

August 9th, 2015 - Kevin Witkos - State Senator from Canton, and a Deputy GOP Senate Leader.

Subject Matter: On this Dialogue edition Republican State Senate leader Kevin Witkos criticized a change in the way the probate court system works in Connecticut. The net effect of it is Connecticut winds up being the most expensive state to die in. Senator Witkos says that is nothing to be proud of. He explained that what happened in the recently passed budget is Governor Malloy removed all state funding for the probate court system and told them they had to fund themselves. What they did Senator Witkos explained is double the taxes that are paid on estates above 2 million dollars and remove the cap that was there. The cap prior to July 1st was 12,500 dollars, and now that has been removed. So Witkos says now someone's estate could pay a million dollars to the State of Connecticut if they pass away and had wealth in their estate. This was done to fund the probate court system, which costs about 32 million dollars a year. Senator Witkos says now there's really no incentive to stay in Connecticut if you have an estate worth more than 2 million dollars. He says he feels especially bad for individual's families whose loved ones died earlier this year with estates that were valued over 2 million dollars. Witkos says this is because the law was made retroactive to January 1st of this year, and now these families are going to get a bill from the State of Connecticut Probate Court System for tens of thousands of dollars that they now owe ... which they didn't owe at the time of their loved one's passing.

Senator Kevin Witkos told that for those listeners who may be thinking that those people can afford to pay doubled probate taxes because they're rich, you don't want to make it so onerous to force people like that out of state. He says before they die they may leave Connecticut so their loved ones aren't burdened with those high fees. Witkos also reminded listeners that 3% of the rich population in Connecticut pay over 40% of the taxes in the state ... so we can't afford to lose even 1% of that population moving to another state. He says this should not have happened where the state didn't fund the probate court system ... and instead they had to fund themselves with ridiculously high taxes. Witkos says imagine if this were done with the State Police and the State of Connecticut said we're not going to fund the State Police anymore. The state tell the State Police you have to fund yourselves ... and they start writing tickets left and right to fund themselves. He says that is a bad policy, but this Democrats' ideology seems to be creating new ways to receive taxes from people ... whereas Republicans say let's look at the spending side of state government and ask where can they start trimming so people

August 9th, 2015 - (Witkos continued) - can keep more money in their pockets.

On another matter Senator Kevin Witkos was asked about possible funding for Governor Dannel Malloy's 30 year transportation infrastructure program. He says he wasn't happy to hear about one of the ideas being floated about ... a mileage tax. Witkos says the mileage tax would tax an individual car owner for the number of miles that they drove their vehicle in the State of Connecticut via GPS. He says he doesn't believe anyone would want that intrusion and feels it would be very onerous.

In the past special legislative session the general assembly put money in the budget for police body cameras for the State Police and for some incentives for local police departments. As a former police officer Senator Witkos feels it is good for the state to provide some money for police body cameras, rather than mandate that towns have to do it on their own. As a former officer Witkos feels body cameras are there to protect the officers rather than harm them. He says these cameras show exactly what transpires in a police incident one way or the other and get past the he said/she said phase if it ever goes to a judicial process.

August 16th, 2015 - James Redeker - State Transportation Commissioner.

Subject Matter: On the show State Transportation Commissioner James Redeker discussed Governor Dannel Malloy's 30 year plan to upgrade Connecticut's transportation system. Commissioner Redeker told that the 30 year plan is a vision for what Connecticut's transportation infrastructure should be like. He says they listened to business, commuters, interest groups, truckers, and all kinds of people. Redeker says in the past the Department of Transportation would do a plan based on resources available, so it was constrained in its vision. She he says status quo would prevail with roads continuing to be in poor condition. Redeker says they never had a plan that had a vision for Connecticut's future. D-O-T Commissioner Redeker told that this 30 year vision plan is one where highways would be stressless, moving, uncongested, and predictable. He says the rail system would be expanded with high speed and high frequency services, and bus networks expanded across the state. Redeker says ports will be active and vibrant and Bradley Airport expanded with international and much more direct services. The state transportation commissioner says the plan also calls for moving goods by rail

August 16, 2015 - (Redeker continued) - and by trucks in a more efficient way. Redeker says this 30 year transportation vision plan even includes a focus on bicycles and pedestrian mobility and safety. So he says it is multi-dimensional, bold, and expensive ... a hundred billion dollars for 30 years. Redeker told that the governor proposed and it was adopted by the legislature a 5 year ramp-up. So he says that's a good kick-start to upgrade the state's transportation infrastructure with the 5 year ramp-up funding. Redeker says they are actually engaged to get more done, to get things done more innovatively, to get them done faster, cheaper, and to streamline everything they do. He says that is critical because if they do things the same old way it won't happen in 30 years, it'll take 50 years. So Redeker says they are really focused on delivery of this.

State Transportation Commissioner James Redeker told on the show their history has been in the past when they didn't have money to build things on a predictable source of money ... and with that philosophy things would just never get started. He says those delays were what really plagued conditions in Connecticut. So now in the 5 year ramp-up widening of highways, extending highways, planning for extended rail services, and planning for massive bus line extensions are all in there. Redeker says if we want an economy that is going to be growing, sustained, vibrant, and a place where people want to live, you have to plan the transportation network and pay for it over the long haul and not be totally reliant on federal money.

Commissioner James Redeker was also asked on the show about these improvement projects aggravating existing traffic congestion as they are built and affecting businesses in the area. He answered by saying first of all the existing congestion on Connecticut roads and inadequate infrastructure leading to delays is costing 4.2 billion dollars a year in lost time and productivity. Redeker says that's a huge amount that is only going to get worse if they don't take action. He says they cannot promise that these massive projects can be done without impact. Be he says they are trying to do things with the customer first in their planning, and coordinating all of their construction activities so there's an awareness and real time information about what's going on. Redeker told for instance the Arrigoni Bridge reconstruction project in Middletown went on almost flawlessly from an impact perspective.

August 23rd, 2015 - Richard Blumenthal – Connecticut U.S. Senator, (D).

Subject Matter: This week on Dialogue, Connecticut U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal discussed important issues including the Iran nuclear deal, and his decision-making process on whether to vote for it. He explained that very few decisions that he makes in the United States Senate will have the consequences, both nationally and internationally, that this vote and the ultimate result will have for our country. Senator Blumenthal says he was considering, weighing, listening, and learning through a variety of means on this important matter and decision. He says he's had classified briefings on the deal in Washington and discussions with administration officials. Blumenthal says he also spoke with opponents of the deal as well as experts on the matter like nuclear physicists and others with a scientific background. So he told that he's listening to a lot of different people and experts regarding the deal ... and ultimately his decision would be one of conscious and conviction for him. Senator Blumenthal told that he wanted to have the best information on what the consequences will be of the agreement that he says must stop a nuclear armed Iran, but in his view avoid war. He told that he did see flaws in the agreement, but what is the alternative he asked as the last thing this country needs is another war. He also told that the fact that 2016 is a reelection year for him in the U.S. Senate would play no role at all in his decision.

(Note: in early September Senator Blumenthal told that he would be voting yes in favor of the Iran nuclear deal).

On another matter there's a federal investigation underway, which Senator Richard Blumenthal called for, into possible collusion by the airlines in the United States. The feds are looking into whether the airlines are colluding to limit the number of flights and routes, so they can say there's an increased demand and they can keep prices higher. Senator Blumenthal told on the show that when people fly they see full flights with no empty seats ... and that's not by accident. He says we are also seeing fees imposed by the airlines that are skyrocketing for carryon baggage, checking baggage, Wi-Fi, priority seating and boarding, and preferred seating. Senator Blumenthal told that if you want to sit with your kids on a flight ... now you have to pay more. He says these incredibly increasing fees and fares are producing record revenues and profits for the airlines. He says deregulation of the industry a few years ago may be a contributing factor but he feels more than anything it is the consolidation of the airline industry with the mergers that we've seen. Blumenthal says there are fewer and fewer airlines with more and more

August 23rd, 2015 - (Blumenthal continued) - power in fewer hands, bordering on monopolies ... with the result being less choice and less competition. Senator Blumenthal says that's why he asked the Department of Justice to investigate this. He told that the fewer number of airlines the easier it is for them to collude illegally. Senator Blumenthal says fortunately the Department of Justice has responded to his call and is investigating. He added that he's also asked for the airlines to voluntarily take some action to reduce these add-on fees, and if not, for the FAA to do more.

August 30th, 2015 - Kevin Borrup - Associate Director of the Injury Prevention Center at Connecticut Children's Medical Center.

Subject Matter: On this show Kevin Borrup, Associate Director of the Injury Prevention Center at Connecticut Children's Medical Center, discussed back to school issues for children, parents, and motorists. Mr. Borrup told that for parents of children who walk to school, they should scout out the route that their child will take ahead of time. He says the parents should take a look at the route, make sure there are sidewalks all the way, and make sure there are lighted crossing areas, so that children can safely get to school. Borrup says children also need to be taught about how to walk to school and to make sure they use the crosswalks, and only cross when the signals allow them to go, after checking that all traffic is stopped before crossing. He says children should always cross at a crosswalk, never in the middle of the street and make sure they are not walking with earbuds in their ears distracted listening to music. Borrup told that it is good if a child can walk with friends, neighbors, and even the first couple of days to walk with a parent to school. He says that way they can make sure the child is familiar with the route and knows how to be safe crossing those roads. He says if parents scout out the route their children are going to take to walk to school and see there are no sidewalks and they're on narrow roads, Borrup advises that the parents might want to contact the school system and talk about having a bus pick their child up. He says if the route is not safe, then they should probably be bused to school.

Now some students may bike to school, especially if they are teenagers. Kevin Borrup told that they need to ride in the direction of traffic and obey all of the same road rules as a motor vehicle, such as stopping at lights and stop signs, and giving the right of way when they are supposed to. Borrup also stated that just

August 30th, 2015 - (Borrup continued) - as a driver in a car needs to wear a seatbelt, everyone riding a bike should be wearing a bike helmet ... and if you are age 12 and under in Connecticut you have to wear a bike helmet.

Meantime some teens might be driving themselves to high school if they have a driver's license. Kevin Borrup on the show told that a teen in the first 6 months of driving can have no passengers at all. In the second 6 months he explained they are only allowed to have a sibling in the vehicle with them ... but no friends. Borrup says we know the more passengers that are place in the car with a teen driver, the more dangerous it is because of distractions and the impulse by the teen driver to show off for their friends and take risky chances they wouldn't do if driving by themselves. Borrup says of course teen drivers (as well as everyone else) should also not be using a cell phone or any electronic devices when behind the wheel.

For kids that take the bus to school Kevin Borrup says children need to wait on the side of the road. He says when the bus comes to a stop they should wait until the stop sign on the side of the bus is fully extended before they enter the roadway to get on the bus. For motorists he says when those school bus flashers go on and the stop sign is extended on that bus they need to stop and be prepared to look for children. Borrup says if you are on any road, except for a divided highway, if you see a bus even going in the opposite direction, you need to stop for it.

Kevin Borrup says luckily these days there's been an increasing trend by school districts to put homework on electronic devices or kids being given light weight laptops to bring back and forth to school. But for those that still need to put books in their backpacks Borrup told the recommended rule is that a backpack's weight should not exceed 10% of the body weight of the child. So he says if your child weighs 80 pounds, then the backpack should not weigh more than 8 pounds to avoid injury.

September 6th, 2015 - Lori Pelletier - State AFL-CIO Leader.

Subject Matter: On this Dialogue show for Labor Day weekend the guest was State AFL-CIO Leader Lori Pelletier. She told that recently people have been more inclined to join unions. Pelletier says that's because over the last 30 years workers have seen their incomes stay flat and they have seen the super-rich get even richer. She says they are starting to realize that the trickle-down promise is not working and so they want to have a voice on the job with a union backing them. Pelletier says our society is driven by consumer spending and when workers earn more they will spend more in the community which helps everyone out. But she says over the course of the last 30 years American workers have been more productive ... but they have taken less vacation and sick time than their counterparts in industrialized nations across the world and their incomes have been flat. Pelletier says that's a very frustrating position to be in and so workers are now saying wait a minute, we want our piece of the pie ... we're due. She says if you are in a workplace and you have a union, you make more money, you have better security, you have retirement funds, and you have healthcare, which are all important to families. Pelletier told that companies still try to discourage their workers from joining a union by trying to divide them ... because they don't want to give up power over their workers.

Connecticut became the first state in the country to pass a \$10.10 minimum wage by 2017. Now there's a push across the country for a \$15 minimum wage. Lori Pelletier says she hopes that happens because the idea that people can work fulltime and still be in poverty is not something that America should be proud of. She says you have to pay people a decent wage so that they can buy the products that companies are trying to sell. Pelletier says studies show that if fast food worker's pay were increased to \$15 an hour people would have to pay an extra 10 cents for a hamburger. But in return she told those workers will not be on public assistance, they will be able to provide for their family, and that money will go right into the economy.

On the show State AFL-CIO Leader Lori Pelletier was asked about some large corporations raising concerns about business taxes just before the budget was about to be passed, with some like GE threatening to leave the state. Efforts are being made now to try and save GE from leaving the state. From a labor point of view Lori Pelletier told the thing that is so frustrating is that General Electric is not a poor company, in fact it's a very wealthy company that for years and years has

September 6th, 2015 - (Pelletier continued) - lived off of the public dole. Now she says they turn around and are pitting state against state, taxpayer against taxpayer, for their corporate headquarters. Pelletier says they complain that Connecticut taxes are too high ... but she says they pay nothing. So she says she guesses if GE is asked to pay a dollar, then it is a huge increase. Pelletier says she doesn't get how this is not considered unpatriotic what they are doing because they are really just pitting taxpayers (their employees) against the corporation (themselves). She says if GE wants to continue to hide all of their money offshore and say they don't make this amount and shouldn't have to pay taxes on that, then shame on them. Pelletier says that also shows what's wrong with the federal tax code. She says that should not be allowed, this poaching between states.

State AFL-CIO Leader Lori Pelletier also voiced their concerns about plans to cut 95 positions at 6 State Labor Department job centers in the state. Ironically this is due to a cutback in federal funding because of the improving jobs picture in Connecticut with an unemployment rate down to 5.4%. But Pelletier says it'll be decimating to those still looking for work not to have those vital services, such as resume writing, easily available to them with these layoffs. She says the Malloy administration needs to rectify this.

September 13th, 2015 - Benjamin Peters - Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Saint Joseph in West Hartford.

Subject Matter: On this show Benjamin Peters, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Saint Joseph in West Hartford, discussed the upcoming visit to the United States by Pope Francis. Professor Peters says Pope Francis is different from his predecessors and had brought a real excitement and enthusiasm to the church with his charisma. Peters says Pope Francis is not necessarily changing anything the church is teaching within its tradition, so it's more a stylistic change. He feels this has a lot to do with Pope Francis being from Latin America, not from North America or Europe. Peters says one of the things about Pope Francis coming to the United States is this will be his first time to the U.S. ever ... not just as pope. So Professor Peters says Pope Francis has brought a level of interest, spirit, and enthusiasm to the church that was lacking in many ways.

This visit to the United States is going to be a major one for Pope Francis. He is going to be in Washington D.C. meeting with President Obama, speak to a joint session of Congress, then he goes to New York City where he'll speak at the

September 23th, 2015 - (Peters continued) - United Nations and hold a mass at Madison Square Garden, and then Pope Francis will wrap-up his visit in the United States in Philadelphia with a huge mass tied to the World Meeting of Families ... where over a million people might attend says Professor Peters.

Professor Benjamin Peters expected Pope Francis in his speeches in the United States to touch on the theme of economic inequality. He says he expects the pope to make statements that fit in with the Year of Mercy that he is calling for. Peters also thinks Pope Francis could touch upon issues like forgiveness of women who have had abortions and also streamlining the annulment process. He says these would fit in with the pope's general message that the church needs to be one that goes to the margins, that goes to the people that in general have been left out of society or have been marginalized. Peters says if the pope were to deliver that message to the U.S. Congress it would have more of an impact to it. He told that he believes Pope Francis feels the church is not a club for people who don't need help, but is seen more in a medicinal sense and more of a field hospital for wounded people who can't do it on their own.

Professor Peters says that people are drawn to Pope Francis because there's a certain authenticity to him ... not just someone who is preaching a good game, but is living it. Pope Francis drives around in a little Fiat rather than a big Mercedes, he lives in a small apartment in the Vatican not a huge papal residence, he's a sports fan, and takes selfies with people ... a modern, but average guy pope that relates to common people. Peters says this isn't something that he just started when he became pope as a public relations move ... it's something he always did when he lived in Argentina. But Professor Peters says Pope Francis' style isn't one of chastising people. So he wouldn't expect the pope to come in and tell Americans what they should be doing ... but rather getting people excited and on board with this sense of mercy for those on the margins, not just the young, wealthy, and beautiful. Peters feels Pope Francis is comfortable enough that his message speaks to what the majority of Catholics are concerned about, which are things like economic inequality, poverty, and global warming. Although Professor Peters did say that these are the things Pope Francis is most concerned about for the "global" church and planet ... not necessarily what American Catholics might want to hear about, such as should women be allowed to be priests at some point, or should priests be allowed to marry.

September 20th, 2015 - Michael Lawlor - Criminal Justice Advisor to Governor Malloy.

Subject Matter: On this show Michael Lawlor, Criminal Justice Advisor to Governor Malloy, discussed crime data for the State of Connecticut that his office had just put out. He told that the statistics show a rapidly dropping number of murders in Connecticut. Lawlor says there were 88 murders in Connecticut last year and the year before there were 86. He says so far this year it is trending about the same amount. So Lawlor says it looks like for 3 years in a row Connecticut will end up with far fewer than 100 murders. Lawlor says that would really be unprecedented in the last half century in our state.

Michael Lawlor told on the show the number that jumps out to him the most is the consistently dropping number of young people coming into the criminal justice system as juveniles and as adults. He says the number of inmates between the ages of 18 and 21 has dropped 51% in just the last 6 years, from about 2,100 to 1,000. Lawlor says the juvenile correctional facility has a record low number of people there, 63. In juvenile detention, which is the pre-trial place for juveniles there's fewer kids there than ever before which is about 60. Lawlor says these statistics indicate that in the foreseeable future crime should continue coming down. He told that a relatively small number of people commit a relatively large proportion of the crime. Lawlor says if there's fewer people coming up to be career criminals then you can project there will be a lot less crime going forward.

Criminal Justice Advisor Michael Lawlor explained that the drop over the years doesn't seem to have anything to do with the economy. He feels a big reason is the State of Connecticut is doing a good job with curtailing what is known as "the school to prison pipeline." Lawlor says if you can change the rate at which kids are being suspended and expelled from school, then you should see 10 to 15 years down the road a real dividend of fewer kids coming into the criminal justice system ... and that is what Connecticut is seeing. He also says there's been an increased focus led by Governor Malloy in his 2nd chance society program, in trying to encourage the criminal justice system to focus on violent crime and guns, as opposed to nonviolent victimless crimes like drug possession. Lawlor told that in the past a simple possession of drugs had been a 7 year felony, regardless of the amount, regardless of the drug except for marijuana. He says Governor Malloy said why don't we adjust the penalty if it's just a simple possession and make it a misdemeanor, punishable up to a year in prison and get rid of the mandatory

September 20th, 2015 - (Lawlor continued) - sentence. He told that the law would stay the same for sale or possession with intent to sell. Lawlor says the goal is to have fewer people who are really dealing with a substance abuse problem ending up with felony convictions. He says it's the felony conviction that is a substantial barrier to getting a job or even housing.

Criminal Justice Advisor Michael Lawlor says another reason for the decrease in crime is technology today. He says it's almost impossible to commit a crime these days without being caught on a video camera. He also told that young kids use twitter and Facebook and other social media and the police can monitor those.

Lawlor says with crime being down in Connecticut the state's prison population has been steadily going down over the last few years as well. He says the state's prison population was nearly 20-thousand in 2008 and is now down to 16-thousand currently. He told with that prison population going down 3 prisons have closed in the state over the past few years saving the state money. It was pointed out that it's more costly to take care of somebody in prison than to educate them. Going forward Lawlor says they anticipate over the next couple of years the prison population will drop even more by about 2-thousand with 2 more prisons taken offline.

Now Michael Lawlor says there is one aberration in the state when it comes to murders and that is the city of Hartford. He says there is a spike in Hartford this year for murders, already surpassing last year's total of 19. Lawlor says some of it is gang related shootings, some drug deals gone bad, and domestic violence murders too. He told the governor assembled everyone together to figure out how to quell the problems in Hartford and feels there will be a rapid turnaround there over the next few months.

The State Supreme Court just recently ruled on the death penalty in Connecticut. The state legislature had abolished the death penalty going forward, but said the 11 men on death row would still be liable for the death sentence that was handed down to them. But the State Supreme Court ruled Connecticut could not do that, as it is 2 standards. Michael Lawlor also told the court found the death penalty really was a charade in the state in that it was never carried out, except for serial killer Michael Ross who waived all of his appeals. So now the 11 men who were on death row will be serving life sentences without the possibility of release and will be in maximum security.

September 27th, 2015 - Jonathan Harris - State Consumer Protection Commissioner.

Subject Matter: On this show State Consumer Protection Commissioner Jonathan Harris discussed the state's medical marijuana program one year after it began. He says the program has worked great with 4 companies that grow and produce medical marijuana products for the state's program, and 6 dispensaries across the state. Harris says there are a lot of people who are suffering from some really serious debilitating conditions and are now able to have the choice (with their doctor's certification) of medical marijuana and be able to get relief provided from the pain. He says Connecticut has a true medical model and it is not about legalization, as the State of Connecticut regulates medical marijuana like it would any other pharmaceuticals, and only licensed pharmacists can dispense the product. Harris says it was the first of its kind in the nation and it has gone exceedingly well.

Jonathan Harris told that what many people might not realize is that not all of the medicinal marijuana is smoked. He says the dispensaries have reported that less than 50% of the medical marijuana in Connecticut is actually flower that is smoked. Harris says the rest are innovative products like edibles, topical oils that you can cook with, things like Listerine strips that you can put under your tongue, another that you can use like a chapstick ... all of these medicinal marijuana products providing relief to people who are suffering.

State Consumer Protection Commissioner Jonathan Harris, who oversees the state's medical marijuana program, says the program has grown since its inception one year ago. He told that when product became available last September there were 1,681 patients getting medical marijuana in the program, and now as of August 27th, 2015 that number has grown to 5,357 patients in the program. Harris says they have been growing at a rate of about 100 patients a week. He says the number of doctors has also grown in the last year who can certify medical marijuana for their patients. Harris says there were 108 doctors participating at the start a year ago, and now there are 257. With this increase in the program Harris says they are also looking to increase the number of dispensaries in the state from 6 to 9. He told that since a high concentration of patients are in New Haven and Fairfield Counties they are looking to add the new dispensaries in those 2 counties by early next year.

Jonathan Harris says there was a lot of stigma, misconception, and

September 27th, 2015 - (Harris continued) - disinformation out there when the medical marijuana program started in Connecticut a year ago. Many worried about abuse. But Harris says the program has worked extremely well providing relief for patients who have one of 11 debilitating illnesses. He says early next year they will be adding 7 additional illnesses to that 11 and hopefully have even more success stories where people are finding relief from those illnesses through the state's medical marijuana program.