

February 21st, 2016 - Joe DeLong - Executive Director of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities.

Subject Matter: On this show Joe DeLong, Executive Director of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, discussed how cities and towns will do in this session of the legislature after Governor Malloy unveiled his budget plan. As far as cities and towns getting state aid, DeLong says CCM is hopeful that they will be held harmless, in other words not cutback in aid from what they've received the previous year. He explained that the big problem local cities and towns have is that they have no revenue diversification which is a huge issue. DeLong says communities have the ability to generate funds one way and one way only – through the property tax. He told that all of the rest of the taxes that are collected go to the state and then a portion of that money is returned. DeLong says it's called "state aid" but it's actually money that came out of the community to begin with. He says what they try to educate people on when there's talk about spending reductions in the state budget and shared pain, is that reductions in municipal aid aren't exactly spending cuts. The CCM executive director says they are just shifting a greater burden into the property tax. DeLong says to some degree they look at it as a tax increase because the difference is made up by a hike in property taxes. DeLong told that Governor Malloy is a former mayor, so they know he gets it, and they are hopeful even in these very difficult budget times that local cities and towns will not be hurt by cuts to state aid. They hope the state legislature is sensitive to this as well.

One thing Joe DeLong told on the show that local communities are trying to do more of these days to save them and the state money is trying to find more regional efficiencies and share services. He says neighboring communities are looking to find commonalities in areas of education, public works, transportation, and health to share resources and save dollars.

On another topic CCM Executive Director Joe DeLong was asked about a new proposal by Governor Malloy to shorten lines at Department of Motor Vehicles branches in the state. The state had just undergone a computer upgrade changeover at the DMV that did not go well, ending up with very long lines and long wait times. Governor Malloy, in trying to respond to public consternation, has proposed having the DMV stop refusing to give motor vehicle registrations to people who haven't paid their property taxes or local parking tickets. The governor says the DMV should not have to be the collection agency for cities and

February 21st, 2016 - (DeLong continued) - towns. He feels this would eliminate people waiting in line for long periods only to get to the counter and find out they can't get their registration renewed because they owe back property taxes or have not paid a parking ticket. However, Joe DeLong of CCM says doing that could mean lost revenues of some 40 million dollars to cities and towns if people are not forced to pay up in order to register their vehicle. He says the governor's proposal could be called the tax evasion protection act because it would reward cheaters and allow people to not have to play by the rules ... because if you allow people to register their vehicle without having paid their car taxes and tickets, then what incentive do they have to pay them. DeLong says that would leave a gaping 40-million-dollar loss in revenues collected and give towns and cities no way to make up that lost revenue. He says fortunately they feel people in the legislature don't agree with the governor either and also feel it's a terrible approach to reduce DMV lines.

February 28th, 2016 - Jeff Walter – Interim CEO of the Connecticut Community Nonprofit Alliance.

Subject Matter: On this week's show Jeff Walter, the Interim CEO of the Connecticut Community Nonprofit Alliance was the guest. He explained that this alliance is a major merger of two groups: The Connecticut Association of Nonprofits and the Connecticut Community Providers Association. He told they merged for the enhanced advocacy at the state level and to have a more unified voice for non-profits in Connecticut and to find a more efficient way for both organizations to operate. Mr. Walter says they represent over 550 organizations across the state that provide services in areas of health and welfare, human services, housing, employment, and arts and culture.

Jeff Walter told though that they are a sector that is under siege because of the budget deficit and the call by Governor Malloy for significant spending cuts. Malloy's stance is state government has to be rightsized and can no longer afford to do all of the things it has done in past years. Walter on the show told that in the 40 years that he's been working in the non-profit arena this is the worst budget for human services programs that he has ever seen. He says that is no exaggeration as the depth of the cuts that are proposed are unprecedented. Walter told the governor's proposed budget reductions represent about 400 million dollars to areas heir members are involved with. That represents 72% of all the proposed budget

February 28th, 2016 - (Walter continued) - reductions in the whole state budget ... so Walter says they are being unfairly targeted. He says they do agree that longer-term structural changes need to happen in state government ... but he says it can't be done in one budget cycle. Walter says it also cannot be done on the backs of people who receive the services by their members that can be the difference between life and death. He says at the very least their services mean the ability of these people to be independent and not forced into settings that no one wants.

Connecticut Community Nonprofit Alliance Interim CEO Jeff Walter says they have a disagreement with Governor Malloy on whether his proposed cuts would shred the safety net ... something the governor has said in the past he would never want to happen. Walter says they feel it does, the governor disagrees. But Walter says in looking at the hard facts if these budget cuts were enacted as proposed, then they are looking at about a 15% reduction in most of their member organization's budgets that are funded primarily through state funds. Walter says that is a big cut and cannot be absorbed without significant reductions in services and up to 75-hundred jobs ... which is a lot of people he says. Walter says that would have both an economic and human impact.

Jeff Walter of the Connecticut Community Nonprofit Alliance told that the state provides funding for their members to do their work, that if they were not doing would have to be done by the government ... which would make matters even worse economically for the state. He gave as an example the governor's Second Chance Society Initiative, which helps people who have been in prisons and jails transition out into the community to be productive citizens. Walter says that effort is totally dependent on the nonprofit sector to carry that load and provide the services such as helping with housing, employment, mental health and addition services and others. He says if these services are reduced, that initiative fails. Walter says they have no fat to cut and hopes the legislature will reinstate the cuts proposed by Governor Malloy.

March 6th, 2016 - Antonio Guerrero - State Representative, Democrat from Rocky Hill and Co-Chair of the Legislature's Transportation Committee.

Subject Matter: Transportation issues were discussed this week on Dialogue with the co-chair of the legislature's transportation committee Representative Antonio Guerrero. One of the bills before the transportation committee deals with allowing electric car maker Tesla Motors to sell their vehicles directly to consumers. State car dealers are opposed to this not wanting to be bypassed. Representative Guerrero told that they had a public hearing on the matter in which they heard from both sides. He told that he asked the question in other states where Tesla has opened shops, have they hurt any of the dealers out there. Guerrero says the response he got was no. Now he explained that we don't need 10 to 15 Tesla dealers popping up throughout the State of Connecticut. But he feels there's ways of crafting legislation that will allow maybe one or two of these dealerships in the state, so as to not hurt the auto dealers across the state. So Representative Guerrero feels there's going to have to be some compromise here, so everyone can win, and so Connecticut consumers don't have to go out of state to purchase Tesla vehicles.

Also discussed on the show with Representative Antonio Guerrero was something Governor Malloy is pushing for: a so-called transportation lockbox. This would secure funds for improving the state's transportation infrastructure so that those funds can't be raided for other things. If passed by enough votes in the legislature it would be put on the ballot for voters to decide whether it would become a constitutional amendment. Representative Guerrero feels though they need to carefully craft the legislation in a way so that it secures the money in this lockbox ... but he also thinks it shouldn't just sit there and balloon to the point where they have so much money they don't know what to do with it, but can't touch it. He does feel they need a lockbox however to make sure the funds raised are used to fix roads, bridges, and other transportation modes.

Another proposal by Governor Malloy is not going over too well with lawmakers and local municipalities. The governor proposed allowing people to still be able to register their vehicles at DMV branches even if they get to the counter and learn that they owe car taxes or haven't paid a ticket. Right now this prevents people from being able to register their vehicle until they pay the past due car tax or ticket. Governor Malloy proposed this after the DMV upgraded its computer system ... which did not go well with DMV customers having to wait in extremely long lines. But Transportation Committee Chair Representative Antonio

March 6th, 2016 - (Guerrera continued) - Guerrero told that municipalities are totally against the governor's proposal fearing that with no incentive to pay their car taxes or parking tickets without the repercussion of not being able to register their vehicle, that people would never be forced to pay them. He says most legislators agree. Guerrero feels a better way would be to outsource more DMV functions to AAA offices in the state. AAA already renews driver's licenses and he says they could also add renewing vehicle registrations to that to cut down DMV lines.

With Connecticut constantly in recent times running budget deficits, Representative Antonio Guerrero ... a longtime proponent of electronic tolling ... feels the state needs to go in this direction in the not too distant future. He says Connecticut is getting less and less revenue from the gasoline tax with the combination of lower gas prices and more and more hybrids and electric cars on the road. Representative Guerrero also feels that it's not fair that out of state drivers use Connecticut roads for free and only Connecticut residents are paying for their upkeep.

March 13th, 2016 - Eric Hammerling - Executive Director of the Connecticut Forest and Park Association.

Subject Matter: On this week's show Eric Hammerling, Executive Director of the Connecticut Forest and Park Association, discussed what they do and how they want to protect parks from unwise land deals and state budget cuts. He told that they are not a state agency but the oldest conservation organization in Connecticut established in 1895. Hammerling says they are dedicated to protecting forests, parks, walking and hiking trails for future generations.

Eric Hammerling told on the show that they have concerns about the selloff, swapping, or giveaways of park lands in the state for various reasons. Every year the legislature has so-called conveyance bills where a parcel of land might be given to a town or sold to a town or a business. Hammerling says their group feels these conveyance acts are far too reaching in having the authority to give these lands away. They would like a constitutional amendment passed to make sure when situations like this occur that it's done in a much more transparent fashion. He says they are most concerned about lands that have been set aside for conservation, agriculture, recreation, and open space purposes. Hammerling says the integrity of these lands should be respected before, for example, turning them into a soccer

March 13th, 2016 - (Hammerling continued) - field. Hammerling says they are not saying that a constitutional amendment would say that a transfer of land could never happen, it's more if it's going to happen you have to raise the bar and ensure that it's done publicly, with public hearings and a two-thirds majority okaying it in both the State House and Senate. He says he's very hopeful they can get this constitutional amendment on the ballot for this fall.

With the State of Connecticut running a budget deficit and the prospects of big spending cuts needed to close that gap, Connecticut Forest and Park Association Executive Director Eric Hammerling says the State DEEP could face cuts that affect how our state parks and campgrounds are run this summer with less staff and lifeguards. He says seasonal workers would especially be cutback. Hammerling says it's a shame and that right now the State DEEP has fewer than 70 field employees responsible year-round for 109 state parks. He says if the 500 seasonal workers in the May to October period are cutback dramatically it could mean park closures and some campgrounds not opened. Hammerling says this would be a real shame because the value of the state parks to the state is extraordinary. He says this would be especially distressing because for every dollar that's spent on state parks, about 38 dollars is returned to the state coffers. Hammerling told that over a billion dollars in annual revenue come from state parks with 8 million visitors every year and 9 thousand jobs are sustained by state parks. He feels there should be a dedicated fund for state parks so they don't suffer in tough budget times.

March 20th, 2016 - Mae Flexer - State Democratic Senator from Killingly.

Subject Matter: On this week's show Killingly State Senator Mae Flexer discussed legislation that she'd like to see passed this legislative session. One measure would prohibit anyone subject to a restraining order from possessing firearms. She explained that this is a really important measure to provide safety for victims of domestic violence. Senator Flexer says when a victim comes forward and applies for a temporary restraining order it's often the most dangerous moment of their lives deciding to leave their abuser. She says because it is such a dangerous time they want to see where it is required that the abuser has to turn over their firearms, because it is such a volatile time. Senator Flexer told that a woman is five times more likely to be killed if her abuser has access to a firearm. She says unfortunately Connecticut averages about 14 domestic violence fatalities a year

March 20th, 2016 - (Flexer continued) - and in those it's a firearm 40% of the time that's used to commit the homicide. Flexer says they need to close this loophole in victim's safety.

Senator Mae Flexer also told that as part of this bill that has to do with violence against women, it also looks to improve state law regarding human trafficking and sex trafficking. She says it would hold those who solicit prostitutes to the same penalties as those who sell it. Senator Flexer says most of the time now only the prostitute faces criminal action.

Senator Flexer is also leading efforts to pass the affirmative consent bill, that would make affirmative consent, yes means yes, the standard on college campuses when it comes to students engaging in sexual activity. She says this would be the standard when investigations of sexual assault on college campuses are done. Senator Flexer tells it would also require that all colleges and universities teach students about affirmative consent and what getting to yes means in a practical way. She says this can change the culture on a college campus, like it has at Uconn and Yale which already have this policy. Senator Flexer says it should also lead to a decrease in the number of sexual assaults on Connecticut college campuses.

Senator Mae Flexer told on the show that they'd also like to fix a loophole in current state law that allows a rapist to sue for custody of the child that's been produced from the rape. She says the only way the rapist can be omitted from the custody proceeding is if they were convicted of sexual assault in the first degree. She told that in many criminal cases people often plead down to a lesser charge ... and if they do then they could sue for custody of the child that resulted from that rape. Senator Flexer says they are trying to eliminate that possibility and make sure that a woman who has been raped won't have to go through the nightmare of fighting their rapist for custody of their child.

Another bill Senator Flexer has introduced this legislative session would raise the age to purchase tobacco products from age 18 to 21. She explained on the show that they know the way teenagers get cigarettes is from other teenagers. Senator Flexer says most people start smoking before they leave their teenage years as 80% of smokers start before they are 20 years old. So she says it's important to raise the age to get them out of the hands of teens and try to ensure people don't start smoking in the first place. Senator Flexer told that we spend millions of dollars in Connecticut to combat the effects of tobacco usage.

March 27th, 2016 - Rob Kane - Deputy Senate Republican Leader of Watertown.

Subject Matter: On this show Deputy Senate Republican Leader Rob Kane discussed the daunting deficit problems facing the State of Connecticut. Senator Kane told that while Governor Dannel Malloy has recently come to the conclusion that the economy has not turned around here in Connecticut, Republicans have been saying that for the past few years. He says during that time the governor tried to say that things were good and Republicans were just being pessimists. Senator Kane stated that the state has been spending more than it brings in in revenue and the economy has been stagnant. So he says Republicans have been very prophetic in warning that the economic climate in the state is not good and now finally Democratic Governor Malloy and the Democratic-controlled legislature are waking up to this fact ... albeit very late to the table.

Senator Rob Kane says now the finger pointing has to stop and they have to get down to the business of fixing the state's economic woes. He says the big key that Republicans have been clamoring for is that the state needs long-term structural changes so that they don't keep revisiting budget deficit after budget deficit. Senator Kane says one thing they need to do is open up the labor deal with state employees and renegotiate some of the benefits employees get, which are way too rich for this day and age and economic climate in his opinion. Governor Malloy has stated that state employee concessions are needed to cut down on the number of employee layoffs that will occur, with numbers floated as high as 1,000. Senator Kane told that Republicans would rather go with some layoffs, but get savings in other ways to limit the number of layoffs, by offering employees the alternative of taking furlough days without pay to save money. He also added that state government will also shrink through attrition with state workers retiring and those jobs not being filled. Senator Kane says that number could be between a thousand and two thousand jobs. He says if the Democrats in this election year put forth a budget encompassing some of the ideas that Republicans have put forward, then there could be bipartisan support ... but only if it provides real savings and is a responsible budget that put the state on the right fiscal path. Senator Kane noted they can't just keep kicking the can down the road ... they need to fix it.

One thing Senator Kane told on the show that Republicans will not go for is any new taxes after a couple of the biggest tax budgets that state has ever seen. He also told that Republicans are not happy about talk of cutting municipal aid to cities and towns. Senator Kane also discussed a proposed lockbox for

March 27th, 2016 - (Kane continued) - transportation funding to make sure that those funds are not raided for other purposes in the future.