

STATE SENATOR TONY HWANG

**20
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LEGISLATIVE SESSION INITIATIVES



**CONNECTICUT
SENATE REPUBLICANS**

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Introduction

Thank you for attending this Legislative Session Town Hall and for your commitment to staying informed and engaged. Your awareness of the state's ongoing opportunities and challenges not only strengthens our community but also helps me ensure that I am representing you effectively and advocating for the best interests of our district.

I am deeply grateful for the trust you have placed in me by once again electing me as your state senator. It is an honor to serve you and work on behalf of our district in the state legislature.

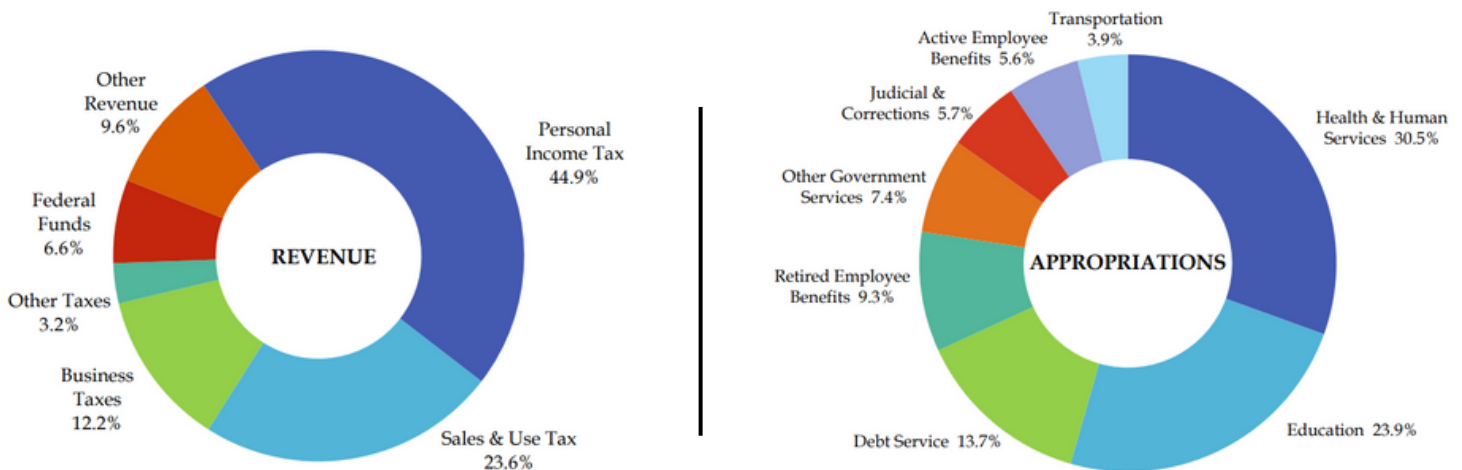
This session, I am eager to build upon the progress we made during my previous term. The priorities I have outlined for this session are directly informed by the conversations I've had with residents across the district. Your voices guide my work, and I remain committed to addressing the issues that matter most to you.

State Budget

As we plan the state's budget this session, I will be fighting for fiscal responsibility, smarter spending, lower taxes, and a focus on reducing the state's debt.

That is why I am going to fight to ensure that we adhere to our state's fiscal guardrails. The 2017 bipartisan budget enacted significant structural changes aimed at improving the state's long-term fiscal health. These changes included enforcement of the constitutionally required spending cap and creation of additional controls, collectively known as the fiscal guardrails. Together they are essential policies that ensure Connecticut's financial stability by promoting savings, reducing the state's debt, and maintaining responsible spending. These policies protect against economic downturns but also make Connecticut more affordable for families and businesses alike and allow for additional support for priorities like human services.

It is crucial that we preserve these guardrails. Removing them would jeopardize the firm fiscal footing that Connecticut previously struggled to attain. Without these policies, we risk falling back into the unsustainable spending habits of the past, increasing debt burdens for future generations, and increasing taxes on all Connecticut residents.



Housing

Housing remains one of the most important challenges facing Connecticut, and I am committed to promoting policies that balance the need for affordable housing with the unique needs of our communities. I believe that meaningful progress requires collaboration and common sense, ensuring that we address housing shortages while respecting local concerns and preserving our environment.

One issue at the forefront of this discussion is the Affordable Housing Land Use Appeals Procedure, commonly known as 8-30g. While the law was enacted with the goal of increasing affordable housing across the state, it has raised significant concerns about its impact on local municipalities. Under 8-30g, towns that do not meet the 10% affordable housing threshold face limited control over zoning decisions, allowing developers to bypass local regulations. This diminishes the ability of locally elected officials to make decisions in the best interests of their communities.

To bolster the notion of local control, this year, I am proposing an amendment to section 8-30g of the general statutes to exempt from the affordable housing appeals process any municipality in which more than seventy percent of the land is within a watershed protection area. This measure recognizes the critical role of watershed protection in safeguarding our natural resources and ensuring clean drinking water for future generations. Municipalities facing unique environmental constraints should have the ability to maintain this balance while planning for housing development. In this way, I hope to protect the character of our towns and ensure that housing solutions are practical and effective for all Connecticut residents.

Transportation

As policymakers, our most important responsibility is to protect lives. That's why I've been proud to support and champion initiatives like the bipartisan Vision Zero bill, which focuses on eliminating preventable tragedies on our roads. This legislation is about making Connecticut's streets safer for everyone and making a commitment to ensuring that no family has to suffer the heartbreaking loss of a loved one due to a traffic-related incident.

In addition, I'm particularly proud of the work we've done to address wrong-way driving. Through bipartisan collaboration, we've introduced legislation that will install wrong-way detection systems at more than 120 high-risk highway exit ramps. These systems will help prevent the kind of devastating accidents that have taken too many lives in our state.

This session, I am focused on several key initiatives aimed at improving transportation safety and fairness. I am working to amend section 14-20b to eliminate the fee charged for the issuance of commemorative number plates for veterans and members of the armed forces, making it easier for our military heroes to honor their service. Additionally, I am advocating for the Department of Transportation to install sound barriers along Interstate 95 in Fairfield to reduce the noise pollution caused by tree-clearing activities. These measures will help improve the quality of life for residents while supporting our ongoing efforts to enhance transportation safety across the state.

Technology

As we continue to advance technologically, especially with artificial intelligence, we must ensure that progress is made in a way that is transparent, ethical, and responsible. AI has the potential to improve our lives in ways previously thought impossible like automating tedious tasks, enhancing healthcare, and creating opportunities for new business models. However, we must be vigilant about the risks AI poses, particularly when it comes to bias, privacy concerns, and its potential misuse.

This year, I am committed to advancing legislation that ensures AI is used in ways that are equitable, transparent, and just. My work with the CT AI Task Force and the Multi-State AI Working Group, alongside technology leaders and legislative colleagues, has been a critical step in understanding how AI impacts our society and what must be done to protect against its risks. As we've seen, AI algorithms can be trained on biased data, leading to outcomes that perpetuate discrimination in critical areas like hiring practices and higher-education admissions programs.

To mitigate these risks, I am working to implement protections that will prevent harm caused by AI. This session, I am working on legislation to address this issue by creating stronger regulations and introducing a ban on AI-generated, non-consensual pornography. We must take action to protect privacy and public trust, ensuring that these technologies are used responsibly and ethically.

Public Safety

Public safety is a cornerstone of a strong and thriving community, and ensuring that residents feel safe in their neighborhoods is one of my top priorities. This past term, I worked across party lines to strengthen penalties for threats against schools, places of worship, and other public spaces, recognizing the profound impact these threats have on our communities. In the past, I also supported bipartisan reforms like Public Act 23-53, which promote responsible gun ownership while prioritizing public safety.

In response to rising crime, including car thefts and street takeovers, I've worked with law enforcement to develop targeted prevention and enforcement strategies, while also advocating for second-chance reentry programs to help individuals rebuild their lives and reduce recidivism. Additionally, I remain committed to addressing the fentanyl crisis by expanding access to treatment programs and raising awareness through partnerships with the Connecticut Governor's Prevention Council.

Emerging threats like cybersecurity breaches and AI misuse are reshaping the landscape of public safety. I've championed stronger data privacy protections and advanced cybersecurity measures to protect individuals, businesses, and government systems. Looking ahead, I am submitting a bill to establish a dedicated cybersecurity task force. This task force will focus on identifying vulnerabilities, enhancing defenses, and preventing cyberattacks across public and private sectors. Their findings and recommendations will be reported by December 31, 2025, in an effort to ensure Connecticut remains proactive and resilient in the face of evolving digital threats.

Aging

With an increasing senior population, my focus is on supporting older adults in maintaining their independence and ensuring they have the resources and opportunities to age with dignity, whether at home or within their communities. I believe no one should be forced into institutional care when they are capable of remaining in the comfort and familiarity of their own home. To that end, I am advocating for amendments to the General Statutes that would require the Department of Social Services to expand, within available appropriations, programs that allow senior citizens to age in place. These programs will provide seniors with the necessary support services to live independently while staying connected to their communities.

Additionally, I am pushing for increased transparency and accountability in long-term care facilities. My proposal calls for an informational hearing whenever an assisted living facility increases its rates by over ten percent. This will ensure that seniors and their families are fully informed about changes that may significantly impact their financial stability and quality of life. These efforts build on my previous work and reflect my ongoing commitment to promoting policies that protect the dignity and independence of older adults in Connecticut.

Education

Unpredictable education budget cuts have severely impacted the ability of our schools to provide consistent, high-quality education for all students. Connecticut's failure to protect education funding has placed undue stress on local districts, teachers, and families. I am committed to championing a student-first approach that ensures resources are available where they are needed most.

Building on my commitment to fostering a stronger education system, I am working on several initiatives this session. Firstly, I am submitting a bill that aims to help local and regional boards of education recruit and retain school bus drivers by proposing grants to assist with health insurance costs for these essential workers.

In order to address our current teacher shortages, I am submitting a bill that aims to strengthen career and technical education by requiring the Department of Education to establish a rubric for career pathway training programs and creating an accelerated pathway to teacher certification for those in the trades.

This session, I am also addressing the barriers that stand in the way of workforce development. My bill provides solutions to issues such as transportation challenges for participants in work-based learning programs and improving oversight and effectiveness of these programs.

In addition, I am placing a bill that would fully reimburse local school districts for the total excess cost of special education, ensuring that no student's needs are overlooked. Finally, I am proposing the creation of a task force to support students with dyslexia by reviewing the effectiveness of current education statutes and recommending improvements to ensure accountability and better outcomes.

Utility Rates

Connecticut residents have long struggled with some of the highest utility rates in the nation, and recent increases have placed an even greater strain on families and businesses. During my last term in office, I supported bipartisan measures to increase transparency and accountability for utility companies, including legislation preventing pass-through charges for lobbying and political expenses. I also backed reforms to ensure the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) can better protect consumers, such as expanding rate-setting factors to consider the burden on residential ratepayers.

Looking forward, I am submitting a bill that would remove public policy charges from electric bills and fund them through the state budget for greater transparency. I am also proposing capping future power purchase agreements at 150% of market rates to balance affordability with environmental goals. Additionally, we must strengthen PURA's oversight by fully staffing the commission and requiring disclosures of parent company profits to ensure fair rate-setting. Lastly, I am submitting a bill that supports exploring municipal electric options to encourage competition and lower costs.

Environment

I am committed to protecting Connecticut's natural resources while addressing climate change in practical ways. As a CT League of Conservation Voters Legislative Champion, I've worked on important initiatives like codifying water as a public trust and advancing the Long Island Sound Blue Plan for Sustainability. These efforts are ongoing, and I'm dedicated to continuing this work for the benefit of Connecticut's environment.

This session, I will focus on preserving our open spaces, forests, and waterways, which are vital for combating climate change and maintaining biodiversity. At the same time, I will ensure that our environmental progress does not come at the expense of Connecticut residents. It's important that we reduce greenhouse gas emissions and transition to renewable energy in ways that are affordable for families and businesses. This session, I will continue to advocate for policies that balance environmental protection with economic responsibility, supporting green jobs and fair utility rates while working toward a more sustainable future.



Thank you for your
continued support.

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