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Legislative Press Bureau at (401) 528-1743

THIS WEEK AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

STATE HOUSE – Here are the highlights from news and events that took place in the General Assembly this week. For more information on any of these items visit <http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/News/>



- **General Assembly receives governor’s budget address**
Members of the General Assembly this week gathered for the inaugural budget address presented by Gov. Gina M. Raimondo. Also in attendance for the address — which touched on jobs, healthcare, education and other issues — were the other General Officers, members of the Judiciary, heads of state departments and agencies, state education officials, municipal officials and other guests.

- **Senate hosts annual economic summit**
The annual Rhode Island Senate Economic Summit was held at Rhode Island College with this year’s theme “Connecting Workforce and Higher Education.” Members of the legislative chamber participated in a panel discussion that featured several prominent state business leaders and heard keynote presentations from nationally renowned leaders in higher education.
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- **Majority Leader Ruggerio sponsors bill to regulate ‘vape lounges’**
With the increasing popularity of vaping, whether the substance being imbibed is tobacco or medical marijuana, Senate Majority Leader Dominick J. Ruggerio (D-Dist. 4, Providence, North Providence) has introduced legislation ([2015-S 0441](#)) to establish registration procedures for “vaping lounges” and to set minimum oversight, reporting and safety requirements for the operation of such establishments. The bill defines “marijuana vaping lounge” and sets penalties for license/regulation violations.
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More...

- **Sen. Pichardo legislation would give housing priority to veterans**
Sen. Juan M. Pichardo (D-Dist. 2, Providence) has submitted legislation that would give homeless veterans an edge when seeking public housing assistance. The bill ([2015 S-0646](#)) would give veterans a priority for housing rental subsidy and housing retention assistance by amending the Rhode Island Housing Resource Act.
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- **Rep. Craven bill requires separate account for campaign funds**
Rep. Robert E. Craven (D-Dist. 32, North Kingstown) has introduced legislation ([2015-H 5840](#)) to require candidates for office, officeholders and political action committees to maintain separate campaign bank/credit union accounts exclusively for campaign funds. The bill expressly prohibits the comingling of a candidate's personal or business funds with campaign funds. Sen. Michael J. McCaffrey (D-Dist. 29, Warwick) has introduced similar legislation ([2015-S 0633](#)).
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- **Sen. Nesselbush calls for labeling of genetically modified products**
Sen. Donna M. Nesselbush (D-Dist. 15, Pawtucket, North Providence) has introduced a bill ([2015-S 0557](#)) calling for labeling of food products that contain genetically modified ingredients (referred to as GMOs, for genetically modified organisms). Similar legislation has been submitted by Sen. William A. Walaska (D-Dist. 30, Warwick) ([2015 S-0093](#)), Rep. Dennis M. Canario (D-Dist. 71, Portsmouth, Little Compton, Tiverton) ([2015-H 5197](#)) and Rep. Rep. Raymond A. Hull (D-Dist. 6, Providence, North Providence) ([2015 H-5078](#)).
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- **Rep. Ucci bills offer incentives to investors in RI businesses**
Rep. Stephen R. Ucci (D-Dist. 42, Johnston, Cranston) has introduced a package of bills intent on growing business and creating jobs in Rhode Island by attracting investor money into the state. The bills ([2015-H 5796](#), [2015-H 5797](#), [2015-H 5858](#)) provide various kinds of tax incentives to manufacturers, to venture capitalists and to “angel investors,” a term referring to individuals, groups or networks of people who provide capital for a business start-up or who consult or mentor new businesses.
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- **Legislation would increase penalties for DUI resulting in death**
Several bills dealing with driving while under the influence have been introduced at the behest of Attorney General Peter Kilmartin. ([2015-H 5460](#)) and ([2015-S 0629](#)), introduced by Rep. Gregg Amore (D-Dist. 65, East Providence) and Sen. V. Susan Sosnowski (D-Dist. 37, South Kingstown, New Shoreham), would increase the “look back” period on repeat alcohol-related offenses from five to 10 years. Another bill sponsored by Senator Sosnowski ([2015-S 0640](#)) would increase penalties for anyone convicted of driving under the influence resulting in serious bodily injury from a maximum of 10 years to 20 years. A separate act ([2015-S 0628](#)) sponsored by Senator Sosnowski proposes creating a criminal offense of driving under the influence resulting in injury.
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- **Sen. Jabour calls for freeze on electricity sales tax at pre-rate hike level**
Sen. Paul V. Jabour (D-Dist. 5, Providence), in response to the recent large rate hike granted to Narragansett Electric by the Public Utilities Commission, has introduced legislation ([2015-S 0400](#)) that would freeze the sales tax on the utility service at the rate that was in effect on Dec.31, 2014, after which the increase went into effect. The bill ensures that ratepayers do not pay any state tax on the recent increase as well as any future rate hikes.
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- **Sen. Sosnowski bills address high cost of energy**
Sen. V. Susan Sosnowski (D-Dist. 37, South Kingstown, New Shoreham) has submitted three bills to promote renewable energy, energy efficiency, and ensure that National Grid's profits are set in a transparent process. The first ([2015 S-0089](#)) would extend Rhode Island's Renewable Energy Standard (RES), which is set to expire in 2019, to 2035. The second ([2015 S-0409](#)) would authorize the Public Utilities Commission to conduct a more comprehensive review when determining a utility's profit. The third ([2015 S-0410](#)) would require the Office of Energy Resources to assemble a task force to promote the development of markets for alternative renewable home heating and transportation fuel.
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