

## Editorial

## The New Green

Backers of a bill to "roll back" the amount of electricity that Connecticut has mandated must come from renewable sources almost have the right idea. Legislators need to recast Connecticut's clean energy policies and spending, completely.

Legislators and environmentalists alike need to wear their green eye-shades when evaluating green policies and projects. The basis of the sustainability philosophy is to use resources wisely — sound practice, transparency and not dogma.

Today, Connecticut has the lowest per capita output of carbon dioxide of any state, we are not the problem.

What are really driving Connecticut's policies are lobbyists and all manner of energy opportunists who view Connecticut as a cash cow because of subsidies, mandates and artificially high energy prices. What Connecticut is *not* seeing are tangible benefits such as a cleaner, healthier environment, lower energy prices or more jobs. To the contrary, in fact.

Last month another manufacturer, Turbotec of Windsor, decided to move its operations to North Carolina, where the company felt it could grow more successfully, including its new product lines for the solar and geothermal energy markets (see story, page 26).

The strategy that is best for the environment and the economy is the same — directly target clean energy spending and policies to employers to help them save energy. This is a strategy for a cleaner environment, lower operating costs — and protecting jobs.

## Outlawing Unpaid Interns

The war on free enterprise escalates. Now the Obama administration, or at least part of it, is taking aim at a new target: unpaid internships for college students at private companies. "There aren't going to be many circumstances where you can have an internship [at a for-profit company] and not be paid and still be in compliance with the law," a U.S. Department of Labor official told the *New York Times* recently.

The business community ought to be very afraid.

This is wrong on more levels than can be examined here. Even interns who are not paid cash earn "compensation" — in the form of experience, skills-building and forming valuable connections in the industry the student intends to pursue.

In addition many companies (such as *BNH* parent Second Wind Media Ltd., which is sponsoring an editorial intern this semester) insist that they will take on unpaid interns only if the latter is earning course credit for the experience.

If the government mandates that all interning students be paid cash for their troubles, the number of internship opportunities available will plummet, if not evaporate altogether.

Telling individual workers how they must price their time and labor is fundamentally un-American — and yet another assault on our economic freedom and personal liberty. Its authors persist in introducing government intrusion into nearly every sphere of commercial interaction — seemingly oblivious to the electoral Armageddon that awaits them in November. **BNH**

## Op-Ed

## Sick-Leave Mandate: Poison Pill

By Jason R. Stanevich

The General Assembly is at it once again. Following the federal government's unprecedented health-insurance legislation, state lawmakers are poised to pass a bill requiring Connecticut employers to provide up to five days of paid sick leave to their workers. This mandate would make Connecticut — which already has one of the most unfriendly business climates in the country — the first state to impose paid sick leave on private employers. The legislature seems set on increasing Connecticut's competitive disadvantage in the business community.

Under Senate Bill 63, which has been approved by the Labor & Public Employee Committee, employers of 50 or more hourly and non-exempt employees would be

required to provide one hour of paid sick leave for each 40 hours worked by an employee in one-hour increments up to a maximum of 40 hours per year. The term "sick leave" is a misnomer, however, because it is not limited to an employee's personal illness. Employees can use this leave to take care of their children or even for preventative care in the absence of illness, injury or medical treatment. The bill also allows employees who are victims of family violence or sexual assault to use sick leave to obtain victim services, to relocate or to participate in civil or criminal proceedings related to family violence or sexual assault. While well-intentioned, the bill broadens traditional definitions of sick time and mandates that employers pay for absences that are not covered in many sick-leave policies.

The bill presents logistical and legal nightmares for businesses, as employers would have to manage sick leave in one-hour increments. In addition, like the often-abused intermittent leave available under the Family Medical Leave

Act, the legislation makes it difficult for employers to verify that workers taking leave are actually sick. The bill allows employees to take three consecutive days of leave before medical documentation can be required. Repeated studies demonstrate that the majority of sick days are used for reasons other than illness. In addition, the bill allows employees to undermine legitimate disciplinary and operations decisions by filing "retaliatory personnel actions" with the Department of Labor. The bill provides little guidance on what constitutes an adverse employment action or how retaliation complaints will be adjudicated.

The legislation fails also to consider costs and challenges of doing business and maintaining jobs in Connecticut's struggling economy. In fact, Connecticut has long had the worst job performance of any state in the nation, creating no net new jobs from 1999 to 2009. Thus mandating sick leave on employers struggling to remain competitive, and even to remain in business, is a bad idea. Most

Connecticut companies, in response to the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, have already reduced personnel and overhead. As such, mandating sick leave at this time will force businesses to reconsider adding new employees, increasing wages or extending other benefits. As the Connecticut Business & Industry Association (CBIA) notes, more than ever employers require flexibility to design and negotiate their own benefit and time-off policies that meet the needs of their employees, business demands and productivity needs.

The legislature needs to stop forcing private businesses to support its continuing efforts to create a nanny state. At the very least, the legislature needs to acknowledge there is a reason that Connecticut's workforce has not grown in 20 years and to refrain from passing legislation that makes Connecticut a less desirable place to do business. By seeking to mandate additional benefits, state lawmakers demonstrate their sharp disconnect with current economic realities.

*Jason R. Stanevich is a management-side labor and employment attorney with Berchem, Moses & Devlin, PC in Milford.*

## BusinessNewHaven

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**Contributors**  
Susan Cornell  
Steve Higgins  
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