

# The ADVOCATE

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## Editorial

# A reasonable deficit proposal

Not only was there no budget. Not only does the impasse require a special session of the Legislature at taxpayer expense. No, the two sides in Hartford couldn't even agree on the problem they were supposed to be solving.

The size of the budget deficit is a moving target. Projections can always improve or worsen, and as the economy's failure grew over the past six months, those forecasts became continually grimmer. But that's no excuse for a series of events that left participants unsure what they were even fighting about.

Gov. M. Jodi Rell submitted a budget in February that was almost immediately derided, from all sides, as woefully underestimating the size of the budget deficit. It's easier to solve a problem when you pretend it's not as bad as it really is, or so it seems. In reality, no

**The Issue:**  
*No more haggling over the size of budget shortfall.*

one was buying the governor's rosy (by comparison) outlook for state finances. Her plan went nowhere.

The Legislature, controlled by Democrats, passed a bill in the regular session's waning days aimed at preventing such a situation in the future. Rell vetoed the plan, which would have taken away her budget office's authority to forecast the state's budget deficit. Democrats want to override the veto.

The bill would have removed authority not only from Rell's budget office, but also the Legislature's nonpartisan fiscal office if the two failed to reach a consensus on the size of the deficit. Such was the case this

year: the two sides grappled over the scope of the problem for the past four months.

When no consensus is reached, according to the bill, the authority would go to the state comptroller. That's a position Democrats have held for more than 30 years, so Rell and fellow Republicans have chosen to view the move as a power grab.

Maybe it is. But the governor, with her initial budget that by all accounts bore no resemblance to reality, is in no position to complain.

Such matters belong in non-political hands. This bill would allow both sides to have their say, and only without a consensus would the comptroller step in. This is a reasonable solution, and should not be viewed with the hostility the governor has directed its way.

We can only wonder — if no one can agree on even the size of the problem, how can we ever hope they will solve it?

## Don Wright's View



# Harry and Louise need health reform

Fifty million new customers.

Those may be the most important words to remember as the health care reform effort hits its stride this week.

Many have expressed amazement that the interest groups historically opposed to fixing the health system seem ready to work with the reformers. Their public-spiritedness reflects enlightened self-interest: The health system is so unstable that even the drug industry and the insurance companies are worried that it will crash on top of them.

Health care reform could bail out these interests by adding the currently uninsured — fast approaching 50 million people — to their customer base, and by preventing more individuals and employers from dropping insurance altogether.

Remember Harry and Louise, the imaginary couple who appeared in the television ads that helped beat President Clinton's health plan 15 years ago? That middle-class duo, which is to say a great many people just like them, has switched sides in the debate. The insurance companies and the drug companies that paid for the ads know that Louise's



**E.J. Dionne Jr.**

employer has probably restricted her health coverage or dropped her altogether. And who knows if Harry still has a job?

Chris Jennings, who was a senior adviser on health issues in the Clinton administration, says that all participants in the health care system see a vicious cycle at work unless government intervenes. It involves "more and more uninsured, which means more and more premium increases, which means more uninsured, which means more premium increases."

From the point of view of the interest groups, he adds, "that means less market share for the insurance companies, more uncompensated care by the providers, and less ability for people to afford high-cost prescription drugs."

Are you still wondering why the big interests, so far at least, are playing ball with congressional health reformers and the Obama administration? Leaders of the health industry know that unless more government money flows into the system, they will suffer along with everyone else.

The conventional view, true as far as it goes, is that the big sticking points are whether a final bill should include a government-sponsored health plan in the menu of choices consumers will be given (I believe it should), and how to pay for expanded coverage.

But the toughest behind-the-scenes battles will be about how much the insurance companies, the drug companies and the providers are willing to give up to get a government bailout of the health system. That was the significance of a little-noticed line in President Obama's letter last week to Baucus and Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, the other Democrat leading the health-care battle in the Senate.

Obama wrote that "reform cannot mean focusing on expanded coverage alone." The

president stressed that it also had to be about "a serious, sustained effort to reduce the growth rate of health care costs."

That sounds like boilerplate. It isn't. The hardest part of the health care fight, says Ralph Neas, the CEO of the National Coalition on Health Care, may not be providing assistance for the uninsured — remember, that means expanding the customer base — but getting all the players to agree to serious cost controls. Neas' coalition includes both business and labor, both of which have been hit hard by spiraling health costs.

So by all means, let's welcome the drug and insurance companies to the health care bargaining table. But let's also remember that they are sitting at that table as a matter of urgent necessity. Negotiators should bear in mind that health care reform is as vital for them as it is for the now underinsured Harry and Louise.

*E.J. Dionne is a columnist for the Washington Post. His e-mail address is ejdionne@washpost.com. He is filling in for Don Russell today.*

## Letters from readers

### Patrol duty

To the editor:

I'd like to respond and elaborate a little on the letter "Mean Streets" (June 9) about the Stamford Police Department's lack of effort in city traffic control. In the past several years, I've seen a large and steady increase in the number of Stamford "rental cops" at construction sites, parties, etc. These individuals are dressed like police officers, carry badges and weapons like officers, but appear like mannequins on cell phones.

I've watched traffic either grind to a halt or whizz by them in amazement that these officers rarely do little more than stare away looking bored. My friends and neighbors have taken to calling the Stamford P.D. "per diem" officers since they appear most frequently at these lucrative \$60 per hour "side jobs" around our city. This is disappointing and reflects poorly on the Stamford P.D.'s image. Whatever happened to Stamford police officers patrolling the city in cruisers or on foot patrols?

**John Walker**  
Stamford

### Concert changes make good sense

To the editor:

I am writing in reference to the article from May 13 regarding Stamford Alive @ Five to become "alive for \$5." As a loyal concert attendant, I have to say that I disagree with the article and the points of view. It is a lopsided article and I don't feel the changes were properly explained or given a justified explanation.

First of all, the concert has grown tremendously over the years and has evolved into much more than a "block party" as mentioned in the article. It is now an event that is using nationally known artists and attracting crowds from the tri-state area. It is a great time with a very diverse audience and I feel that the additional rules and regulations will help keep it in Columbus Park and in Stamford. I remember when concerts in Central Park were free, but last summer people paid money to see Bon Jovi because the concerts in Central Park grew bigger than they expected.

Although it is a change, the cover charge will be going to pay for the event's costs. The private funding is simply not there anymore. In this time, I have friends who can't afford a \$2,000 seat to see their beloved Yankees, but can swing \$5 to hear some great music in downtown Stamford.

Lastly, I feel it is a good thing to make sure the younger people are there earlier in the day. Last year, large groups of teenagers were showing up near the end of each concert. They were not there for the music because the show was over. I think this rule will make sure that people interested in the show are there and we can all enjoy it together.

Sincerely,

**Anna Lisa Coppola**  
Stamford

### Be a mentor

To the editor:

For the past five years I've spent a half-hour a week with a middle school student in Norwalk. I'm not a social worker or a psychologist, and I have no special skills or training. Officially, what I am is a mentor, but the reality is I play video games, shoot hoops, throw a baseball, or play chess with this great kid once a week. That's it. Nothing deep. Nothing dramatic. To me it's simple, but to him it makes a world of difference.

I'm telling you this, of course, because the Connecticut mentor program is desperately in need of help. In Norwalk alone there are 350 kids who need someone to come by their school and

hang out with them once a week.

Studies show that young people who are mentored are 73 percent more likely to raise their goals, 59 percent more likely to get better grades, and 46 percent less likely to start using drugs.

According to the Governor's Prevention Partnership, "an astounding 17.6 million young people — nearly half the population of young people between 10 and 18 years of age — live in situations that put them at risk of not living up to their potential."

We're not talking about kids in Bangladesh or Laos; these are children who live right here in our community. While most of us struggle to spend enough time with our own children, it's worth taking a moment to think about how fortunate we are. In fact, I will assert, it's worth taking half an hour a week. I promise, it's worth it!

If you'd like more information, please contact Jackie Effren, coordinator of the Norwalk Mentor Program, at 849-1111 or jeffren@hscct.org.

**Mitchell Reichgut**  
Wilton

### Blame game will backfire on Dems

To the editor:

It strikes me how thin skinned Democrats are to criticism of their programs with a reliance on blaming the past administration for everything in response. It was easy to play the blame game, which was perfected during the Bush years. It seems they still haven't gotten over losing and continue to focus on Gingrich and Cheney. To me, it's getting a little absurd.

The real story is the difference in opinion shaping up between the championing of individual rights and freedoms versus government encroachment on our liberties. One thing for sure is that the size and influence of the government bureaucracy is increasing by leaps and bounds. This should be debated. It wasn't that clear during the elections, but it sure is now. This transcends the last administration.

Here's my take on this:

The government bureaucracy has an insatiable appetite for money and is the biggest single reason we are in a financial jam now. Financial independence is the key to our individual rights and freedoms. To me, more government will lead us down the same path as California and now New York. It looks like these high tax states are heading toward a taxpayer revolt. It may be the only way to stop the bureaucrats. All of the current administration's initiatives are going to cost a lot of money, either now or in the future and, when the bill comes, taxpayers are going to revolt. It could get ugly, and blaming Bush isn't going to fly.

**George Fjeldal**  
Stamford

### Papal advice

To the editor:

"Rerum Novarum" — Leo XIII, 1823-1829  
"Quadragesimo Anno" — Pius XI, 1922-1939  
"Mater et Magistra" — John XXIII, 1958-1963  
"Populorum Progressio" — Paul VI, 1963-1978  
"Laborem Exercens" — John Paul II, 1978-2005  
"Sollicitudo Rei Socialis" — John Paul II, 1978-2005  
"Centesimus Anno" — John Paul, 1978-2005

If you really want to know how to resolve our economics, and how to treat workers, read the above at: vatican.va.

**Mark Sanford**  
Greenwich