The 2013 session of the Connecticut General Assembly concluded at midnight on June 5. Almost 2,500 legislative bills were introduced during the legislative session, 334 passed both chambers and, to date, the Governor has signed 327 of these acts and vetoed eight of them. Interestingly, on the last frenetic day of the session, the State House approved 43 bills and the Senate passed 40 bills. So much for a contemplative process...

On reflection, the session seemed to have trapped legislators in a “wilderness of mirrors.”* Confronted by the aftermath of the Sandy Hook tragedy, a prospective budget gap of $1.1 billion in Fiscal Year (FY) ’14 and $1 billion in FY ’15, a state economy that, at best, is stuck in neutral and an on-going federal investigation of a former Speaker of the House, Governor Dannel Malloy and the General Assembly faced the prospect of a legislative session that could well have bled into the summer months.

Sandy Hook

Reacting to the horrific murder of 20 children and six adults at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, the legislature and the Governor each created working groups to develop recommendations on school safety, mental health reforms and gun violence prevention. The Governor’s Sandy Hook Advisory Commission submitted an interim report on March 18 calling for broader restrictions on the sale and possession of semiautomatic firearms and ammunition. The legislature’s Task Force on Gun Violence and Children’s Safety recommended similar gun restrictions, together with new school infrastructure and safety standards and the promotion of early mental health intervention programs. The deliberations over these recommendations so consumed the activities of the legislative leaders that both the House and Senate only met in session three times between January 9 and March 6. As a consequence, legislative calendars experienced a significant backlog of bills to be acted on in the following eight short weeks.

Major Legislative Issues

Despite the delay caused by the Sandy Hook initiatives, members of the General Assembly established an admirable record by passing a biennial budget, modifying the restrictions of the state spending cap, promoting economic development activities, restructuring the state’s energy policy, addressing brownfield and coastal zone management issues and tinkering with our always evolving health care policies.

State Budget

With fresh memories of the last biennial budget that increased state and municipal taxes by almost $1.6 billion, legislators were concerned they would be forced again to reach into their constituents’ pocketbooks to cover projected deficits in the FY ’14 and FY ’15 state budget. In the end, after days of backroom discussions, the Governor and Democratic leaders blessed a 3.7% increase in appropriations for FY ’14 and a 2.1% increase for FY ’15. Rather than create “new” taxes, Democrats resorted to maintaining a

* From T.S. Eliot’s poem “Gerontion”
requirements, reduces the value of Class I RECs generated by use of large-scale hydro to meet the state’s renewable portfolio and Environmental Protection, the new law authorizes the future expansion of natural gas networks.

Asserting that Connecticut must take “control of our energy driver’s license. Six other states have a similar law.

Connecticut’s hourly minimum close to Washington State’s which rose from $8.70 to $9.00 on January 1, 2015. This will make Connecticut’s wage the highest in the nation - $9.19.

Connecticut also has the distinction of being the first state to pass legislation requiring the labeling of certain foods containing genetically-engineered ingredients. The act takes effect when similar laws are approved in four other states, meeting certain criteria, and the total population of these states in the northeast must equal 20 million.

Finally, in an effort to encourage employment and promote public safety, the legislature approved a measure, effective January 1, 2015, which will allow undocumented immigrants to obtain a driver’s license. Six other states have a similar law.

Asserting that Connecticut must take “control of our energy future,” Governor Malloy proposed sweeping reforms to the state’s energy policies, focusing on renewable power requirements and the expansion of natural gas networks.

Clearly, the most contentious of the energy bills passed during the session was the measure to restructure the state’s renewable energy portfolio requirements. Pitting the environmental community and labor against the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, the new law authorizes the future use of large-scale hydro to meet the state’s renewable portfolio requirements, reduces the value of Class I RECs generated by biomass facilities, establishes new power purchase requirements for renewable sources built after January 1, 2013 and provides for a return to consumers of Alternate Compliance Payments if renewable portfolio goals are not met.

Furthe...
UPCOMING EVENTS:

EMPLOYMENT LAW 2013 - NEW LAWS & MANDATES

Join the Labor & Employment attorneys of Murtha Cullina for a seminar discussing the new employment laws and mandates impacting your business.

Tuesday, November 12, 2013
8:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Hartford Marriott Downtown
200 Columbus Boulevard | Hartford, Connecticut

For more information or to RSVP, please contact Jackie Rowe at 860.240.6140 or jrowe@murthalaw.com, or visit www.murthalaw.com.

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