

Connecticut's Environment & Natural Resources Threatened & Endangered

Governor Dannel Malloy has proposed the taking of the Community Investment Act fund - \$15 million

currently in the fund, and \$40 million to be collected through 2017 - to cover the state's budget shortfalls.

This very short-sighted proposal contradicts the governor's pledge to invest \$7.5 million annually in open space acquisition through this very act.

Additionally, the governor has proposed a 20% budget reduction for state parks and preserves which have

already suffered from severe, long-term underfunding. Parks will be closed, left unsupervised, unmanaged

as personnel will be drastically reduced (adding to the state unemployed rolls). Income from visitor fees,

purchases will be lost, local businesses will also suffer.

As the coup-de-grace, the Governor proposes to eliminate the Council on Environmental Quality, an

independent watchdog agency that provides objective, critical analysis of the state's environmental issues

and land preservation efforts which can guide positive land use planning and stewardship of open spaces..

These very unwise proposals are serious lapses in state leadership and management, and if enacted, will

have a devastating impact upon CT's environmental and public health, quality of life and economic vitality.

Much more would be lost than any imagined savings, and would further reflect poorly upon our state.

Chronically "robbing Peter to pay Paul" as band-aid fixes for deficits is misguided, irresponsible budgeting,

accounting, and management, resulting in constant, desperate scramblings for dollars to cover errors and shortfalls.

And now, it's recently been discovered that the state's deficit is much larger than originally thought? An accounting

error? Oops! Reckless spending? Whoa!

Haven't CT's leaders learned from what happened when state transportation funds (designated for infrastructure

maintenance and upgrades) were raided to cover deficits in other areas of the state budget? The result: CT having

among the worst infrastructure and transportation woes in the country, hindering economic growth, and affecting quality of life.

The governor and other state leaders must be held accountable for such questionable practices and blunders that are beyond mere oversights. The perpetual cutting, raiding and shuffling of monies from one fund to another leads to endless cycles of budgetary fluctuations of various state departments and agencies, handicapping the quality of their functions, services and worker morale. In the long run, this only serves to negatively affect life quality, discourage confidence and investments in CT, and is very uninviting, unwelcoming to potential new residents and businesses. Countless people have to live within honest budgets and so should the state.

With millions and millions of taxpayer dollars questionably spent as incentives for the business sector (too many “eggs in one basket”!) intended as a means to “grow” CT’s economy, we must not lose sight of quality of life for the very people who work and reside in the state,. There has to be a balance - life in CT is not all about big corporations. There other ways of “growing” the economy without butchering the budgets, pillaging funds that support some of CT’s greatest assets: its natural resources.

CT is truly blessed with an amazingly rich diversity of beautiful natural areas and wildlife - from Long Island Sound to the CT River Valley, the hills of Litchfield, coastlines, lakes, forests, and fields. If the state is not willing to invest in conserving its wonderful and very essential natural assets, there will be adverse immediate and long-term ripple effects upon many aspects of life and work in CT, including its economic vitality.

With so much natural habitat loss and degradation, environmental conservation is all the more crucial in protecting and restoring habitats for the great variety of wildlife in CT. Open spaces not only contribute to the well-being of people and the environment, but also enhance state and local economies by way of visitor and tourism dollars, and are a factor in attracting new business and residents to our state..

As an example: wildlife watching is one of the top recreational activities in the U.S., and is a well-documented, significant contributor to local and state economies. CT has an impressive diversity of habitats which in turn,

are home and critical migratory stop sites for several hundred bird species. Consequently, CT is also home to a large and very active resident birding community. Rare birds also attract countless out-of-state bird-watchers, thus, more income is generated for the state and local businesses e.g. gas, restaurants, motels, hotels, birding gear, etc. Certainly, not something to so readily dismiss! Clearly, this is just one of the many benefits of open space protection, accessible and well-managed state parks and preserves, the Community Investment Act, the CEQ - all solid, sound investments with solid, rich returns.

Historically, the Community Investment Act has served as a powerful tool, and leveraged in partnership with private funding sources, has proven to be instrumental and very successful in preserving more of CT's open spaces, bio-diversity and supporting economies. So much more can be accomplished if this act and its funds are left intact, invested in, and used only for its originally designated purpose.

Therefore, I urge lawmakers to make it unmistakably clear to Governor Malloy: stop reckless spending and bad budgeting. Hands off the Community Investment Act, and walk your talk by following through on your pledge to invest in this act. Do not cut budgets for our state parks and preserves. Do not eliminate the Council on Environmental Quality. Life in CT would be greatly diminished without them all.

Respectfully,

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