

NEWS from Assemblymember Jonathan Jacobson



Fall 2023

Year in Review

Dear Neighbor,

Unfortunately, 2023 was the year of Central Hudson – again. Customers are still suffering from late or missing bills and wildly inaccurate billing. Our office has opened more than 350 files to help customers, and assisted countless others over the phone. I have sponsored and passed legislation to deal with these problems. Our office also arranged two in-person billing assistance meetings this year so customers could meet directly with representatives of Central Hudson.

As most residents are aware, Central Hudson has requested a 16% rate increase for electricity and 19% for gas. **I spoke out against this increase at a Public Service Commission (PSC) hearing.** Central Hudson should not be rewarded for late, inaccurate billing and poor service. According to its own numbers, Central Hudson is claiming a “one dollar per day increase,” but **with the average electric bill of \$118, this amounts to a more than 25% increase!** I told the PSC that customers of Central Hudson have learned not to trust the utility’s numbers, and neither should the PSC.

Battling Central Hudson is not the only thing I worked on this year. **Reproductive health rights are still under attack in this country, and we in the Assembly majority remain diligent. In 2019, we passed the Reproductive Health Act,** which codified Roe v. Wade into New York State law before last year’s terrible Dobbs decision by the United States Supreme Court. We have also passed legislation protecting medical providers who treat out-of-state patients seeking reproductive healthcare.



Addressing the Assembly in Albany

I personally believe a woman’s decisions about her reproductive health should only be made by that woman. This is why I helped the Assembly pass the **Equality Amendment to enshrine reproductive rights in the State Constitution.** I also co-sponsored both the Reproductive Health Act and the Equality Amendment.

Voters will decide whether to adopt the proposed Amendment at the next General Election in November.

Meanwhile, I continue working to support students throughout their public school experience. I am proud to report that all of the school districts in my Assembly district now have pre-K programs, **thanks to increases in**

state aid for schools and pre-K. Additionally, I have introduced a bill requiring high school students to take a class in financial literacy to graduate (A.2298-A), as well as a bill requiring schools to help students with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form, which is used by most colleges when determining financial aid (A.1164-B).

The **State Education Department Blue Ribbon Panel** recommended that financial literacy classes be required to graduate. This recommendation mirrors my bill. Let’s hope this is in the final list of changes to be made by the Board of Regents next spring.

If you need help resolving a problem with a state agency or Central Hudson, my office is here to help.

Thank you for letting me serve as your representative in the Assembly.

Very truly yours,

Assemblymember Jacobson sponsored and passed legislation that:

- **Requires utilities** (such as Central Hudson) **to bill within two months of the due date or be prohibited from back billing;** also requires utility corporations to provide a two-year history of charges in their bills. (A.4055-A)
- **Eliminates opportunities for Industrial Development Agency (IDA) fraud and** corruption by prohibiting IDA officials, employees and independent contractors of the IDA from being employed with any entity applying for or receiving benefits with the IDA and for two years after the conclusion of an individual’s IDA employment or rendering of services to the IDA (A.4847-A)
- **Prohibits faithless electors** by requiring presidential electors to vote for the presidential and vice-presidential nominees of the party that nominated and elected them (A.928)
- **Allows police officers** injured in a motor vehicle accident to **use their supplementary uninsured/underinsured motorist insurance coverage** (A.1178)
- **Extends the ability of local governments to accept electronic bids** for bonds and purchase contracts (A.7445)
- **Authorizes the city of Poughkeepsie to impose a hotel and motel tax** up to five percent of the daily rental rate. **This would also apply to bed and breakfast businesses** (A.6555)
- **Authorizes the city of Beacon to impose a hotel and motel tax** up to five percent of the daily rental rate. **This would also apply to bed and breakfast businesses** (A.6556)
- **Extends the authority of the Town of Newburgh to impose a hotel and motel tax** up to five percent of the daily rental rate. **This would also apply to bed and breakfast businesses** (A.7477)
- **Requires a landlord to comply with the landlord registry law in the City of Newburgh to bring an eviction proceeding** (A.7265)

THE MISSION TO REPLACE LEAD-CONTAMINATED WATER LINES

I have been a strong advocate in Albany for more funding to replace the lead-contaminated water lines that still plague most of our older, municipal water systems in New York — none more so than the Cities of Newburgh and Poughkeepsie.

Lead poisoning is a well-known contributor to brain damage, disrupting brain development in children and leading to lower IQ scores, learning disabilities and poor school performance. Lead poisoning in water also contributes to behavioral problems, slowed bone growth and nervous system damage in children.

In adults, lead poisoning can contribute to higher blood pressure, increased risk of hypertension, cardiovascular problems, reduced kidney function, increased risk of tremors, and fertility issues in both men and women.

There is no safe level of lead in our drinking water.

Since I was elected to the Assembly in 2018, **I have increased funding for the Lead Service Line Replacement Program**, established by the state in 2017 to provide money for municipalities to replace lead service lines.

This year, **I was proud to co-sponsor and pass the Lead Pipe Right to Know Act (A.6115)**. If the Governor signs this bill into law, every municipality must conduct a survey to determine where there is lead contamination in our water systems.

Unfortunately, even with increased funding from the state, it would take more than 100 years to make our cities safe without additional money and an aggressive program to replace all lead-contaminated lines, neighborhood by neighborhood, rather than the current piecemeal approach.

I had read about funding opportunities from the Federal Infrastructure Act and the Inflation Reduction Act, which passed in the prior Congress. **I discussed this with Congressman Pat Ryan, who quickly convened a meeting with me, Poughkeepsie City officials, representatives from the Environmental Protection Agency, and the state Department of Health (which will administer the distribution of the Federal funding in New York).**

Soon after the meeting, **I made sure that both cities knew the deadlines and how to apply** for the funding. I am happy to report that **both cities applied**.

I will keep you informed on our progress combatting this pressing problem.



Meeting with Rep. Pat Ryan and Poughkeepsie officials on lead line replacement



COMMUNITY SAFETY



I secured a \$217,000 grant for a new ambulance for the town of Newburgh EMS



I sponsored the very successful gun buyback held in Poughkeepsie through a grant I secured

CENTRAL HUDSON UPDATE

Since December 2021, I have been fighting for the thousands of Central Hudson customers who have been victims of the utility's billing disaster. Some residents had not received a bill for more than six months. Others were expecting a bill for \$300 and received a bill for \$30,000. One of your neighbors received a bill for over \$700,000! Customers have called Central Hudson and were left on hold for a seemingly endless period of time before being disconnected. Some customers would be lucky enough to speak to someone, only to be told that their name or account number did not exist in the company's system.

Utilities have one job: provide service with transparent billing on a timely, monthly basis.

Central Hudson blamed these problems on a failed software rollout. But the **Public Service Commission (PSC) report issued on Dec. 15, 2022**, revealed that Central Hudson failed to properly test the software before changing their entire system. The report also noted that Central Hudson did not listen to its own employees when they warned of problems. The utility also did not properly train its employees to deal with this new software or its potential issues. The link to the PSC can be found at the PSC website: <https://dps.ny.gov/notable-cases-and-matters>.

Last year, I held an online forum with Central Hudson so constituents could voice their concerns directly. Shortly afterward, I introduced legislation to limit when a utility could issue estimated bills and to limit back-billing if a bill is more than two months late. When Central Hudson did not respond to my question last year about whether the software problems had been resolved, I asked the PSC to open an investigation. This request resulted in the December 2022 report.

The problems have persisted, and my office continues to help Central Hudson customers. Thus far, **my office has opened over 350 case files**. This does not include the many others we helped over the phone.



Your electric bill should be timely and not be a mystery

I arranged **two in-person billing assistance meetings** so that customers could meet with a Central Hudson representative. **Central Hudson has finally agreed with the PSC to follow the law** and bill every month – but only starting at the end of 2024. The utility should not be applauded for agreeing to follow the law and certainly not for waiting another year to get their act together.

My two bills to deal with the situation are making progress. **One bill to prohibit back-billing by a utility if it is more than two months late has passed both houses and is awaiting the governor's signature (A.4055A).** The **other bill to limit when estimated billing can occur has passed out of Committee (A.888B)**, and I expect to have it pass the entire Assembly next year.

As most residents are aware, Central Hudson has requested a 16% rate increase for electricity and 19% for gas. **I spoke out against this increase at a Public Service Commission (PSC) hearing.** Central Hudson should not be rewarded for late, inaccurate billing and poor service. According to its own numbers, Central Hudson is claiming a "one dollar per day increase," **but the average electric bill of \$118 amounts to a more than 25% increase!** I told the PSC that customers of Central Hudson have learned to not trust the utility's numbers, and neither should the PSC.

Meanwhile, if anyone is still having problems with Central Hudson, please contact my office so we can help.



I was proud to stand with the nurses for safe staffing at Vassar Brothers Hospital



I gave away school supplies at many events this summer, including this one in Beacon

FINALLY, I-84 AND I-87 REPAVED!

Getting results doesn't always take a new law. Sometimes, it takes bringing the problem to the attention of those in power, along with some old-fashioned pestering.

As anyone who has traveled from the Newburgh-Beacon Bridge to the Thruway Exit knows, I-84 was one big hazard: craters where vehicles entered and left the highway, exit ramps that were virtually impassable. At night, I had to drive on the right shoulder of eastbound Exit 37 just to avoid the potholes.

After voicing my concerns to the Department of Transportation, I raised the problems with I-84 to the DOT Commissioner at the budget hearings last February.

I followed this up with phone calls to the regional office in the spring. Paving began in early summer, but it was painfully slow and done in a piecemeal fashion. So, I called again.

Finally, the job is done! We can now use that stretch of I-84 without fear of losing a tire or front axle. We can concentrate on our driving and not the potholes.

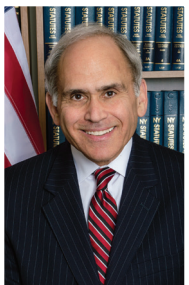
Getting the Thruway paved took a little less heavy lifting. In the spring, **I spoke directly to the Thruway Authority's Executive Director** about the highway's condition **approaching Exit 17 (Newburgh/ I-84)** and some massive craters around Exit 16 (near New Paltz). Almost overnight (actually, in just a few weeks) **the Thruway Authority got the job done!**



The repaved stretch of I-84

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