

NEW HAVEN INDEPENDENT

IT'S YOUR TOWN. READ ALL ABOUT IT.

Through The Dome Looking Glass

BY **Staff** | MAR 25, 2008 9:05 AM

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MELISSA BAILEY FILE PHOTO

Two New Haven activists took their budget concerns to Hartford; they sent in the following reports.

■ * * *

Rebecca Turcio and I, Jeffrey Kerekes (pictured), went to the State Capitol yesterday to testify about two bills that could effect New Haven.

Rebecca and I [met at Democracy School](#) last fall. We were contacted by Emily Byrne, the organizer of Democracy School, to see if we were interested in testifying on these issues.

One bill was the Penny Tax, and optional 1 percent sales tax that could be added to sales within the borders of any one of Connecticut's cities (a city sales tax). The

other bill focused on a property tax cap.

I have [taken an interest](#) in the financial health of our city, and to this end, felt it was important to share a few words at the hearing. You can read my testimony [here](#).

My chief point is that we, as a city, do need help with creating revenue although, in my opinion, we need such revenue to apply to current debt and outstanding IOUs. If new money only goes to new spending, our underlying financial situation would be the same – we would pay more taxes but still be in bad shape financially.

I also support a tax cap to help protect homeowners as well as to force greater efficiency, reduced waste and greater accountability on our elected officials. When we need to tighten our financial belts (because there are limits on our spending increases), we would look hard at all the non-essentials, and [weird line items](#) in our spending to see where we can save.

It was odd testifying at the State Capitol as many of the legislators came and went throughout the hearing and there was much talking happening in the audience and among the legislators. A three-minute time limit was also a pressure — especially since Rebecca and I needed to share this time. My assessment is that there need to be more citizens at such hearings even under such circumstances. Many lobbyists were there on behalf of industry groups but not many average citizens.

Going to Hartford in the middle of the day is not easy on most people; that is why it is much easier to be involved here in New Haven. Our Board of Aldermen meetings are in the evening — see the annual schedule and agenda [here](#).

In fact, you can come tonight to the Finance Committee Meeting Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. ([tonight's agenda](#)). Please find me at the meeting!

Thanks,

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■ * * *
(From Rebecca Turcio:)

When reciving a call from Emily Byrne asking us if we would go to Hartford to speak about to bills that were up for review, I was more than willing to go. Two citizens from New Haven took a trip to Hartford on Monday to speak on behalf of the [Penny Tax](#) and the [circuit breaker bill](#).

This being my and Jeffery's first time at the legislator building ,we were both unsure what to expect. Going in, we ran into [New Haven mayoral chief of staff] Sean Matteson, who showed us were to go. We were introduced to Laoise King, the legislative assistant to the mayor. She had gone early to secure time slot for people who spoke. Which was a bonus because that made it so we did not have to sit there all day like some.

When we walked in, there was our mayor and three other ones (New London, Stamford, and Bridgeport) speaking about REAL PROPERTY tax reform. Which I must say was an amazing show of force and a great presentation. I was impressed.

([Click here](#) to read Mayor John DeStefano's testimony.)

We listened to Realtors, who spoke on all kinds of taxes and dairy farmers in a world of trouble in Connecticut... to the point that, the 10 last farms may be bought out by the state. That was a real sad thing.

We looked to our right and there was New Haven Alders Charles Blango and Roland Lemar who came and joined us at one point. When called they to made a great presentation. ([Click here](#) to read their testimony.)

Here is the kicker...not really sure what happened, but Jeffery and I had to share our three-minute slot. How do you squeeze two three-minute speeches into one three-minute slot?

Well we tried and lost a bit of the points we were there to make. But all and all I learned a lot about how the hearings are run and how overwhelmed they are with bills.

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Comments

posted by: [cedarhillresident](#) on March 25, 2008 1:10pm

The one thing that I was up there for the most was the Circuit Breaker. After talking to people in my community they all where in support of any kind of property tax reform...which my guess is so are most of New Haven's. This may be a temp. fix but it is a start. More or less Property Tax would work the same way as Income Tax.

When asking for the working mans explanation of the Circuit Breaker bill this is how it was explained. What this means is that the city would determine what the tax bill is for a piece of property - in the example it would be \$4500. The city would still need to collect this amount in order to fund the city budget. However, with the circuit breaker bill - the state would be providing property tax relief to residential homeowners by subsidizing their tax bill. So, the resident would pay \$3000, the state would pay \$1500 and the city would still receive the \$4500 it is owed. does that make sense?

All and all I would tell people no matter how you think it is a waste of time to go there... I would say that the more that do go, can make for a powerful argument that change on all levels of government needs to happen and it start in Hartford, yes even for New Haveners.

I thank Emily for allowing me a chance to see how it all works and for letting me be apart of it.
Rebecca Turcio :)

posted by: [Andy Ross](#) on March 25, 2008 3:11pm

I am in full agreement with Jeff and his team. I cannot see adding another tax burden to residents or visitors, wit out it having a very specific application, such as debt reduction. In general I do not think a city sales tax is the answer. New Haven will suffer if we and only a hand full of other destinations apply this tax, because people will simply go and buy their goods in a town with out the tax.

posted by: Sean Matteson on March 25, 2008 3:31pm

Glad you both could come and make your voices heard on the issue.

<http://www.courant.com/news/politics/hc-onepercent0325.artmar25,0,5644449.story>

posted by: abg on March 26, 2008 1:12am

next field trip: washington DC

posted by: Ned on March 26, 2008 8:00am

I love testifying at the state legislative office building. Looking down from the galleries into the atrium always makes me think of Dante's Inferno, or a pit of vipers. Also, the building is so full of windbags and hot air that I'm surprised it doesn't float like a balloon. For the most part, one gets the impression that the "public" hearings are perfunctory and that the wise sages and would be diktators, who run the shows [hearings], would prefer that John Q. Public just shut up and go home. Have you ever seen so many people in one place with itchy and greasy palms?

posted by: Kevin on March 27, 2008 3:48pm

As a legislative staffer, I understand that the three minute limit can be a challenge (although, having sat through a 14 hour hearing a couple weeks ago, I understand the rationale for it.)

People should feel free to submit written testimony to flesh out their presentations. Amazingly enough, legislators (particularly committee chairs and ranking members) actually read the testimony.
