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## State cuts \$155M in public benefits charges

Officials say consumers could save \$5 to \$10 per month on electric bill

By Christopher Keating

Hartford Courant

For more than one year, legislators and consumers have been complaining that electric bills are too high because “public benefits charges” have been added to their bills.

On Friday, the State Bond Commission removed some of the charges in less than five minutes.

In two votes with little discussion, the commission voted 10-0 to pay for the charges by borrowing \$155 million instead of having consumers pay for the totals on their monthly bills. Now, taxpayers, rather than ratepayers, will pick up the tab.

While estimates have varied, officials said consumers would save \$5 to \$10 per month on their

electric bills, depending on the amount of electricity they use.

Gov. Ned Lamont said multiple factors contribute to high electric bills, including increased usage from air conditioners running on a near-constant basis during the hot and humid month of July. The state, he said, needs an increased supply to bring down prices.

“We pay an awful lot for our electricity,” Lamont told reporters after the vote. “We bring in a lot from out of state. ... These are

short-term solutions to give you some immediate relief, and I’m glad people got relief. But longer term, we’ve got to do everything we can to reduce demand and increase supply.”

Republicans have been complaining about the public benefits charges, which showed up on bills at a higher rate in July 2024 — at exactly the time that bills spiked from heavy use of air conditioning. That spilled over into the fall political season. House

Speaker Matt Ritter of Hartford said that electric prices became the top political issue of the November 2024 elections. Republicans, however, did not gain any seats in the legislature and instead lost seats to give Democrats the current majorities of 25-11 in the Senate and 102-49 in the state House of Representatives.

State Rep. Joe Polletta of Watertown and Sen. Ryan Fazio of

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## Business invests to quell outcry

Bright Feeds spends big to install thermal oxidizer at waste plant

By Don Stacom

Hartford Courant

Odors and noise from Bright Feeds’ commercial food waste plant in Berlin drew a chorus of complaints from neighbors last winter, but for the past several months the controversy appears essentially over following installation of 35-foot-high thermal oxidizer.

The pioneering facility that converts food waste to animal feed is back to normal operations, and neighbors’ monthly grievances at selectmen’s meetings have fallen silent.

“It’s great. I consider this pretty much resolved,” said Town Manager Ryan Curley, whose office was inundated with calls and emails at the peak of the dispute in January.

The situation was a fairly familiar story for any community where industry is close to homes: The operations of the business began to annoy residents, and patience ran out as months went by without an answer.

But after some failed efforts with relatively inexpensive fixes, Bright Feeds brought in complex and costly equipment that appears to have curtailed the noxious odors and persistent industrial noises that drifted blocks away into quiet suburban neighborhoods.

“We knew it was a long road for the neighbors and we felt for them,” Curley said. “The council, the mayor, the state, the Central Connecticut Health District all worked together on this. But I give a lot of credit to Bright Feeds; if it wasn’t for them, we wouldn’t have had this answer.”

Jonathan Fife, the company’s chief executive officer, said the months of contention were



## A whale of a good time

Did you say the Hartford Whalers? Yes, those words still bring smiles in Connecticut, especially in Hartford. That’s exactly what happened when former players attended the Hartford Yard Goats’ eighth annual Whalers Alumni Weekend on Friday at Saint Francis Hospital.

**Top:** Former Hartford Whaler Paul Lawless signs an autograph for Linda Walker, a nurse at Saint Francis Hospital on Friday.  
**Left:** Former Hartford Whaler Russ Anderson laughs with staff at Saint Francis Hospital as he signs autographs with former players.

AARON FLAUM/HARTFORD COURANT PHOTOS

## More deaths, injuries to bike riders this year

‘An alarming trend,’ DOT says; more focus on e-bike safety urged

By Sean Krofssik

Hartford Courant

While the total number of deaths on state roads has been trending down so far this year, one number is up considerably: fatalities and injuries involving bikes and e-bikes.

“Wow, there’s something going on here,” Department of Transportation spokesperson Josh Morgan said, after seeing a more than a 350% increase in deaths.

According to the Connecticut Crash Data Repository, there have been six deaths in crashes involving bikes or e-bikes vs. an automobile to date this year. These deaths and injuries have occurred even as the state heads

toward new, stricter e-bikes laws that take effect Oct. 1.

“Six may seem like a small number compared to a total of 124 (deaths), compared to 166 at this time last year, that have died on the state roads this year,” Morgan said.

But Morgan said typically in mid to late July, there would be typically one or two bike/e-bike deaths in the state so far in the year.

“Seeing that number six is concerning, because we have a lot of fall left and people are going to be out with about,” Morgan said.

“You have the trends overall are positive. But we don’t want to lose sight that there’s still 124 people who have been killed (on roads), but the numbers are better than last year, but the

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Chef Brian Lewis. COURTESY

### Restaurant features nature’s bounty

Connecticut Chef Brian Lewis says his dishes ‘delight but also honor the ecosystem.’ Peterson gets his food sources from the shores of Long Island Sound and the Saugatuck River.

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## US injects new uncertainty in tariffs on 66 countries

Trump pushes back starting date as food prices poised to rise

By Josh Boak

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — For weeks, President Donald Trump was promising the world economy would change Friday with his new tariffs in place. It was an ironclad deadline, administration officials assured the public.

But when Trump signed the order Thursday night imposing new tariffs, the start date of the punishing import taxes was pushed back to next Friday so the tariff schedule could be updated. The change in tariffs on 66 countries, the European Union, Taiwan and the Falkland Islands was potentially welcome news to countries that had not yet reached a deal with the U.S.



Trump

It also injected a new dose of uncertainty for consumers and businesses still wondering what’s going to happen and when.

Once Trump’s planned tariffs take effect, Americans will see an average tax of 18.3% for imported products, the highest rate since 1934, according to the Budget Lab at Yale, a non-partisan policy research center.

Tariffs are a tax, and U.S. consumers are likely to foot at least part of the bill.

The Budget Lab estimated that prices will increase 1.8% in the short term as a result of the trade war the U.S. waged this year. That’s the equivalent of a \$2,400 loss of income per U.S.

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