

Major legislation that succeeded and failed in 2005

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HARTFORD, Conn. -- From civil unions and stem cell research to the death penalty and junk food in schools, the state legislature took up a variety of major issues in the 2005 session.

A look at the winners and losers:

WINNERS:

CIVIL UNIONS - Connecticut lawmakers became the first to create civil unions for same-sex couples without a court order. The unions extend the rights of married couples to gay and lesbian couples.

STEM CELL RESEARCH - Lawmakers voted to pour \$100 million into adult and embryonic stem cell research over 10 years. Researchers say the state's law was previously silent on the issue, and the legislation gives them confidence the state won't abandon its commitment.

SUBMARINE BASE - As the state tries to keep the Groton submarine base off a Pentagon shutdown list, lawmakers committed to investing millions in the base for improvements and for the fight to save the base.

HUSKY INSURANCE - More than 13,000 working parents were saved from being axed from a state health care insurance program in July. The state budget includes funding for them to stay on the program, but with additional co-pays and premiums.

CELL PHONES - Drivers will have to hang up their cell phones unless they have a hands-free device come Oct. 1. The bill, first introduced in 1999, won support after lawmakers said they were concerned about video, text messaging and other technological advances on the phones. The governor is expected to sign the bill.

VOTING MACHINES - Electronic voting machines will have to produce a paper record of votes. The bill helps bring the state in compliance with the Help America Vote Act, passed in the wake of the 2000 election problems in Florida.

MINIMUM WAGE - Lawmakers voted to raise the minimum wage over the next two years. The hourly rate will increase from \$7.10 to \$7.40 on Jan. 1, 2006, and to \$7.65 on Jan. 1, 2007.

LOSERS:

DEATH PENALTY - Before serial killer Michael Ross was executed in May, lawmakers weighed the question of whether Connecticut should have a death penalty. A bill to abolish the death penalty was rejected by the House.

TRANSPORTATION - Neither the House nor Senate took action on the governor's plan to spend \$1 billion on transportation improvements over the next decade.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM - The House and Senate passed two competing bills in the final hours of the legislative session that would have created a publicly funded political campaign system. But leaders deadlocked with no reconciliation in sight and the bill failed. A widespread ethics reform bill also died.

MEDICAL MARIJUANA - A proposal to let seriously ill patients smoke marijuana for medicinal purposes died when the House did not take it up. The U.S. Supreme Court recently ruled that patients who smoke pot can be prosecuted for violating federal drug laws.

HEALTH INSURANCE FUND - After a state report found that Wal-Mart, Stop & Shop and Dunkin' Donuts were the top businesses in Connecticut with workers on state health care insurance programs, lawmakers proposed asking big companies to chip in for the cost. The bill was never debated.

SCHOOL STEROID TESTING - The House voted down a proposal to create a pilot program to test high school students for steroid use.

TUITION - College students won't get a reprieve in tuition increases next year, after a committee killed a proposal to freeze tuition.

PENDING LEGISLATION:

JUNK FOOD - The decision about whether to ban soda and junk food in schools lies in the hands of Gov. M. Jodi Rell. The bill approved by the legislature would also require 20 minutes of physical activity for young children each day outside of gym class. Rell has said she believes the decision belongs to local districts, but has not said if she will veto or sign the bill.

INFERTILITY INSURANCE - People undergoing infertility treatment would be able to get insurance coverage for some procedures. The bill would place limits on how often certain procedures can be tried. The governor has not said if she will sign the bill.

MEDICAL MALPRACTICE - Lawmakers approved a package of reforms to the insurance industry, the courts and public health practices to control rising medical malpractice insurance rates. But Rell, who wanted more of her proposals included in the plan, has not decided if she will sign it.

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