

Rep. Wright hears from constituents on senior issues

By ELIO GUGLIOTTI
STAFF WRITER

As the state legislature prepares to head back into session, state Rep. Chris Wright (D-Bristol) paid a visit to Meridian Towers on Sheila Court recently in an effort to reach out to his constituents.

Wright began by touching on the budget issues facing the state.

"As I'm sure everyone here is aware, we have budget problems here in Connecticut," Wright said.

Wright said the state is currently facing a projected budget deficit of about \$500 million. But, he said the real problem will be in the years to come when the deficit is

projected to be \$3.5 billion in 2011 and 2012.

"(These are) some serious issues that we're going to be dealing with," said Wright.

When asked why the deficit is projected to grow so much in the years to come, Wright spoke about the state's use of one-time revenue sources to balance the budget. He said the state used federal stimulus money, funds from its rainy day account, and swept off-budget accounts to help balance the current two-year budget.

The future deficits are projected to occur once those funds dry up, Wright said.

"That money's not going to be there in a couple of years," Wright said.

While the topic of discussion started with the state's budget issues, the conversation quickly turned to proposed increases in the co-pay for the Medicare and ConnPace programs, and a cost increase for those who use the state's home care program for the elderly.

The increasing costs for these programs were an issue that was near and dear to the hearts of those that live at Meridian Towers, an independent senior housing unit.

Mary Priestman, resident services coordinator at Meridian Towers, said many

of the people who live there rely on such programs. She told Wright although an additional \$20 may not seem like a lot of money to the state legislator or herself, it's a huge amount for some residents living at Meridian Towers.

In reference to the proposed increase in Medicare and ConnPace programs, Wright said those increases stem from the rising costs for the state to run those programs.

"A lot of that is the price it costs the state to do (the programs) goes up too," said Wright.

The home care for the elderly program provides multiple services to seniors,

including house keeping and health care.

Priestman explained the cost for those who use the program is calculated based on income levels. In the past, she said, people who utilize Title 19 received the program for free. But, she said, this year those people are expected to pay 15 percent of the costs of the program.

Priestman said that increase has an impact on many people at Meridian Towers. She told Wright that if people give up their home care because of the costs, that would mean that more people would move into nursing homes.

Priestman felt the state

is balancing its budget on the back of the poor.

"This is not an acceptable budget cut," Priestman told Wright.

Wright said the home care program is an important one to him. He said the longer seniors can live at home, the better it is for the state and for them. He said he is working to put back the money taken from the program.

"You can be pretty sure that is something that we will look at," said Wright.

Comments? Email egugliotti@BristolObserver.com.

State senator: Families, businesses missing opportunities for energy aid

Last Friday, State Senator Thomas A. Colapietro (D-Bristol, Plainville) joined with Thomas Morrow, executive director of the Bristol Community Organization, and Bristol area families receiving home heating assistance to explain why many Connecticut businesses and families are missing out on significant opportunities to save on energy costs.

"In this economy, everyone needs to save money, and one of the easiest ways to do that is by lowering your energy expenses," said Senator Colapietro, according to a press release from his office. "Not many people are aware of this, but by switching to an alternative electric supplier, both families and businesses can save up to 10% or more on their electric bills immedi-

ately."

According to the state Department of Public Utility Control, the release said, at the end of November 2009 only 17 percent (or 259,885) of Connecticut's residential and commercial customers had chosen their own electric supplier. If all 1,387,441 Connecticut customers switched they would save over \$87 million this year on their electric bills.

Senator Colapietro said, the release reported, "Those in the market for a new Energy Star appliance can also save more money than they might expect. Not only will such an efficient appliance cost them much less to operate, but thanks to a new rebate program inspired by this summer's popular 'Cash for Clunkers' initiative, rebates are now available to help lower their

up front cost."

Connecticut has been awarded \$3.4 million in federal stimulus dollars and will be one of the first states in the country to offer a consumer rebate on Energy Star appliances, including refrigerators (\$50), freezers (\$50), clothes washers (\$100), room air conditioners (\$50) and central air systems (\$500).

The program runs until April 30, 2010, and will be extended if funds are available. Each Connecticut residence is eligible for up to three rebates for room air conditioners, and one rebate per other qualified appliance.

The news conference was held at the headquarters of the Bristol Community Organization (BCO), a private non-profit community action agency that seeks to help eliminate

or alleviate the causes and effects of poverty in the greater Bristol area.

For families having difficulty keeping the heat on during these cold winter months, BCO provides home heating energy assistance, as well as home energy audits and weatherization in partnership with the Community Renewal Team, Inc. (CRT).

"February will bring some of the coldest weather we'll see all year" said Thomas Morrow, Executive Director of the Bristol Community Organization, the release reported. "I have seen applications for help with home heating increase by 238% since the recession began taking its toll two years ago. No family should have to go without heat in their own home during this cold winter. If you live in the Bristol area and you need

help, please contact us."

Households in Bristol, Plainville, Plymouth, Farmington, and Burlington with income less than \$55,000 or already accepted for energy assistance through the BCO are automatically qualified for a home energy audit through CRT.

For homes in need of entirely new windows, further assistance is also available. Thanks to a recent federal tax credit, homeowners may now receive \$1 back for every \$3 spent on new win-

dows, up to a limit of \$1500.

Further information on the energy efficient appliance rebate program can be found at www.ct.gov/opm/ApplianceRebates. Rebate forms will also be available in retail stores after Feb. 1. To have a form mailed to you, call 1-877-WISE-USE (947-3873).

The Bristol Community Organization may be reached at (860) 584-2725 and online at <http://www.bcoinc.org/>.

Concussion: Bristol ahead of curve with proposed law

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state.

If the proposal gains enough support to become law, not much would change in Bristol since the school system has followed a strict practice when dealing with concussions for years.

"I think we're ahead of the game on this one," said Ellen Benham, supervisor of

athletics for the Board of Education.


Benham explained every high school athlete has a baseline test done on their cognitive brain activity before his or her freshmen and junior years.

Benham said if any student athlete suffers a head injury or concussion they are pulled from the game or practice. The next day, she said, the athletes undergo a

test to read their baseline.

"Obviously, we want the students to test as close to baseline as possible. If (the athlete) doesn't they're not allowed back," said Benham.

The test results are sent to Dr. Scott Organ, team physician for the school system, who has the ultimate say in whether the athlete returns to play, said Benham.



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