

November 27th, 2016 - Tim Phelan - President of the Connecticut Retail Merchants Association.

Subject Matter: On this show Tim Phelan, President of the Connecticut Retail Merchants Association, discussed the holiday shopping season ahead. The season normally gets going with the big Black Friday sales the day after Thanksgiving. However recently those sales have been starting right on Thanksgiving Day itself with many stores opening later in the day. This year though it seemed like more stores were making a point of it not to open on Thanksgiving Day so that their employees and customers could spend the day with their families instead of working or shopping. Tim Phelan told that really, it's consistent with retailers' philosophy of responding to their customers and consumer requests. So, he says if you're a retailer that feels your customer base is not going to come out, then you're probably not going to open on Thanksgiving night ... but on the other hand stores that feel their customer base will come out on Thanksgiving night will probably choose to open.

As far as Black Friday goes the President of the Connecticut Retail Merchants Association Tim Phelan says the holiday season and the kick off on Black Friday is still a very critical part of the retail calendar. He says for the vast majority of retailers this is still a very important time of the year. Phelan says for brick and mortar retail stores the competition is greater than it has ever been, as they are also competing with online retailers ... not just other stores in their area. So, he says a good strong Black Friday starts the holiday season for retailers ... it doesn't complete it ... but kicks it off and gets it rolling.

After Black Friday, a rather new promotion is Small Business Saturday. Phelan says that is a small business strategy promotion that the Connecticut Retail Merchants Association supports. He says they feel it's a great event that highlights the importance of small independent retailers that are located here in Connecticut and nationwide. Phelan told that when analysts talk about retailers they focus on national multistate retailers and they forget the smaller independent retailer that really is the backbone of everybody's economy and particularly here in Connecticut. He says the biggest area for small businesses is small retailers all over Connecticut that make their communities come alive. Phelan says Small Business Saturday helps promote those retailers and hopefully brings that to the attention of the public and shoppers to support them ... as these retailers are under tremendous stress against online retailers.

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Meantime to round out the special shopping days there is the Monday following Thanksgiving known as Cyber Monday designed to promote shopping online. Tim Phelan told that Cyber Monday started a few years ago, purely with online retailers ... but he says now brick and mortar retailers also have a strong online presence as well. So, he says both have strong promotions to shop from at their online sites. Unfortunately, Phelan also told that Cyber Monday highlights the disconnect that is going on between purely online retailers and those retailers that have a physical presence in the State of Connecticut. He says those retailers that have a physical presence in the state are required to charge the State of Connecticut's sales tax, whereas online retailers (with the exception of Amazon because they have a distribution center in Connecticut) for the most part do not. Phelan says this is a big beef for brick and mortar retailers who are at a big disadvantage with this unlevel playing field.

As for holiday shopping here in Connecticut, Tim Phelan says the state has all of the major national retail stores, plus the wonderful local smaller shops ... so he says there's really no reason to go anywhere else for your holiday shopping. He says he expects the stores to be well staffed to help customers, and even though it is a hectic time, it should be festive not stressful. Phelan expects that the top purchases for gifts will be gifts cards, clothing, books, toys, Barbies, promotions tied to movies, Legos, electronics, jewelry, and don't forget food from food retailers for those holiday get togethers.

December 4th, 2016 - Joe Aresimowicz - Currently State House Democratic Majority Leader, and soon to be State House Speaker – (D) from Berlin.

Subject Matter: On this Dialogue edition Joe Aresimowicz, currently the House Democratic Majority Leader in the legislature, and soon to be Speaker of the House when the new session starts in January, discussed the new power structure in the general assembly after Republicans made major gains in the November elections. The State House of Representatives for the new session will 79 Democrats to 72 Republicans, and in the State Senate there will be an 18-18 split. Aresimowicz told that he really doesn't think things will change too much, saying that here in Connecticut 90% of the bills passed are done on a bipartisan basis anyways. But he says Democrats and Republicans will now almost be required to work across the aisle ... but added that's when they do their best work when they

December 4th, 2016 - (Aresimowicz continued) - do it in a bipartisan way. Aresimowicz does admit they'll have to be mindful of attendance and make sure when they bring legislation to a vote, that they do have the necessary people present to vote to pass it. But he says he feels good with the situation and told that he has always had a very good working relationship with Republican House Leader Themis Klarides. Aresimowicz says they'll work together to move the state forward.

Regarding the state budget, which has a big projected deficit of 1.5 billion dollars for next fiscal year, Governor Malloy made a comment that perhaps he could possibly work with some Republicans to get what he wants ... since he is more conservative than many Democrats in the legislature. When asked about the governor's comments Representative Joe Aresimowicz stated that he doesn't think the people of Connecticut care anymore about liberal, moderate, or conservative tags. He says they want people to work together to move the state forward. Aresimowicz says the people of Connecticut are tired of the fights they have in D.C. that have essentially paralyzed our government and their inability to get things done. He says people don't want to hear that here in Connecticut. Aresimowicz also said he wants a common-sense approach to the job crisis the state is facing, as well as the deficit. But Aresimowicz says as long as everyone is willing to work together, he feels titles and political alignment shouldn't matter much.

With the new session coming up, soon to be State House Speaker Joe Aresimowicz told with a projected budget deficit of over a billion dollars it will be difficult. But he says they'll make the tough decisions to put Connecticut back on the right track. Aresimowicz says the problems the state has have escalated because over the years Connecticut hasn't fully funded the state pension fund. He says ideally Connecticut needs to expand its base of taxes ... not by expanding the number of taxes, but by adding more businesses that will pay taxes. But until that happens to a greater degree he knows they'll be faced with having to make more painful budget cuts. As far as adding taxes ... he says he never makes up his mind before the budget negotiations ... so he would not rule it out. Aresimowicz feels they really need to find efficiencies in the budget. For instance, he says there are too many consultants and managers in state government that could be curtailed and save money. But again, Aresimowicz says they'll make the hard decisions ... they may not be popular ... but they have to be willing to make them to get Connecticut back on the right track.

December 11th, 2016 - Karen Jarmoc - CEO of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

Subject Matter: On this Dialogue show Karen Jarmoc, CEO of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence, discussed a new report that they put out regarding the use of emergency domestic violence shelters in Connecticut by people in fear of domestic violence. Jarmoc told that there are 18 designated domestic violence service providers in the State of Connecticut with 16 of the 18 actually having a physical shelter. She says the other 2 providers give safe home stays temporarily to victims in a hotel or motel, and then are transitioned to one of the shelters. Jarmoc says this has to do with space at the shelters. She told that any woman who is feeling threatened in a domestic violence relationship feeling they need help should call the statewide hotline at 888-774-2900. Jarmoc says it's a 24-hour number all days of the week. She told that they'll link that person to their most local program. Jarmoc says whenever someone calls that number they'll always get a live person who is a certified domestic violence counselor. She says the call is fully confidential and they will be able to assist the person in need.

In their report just issued, the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence says there has been a very heavy use of these domestic violence shelters over the last 8 years or so. CEO Karen Jarmoc says they are becoming increasingly over-capacity all the time. She says years ago there would be times when they had to use a family room or a children's playroom space to house a family when there was an overflow. But now Jarmoc says that is the constant state of being for domestic violence shelters. She also says that families are staying much longer and that's because families are coming in with multiple problems ... such as emotional issues and trauma where they need some behavioral healthcare and maybe even substance abuse help. This she says is in addition to the risk and safety issue of domestic violence which they have escaped from. Jarmoc says the resources to house victims in transition is getting more and more difficult, as the shelters were about 57% in use back in 2008 ... and now they are at 125%. Although Jarmoc says she's not so sure this is because there's more domestic violence now ... she feels it's more reflective on them getting the word out for where domestic violence victims can get help, and that this shelter network exists. She told when she came to the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence in 2011 most victims did not know where to get help. So Jarmoc says they started a fundraiser every year and then have done a huge push on information about where to access help and that has worked.

December 11th, 2016 - (Jarmoc continued) -

Karen Jarmoc told that all of the emergency shelters are at undisclosed locations in the state to protect these women from domestic violence situations. In addition to the women, Jarmoc told that there are also over a thousand kids at the shelters with their mothers who also need support. Though she stated that in most cases the kids are pretty resilient and often enjoy the family atmosphere at the shelters. The average stay has gone up for them since 2008 when it was 26 days, now the average stay is 46 days before they try to transition them into permanent housing.

Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence CEO Jarmoc told that while they do have some fundraising events during the year the bulk of the funding for the shelters and hotline services comes from the State Department of Social Services. But with the state in a very tough budget deficit situation they are worried about losing any funding. That is one of the reasons why they have released this report and data to show how vital it is to continue to get the funding for the domestic violence shelters and support services.

December 18th, 2016 - Alicia Woodsby - Executive Director of the Partnership for Strong Communities.

Subject Matter: This week Alicia Woodsby, Executive Director of the Partnership for Strong Communities, was the guest on Dialogue. She explained that they are a statewide non-profit, policy and advocacy organization that is dedicated to ending homelessness, expanding affordable housing, and building strong communities in Connecticut. Ms. Woodsby told that they staff and manage two statewide campaigns: The Reaching Home campaign which focuses on preventing and ending homelessness and building the political and civic will to do so. The second campaign she told is the Home Connecticut campaign which is focused on expanding affordable housing options and choice across the state.

Connecticut has become the second state in the nation to virtually end homelessness among veterans, which is a big problem nationwide. Alicia Woodsby explained that they define ending homelessness as making it rare, brief, nonrecurring, and being able to create a system that can quickly identify individuals who are experiencing homelessness and connect them to housing in a very short period of time. She says their standard is under 90 days. Woodsby

December 18th, 2016 - (Woodsby continued) - told that it's about creating a response system to have the outreach and engagement to be able to find and identify these folks and be able to quickly get them into permanent housing, and then ensure that they are not coming back into homelessness. So, Woodsby says while people will still continue to fall into homelessness, now there is a system in place to help them quickly. She says it's a response system that is streamlined, efficient, and targeted. Woodsby says they are doing that for those who are experiencing chronic homelessness as well, and for their overall homelessness response system in the state too. She told listeners that over the last 5 years they've transformed it from a disjointed system of shelters across the state to teams of providers who work in 8 regional coordinated access networks. Woodsby says they all have lists of every individual in their community who is homeless and they prioritize housing resources for folks based on vulnerability. She says they are on the cusp of ending chronic homelessness as well in the state. Woodsby says they are also making strides and working towards next accelerating ending homelessness with families with children. Woodsby says Connecticut is a leader in the nation on the work they are doing on homelessness for veterans and chronic homelessness. She credits Governor Dannel Malloy for being very supportive in the effort as well.

As for chronic homelessness in the state, Alicia Woodsby told that Connecticut has had a significant drop by 20% from last year to this year. She says the chronically homeless have experienced homelessness repeatedly over long periods of time and have a severe disabling condition ... such as mental health, substance abuse, or other chronic health conditions.

Woodsby on the show told that last year there were around 11-thousand people that experienced homelessness in Connecticut. Aside from people with health or abuse issues, she says many people become homeless when they can no longer afford their housing for reasons like a job loss. Woodsby says affordable housing is a big problem in Connecticut. She explained one needs to make \$24.72 an hour to be able to afford a basic 2-bedroom apartment. Woodsby also told there are more and more renters in Connecticut and less home ownership ... so there's a huge demand which drives up the cost. She says the Partnership for Strong Communities is constantly talking to towns about this lack of affordable housing. Woodsby told that it's not only hurting individual achievement, but also the viability of communities and the state's economy too. So, Woodsby says they are working with towns and the state in this area to get more affordable multi-family

December 25th, 2016 - (Krebs continued) - reported that there were 7,235 ignition interlocks in Connecticut being used. She explained the great thing about ignition interlocks is that it stops someone from starting their vehicle if they have a breath alcohol content of above .025 ... but also allows them to go to work and continue to go other places in their daily lives ... except being able to drive that vehicle after they've been drinking. Krebs says these ignition interlocks from July of 2015 to July of 2016 have prevented 58,197 engine starts ... preventing drivers from getting on the road after drinking. She says they can see that these ignition interlocks are working. Krebs says in the past when a person's driver's license was suspended 50-to-70 percent of those people still went out and drove under the suspended license. So, she says the suspended license did not stop them from driving after consuming alcohol ... but the ignition interlock does.

Johanna Krebs also told on the show that MADD Connecticut is also pleased they were able to spearhead another law that just took effect in Connecticut in October. This is the DUI Child Endangerment Law that increases penalties for driving drunk with a child under the age of 18 in the vehicle. She says that's a life-threatening situation and MADD is happy that the legislature passed this law and now increases the penalties for someone who would drive intoxicated with a child in their vehicle.

Meantime, Johanna Krebs told that MADD also combats underage drinking and driving. She says they have a youth development team that goes to communities and schools educating students about this. Krebs told they are extremely thankful for the Department of Transportation Highway Safety Office for providing them the funding to be able to reach hundreds of parents every single month through their Power of Parents Program. She says they educate PTA's and local school programs so that parents have the information to have effective conversations with their teens about drinking and driving. Krebs says 74% of teens says parents are number one on their list when it comes to engage or not engaging in underage drinking. She says teens are listening ... many times it seems like they aren't ... but they are, so it's extremely important to set rules and boundaries, as it could save their life. Krebs says the conversation also needs to make it clear for them not to get into a car with someone who has been drinking. Krebs mentioned that it also extends to impaired people and driving these days, especially with the opioid crisis in society, not just alcohol.

Johanna Krebs says they have an entire department at MADD Connecticut,

December 25th, 2016 - (more Krebs continued) - including 3 on-call victim advocates, 24 hours/7 days a week, in their Victim Services Department who help families and loved ones that have lost a loved one due to an impaired/drunk driving crash. She says their victim advocate is ready to talk 24/7, even on Christmas. MADD also helps them deal with the tricky criminal justice system, providing resources, or just being there to support the victim. Krebs says drunk or impaired driving is a crime ... and a preventable crime.