

February 15th, 2015 - Brendan Sharkey - State House Speaker, Democrat from Hamden.

Subject Matter: On this week's show State House Speaker Brendan Sharkey discussed the goal of trying to get cities and towns to regionalize more of their expenses to save communities money and also reduce pressure on the state budget. Sharkey is on the MORE Commission which stands for Municipal Opportunities in Regional Efficiencies. They have been trying to come up with ideas to make local government run more efficiently. Sharkey told that just as the state cannot be running inefficiently it also cannot afford to be subsidizing inefficiency at the local level. He says any opportunity they get to reduce costs at the local level they should pursue it. Sharkey for instance says on the education side there's a phenomenon that's occurring where even though school enrollments are down ... costs of education and education budgets are consistently going up year after year. So he says they have to make sure that they are keeping an eye on that side of the budget at the local level. Sharkey says he has had many towns and boards of education tell him that they welcome this because, particularly on the education side, there are opportunities for great efficiencies that they could be realizing that they are not.

State House Speaker Brendan Sharkey told that because Connecticut is made up of 169 cities and towns with no county government therein lies a lot of the problem. Sharkey says this is different from most states. He told that if you go to other states where they have county government a lot of the functions that are performed at the state or local level here in Connecticut are done at the county level there. Sharkey says that means local property taxes generally in other states are not as high as Connecticut's and Connecticut relies on towns to do more than a lot of other states do. On the other hand in Connecticut the state pays for school construction which is normally in other states done at the county level. So Sharkey says when they talk about the state's bonded indebtedness being the highest in the country that is why, because the state takes on county government responsibilities.

One of the proposals that State House Speaker Brendan Sharkey says they may consider this year is giving towns permission to separate the property tax bill into the municipal side and the education side so taxpayers can truly see what is being spent on what. In this process they may also give the boards of education the

February 15th, 2015 - (Sharkey continued) - power to set their own mill rate. Sharkey told that the reason why is because having boards of education and elected board of education members directly responsible to the taxpayers ... including being responsible for the tax bill that is sent out to the local taxpayer for the cost of education ... is a good thing. He says given the fact that education is such a huge portion of the local tax burden perhaps it makes sense for boards of education members who are elected by the public, to actually be directly responsible to the taxpayers.

State House Speaker Brendan Sharkey says there also needs to be reform on the way special education for children with special needs is paid for. He told that it is the most volatile part of every town's local budget. Sharkey says that's because they don't know from year to year whether a family may move into town with a child that has acute needs, which requires a very specialized program that is very expensive. He told this is an area that would make more sense to create regional programs for special needs kids and locate them in a centralized place where everybody contributes to the cost. Sharkey says then everyone could send their child to the specialized quality program and at the same time save a ton of money. He says this is something we should be doing in our state on a regional basis rather than town by town.

February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015 - Rob Kane - Republican State Senator from Watertown.

Subject Matter: On this edition of Dialogue State Senator Rob Kane, the ranking Republican on the legislature's budget-writing Appropriations Committee, gave his opinions on Governor Dannel Malloy's budget proposal. He told that transparency and honesty in a budget is something he wants to see as a member of the Appropriations Committee. But Senator Kane told that this is Governor Malloy's 5<sup>th</sup> budget and they find more and more things that raises eyebrows in ways the governor's budget uses to get around the spending cap ... in order to spend more.

When Governor Malloy first came into office he told that there had to be shared sacrifice on everybody's part with tax increases, a new deal with state employees' concessions, and spending cuts. Those actions were supposed to improve things and get Connecticut back on an even keel, but the budget is still

February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015 - (Kane continued) - coping with a large deficit threat. Even the governor's budget chief Ben Barnes told reporters that when he's feeling down, he thinks perhaps the Connecticut state budget will always be in a state of crisis because there are so many things the state cannot control the cost of every year. Senator Rob Kane says you hear around the State Capitol that it's "a bad budget year" too often in recent years and someone said to him that seems to be the new norm. But Kane says that is awful if that's Connecticut's new norm, because it would mean Connecticut has some pretty low standards. He says they need to right the fiscal ship long term and plan ahead and not just tread water all the time. Kane says maybe there is something structurally deficient in the way they operate. He says they need to look at the size of government, the amount of programs they pursue, and the amount of initiatives the governor puts forward and take a hard look at all of that ... because the economy is not great. Senator Kane says the State of Connecticut is in a constant peril of bad budget deficits and there's nothing they are doing to fix that long-term.

The governor's budget is 40 billion dollars and with budget deficits looming no doubt tough spending cuts will have to be made. Senator Rob Kane on the show says he's got some areas where the state can save money. He told that a perfect example is in the Department of Children and Families where there's 30 million dollars in administrative salaries alone. He says he'd like to see more social workers and people providing services on the street rather than bureaucrats sitting in Hartford. Kane says many of these agencies are top heavy. He says in the governor's budget office there's well over a hundred people making 6-figures... so there are certainly places to cut. Kane says Governor Malloy told that if anyone has suggestions he'd listen to them. He says if Republicans bring him ideas he hopes Governor Malloy will be receptive to them and not close them out of the room because they have plenty of ideas on where to cut.

One of the big things the governor talked about in his budget address was a 30 year overall transportation plan for the state to improve transportation in all areas. It has a 5 year ramp-up, but as Senator Rob Kane told on the show there is no funding mechanism for the governor's plan. Instead the governor will put together a bipartisan panel to come up with a plan to fund his transportation plan. Senator Kane says there's no doubt Connecticut needs to upgrade its transportation infrastructure with heavy congestion on its major highways during drive time.

March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 - Karen Jarmoc - CEO of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

Subject Matter: On this week's show Karen Jarmoc, CEO of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence, discussed strategies to lower the risk of domestic violence. One bill before the legislature that the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence is looking to get passed deals with guns tied to restraining orders. Ms. Jarmoc explained that when one applies for a restraining order an ex parte order is granted in many cases which is available for a 2-week timeframe ... followed by a permanent hearing. She told however that this is a very dangerous time for victims of domestic violence. Therefore Jarmoc says legislation has been introduced that would remove firearms in the case of even an ex parte order. She says there's no problem when a permanent order is in place because firearms are absolutely removed with 2 business days. But Jarmoc told that even for just that 2-week timeframe it is an enormously dangerous time. She says just access to firearms increases the chance of lethality for a victim of domestic violence by 5 times. Jarmoc says the guns would be turned over to a local law enforcement agency, and if after the permanent hearing the order is not granted then the individual would get their firearms back. But she says this is about victims' safety because women have been killed during this 2-week waiting period. Jarmoc says they are encouraged this legislation will pass.

Karen Jarmoc on the show also discussed the re-launch of a mobile app for teens with dating advice called TD411. She told that they had first initiated this back in the spring of 2011 and now they have improved it. Jarmoc says it is a free confidential app for Droid and iPhones and talks about healthy relationships and gives resources and opportunities for help. She says teens have their own way of talking with each other through technology. However she says while a teen might find it flattering that their boyfriend or girlfriend is texting them 40 times a day and wanting to know what they are wearing and who they are talking to ... that can actually be controlling behavior and an element of an unhealthy relationship. Jarmoc says through this app they can talk to teenagers and prevent these kinds of circumstances before they can more fully occur into adulthood. She says the app identifies some of the behaviors that are not appropriate and should be warning signs and hopefully teens will use this app as a tool for healthier relationships and recognize ones that are not. Jarmoc says for a teen that is in an unhealthy

March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 - (Jarmoc continued) - relationship the app allows the teen to click on what town they live in or where they'd like to seek help and can link them to the most local domestic violence program with a counselor to talk to ... which is free and confidential. Jarmoc told that the TD411 app can be gotten at [td411.org](http://td411.org) site or at their site [www.ctcadv.org](http://www.ctcadv.org).

Karen Jarmoc says domestic violence is still a problem in Connecticut with 40-thousand arrests a year. She says the NFL Ray Rice incident where the player punched and knocked out his future wife in an elevator and the way the NFL bungled handling it has helped to raise awareness on the issue. But Jarmoc says that anyone who feels they are in an abusive relationship should call the statewide hotline for help at 888-774-2900.

March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015 - Beth Bye - State Senator from West Hartford, and Co-Chair of the Legislature's Appropriations Committee.

Subject Matter: On this week's show West Hartford State Senator Beth Bye, who is Cho-Chair of the legislature's budget writing Appropriations Committee, discussed Governor Dannel Malloy's budget proposal. Senator Bye told that overall it wasn't a happy day when the governor spelled out his budget proposal. She says when you look at the cuts proposed it signals to her that they are going to have some really hard choices to make. Senator Bye says she was happy about Governor Malloy's focus on the state's transportation infrastructure and his second chance society proposal for offenses that are non-violent. But aside from that Senator Bye says it was not a happy day because the budget is pretty bleak.

Senator Beth Bye's Appropriations Committee has been holding hearings on the governor's proposed budget. She says they have had hundreds and hundreds of people come testify before them on different parts of the budget. Bye says she was particularly impressed by college students coming before the committee to say please don't cut their budget and financial aid as it will increase their tuition. But more than their comments told Bye, it was the way they conducted themselves. She says they were prepared, passionate, and respectful. Senator Bye says it's a tough situation because they are big cuts and they don't really have the dollars ... but it was really heartening to see the kids voice their concerns to hopefully make a

March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015 - (Bye continued) - difference. Meantime another night for budget hearings was a much more difficult one when the human services hearing was held and they had over 200 people come out to testify. Senator Bye says they told the committee they were worried about the impact of the budget on their healthcare, their housing, and their mental health. She says 5 or 6 people cried as they told stories about losing respite dollars when they have a spouse with Alzheimer's disease, but they still have to get to work and do errands and can't leave their spouse alone. Senator Bye says it's stories like that where the state budget is meaningful in people's everyday lives and people depend on things like Alzheimer's respite and medical reimbursement rates that allows them to find a doctor who will actually see them. Senator Bye says they also heard very moving testimony from people who work at nursing homes. She says these hearings put a human face on who the cuts would impact and shows that the programs they fund are important. So Bye says these are very difficult budget times.

Back on the education element of the budget Senator Beth Bye told that Uconn President Susan Herbst testified about what the negative impact of the cuts would mean and could undo a lot of the progress that's been made. Senator Bye says as a policymaker she views it that the future of the State of Connecticut is finding ways to get and keep young people here as the Northeast is the oldest region in the country. Bye says we need young people to fill the really good jobs that we have here. She explained that the expansion of Uconn was not just about getting more students into Uconn, it was trying to keep it affordable and keeping students when they graduate in Connecticut. Senator Bye says it was part of a broad economic development strategy so she knows that it's got to be discouraging for President Herbst to be part of growing something that is supporting the whole state and then feeling the pullback. So there are a lot of hard choices to make with the budget ... and there's probably going to be a lot of unhappy people says Bye.

On the local level Senator Beth Bye is also concerned that charter and magnet schools are getting funded at the expense of public schools. She says the Education Cost Sharing Formula in Connecticut has to be changed. Bye says it's totally inequitable with 40 towns getting more than 100% of what they should get and 19 towns getting less than 50%. She says the state needs a better plan for school funding.

March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015 - Doug Schwartz - Director of the Quinnipiac University Poll.

Subject Matter: On this Dialogue edition Quinnipiac University Poll Director Doug Schwartz discussed some new polls that they had just taken. One of them was on Governor Dannel Malloy who was re-elected in this past November's election. But Q-Poll Director Doug Schwartz says Malloy is getting off to a rough start in his second term. He told that while Malloy has never been all that popular, their new Q-Poll shows that more voters have a negative opinion of him than have a positive one. Schwartz says only 43% of voters approve of the job that Governor Malloy is doing while 47% disapprove. With that being the case one would ask if Malloy is unpopular how did he ever get re-elected? Schwartz told the reason why is that the Republican candidate Tom Foley was even more unpopular than Dan Malloy. So Schwartz says people did not want to vote for Foley even though they weren't wild about Malloy. He noted that Governor Malloy hasn't been too popular right from the start when he raised taxes right in his first year in office. Schwartz however says it is better if the governor was more popular in order to get the legislature to pass his programs. He says the more popular you are as governor the more influence you are going to have over the state legislators. Schwartz also told in their poll they asked voters if Governor Malloy understands the needs and problems of people like you ... and he only scored in the 40's on that question ... one where Democrats normally score very high. So voters don't feel Malloy is an empathetic governor. On the other hand voters felt Governor Malloy did handle the state's snowstorms very well and gave him good marks for leadership qualities, though they don't like his policies. Schwartz says there's still a lot of economic anxiety with 2-thirds feeling the economy is in bad shape and only 1 in 5 feeling it is getting better.

In the latest Q-Polls they also polled on issues and one of those was on casinos. The two Native American Indian tribes – the Mashantucket Pequots and Mohegans – are working with Democratic legislative leaders to pass a bill that would allow for as many as 3 new smaller casinos to be built in the state to stave off competition from neighboring states. Doug Schwartz says they asked voters about casinos. He told that most voters thought having the 2 current casinos (Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun) was good for the State of Connecticut. But he told when asked if voters would like to see more casinos in the state the answer was a resounding no. So Schwartz says lawmakers will have to sell the idea that in order

March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015 - Ronald Thomas - Director of Public Policy and Advocacy for the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities.

Subject Matter: On this show Ronald Thomas, the Director of Policy and Advocacy for the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, discussed what cities and towns will be seeking from the state for aid in this difficult budget period. He told that Governor Malloy, a former mayor of Stamford, has flat-funded major grants for cities and towns. Thomas says the governor knows that if cities and towns don't get the aid it will mean an increase in property taxes across the state. But he says they do have concerns about the PILOT program (Payment in Lieu of Taxes for state property, colleges, and hospitals) not being fully funded. Thomas says there are some shifts which cause some towns to get a little more while others get less. He says 70 towns are getting less and some of those are amongst the state's poorest including Hartford getting 2.5 million less, New Haven 1.2 million less, and so it causes them great concern. Thomas says these are real significant cuts that can mean a difference between adequate or inadequate services such as a quality education and safe roads. He says they are making that argument to legislative leaders in the legislature with the hope they will restore that funding.

Another big issue for smaller municipalities is the cost for resident state troopers. Right now towns pay about 70% of the cost for the troopers with the state picking up the other 30%. Governor Malloy says it is a tight budget year and they are going to have to ask the towns to pick up the full 100% of that cost. Ronald Thomas of CCM says they are not happy about this. He says these are small towns and CCM estimates that this is going to cost each town between 100-to-300-thousand dollars. He says that is a lot for these smaller challenged communities.

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities has also been wrangling over cost with the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection on new stormwater treatment regulations. The DEEP wanted towns to do more in terms of protecting stormwater. They wanted towns to do things like street sweeping more frequently and cleaning out catch basins on a more frequent basis. Ronald Thomas says they are still negotiating with the state on this. They feel it shouldn't be left to one town and the property taxpayers of a particular town to have to fund cleanup. Thomas says it's a state issue and they feel the state should not go beyond what is



March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015 - (Thomas continued) - required by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency. Thomas says they did a survey and the DEEP's original proposal was going to cost towns and cities over 100-million dollars. So he says they are having discussions with DEEP about it ... but also with legislative leaders as CCM feels permits like this that have a great fiscal impact should not be enacted outside of the legislature. Thomas says municipalities are as concerned about the environment as anybody but they are also concerned about the impact on property taxpayers and that it shouldn't just be the property taxpayers in a particular town.

One of the big problems municipalities have had over the years with the State of Connecticut is over state required mandates. In a lot of these the state thinks it's a good idea that all cities and towns comply on something passed but don't give them the dollars to do it, rather putting the cost on the backs of the local municipalities. CCM's Ronald Thomas told on the show that there are over 12-hundred unfunded state mandates placed on towns and cities. One of the ones they are trying to get rid of told Thomas is the mandate that all legal notices must be posted in full in newspapers, costing 5 to 6 million dollars a year. He says in this day and age every town has an online website where it could be posted or at the very least just a notice could be put in the local newspaper saying that the full text can be found on the town's website which would save them money. Thomas says they know that many lawmakers are reluctant to change this because it does provide a hurting newspaper industry these days with the much needed revenue. However the Director of Public Policy and Advocacy for the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities Ronald Thomas says it shouldn't have to be the job of towns and cities to prop up the newspaper industry fiscally.

March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015 - Antonio Guerrero - State Representative (D) from Rocky Hill and Co-Chair of the Legislature's Transportation Committee.

Subject Matter: On this show State Representative Antonio Guerrero, who is co-chair of the legislature's Transportation Committee, discussed the outlook for having electronic tolls in Connecticut. He told that their Transportation Committee voted out the bill by a count of 18 to 13 and is sending it to the full legislature to consider. Representative Guerrero says the legislation basically gives them all options to look at which include: border tolls, congestive pricing, tolls within the State of Connecticut, and also talks about having a "lock box" to make sure that any revenues generated by electronic tolls would be used specifically for repairing Connecticut's roads and bridges.

Representative Antonio Guerrero explained that the option of border tolls would obviously be put at the border towns that affect I-95, I-91, I-84, and a couple of roads near the Rhode Island border as well. He says he personally has always been a proponent of border tolls because Connecticut is a cut-through state for motorists who drive from New York to Massachusetts and vice-versa and these out of state drivers don't pay anything to use Connecticut's roads. Meantime he says Connecticut residents are paying for all of the repairs to the roads and bridges when 75% of the people that use that infrastructure are from out of state.

As for electronic tolls Representative Guerrero told that these would not be like the old days when Connecticut had tolls and you had to stop to put money in a bin or pay an attendant. He says those days are long gone. Guerrero explained that with electronic tolling there is a camera that sits above the highway and sends a signal to a transponder in the car's dash while driving through at 60 to 65 mph and the motorist never has to stop. He tells for those people who don't have a transponder that's where the camera comes into play that takes a picture of the license plate and the driver is sent the bill on a monthly basis. Representative Guerrero told that a study was done a few years ago (the Cambridge Report) that projected border tolls can raise over a 20-25 year period close to 30 billion dollars.

Another revenue problem for the State of Connecticut is cars are getting more and more fuel efficient these days so people are having to gas up less. This means that Connecticut is not going to be generating the same kind of revenue that

March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015 - (Guerrera continued) - it has in the past from the gas tax. Representative Guerrera says also more and more people will be buying electric cars and cars that get better gas mileage so the state will be getting less and less revenue as the years go by from the gas tax as people won't be filling up as much. So he says the state has to look to other areas for this revenue that is being lost. Guerrera says this money is needed to fix the roads and bridges in Connecticut and to maintain them, and he feels electronic tolls is the best way to generate that much needed revenue. He says he's working very hard to get the legislature to vote on the bill and hopefully onto the governor for his approval. Guerrera says this would be best for the state so we don't have another Mianus River bridge collapse like what happened in the early 80's when the state's roads and bridges were left to deteriorate.

Some critics have said that if the state adopts highway tolls that could create a lot more congestion on local roads with drivers avoiding the tolls. But Transportation Committee Chairman Antonio Guerrera feels that won't happen as people are not going to add additional time to their drive to avoid paying the toll and get stuck in traffic on the local roads. He thinks that's just a scare tactic by the critics of tolls. Representative Guerrera says Governor Malloy has proposed a 100-billion dollar 30-year transportation infrastructure improvement initiative to upgrade the state's infrastructure that was built in the 50's and 60's. He says this infrastructure improvement plan is needed to help alleviate congestion which is a key to economic development for vehicles to be able to freely move goods and services in the state. Guerrera says electronic tolling is one of the best ways to pay for that. He also says that at the same time they should lower Connecticut's gasoline tax, which is one of the highest in the nation. Representative Guerrera says this would give motorists a break and also out of state drivers might start filling up in Connecticut instead of waiting until they get over the border.