

August 21st, 2016 - Kevin Sullivan - State Revenue Services Commissioner.

Subject Matter: On this Dialogue edition Kevin Sullivan, State Revenue Services Commissioner or the State Tax Commissioner, talked about good tax news this time: Connecticut's sales tax free week. He told that while some states have done away with it like Massachusetts ... Connecticut, despite the state's budget problems, is still having its sales tax free week from Sunday August 21st to Sunday August 27th. Sullivan admitted that with it being an election year perhaps there was no sentiment for suspending it. He told that the sales tax free week is tied to the back-to-school shopping time ... but is open for all to take advantage of. Sullivan let listeners know that all clothes and footwear under \$100 dollars would be sales tax free during the week. (At one time it was under \$300 dollars, so there was a concession made there).

Commissioner Kevin Sullivan says sales tax free week is good for consumers on clothing and footwear under \$100 dollars where they won't have to pay the State of Connecticut's 6.35% sales tax. He told that it's also good for retailers, as brick and mortar stores use it as a marketing tool. Sullivan says they get people into their stores, which is especially important these days whereas they are competing with Internet retailers. But he also pointed out that online retailers that honor Connecticut's sales tax, also honor sales tax free week and don't charge the tax during this week. Sullivan told that this is the 16th year that Connecticut was having a sales tax free week, so it is very popular for both consumers and retailers. He estimated that about 4.5 million dollars would probably be lost to the state coffers as a result of not collecting the state sales tax for the week. Sullivan told that if the money was going to go into the state's rainy day fund he'd feel bad, but it wasn't so it would have been spent. So his view is let the consumers spend it instead. He did advise consumers though to keep their receipts to show that their item was purchased during the sales tax free week if they should need to exchange it. Sullivan also told that during the years there have been some people feeling the sales tax free goods should be expanded to other items like school supplies or even furniture ... but that has never gotten any traction and is limited to clothing and footwear.

On another subject State Revenue Services Commissioner Kevin Sullivan was asked on the show where the battle stands to get all online retailers to collect Connecticut's 6.35 sales tax. He told that it is not going well ... with the exception of some online retailers like Amazon, because they have a physical presence in the

August 21st, 2016 - (Sullivan continued) - state now with a distribution center, so they do collect Connecticut's sales tax on purchases, but many, many other online retailers do not. Sullivan says the problem is Congress has refused to act on it, and the Supreme Court has said that Congress should fix it. But he says Congress has shown no desire to force online retailers to charge state sales taxes. Sullivan says that is bad for the states who are losing millions in revenue, and for brick and mortar stores who are required to charge the state sales tax and are at a big disadvantage with their online retail competition. Sullivan did say though that theoretically all consumers are responsible for reporting their own online purchases or items purchased out of state and used in Connecticut where sales tax was not paid. He says that is supposed to be declared and paid as use taxes when state residents file their state income tax return. Sullivan says the state is considering requiring all online retailers to inform both their customers and the State of Connecticut of all the sales that they have transacted with Connecticut residents, and that info would give the State of Connecticut the ability to collect the use tax.

August 28th, 2016 - Amy Parmenter – Spokesperson for the AAA in Connecticut.
Subject Matter: On this week's show, Amy Parmenter of the AAA in Connecticut discussed many issues that they deal with. One thing she says they always watch intently is gas prices because their members care about gas prices. Parmenter says it's been a great year for gas prices as they went down dramatically. This summer, she told, gas prices have been as low as they were back in 2004, just over 2-dollars. Parmenter says the Triple-A expects gas prices to remain relatively low with a good supply of oil worldwide, and that they could drop even further with the switchover to the winter blend coming, which is less expensive. With the lower gas prices Parmenter says that has enabled people to get out on the road this summer and take motoring vacations in record numbers. It was also the 100th anniversary of the National Parks this summer, so people were able to travel to them without spending a ton of money on gasoline to get there. Parmenter says lower oil prices have not only translated to lower gasoline prices for drivers at the pumps ... but also to lower air fares for people flying. She says the Triple-A's travel business has been booming, with people flying to vacation spots.

Another thing that the Triple-A advises motorists about is new technology in the auto world. Amy Parmenter says they looked at the newly-developed automatic emergency braking systems that automatically slow down a vehicle. She says auto

August 28th, 2016 - (Parmenter continued) - manufacturers have agreed to make the automatic emergency braking systems standard in vehicles by the year 2022. She told there are two types, one that slows down the vehicle enough to avoid the crash altogether, and one that slows down the vehicle to lessen the crash.

Amy Parmenter of the AAA of Connecticut told that it's an exciting time for auto safety, with such things as lane assist and rear-side cameras being added to vehicles for safety. She says this is all moving quickly to autonomous self-driving vehicles ... and the Triple-A wants to make sure that it is a safe trip. Parmenter told that about 94% of crashes are driver-related, caused by something the driver did wrong. So she says if the driver can be eliminated from the decision making, imagine how many lives will be saved ... and the Triple-A is looking at the steps in that direction.

On the other hand, car manufacturers are putting more and more things into vehicles for drivers to look at like navigation systems, video screens, and touch screens, that can lead to distracted driving ... one of the biggest problems with motoring. Amy Parmenter says the AAA is weighing in on this situation on a regular basis and researching how these systems in the vehicles affect driving. She says Triple-A tests these systems that car-makers come up with and see if they do distract drivers' attention from the road ... and for how long. Parmenter says they also review what kind of voice systems work ... or are **less** distracting, as she says none are 100% safe at this point. Parmenter says unfortunately these days drivers on the road are always being distracted by something. She says a traffic culture study showed that people are aware that distracted driving is a problem, and that they themselves are distracted drivers ... however they think they are better at dealing with it. Parmenter added that it's not just teens that are doing things in vehicles that causes distracted driving, it's a widespread problem. However, she says everyone wants the same thing from the Triple-A, auto manufacturers, insurance companies, and drivers ... and that is to save lives and still get to where you are going to.

It's also the time of year where kids are going back to school after the summer. Amy Parmenter told that the Triple-A has been involved in the School's Open-Drive Carefully campaign for about 75-years. She says it's more important than ever with all of the distractions there are for drivers, and pedestrians as well. Parmenter says people these days are looking down all of the time. She says both drivers and pedestrians need to keep their heads up and look out for what's coming

September 4th, 2016 - Denise Merrill - Connecticut Secretary of the State.

Subject Matter: On this show Denise Merrill, Connecticut Secretary of the State, discussed concerns that have been in the news lately on possible cyber threats to the election process and whether or not it is possible to rig elections this November by the Russians or somebody else. Merrill told that there has been no real threat identified and that it's really all speculative. She says the FBI did send out a memo to all Secretaries of the State in each U.S. state, telling that there had been some ping-pong of voting data bases in some states and in two of them they actually got in. Merrill explained that the voting system in the U.S. is really 2-things: the voter registration list, which is a statewide database that is maintained at the local level, and is not on the Internet but on a closed system. The other part she told, is the actual machines that people vote on, which in Connecticut are really scanners that count the votes, and they are not at all connected to the Internet. She says they are free standing machines ... so when people talk about somebody hacking the election Merrill says there's really no system nationwide or even statewide to hack. Merrill says there's no way someone could mess with the results. She also told that there's a paper backup record. Merrill says any talk of hacker being able to rig the elections in November are unfounded. She says that's why it is so important for people like herself who work in elections to make sure the public is educated, so that people's confidence is not shaken in our voting system. Merrill says it really is a pretty far-fetched idea that hackers can rig it. Merrill says there are just too many safeguards in place for it to happen, especially in this big, but controversial presidential election year. She says if there is anything she might ever be worried about it might be physical intimidation at the polls. But she says there are thousands and thousands of jurisdictions in the country and they are all free-standing. Merrill says there is not a state in this country that does any form of Internet voting or even connectedness of the machines to the Internet. She says it's just not connected at all. Merrill added though, that this is a big reason why she is against voting online because then you would be susceptible to hackers, and that's why no states in the country have online voting.

Also on the show, Secretary of the State Denise Merrill discussed the new motor voter registration that the State of Connecticut has now finally gotten on board with. The state was in the process of getting it going ... but the federal government pushed Connecticut to speed up the process by suing the state. But now Connecticut has complied and when someone either gets a new driver's license or renews their driver's license, at either a Department of Motor Vehicles

September 4th, 2016 - (Merrill continued) - branch or a Triple-A office they are asked by the clerk if they'd also like to register to vote. Secretary of the State Merrill says in just the initial amount of time since it started on August 7th, 10-thousand new people have registered to vote ... an astonishing number. She also told that another 10-thousand people have refreshed their information, such as a new address. She says this saves people from having to go down to their local town hall to register. Merrill says it's convenient and a lot of people are taking advantage of it.

On another voting related topic, the Pew Charitable Trusts came out with an Elections Performance Index and Connecticut came out in the top 5, moving up in the rankings. Secretary of the State Denise Merrill is very thrilled about this because the index measures the ease of voting. She says they measure things like wait times and how easy it is to vote. Merrill says the State of Connecticut has made great strides in this regard with Election Day registration now and having developed an online registration system. So she says this is a good measure of progress the state has made.

Another responsibility of the Secretary of the State's office is to register companies to do business in Connecticut. If they don't do it, Denise Merrill's office charges them penalties. On the show Merrill says as a result they have just raked in \$1.1 million in fines. She says it's all about accountability. Merrill says most of these companies that have been fined are from out of state and are doing business in the state without registering in the state.

September 11th, 2016 - Joe DeLong - Executive Director of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities.

Subject Matter: On this week's show Joe DeLong, Executive Director of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities talked about how they've formed a new state-local partnership panel. He says it came after some of their members expressed concerns and frustration with the so-called MORE Commission that was supposed to spur regional cooperation and pool resources for certain services. He says while the MORE Commission was well intended it was starting to be used against local governments. So they decided to put their own panel together because they the initiative was good but they wanted input from those on the ground level. DeLong says they wanted to study this, come up with a plan where services could be delivered in a more cost effective and efficient manner. He says

September 11th, 2016 - (DeLong continued) - then of course there is also the funding side, trying to figure out how to pay for the services. DeLong told that Connecticut has the 3rd highest property taxes in the nation, and local governments are completely hamstrung with the taxing system. He says the only thing they can do to raise revenue is raise property taxes or go to the legislature for more municipal aid. DeLong says it is an unsustainable system and has been for quite some time. He says it really squashes job growth, home ownership, and is especially tough for urban areas because they have less and less properties that they can tax.

CCM's Joe DeLong says some of the things they discussed to pool resources regionally were to consolidate 911 call centers, open up labor contracts, and try to cut down on duplicating certain education programs, and office services. He says they were also looking at what they did well and what works well in the other 49 states...and what doesn't. DeLong says there are very few new ideas, as most of the time somebody else had done it or tried it. He says they want to look at what's going on across the country and make Connecticut more competitive.

Joe DeLong told on the show that while the fiscal situation with the State of Connecticut has gotten worse in the 2-years since he came to the state as director of CCM, the relationship in working with the legislature has gotten a lot better. He told that when he first took the job it would take multiple phone calls trying to get a lawmaker to call him back to talk about a bill that would have a major impact on cities and towns. DeLong says trying to get a returned call was very frustrating, and he had never experienced that before in other states where he's worked. But he says now they've built up relationships with these lawmakers and have a much better dialogue with them. DeLong says they aren't always going to agree, but says it's important that they turn the page after a disagreement and work together on another issue... and that has been occurring because they are all in this together.

On the show Joe DeLong was also asked about the judge's decision in the state education funding lawsuit. The judge ruled that the State of Connecticut needs to come up with a new education funding formula and he also addressed teacher evaluation, as well as some standards for high school and elementary school graduations. DeLong told that he was in the courtroom for that decision and he says it was fun to be there as he says he never lost interest in the judge's long detailed ruling. He feels that the judge to some degree blew up the whole public education system in the state ... and DeLong feels it was needed. DeLong

September 11th, 2016 - (more DeLong continued) - says he's not only the CCM director but also a parent with 2 children in the public education system. He feels Judge Thomas Moukawsher left no stone unturned. He hoped the state wouldn't appeal the judge's ruling. (But State Attorney General George Jepsen is appealing). DeLong however feels that everybody knows the state has challenges that need to be addressed, and the sooner they get to work on them the better the education system the state will have for our children. DeLong says their organization is willing to be a part of any committee and sit down in any room and talk to anybody and share suggestions and recommendations. He says it can't be about individual cities and towns, or about Democrats or Republicans, it has to be about the kids. DeLong says they need to come together and fix these problems for the kids and their education ... especially in the poverty districts of Connecticut. He says funding for education in Connecticut as far as they are concerned needs to be transparent, fair, and predictable ... and that hasn't been the case for quite some time. DeLong says state lawmakers will often change the funding for cities and towns after the local municipalities have already made out their budgets. He says it's like moving the goal posts in the middle of the game, and it's a terrible way to govern and set education budgets. DeLong says they know the state has a very good education system in the state's wealthier districts, but not in the state's impoverished districts. He says that's an injustice and needs to be fixed as soon as possible, which DeLong says should be done immediately following the election.

CCM's drug abuse prevention work group recently released recommendations for communities to follow concerning the opioid epidemic that's plaguing the state. Joe DeLong says this opioid problem doesn't affect just one city or town or one economic area or population, race or gender. He says anybody you talk to across the state has some connection to someone who has an opioid drug problem whether it be a family member or a neighbor, this drug abuse problem is prevalent right now in Connecticut. He says CCM realizes that it needs to be addressed with the right tools and resources across the board. DeLong says that means working with church groups and community groups, as it's not all from the government side in trying to get a handle on the opioid epidemic and leave no stone unturned.

September 18th, 2016 - Shawn Lang - Chair of the Connecticut Opiate Overdose Prevention Work Group.

Subject Matter: On this week's show Shawn Lang, Chair of the Connecticut Opiate Overdose Prevention Work Group, discussed the opiate addiction epidemic in Connecticut and what they are doing to address it. She told that this group got started over 3-years ago. At that time, she says legislation had changed to make it easier for people to have access to Narcan (Naloxone) which reverses an opiate overdose, but there wasn't any central coordination to get that information out to the public and family members. So Ms. Lang says they pulled together people from the relevant state departments like Public Health, Mental Health and Addiction Services, Corrections, Children and Families, Consumer Protection, plus people who work in treatment programs and researchers at Yale. She says they went to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner to look at opioid involved overdose death data from 2009 to 2014. Ms. Long says they found that there were about 2-thousand accidental and unintentional opioid involved deaths, which occurred in 152 of Connecticut's 169 towns and cities. She says the demographic breakdown was 70% male and 84% white, though she told that it does not discriminate with both younger and older people dying. Ms. Lang says 70% of those involved pharmaceutical opiates with a bit of an uptick in heroin involved overdoses between 2012 and 2014.

Shawn Lang says she feels people have a picture in their mind on who overdoses on opioids, probably an older guy behind a dumpster in a dark alley. But she told that 82% of those overdose deaths occurred in residences, either in their own home, or a family's or friend's home. She says this is why it's important to talk about this because it's happening all around us, whether people want to admit it or not. Ms. Lang told that Yale researchers made a map showing where the hot spots are where this is happening across the state. Ms. Lang also says that the Department of Consumer Protection just released an interactive map so people can find pharmacies that will prescribe and dispense Naloxone. She says their group wants to make people aware of Naloxone and how to access it.

Shawn Lang, with the Connecticut Opiate Overdose Prevention Work Group, says unfortunately opioid abuse starts off by being prescribed to people for legitimate medical reasons ... but people get hooked on them and sometimes make the transition to heroin because it's cheap and readily available. She says also troubling is there are some doctors who prescribe opioids as if they were giving out

September 25th, 2016 - (Kiernan continued) -

Mary Lee Kiernan says it's unfortunate that state government in their priority list didn't feel that promoting women's issues was amongst them. She says that's why they feel it is necessary to continue the PCSW as a non-profit, as there are significant issues around women's economic security, health and safety, and education. Kiernan says these issues go to the heart of the wellness of the population and our economy. She says to minimize women and girls is a step in the wrong direction and they want to bring that back into the forefront.

Now the legislature made a new commission – The Commission on Women, Children, and Seniors. Mary Lee Kiernan says the new commission has been tasked with overseeing public policy for not only women and girls throughout the state, but also children and seniors too. She says that is certainly an enormous undertaking. Kiernan says they'll also have to do that with a reduced budget and staff versus what existed before for those three populations. She says they are looking to partner with the new state agency and collaborate with them to move the agenda forward and pick up where they may not be able to address some of the issues that are on the PCSW's agenda.

Mary Lee Kiernan, of the new non-profit PCSW, says they are still identifying how big they would like to grow. She says they are fundraising from private foundations, community foundations, from individuals, and from corporations. She says there's a lot of enthusiasm for this effort. Kiernan tells that they will be lobbying for women's issues at the State Capitol with lawmakers, but are not a lobbying firm. She says they'll set their own legislative agenda that is independent of what may be going on in any given year in the general assembly and the State of Connecticut.

Ms. Kiernan says while the new non-profit Permanent Commission on the Status of Women is still organizing, she says they know some of the issues they'll be fighting for when the 2017 Connecticut legislative session gets underway. She says they will certainly be a partner in the ongoing fight to make Connecticut the next state to pass a comprehensive program of paid family and medical leave. Kiernan reminded listeners that Connecticut was the first state (with the help of the PCSW) to pass the right to keep your job if you are out on family medical leave. She says then the federal government passed it, as well as other states. However, Kiernan says only a handful of states have passed **paid** family and medical leave. She explained that this is an insurance program that is paid for by employees, via

September 25th, 2016 - (more Kiernan continued) - payroll deductions, not by employees. She says they are “blueskying” 12 weeks of leave with up to a thousand dollars a week in insurance that would help sustain these families when they are out caring for their loved ones.

Another issue that Mary Lee Kiernan says the new non-profit PCSW wants to continue to address that the PCSW was working on when it was a state agency is human sex and labor trafficking. She says they had gathered law enforcement and policy makers together last winter on this issue, and Kiernan says it became very clear that there was a problem with enforcement and not enough convictions going on which didn't make sense. Kiernan says there needs to be a more in depth assessment to pinpoint what the issues are and how legislation can address it. She feels the scope of the problem is vastly underestimated in Connecticut.

Kiernan says they also will be fighting for more rights for domestic workers who are under paid and work in conditions that are not appropriate and probably not legal. She says underpaying and maltreatment of domestic workers is something Connecticut should not tolerate. She told that in general in all walks of paying jobs, women still earn 71-cents for every dollar that men earn ... so there still is a chronic wage disparity that needs to be addressed. Kiernan told that anyone who would like to get involved by contributing to the new non-profit PCSW can go to their website www.ctpcsw.org or contacting them by email at: info@ctpcsw.org.