



17th Legislative District Update

“Working for a better, safer and healthier New Jersey”

Senator Bob Smith Assemblyman Joe Egan

Assemblyman Upendra Chivukula

Dear Friends:

The new year marked the end of the first year that the team of Smith, Egan and Chivukula have been representing you in the State Legislature. As we begin the new year, there are many challenges facing the state of New Jersey, most notably a \$5 billion budget deficit. Yet, the past year has also brought many accomplishments of which we are very proud. In this newsletter, you will find information about many of these current challenges, past achievements, and future opportunities.

Please feel free to contact any of us with any questions, comments or concerns you may have. We hope that you find the information in this newsletter interesting and helpful to you.

Very truly yours,

Bob Smith

In the guarded national atmosphere post-September 11th, and a war in Iraq, homeland security is an issue at the forefront of nearly every public policy decision. While most of the media attention has been devoted to the federal Department of Homeland Security, a great deal is happening right here in New Jersey to prepare our state for any contingency. In a future crisis, it will be local and state government agencies that are on the front lines. Given our close proximity to the 9-11 attacks and the personal losses many of us endured, being ready for any future threat is especially important to us in New Jersey.

The state government has taken a number of steps in the past year and a



half to strengthen our domestic



preparedness After the anthrax scares

Joe Egan Upendra Chivukula

Around the State

Major issues facing the people of New Jersey:

The Governor's Budget

Pegged at approximately \$5 billion, the state of New Jersey is facing the worst budget deficit in recent memory for the next fiscal year. This can be attributed both to an ailing economy, which dries up tax revenues, and over-bonding by previous administrations.

Unlike the federal government, which can cover deficits by issuing debt obligations, New Jersey is constitutionally mandated to have a balanced budget when it is approved on June 30th. This has forced Governor McGreevey to present a

of last year, which hit particularly close to home in New Jersey, bioterrorism has become perhaps the most prominent homeland security threat. New Jersey has become a national leader in bioterrorism response, with the following measures already taken statewide:

- Established the Medical Emergency and Disaster Preparedness and Response Expert Panel (MEDPREP) to enhance the State's ability to respond to a bioterrorist attack. \$40 million in federal and state funding has been allocated to implement this panel's recommendation.
- Through a partnership with Becton Dickinson & Co., New Jersey became the first state to implement a system for tracking and managing smallpox vaccinations.
- New Jersey is the only state to implement a bioterrorism rapid response team that is ready 24 hours a day.

budget that is embraced by no one. There are deep funding cuts across the board, including especially important programs such as prescription drug benefits to seniors, state support for our system of public higher education, aid to school districts and municipalities, and funding for the arts.

While we understand the need for the governor to make these spending cuts, we believe that there is room to lessen the impact on the most needy areas. We look forward to working with Governor McGreevey and our colleagues in the legislature in finding creative solutions to our budget problems that will allow us to restore at least some of the funding to critical state programs.

Homeland Security

- New Jersey is the first state to introduce a two-way radio system interconnecting all of its acute care hospitals.

Furthermore, we are constantly working to secure state funding to assist 17th Legislative District municipalities to better equip their own first-responders. Piscataway Township has received \$87,877 in grants from the Department of Law and Public Safety for various terrorism response items and mass casualty supplies. The Borough of Highland Park was awarded \$165,864 for defibrillators, communication equipment, and a new rescue truck. New Brunswick also received \$90,000 from the Department of Law and Public Safety for domestic preparedness equipment. Finally, we helped Franklin Township secure a \$175,000 grant to purchase a new digital radio communication system from the Statewide Local Domestic Preparedness Equipment Program.

In short, while the threats to homeland

security are at an all-time high, officials at all levels of government are working hard to minimize threats and prepare for any attack. You can be confident that New Jersey is at the forefront of domestic security preparedness and a national leader in bioterrorism and infrastructure protection programs. For more information about New Jersey's homeland security programs, advice on how to prepare for an attack, and threat status alerts, visit www.state.nj.us/njhomelandsecurity and www.ready.gov.

Initiatives:

Statewide initiatives we are working on to make New Jersey a better place to live and work:

Bob Smith

Last summer, the governor signed legislation sponsored by Senator Smith, S-889, which makes protecting water resources the top priority when As a member of the Assembly Labor Committee, he has sponsored legislation designed to protect the rights of working men and women, an especially important issue in these economic times. He has sponsored legislation to increase unemployment benefits and to ensure that companies receiving subsidies from the State do not relocate to other states. He has introduced legislation to create an additional Urban Enterprise Zone in New Brunswick, which will bring more needed jobs to our area.

Assemblyman Egan is particularly alert to the property tax problem. New Jersey has the highest property taxes in the nation. To help offset some of the costs to local government services, he was the prime sponsor of the reauthorization of the Clean Communities legislation, which generates \$14 million a year for litter abatement. Thanks to Assemblyman Egan, with the full support of the business community, companies that

the Department of Environmental Protection chooses sites for open space acquisition and protection.

Because of a dry fall and winter, this spring New Jersey faced one of its worst droughts in many years. New Jersey needs to have sufficient water capacity to get us through these dry spells. Our reservoirs, watersheds and aquifers, which are an integral part of New Jersey's water supply, are quickly succumbing to new development. This legislation takes a significant step towards ensuring a dependable water reserve for future dry seasons.

A serious problem which exacerbated the drought situation is that water supply connections between towns are in a state of disrepair due to a lack of available maintenance funding. Because of a lack of interconnections, some water supplies are not used to full capacity. On the other hand, many of the pipelines that we do have wastefully leak millions of gallons of water each day. As a result, some municipalities were unable to get needed water in times of drought from produce litter-generating products will now help to clean up our towns.

Always a strong supporter of seniors and the disabled, Assemblyman Egan has sponsored legislation that would allow members of PAAD to have a greater choice in pharmacies.

Upendra Chivukula

Assemblyman Chivukula played an intricate role in bringing non-profit organizations together through a project called The Civic Chambers. The mission of the Civic Chambers is to coordinate social service organizations in order to focus on improving their operations and the quality of life in their local communities.

In the summer of 2002, Assemblyman Chivukula along with the Department of Community Affairs reached out to leaders in the non-profit arena such as the Center for Non-Profits and

areas of the state where there may be an excess of water. Furthermore, severe water restrictions have cost businesses many millions of dollars.

As senior citizens grow older, certain abilities such as vision and motor skills diminish. This, combined with increasing traffic congestion has led to a disturbing increase in the number of seniors involved in traffic fatalities. To help curb this, Senator Smith has introduced legislation (S-2202) that will require the Department of Transportation to formulate a comprehensive action plan to assess the transportation needs of senior citizens. This plan will develop strategies to promote senior's safety and well-being while driving on New Jersey's roadways.

Joe Egan

Assemblyman Egan, while serving in his first term in the State Assembly, has already earned the respect of his colleagues from both sides of the aisle.

Rutgers CASE. The coordination of the civic community will decrease a duplication in services and increase efficiency. An important goal of the Civic Chambers is to help social service organizations raise funds. The Civic Chambers wants to outreach to as many social service organizations and local leaders as possible. If you are interested in getting involved in this exciting project, please contact Assemblyman Chivukula's office.

Assemblyman Chivukula is a strong proponent of environmental protection. One of his goals is to protect vital lands in the 17th district. Assemblyman Chivukula is the author of A-2070, which requires the Department of Environmental Protection to develop a Site Master Plan for the Six Mile Run Reservoir site in Franklin Township and other State-owned lands purchased, but not currently used for, water supply purposes.

The bill requires the DEP to identify lands purchased by the State for water supply facilities and update the New Jersey Statewide Water Supply Plan to utilize these lands for water supply purposes. Given the fact that the State has recently emerged from one of the worst droughts in its history, this has become one of Assemblyman Chivukula's top priorities.

Town to Town

State grants to 17th District Towns and Organizations

One of our most important roles as legislators is to act as intermediaries between municipalities and community organizations and the state in securing state grants-in-aid for local projects. This is especially important during hard fiscal times, as such grants offset the financial burden on local governments for necessary projects that may not otherwise happen. We are pleased to report that during the past year, towns and organizations in the 17th Legislative District have been awarded over \$1 million in state grants. Some of these grants are listed below:

New Jersey Department of Community Affairs Neighborhood Preservation Program

New Brunswick: \$100,000
Highland Park: \$100,000

This program provides direct financial and technical assistance to municipalities in preserving designated neighborhoods following a strategic plan. The grant supports projects such as home maintenance workshops, rehabilitation grants and loans to homeowners, infrastructure improvements, community organization, and planning.

New Jersey Department of Community Affairs Weatherization Grants

These grants are distributed to

community non-profit organization to assist elderly, handicapped, and low-income persons in weatherizing their homes and conserving energy.

Organizations, such as the Puerto Rican Action Board and the Northwest New Jersey Community Action Association, in Piscataway, New Brunswick, Franklin Township, Highland Park, North Brunswick and Milltown will receive a total of \$182,125 in grants.

New Jersey Department of Law and Public Safety Statewide Local Domestic Preparedness Equipment Program

Franklin Township: \$175,000
Piscataway Township: \$87,877
Highland Park: \$165,863
New Brunswick: \$90,000

These grants will be used to purchase needed emergency supplies and equipment such as communications systems, defibrulators, and rescue vehicles.

New Jersey Department of Transportation Pedestrian Safety and Bikeway Grants

Piscataway: \$175,000
Highland Park: \$149,000

These grants will be used to provide pedestrian safety improvements and bicycle path expansion. Specifically, Highland Park will improve pedestrian safety along River Road and Piscataway will improve the Kermit Sirois Bikeway Extension.