

Under the State House Dome - July 4, 2004

**State House Dome:
Candidates eye different paths to balance budget**

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Thou dost protest too much: Last Monday, the Granite State Conservation Alliance issued a report card on Benson's record for his first 18 months on the environment.

The group gave him a C minus

Benson's camp wasted no time in responding. The governor called the report "a clear political tool." He issued a press release rebutting it point by point and citing "several inaccuracies and incomplete references."

One was the allegation that Benson had held up a federal grant intended to protect the Karner Blue butterflies near the National Guard facility on Concord Heights. Benson held back the contract for some time.

The press release said, "The funding for the butterfly program was approved prior to the report being issued," which is accurate. It was approved the Wednesday before the report was issued.

Another criticism addressed in Benson's press release concerned a section of railroad track owned by Guilford Transportation Industries that is critical to the I-93 widening project.

The governor's press release said: "The report claims the governor refused to acquire a critical link of railroad right-of-way in Salem. When at the time the report was released, that acquisition had been approved by (governor and council)." In this case, it's the Benson release that's inaccurate: Benson had taken the item off the agenda a good while ago, and it has never gone back on the agenda. Guilford recently sued the state over the situation.

The press release also addresses criticism of the governor's position on methyl tertiary butyl ether or MtBE. "The discussion of MtBE in the report is contradictory, using the same piece of information in both the 'accomplishment' and 'area of concern' category. The governor allowed the MtBE ban legislation to become law without his signature, because as an avid supporter of removal of the substance from gasoline, Governor Benson felt the time period allowed for removal was too long."

Even more complaints and "corrections of the record" followed.

Someone in the Granite State Conservation Alliance must have hit a nerve.
