** under a bill approved by lawmakers.
- **Medical marijuana users' personal information will be protected** under a bill lawmakers approved.
- Legislation was passed to require the Department of Children, Youth and Families to undertake an **accreditation process** with the Council on Accreditation.
- Bills passed by the Assembly will prohibit state and local law enforcement agencies from formally or informally advocating a **traffic ticket quota** system.

- Legislation was approved to allow all candidates for general office – not just nominees of a political party – to be eligible to participate equally in the **matching public funds** program.

ENVIRONMENT

- A ballot question asking voters to preserve **Rocky Point in Warwick and India Point in Providence as open space** sites was included in the budget.
- [The Assembly approved legislation allowing for decoupling of energy distribution rate from sales rates to enable utility companies to encourage efficiency and conservation efforts](#)
- Legislators voted to create the **Rhode Island Climate Change Commission** to study the projected impacts of climate change in the state.
- Lawmakers **expanded the Diesel Emissions Reduction Act** to establish requirements for vehicles involved in public construction projects and exempt diesel emissions control technology from the sales tax.
- The Assembly approved legislation to revise and strengthen the existing **mercury reduction and education laws**, requiring manufacturers to submit collection and disposal plans by next January.
- The Assembly passed a bill creating a **Green Economy Roundtable** to establish a comprehensive plan and draft legislation for potential green projects in the state.

CONSUMER/QUALITY OF LIFE

- The sale of **non-aerial fireworks** like sparklers and fountains will be allowed under a bill signed into law.
- Legislation passed by the Assembly will clearly define **discount buying clubs** and will provide certain contract requirements and a three-day right of rescission for those who become members.
- Legislation was passed to help **prevent insurance fraud**, requiring insurers to have fraud warnings on claims and application forms, as is currently being done in 30 other states.
- The Assembly voted to require **nursing homes** to reimburse any money that has been prepaid by a deceased patient to the estate of the patient within 30 days of the date of death.

- The Assembly called for the development of the **John J. MacDonald Jr. Transportation Initiative** to expand the transportation mobility options for people with disabilities and who need wheelchair accessible transportation.
- Bills were approved calling for a number of changes in the medical review procedure for claimants receiving **Workers' Compensation** benefits.

HEALTH CARE

- A bill was enacted to allow beds to be added in **home-like settings in nursing facilities** as other traditional-care beds in the state are lost when other facilities close.
- Legislators designated the financially troubled **Landmark Medical Center** in Woonsocket as “rural” to allow it to qualify for a higher Medicare reimbursement rate, and allowed it to keep its nonprofit sales tax exemption.
- The General Assembly has passed legislation to protect consumers from unfair and deceptive marketing practices by establishing standards for **discount medical plan** organizations.
- Legislation establishing a **licensing process for genetic counselors** within the Department of Health has been approved by the Assembly.
- Legislation was approved to allow workers on **extended medical leaves** to remain on their group health insurance policy for up to 18 months after they are placed on leave.