

# Legislators will focus on tight state budget

By Donna K. Drago

Jamestown's legislators in the state General Assembly were sworn in to begin a new session on Tuesday. The Press asked Sen. Teresa Paiva Weed and Rep. Bruce Long what their top priorities were for 2007.

Sen. Paiva Weed, a Democrat who represents Jamestown and Newport and is also the Senate majority leader, said that her seventh term will be more focused on the issues at hand rather than coming up with new legislation. "It's because of the tight budget," Paiva Weed said.

The biggest issues that she will focus on this year are coming up with an educational funding formula and reducing health-care costs for average citizens.

Paiva Weed said that a joint commission was formed last year, headed up by members of both the House and Senate and facilitated by a professional consultant. The commission is funded by \$100,000 approved in last year's budget, she said.

Legislators have been looking for a fair way to distribute state aid to schools for many years, the senator said, adding that she hopes to see an initial report from the commission in March.

Her other major focus will be affordable healthcare for individuals and small business owners, Paiva Weed said.

Last year, the legislature asked the state insurance commissioner to come up with a "reasonable" health plan that would not be more than 10-percent of the average wage earners income, which is about \$315 per month for an individual plan. The insurance commissioner has introduced the plan in the past

two weeks and is now working with the state's two largest providers to see if it is feasible for them to offer the plan statewide, Paiva Weed said.

The low-cost plan is about 20 percent lower than what is currently offered by the health insurers, she noted.

"I hear from my constituents all the time that this is important to them," Paiva Weed said.

Those who buy into the plan will also be asked to participate in a wellness program to help them lose weight, quit smoking and learn about the health issues that bring up health insurance costs for everyone.

Rep. Long, a Republican who serves constituents in Jamestown and Middletown, said he will not be introducing much new legislation this year, but will spend more time making sure the government runs more efficiently in light of the upcoming budget shortfalls.

Long said that a \$100 million deficit is expected this year, and the shortfall is expected to rise to \$250 million next year.

"There're two ways to look at this," Long said. One is to say "this is a disaster, and the other is to take a look at the structure of the government" and find ways to operate smartly.

In past deficit years, Rhode Island has seen windfalls, like from the national cigarette settlement, that put hundreds of millions in the state's pockets, but, "There will be no miracles this year," Long said.

The economic forecast is that "it's not the best of times," Long added.

Jobs and economic development will be key to bailing the

state out of trouble, he noted.

Quonset Point development is an issue that is important "to the bay, to the economy, and to our lifestyle," Long said. He added that he was instrumental in getting Jamestown a vote on the Quonset Point Development Corporation and that Jamestown should be vigilant in "watching what they do there."

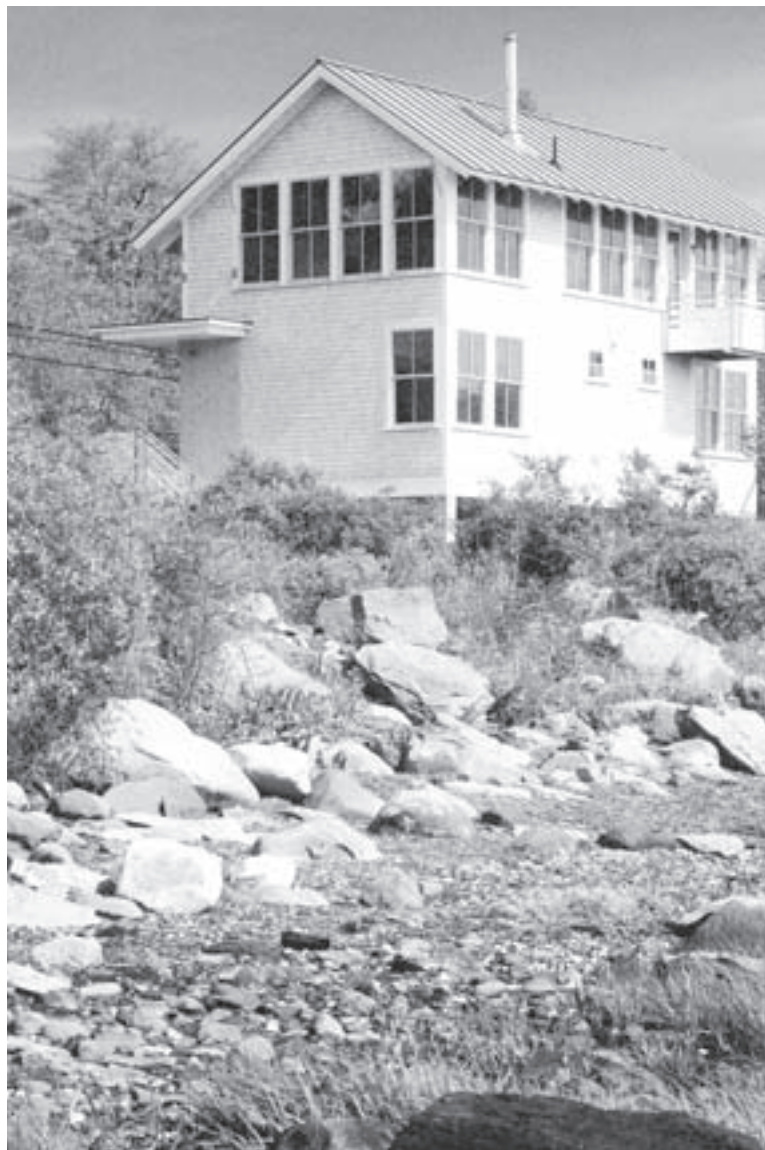
Pointing out that he attends meetings regularly to voice opposition for his constituents in Jamestown and Middletown, Long said, "I continue to oppose an LNG facility."

"I'm hopeful," Long said about the fact that former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney recently signed off on offshore LNG facilities for Gloucester, Mass., which means that putting one in Narragansett Bay will not have the same level of urgency as it used to.

"I've always said we need a regional approach to that issue," Long said.

On other issues, he said that he would continue to push for legislation that would eliminate cesspools along the Rhode Island coast, which contribute greatly to pollution in the bay. He also wants to continue to work on legislation passed last year that forces the state Department of Environmental Management to look at all abutting properties when deciding on septic-system permits, Long said.

The legislative session began on Tuesday and will continue through June.



Estes' Jamestown Cottage

## Architects receive awards

Jamestown architects Jim Estes and Peter Twombly of Estes/Twombly Architects of Newport, both Jamestown residents, recently won two Honor Awards from the Rhode Island chapter of the American Institute of Architects in the annual awards competition.

Twombly won for a new 3,300-square-foot house on the coast in Stonington, Conn. In this project, separate structures were laid out

along a stone wall with saltwater marshes along one side and private courtyards on the other side.

Estes won for a new house in Jamestown. The 1,400-square-foot, two-bedroom cottage replaced a fishing shack, which had formerly stood on the small waterfront lot. Traditional materials and forms belie a distinctly contemporary interior. The house was built by Jamestown builder Joseph Scotti.

## Doctor's office hit by vehicle

A woman drove her car into the front of the Jamestown Family Practice office Dec. 29 at about 9:40 a.m.

Lt. William Donovan of the Jamestown Police Department said that a 73-year-old Jamestown woman was pulling into a parking spot in front of the medical practice and apparently hit the accelerator instead of the break.

The car went over the cement curb-stop, Donovan said, and into the east side of the building.

Damage was substantial at the medical office, Donovan said, noting that two large windows were smashed and walls were cracked from floor to ceiling in a records room as well as in a treatment room.

Gordon's car had damage to the bumper, grille, and the hood, according to Donovan.

There were three people in the building at the time of the accident, Donovan said, noting that none required medical treatment.

The office closed for the remainder of Friday, Dec. 29, but Dr. England continued to see patients at his Newport office, said a member of his staff, who added that the office is fully functional this week.



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