



The Thomas Connection

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Building Bridges, Finding Solutions

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The Newsletter of Ward 5 Councilmember Harry "Tommy" Thomas, Jr.

THOMAS BILL PROVIDES TAX RELIEF TO SENIOR CITIZENS

At the City Council's April 7, 2009 legislative session, Ward 5 Councilmember Harry "Tommy" Thomas, Jr. introduced legislation to provide tax relief to the District's senior citizens. The "Pension or Other Retirement Income Exclusion from Income Tax Amendment Act of 2009" increases the amount of pension or annuity income excluded from the computation of income subject to taxation by the District of Columbia. The changes bring the District's taxation of pension and annuity income more into line with those of other local jurisdictions. Specifically, the bill:

- Raises from \$3,000 to \$10,000 the maximum annual exclusion for military retired pay, pension income or annuity income from the DC or federal government for persons who are 62 to 64 years of age by the end of the taxable year; and
- Creates a maximum annual exclusion of \$20,000 for military retired pay, pension income or annuity income from the DC or federal government for persons who are 65 years of age or older by the end of the taxable year.

THOMAS MEASURES AIMED TO AID SMALL BUSINESSES

Also at the April 7, 2009 legislative session, Councilmember Thomas introduced two measures to assist local commercial property owners, many of whom are suffering financially as a result of the economic downturn.

Councilmember Thomas introduced a resolution requesting that the Office of Tax and Revenue re-evaluate property tax assessments that have increased more than 25 percent between 2008 and 2009. He also introduced a friendly amendment to expand coverage of the "Small Business Streetscape Construction Real Property Tax Deferral Emergency Act of 2009" to include 12th Street, NE, which underwent streetscape construction during the past six months. The bill permits small commercial businesses located in active streetscape construction corridors to defer without penalty their first-half 2009 property taxes until September 1, 2009.

THOMAS BILL ENABLES PERB TO CONDUCT BUSINESS WITH ONE MEMBER

Councilmember Thomas introduced emergency legislation at the Council's April 21, 2009 session permitting the Public Employee Relations Board (PERB) to conduct business with one member. The bill, co-introduced with At-Large Councilmember Michael Brown, was approved by a vote of nine to four.

The emergency legislation resolves the impasse between the Executive and the Council regarding the Executive's nominees to fill the Board's four vacant seats. The Council rejected the Executive's nominees at the April 21, 2009 session because they did not meet the minimum statutory requirements for appointment.

The Board has not had enough members to conduct official business since May 2008. The Board's backlog includes more than 60 cases, some of which have been unresolved for more than one year.

"With a dormant Board, we have far too many important collective bargaining disputes and employee appeal cases that are without resolution," said Councilmember Thomas. "We have employees suffering extreme hardship because management is submitting appeals to a nonfunctioning Board. This emergency bill enables the Board hear these cases while the Council waits for qualified nominees from the Executive. It is a win-win for everyone."



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**KEY BILLS INTRODUCED/CO-INTRODUCED BY COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS
JANUARY—APRIL 2009**

Bill #	Bill Name	Description
B18-0018	NOMA Residential Development Tax Abatement Act Of 2009	Provides for a residential tax abatement program to encourage new multi-family residential development in the NOMA area of Wards 5 and 6
B18-0027	Library Kiosk Services Emergency Act Of 2009	Requires, on an emergency basis, the Board of Library Trustees and District of Columbia Public Libraries to maintain library services at R.L. Christian Library and Langston Library until a permanent alternative library site is determined, with Council approval, for each site.
B18-0076	Public Land Surplus Standards Amendment Act Of 2009	Amends existing city regulations to create standards that must be met prior to classifying public property as surplus; requires community input and adherence to federal land transfer requirements before District-owned property can be declared surplus.
B18-0087	Museum Of The City Of Washington, D.C., Establishment Act Of 2009	Creates a Museum of the City of Washington, DC to plan, develop and manage exhibits, programs, collections and related activities pertaining to the history and culture of the District of Columbia.
B18-0110	Utility Line Congressional Review Emergency Act Of 2009	Requires, on an emergency basis, due to Congressional review, the Mayor to bury all utility lines along 12th Street, N.E., between Rhode Island Avenue and Michigan Avenue in Ward 5, and for the District to pay to connect the utility lines to private properties out of existing funds budgeted for the 12th Street street-scape project.
B18-0124	Single Sale Of Cigar Products Prohibition Amendment Act Of 2009	Amends the Drug Paraphernalia Act of 1982 to ban the sale of individual cigars or cigar products intended or designed for use in ingesting, inhaling or otherwise introducing marijuana into the human body.
B18-0126	Single-Member District Residency Requirement Act Of 2009	Requires that only residents of a single-member district within an Advisory Neighborhood Commission may vote on official actions within that single member district.
B18-0141	Recreation Enterprise Fund Amendment Act Of 2009	Amends the Recreation Act of 2004 to authorize the Recreation Enterprise Fund to be used to purchase food, snacks, and non-alcoholic beverages for the general public, Department of Parks and Recreation program participants, and District government employees.
B18-0145	Hecht's Warehouse Economic Development Act Of 2009	Amends the District of Columbia Official Code to provide for tax exemptions for the Hecht's Warehouse development project.

**KEY BILLS INTRODUCED/CO-INTRODUCED BY COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS
JANUARY—APRIL 2009 (CONTINUED)**

Bill #	Bill Name	Description
B18-0176	Recreation Center and Public Library Municipal Parking Pilot Program Act of 2009	Requires the Mayor to create a feasibility plan regarding the establishment of a municipal parking pilot program on sites under the jurisdiction of the Department of Parks and Recreation and the DC Public Library, and that profits realized by the city from the pilot program be designated for those agencies.
B18-0177	51 st State Commission Establishment Act of 2009	Establishes a 51 st State Commission to conduct a full and complete study of the necessary and appropriate legislation and administrative action that must be taken in order to establish the District of Columbia as a state of the United States of America with all Constitutional rights, or to obtain full voting representation in both Houses of the United States Congress without designation as a state, and to expand educational and promotional efforts regarding the lack of full Congressional representation for the District of Columbia.
B18-0182	Food Stamp Expansion Act of 2009	Requires the Mayor to establish a job training awareness program funded by DC's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families for the purpose of conveying Categorical Eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ("SNAP"); requires the Mayor to establish the Heat and Eat Initiative as part of the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to maximize the allowable standard deduction used to calculate SNAP benefit levels by enrolling all SNAP recipients in this initiative with a standard annual benefit of \$1.
B18-0214	Greenspace Development Advisory Board Act of 2009	Requires the Mayor to establish a Greenspace Development Advisory Board to monitor current greenspace, recreation land, and parks in the District with respect to advising the Mayor and Council regarding how to best utilize, maintain, and enhance greenspace and recreational opportunities, particularly with regards to new and proposed economic development projects.
B18-0236	Elevator Maintenance Standards Act of 2009	Establishes a licensing standard for all aspects of elevator repair, and to set standards for the issuing and renewal of licenses, license revocations, and civil penalties.
B18-0237	Pension Or Other Retirement Income Exclusion from Income Tax Amendment Act of 2009	Increases the amount of pension income excluded from the computation of income subject to taxation by the District of Columbia.
B18-0238	Neighborhood Commercial Corridor Tax Relief Strategy Act of 2009	Requires the Mayor to create a tax relief strategy for all D.C. neighborhood businesses within a commercial corridor economically impacted by DDOT road infrastructure construction.
B18-0244	Public Employee Relations Board Quorum Amendment Emergency Act of 2009	Provides for a quorum of one member to conduct all business of the Public Employee Relations Board if there is a violation of the 45 day rule in establishing a quorum.

THOMAS DENOUNCES TIMING AND NEED FOR DPR REDUCTION IN FORCE

Councilmember Thomas, Chair of the Committee on Libraries, Parks and Recreation, was shocked to learn on April 24, 2009 that the Executive had moved to "RIF" employees in the Department of Parks and Recreation without an articulable basis.

Employees were notified on April 24 of the impending action to separate them from the Department with a 30 day notification. They were all placed on administrative leave, in which the government will continue to pay them for 30 days to stay away from the job. Employees with as many as 39 years of service received notification.

Councilmember Harry "Tommy" Thomas, Jr. denounced the letters of separation forwarded to career service employees of District of Columbia Department of Parks and Recreation. "Once again we are witnessing the flagrant disregard of our City's workforce," said Councilmember Thomas. "These are individuals with families, children, mortgages, and obligations. They are our neighbors and our fellow residents, and include many hardworking childcare service providers."

WARD 5 BUSINESSES SUPPORT OPERATION PRETTY AND POLISHED

Councilmember Thomas and the Ward 5 business community supported Operation Pretty and Polished on April 18, 2009. The event provided free prom attire and accessories for the Class of 2009. Ward 5 businesses supporting the event, and their donations, included:

- *Bennett Career Institute*—hair styling for 35 young ladies; hair cuts for 100 young men, and professional makeovers on May 22, 2009 for 35 young ladies;
- *M&S Barber Services*—15 hair cuts for young men;
- *Paris Caterers and Extraordinary Party Rentals* — 25 boutonnières;
- *Casey Kazemzodeh, Owner, BP Stations in Ward 5*—lunch for volunteers;
- *Dantes Partners, Capital Construction Group, and Hardlight Consulting*—gift certificates for 20 wrist corsages and 20 boutonnières
- *Petals, Ribbon, and Beyond*—25% discount on wrist corsages and boutonnières

"The Senior Prom is a special day and one that should provide joyous memories in future years. Hopefully, Operation Pretty and Polished, and the contributions from the Ward 5 business community, will enable our young people to look back fondly on Prom 2009 in the years to come," said Councilmember Thomas.

CLOSURE OF PUBLIC MENTAL HEALTH CLINICS MAY POSE CHALLENGES

Councilmember Thomas held a press conference on April 7, 2009 on the steps of the Wilson Building to highlight the potential challenges that mentally ill residents may face with closure of the District's public mental health clinics.

"I worry that the closure of our public mental health clinics may adversely impact the safety net that we have worked so hard to build up over the years," said Councilmember Thomas. The District of Columbia Community Service Agency (DC CSA)—the city's public mental health clinic program operated by the DC Department of Mental Health—has ceased new patient intake and has begun transferring patients to private mental health care providers. All patients will be reassigned to private providers by June 1, 2009.

"It is unclear whether privatization is truly in the best interests of our mentally ill residents," said Thomas. "Concerns have been raised about the reliability of the data on which the decision to contract out services has been based. Before we do away with this important public health service, it is imperative that we review and vet the data used to claim that taxpayer dollars will be saved and services improved," said Thomas.



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FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:
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