

# ***SENATOR BRIAN A. JOYCE***

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## **Senior Update Summer 2006**



*My friends at the Avon Council on Aging*

### **New Spending Plan Relieves Tax Burden**

Recently the Massachusetts state Senate developed a spending plan for the 2007 fiscal year that provides additional community aid while providing financial relief to senior taxpayers. I have co-sponsored an amendment that would be of particular interest to senior citizens who are being affected by high tax responsibilities. This bill allows towns and cities to implement a referendum that would exempt seniors from property taxes that amount to 5% of the community's average residential property value. Low-income seniors over the age of 70 would be eligible. It also gives towns or cities the option to increase property tax exemptions for veterans, up to \$1,000.

The Senate has also decided to create a sales tax holiday this August 12 and 13, allowing consumers to buy products, priced up to \$2,500, without having to pay 5% sales tax. Like to shop without leaving the comfort of your home? Internet purchases made during the holiday are also exempt from the sales tax. Articles of clothing are exempt from sales tax, provided that the sale price does not exceed \$175, in which case the amount exceeding the \$175 will be taxed. Items not exempt from sales tax are: all motor vehicles, motorboats, meals, telecommunications services, gas, steam, electricity, tobacco products and any single item whose price is in excess of \$2,500.

### **Driving Examinations**

With the rise of car deaths and injuries among older adults, I have become increasingly concerned about the current measures taken to test driving safety. The Safe Driver's amendment I plan to file will require vision and road safety tests every 5 years for persons over the age of 85. I believe the more frequent testing of both vision and driving reflexes will benefit everyone. Statistics and insurance policies show senior citizens at higher risk for car accidents and the current law, only requiring a vision test every 10 years, is not sufficient, as major changes in health can occur over that period of time. We are looking comprehensively at reforms aimed at junior drivers as well. I believe this amendment will work toward ensuring the safety of everyone.

### **It's That Time Again...**

I am running for re-election to the Massachusetts Senate. I am currently in my fifth term representing the communities of Avon, Braintree, Canton, East Bridgewater, Easton, Milton, Randolph, Sharon, Stoughton, and West Bridgewater. I am proud of my record in the legislature where I have supported the overhaul of the education funding formula and overall increases in local aid. Since 1993, state and local aid has increased for all the communities I've represented under education reform. I have worked to pass legislation for a state income tax rollback, an expansion of senior property tax relief, and on veterans property tax relief. I am currently Senate Chair of the Housing Committee, Senate Vice

Chair of the Bonding, Capital Expenditure and State Assets Committee, and the Senate Vice Chair of the Revenue Committee. I have worked hard on issues including those affecting senior citizens, and have worked with the HESSCO Elder Services Advisory Council, served on the Board of Directors of Fuller Village, and was the recipient of the Eva B. Hester award, given by the Secretary of Elder Affairs. Most recently I was named the 2006 Massachusetts National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials Legislator of the Year, because of my efforts to create affordable housing. I hope to have the opportunity to continue serving the people of Norfolk, Bristol, and Plymouth. *To volunteer on my campaign, call 612-696-0200 or e-mail me Senator\_Joyce@verizon.net.*

### **Commonwealth Seeking Local Entries**

I am pleased to announce that Secretary of State Bill Galvin's office is holding the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Senior Citizens Artistic Interpretation of the State Holiday Card Contest. This is open to all citizens age 62 and over, for both amateur and professional artists. Judging will be done by professional artists and all entries will be exhibited at the Commonwealth Museum starting in August. All types of art will be accepted, measuring between 5"x 7" and 18"x 24." This year's theme is **Celebrating the Winter Holiday at the State House in Your Favorite Era**. The winning entry will be reproduced and sold at the State House Gift Cart with the artist's name. If you would like to enter a piece of artwork for the contest, deliver your entries to the attention of Dolores McCray, Commonwealth Museum at Columbia Point, 220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston MA 02125. The deadline is July 14, 2006. A signed authorization form must accompany your artwork. This is available in my office through Marie Blanchard, who can be reached at 617-722-1643.

### **Protection in Your Home**

The Massachusetts Department of Fire Services is urging citizens to take steps in protecting themselves from harmful gases potentially present in their homes. Passed in November, "Nicole's Law," requires all residential property owners to install and maintain carbon monoxide (CO) alarms in their homes. Carbon monoxide (CO) is a poisonous gas that is odorless and colorless, known as the *Invisible Killer*. It results from burning fuels and causes symptoms such as headache, fatigue, nausea, dizziness, and shortness of breath, but can also lead to death from overexposure. All citizens who own properties are affected by this law if your residence contains fossil burning fuel equipment, which includes oil, gas, wood, coal, etc., or if your residence contains enclosed parking. To ensure the effectiveness of the carbon monoxide alarms, they must be placed on every level of the home, except for basements and attics that do not have habitable living areas, and within ten feet of bedroom doors. You also do not need to put them in your garage, but rather habitable areas connected to the garage. Allowed types of CO alarms include: battery powered with battery monitoring, plug-in units with a battery backup, AC primary power with battery backup, low-voltage or wireless, special approved combination smoke detectors and CO alarms. Look for labels for approval from private testing companies such as Underwriter's Laboratories or International Approval Service, etc. For those living in public housing units or large apartment buildings, your requirements may vary based upon landlords or owners. Feel free to check with them before purchasing your alarms. This is an important measure in securing the safety of all people of Massachusetts. Visit [www.mass.gov/dfs](http://www.mass.gov/dfs) or call your local fire department for more information.

### **Tax Relief for Veterans**

New legislation from the Revenue Committee will give tax relief to veterans. As Senate Vice Chair of the Revenue Committee, I am pleased to announce the Committee's role in allowing for the increase in tax abatement for veterans to change from \$250 to \$400. Additionally, those who suffered the loss of a limb or eye or have received a Congressional Medal of Honor would gain an increase in tax abatement from \$425 to \$750. Those who are Gold Star Spouses, whose husbands or wives were killed in action, would have abatement on their property taxes available to them for five years after the spouse's death, which would equal \$2,500 in exemptions. Through this bill, those who are currently serving in the Armed Forces on active duty may be eligible for suspension of paying property taxes, under the discretion of local municipalities. This legislation is one small way of saying thank you, and I am optimistic this bill will pass in the coming month.

***Questions or concerns? Please contact me at my office at (617) 722-1643, my home at (617) 696-0200, by email at [Brian.a.joyce@senate.state.ma.us](mailto:Brian.a.joyce@senate.state.ma.us), or visit my website at [www.BrianAJoyce.com](http://www.BrianAJoyce.com)***

***Thank you for allowing me to work for you,***