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## GENERAL ASSEMBLY

# Lamont lays out wide agenda

Lawmakers asked to solve some of state's most enduring issues, but GOP wants to hear details

By Christopher Keating  
Hartford Courant

From education to affordable housing to child care, Gov. Ned Lamont is challenging the state legislature to tackle some of the state's most long-lasting problems over the next five months in the 2025 legislative session.

Lawmakers began the session last week with high hopes of craft-

ing solutions, but the veteran lawmakers realize the difficulty of untangling a sticky wicket of competing agendas as scores of divergent interests battle for funding in the next annual state budget that is expected to reach \$27 billion.

Multiple mayors visited the state Capitol on opening day as they collectively seek billions of dollars in operational and bond funds for

everything from public schools to paving local roads.

Lamont called on the legislature to tackle the high costs of electricity, health care and housing in a state where rents and mortgages are higher than many others across the nation. In an unusual move during his 28-minute State of the State Address, Lamont called on individual committees by name and asked them to find solutions.

"Insurance committee, very few of the businesses and homes which

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Gov. Ned Lamont shakes hands with three-term House Speaker Matt Ritter, a Hartford Democrat, after giving his annual State of the State Address on Wednesday at the state Capitol. **AARON FLAUM/HARTFORD COURANT**

With newborns in Connecticut homeless shelters, and as frostbite cases grow for those unhoused in winter's cold, advocates compare situation to 'Hunger Games'



A person dressed for the cold weather pushes a shopping cart down Main Street in Middletown. **AARON FLAUM/HARTFORD COURANT**

# WHEN THERE'S NO PLACE TO GO

By Kaitlin McCallum  
Hartford Courant

The hardest part, Connecticut advocates say, is turning people away in the cold because we've "got no place for you to go."

This can be the reality, even as arctic air blew recently into Connecticut with its frigid temperatures, and Gov. Ned Lamont activated the state's severe cold weather protocol "to ensure that the most vulnerable populations receive protection from the severe cold, which could be life threatening if exposed to the elements for extended periods of time."

The protocol set into motion an all-hands-on-deck response system, coordinating the efforts of police, hospitals, homeless outreach workers

*"In parking lots, there are the families in there — three, four living out of the car. That's a sin in one of the richest states in the union."*

—State Rep. Geraldo Reyes

and shelters through the state's 211 call center. It also released some additional resources to care for people and get them off the street.

Yet the reality across the state is a system where providers say there are not enough beds, not enough services and people sleeping in cars, outside and with newborn infants in shelters. One lawmaker said of the situation that it's time to "find a moral compass for this state."

At the activation of the cold weather protocol, 5,486 people were recorded by name as homeless in Connecticut, including more than 500 children. Of those, more than 800 people were living outside, according to Sarah Fox, chief operating officer of the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness.

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# SoNE puts freedom in the hands of doctors

New option for those who spurn restraints of corporate medicine

By Kenneth R. Gosselin  
Hartford Courant

A physician-owned health network is launching a new medical group with an innovative membership twist: primary-care doctors who aren't interested in being independent practitioners but also don't want the constraints of being part of a big hospital.

Windsor-based Southern New England Healthcare, known as SoNE Health, said the new medical group will allow primary-care doctors to spend more time with patients enjoying some of the same autonomy as independent physicians without the headaches of negotiating contracts with insurers, dealing with government regulations and time-consuming billing.

The medical group also is open to physician assistants and nurse practitioners.

The medical group seeks to open up another avenue for primary care, often the first point of medical care contact for most consumers. In recent years, primary care has undergone a rapid consolidation as an increasing number of independent doctors and other medical professionals have become affiliated with big health systems.

"So when they join SoNE's medical group, unlike being tied to a health system or other organization that demands high productivity — the treadmill and churning out patients and all that — SoNE Medical really allows them much autonomy within how they do their medicine," James Uberti, SoNE Health's medical director and president of the new medical group, said.

Uberti, a physician with a master degree in public health, said doctors and others joining

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# More Christianity in classrooms? Trump's win may embolden some on the right

By Moriah Balingit  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Conservative lawmakers across the U.S. are pushing to introduce more Christianity to public school classrooms, testing the separation of church and state by inserting Bible references into lessons and requiring teachers to post the Ten Commandments.

The efforts come as President-elect Donald Trump prepares to take office pledging to champion the First Amendment right to pray and read the Bible in school, practices that are already allowed as long as they are not government sponsored.

While the federal government is explicitly barred from directing states on what to teach, Trump can

indirectly influence what is taught in public schools and his election may embolden state-level activists.

Trump and his fellow Republicans support school choice, hoping to expand the practice of using taxpayer-funded vouchers to help parents send their children to religious schools.

But there is a parallel push to incorporate more Christianity into

the mainstream public schools that serve the overwhelming majority of students, including those of other faiths. And with the help of judicial appointees from Trump's first presidential term, courts have begun to bless the notion of more religion in the public sphere, including in schools.

"The effect of even Trump being the president-elect, let alone the

president again, is Christian nationalists are emboldened like never before," said Rachel Laser, the president and CEO of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

Large numbers of Americans believe the founders intended the U.S. to be a Christian nation. A smaller group, part of a movement widely

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## In Mystic, a restaurant hits a Milestone

Milestone restaurant marks one year with "something for everyone," like innovative burgers, elevated pork chops and a popular pizza with a Golden Girl namesake. **Connecticut, Page 1**

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