

November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015 - Themis Klarides - State House Republican Leader from Derby.

Subject Matter: On this week's show State House Republican leader Representative Themis Klarides discussed a bipartisan effort to approve a plan that would ease the current state budget deficit, which was in the range of between 350-to-370 million dollars. Democratic Governor Dannel Malloy had invited the Republican leaders into discussions with Democrat legislative leaders to try and come up with a bipartisan plan to solve the deficit problem. Representative Klarides told on the show that House and Senate Republicans have put forth their proposals to fix the budget deficit. But in addition to that she says they have also put forth proposals that changes the way the state operates structurally.

House Republican leader Themis Klarides says as far as both Democrats and Republicans being able to agree together on a solution ... that remains to be seen. Her feeling was at least they were all at the table and that was a good thing. Representative Klarides says they've all been very respectful of each other's thoughts and ideas. However she told that Republicans will not agree to continuously fixing holes in the budget and keep putting together patchwork quilt budgets. Klarides says they need to agree on changing the structure of how the state operates. She told things like a transportation plan, how the state invests money, or the fact that in the budget this year spending has increased by over 22%. Klarides says all of those type of things need be addressed structurally going forth. She says when you continue to spend more and borrow more, you don't have to be a financial consultant or have a PHD in finance to understand that it's a recipe for disaster. She says it is bad budgeting policies that have gotten the State of Connecticut into this mess.

Representative Themis Klarides told that for the short-term the Republican's proposal for fixing the current deficit problem was to go through the budget and find places the budget could be cut without hurting people. She also says they did some consolidations and got rid of some commissions to save money, as well as some other measures that would eliminate the deficit. But Representative Klarides says they want to help the state be sustainable and predictable for the long-term for generations to come. She says they can't continue fixing it piecemeal because it's not working ... so structural changes need to be forthcoming.

In the last legislative session the Democratic majority raised business taxes. But then there was an outcry from companies like GE who stated they would look

November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015 - (Klarides continued) - to leave the state as a result. Following several businesses singing the same tune Democrats tweaked some things and admitted that it was a mistake, and agreed there's a need to look at other things to help business. Representative Klarides commented on the situation saying she felt the Democrats knew what they were doing raising business taxes ... but never anticipated the reaction from companies threatening to leave Connecticut. On another matter Democrats also proposed saving 11 million dollars by suspending the state's public financing program for campaigns ... something Representative Klarides says they also were shamed into abandoning.

House Republican leader Themis Klarides also discussed the Syrian refugees' issue. Many Republican governors across the U.S. have stated they don't want to be forced to accept them ... but here in Connecticut Democratic Governor Dannel Malloy says Connecticut will accept the refugees with open arms. Klarides told that she would rather see a go slow approach due to the fact that it is almost impossible to know who exactly is coming into this country. She says it's very difficult to vet the refugees. Klarides says we are caring, loving people but it's a difficult world these days. She says she also doesn't completely trust the federal government either as just as President Obama had declared the terrorist group ISIS "contained," the attacks occurred in Paris. So she says we can't be too careful these days.

November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015 - Tim Phelan - President of the Connecticut Retail Merchants Association.

Subject Matter: On this edition of Dialogue Tim Phelan, President of the Connecticut Retail Merchants Association, talked about the outlook for the holiday shopping season. He told that in the past Black Friday (the Friday after Thanksgiving) used to be the official start to the holiday shopping season ... not anymore. Phelan says in recent many state have actually been opening up on Thanksgiving night. But really he told nowadays with the Internet and online shopping, people will buy holiday gifts at almost any time of the year if they see something good for someone on their holiday list. A report came out that 25% of people have purchased a holiday gift before Halloween. Phelan stated on the show that this is reflective of the business climate that we live in now with commerce done over the Internet, consumers always looking for bargains, and some people just trying to get a head start to the shopping season. However he told just because

November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015 - (Phelan continued) - someone starts early doesn't mean that they are finished and there's probably still a lot of shopping to do past Black Friday.

As mentioned a lot of stores do open now on Thanksgiving night ... but Tim Phelan says there are also stores that promote they are not opening on Thanksgiving night, making it a point to say they are giving their employees Thanksgiving off to spend with their families. He says the Connecticut Retail Merchants Association's take on it is that retailers react to what customers are looking for ... a good shopping experience. So Phelan says many stores will be open if the customers are there on Thanksgiving night. However if the market shifts and people don't come out on Thanksgiving night, he says more retailers might determine it's not worth it for them to be open and in future years they may make the decision not to open. Phelan says it's up to each individual retailer to determine what they think is best for their customers on how they want to handle Thanksgiving Day. He says the Connecticut Retail Merchants Association feels it's great if they want to open as it's the customers' choice and freedom of capitalism if they want to come out and shop on the holiday. On the other hand while some employees would prefer to be home with their families on Thanksgiving night, there are other who would like to work and get extra holiday pay. Phelan also pointed out that the world has drastically changed for brick and mortar stores. Phelan says it's very difficult to compete against online businesses that are never closed, where people can shop 24/7 unlike brick and mortar stores. Phelan says it's very difficult to compete against that so brick and mortar stores sometimes have to make some changes in their approach ... and one of those might be opening on Thanksgiving because they have to in order to remain competitive. He also told that the brick and mortar stores in Connecticut have to collect Connecticut sales tax, which out of state online retailers do not have to do. He says this is very unfair for the Connecticut brick and mortar stores. Phelan says one giant online retailer Amazon, which is opening a distribution center in Connecticut, does charge Connecticut sales tax which they are happy about. He says that's all Connecticut brick and mortar stores want is a level playing field, but unfortunately most other online retailers do not charge the Connecticut sales tax which Phelan says is Congress's fault for not passing a law requiring them to do so.

For this holiday shopping season Connecticut Retail Merchants Association President Tim Phelan says Connecticut stores will have plenty of help on hand to

November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015 - (more Phelan continued) - help holiday shoppers. As far as hot gift items this holiday season Phelan feels Star Wars products will be a must have with the new movie out. Then he says there are the traditional best sellers like gift cards (with no expiration date to use them in Connecticut), toys electronics, books, clothing, and candy. The National Retail Foundation has predicted a 3.7% increase in holiday sales this season and Phelan hopes that Connecticut can at least match that number. Phelan says with lower gasoline prices he's hoping that translates into more holiday sales with consumers having a few extra dollars in their pockets.

December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015 - Alicia Woodsby - Executive Director of the Partnership for Strong Communities.

Subject Matter: On this show Alicia Woodsby, Executive Director of the Partnership for Strong Communities discussed a new report on housing that her group just compiled. Among the issues that the report looks at are homelessness, the rising cost of rent, and home sale trends. On the issue of homelessness in Connecticut Ms. Woodsby says the news is rather good. She told that there's an unprecedented level of collaboration in the state from the governor, to the legislature, right down to state, federal, and local partners who are all moving in the same direction. She says they know what works and they have state investments to help them with the resources they need to make that happen. Woodsby also told that they are doing well reducing the amount of homeless individuals because the level of collaboration happening locally has allowed them for the first time to be able to identify people who are homeless in a given community by name and place them into housing. She says this has been done with homeless veterans and also the chronically homeless, who tend to have a mental or physical health disability or a substance abuse issue. They report there's been a 10% decrease in chronic homelessness over the past year bringing it down to about 2,431 people who are homeless. Woodsby says they want to get these people housed as well. She says though it is an ongoing situation because when they say they want to end homelessness, it doesn't mean that no one ever falls back into homelessness. She says it's really about creating a system where they can quickly identify them, respond and get them attached to housing quickly. The federal government has recognized Connecticut as being the first state in the nation to have ended chronic homelessness among veterans.

December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015 - (Woodsby continued) -

When it comes to rental housing in Connecticut however Alicia Woodsby says we have a scary situation in our state. She told that Connecticut has a significant number of people ... close to 116-thousand, who are earning less than 50% of the area median income. Ms. Woodsby says that's an extremely low income and they are spending more than half of that on their housing. She says if you are spending more than 30% of your income on your housing you are cost burdened. Woodsby tells with so much of their income going toward housing they are not able to afford other things like food, healthcare, and transportation. She says these people are really right on the edge of falling into homelessness. Woodsby says they are one financial problem away like if their car breaks down, have a healthcare crisis, or jobless, they could be without a place to live. As it is the Partnership for Strong Communities report says that in order to be able to afford an average 2 bedroom apartment in Connecticut, one would have to have a wage of \$24.29 an hour to be able to afford it. Meantime Woodsby told that the demand for rental housing keeps going up with both baby boomers (who are aging), and younger millennials looking for affordable rental housing at low and moderate incomes ... but it is in short supply. So she says the state has to take this opportunity to invest in affordable rental housing because it could have an impact for generations to come.

Alicia Woodsby also commented on the show about home sale trends in the state. She told that prices for homes sold in the state have gone down ... but the number of homes that have been sold have gone up. So Woodsby says more people are getting out of their houses for less than what they wanted to sell them for. She says however it is a good time if you are looking to buy a home ... though not so good if you are looking to sell your house.

December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015 - Janice Heggie Margolis - MADD Connecticut Executive Director.

Subject Matter: This week's guest on Dialogue was Janice Heggie Margolis, Executive Director of Mothers Against Drunk Driving in Connecticut. With the holiday season there are a lot of parties and celebrations involving alcohol and MADD once again is discouraging people from drinking and driving with its annual Red Ribbon campaign called "Tie One on for Safety." Ms. Heggie Margolis told that this is MADD's 35<sup>th</sup> year anniversary which means they've been asking people for all of these years to tie a red ribbon on their vehicle to signify their commitment not to drink and drive during the holiday season. She says from Thanksgiving until New Year's Day is the deadliest time of the year on our roads with fatalities. Heggie Margolis told that between Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve in 2013 there were 846 drunk driving fatalities across the country.

Janice Heggie Margolis says at MADD they strongly believe that the crime of drunk driving is 100% preventable. She says there isn't any reason why in this day and age with Uber, taxi cabs, public transportation, and other ride services, that anyone who has made the decision to drink too much should get behind the wheel of a vehicle and drive. Heggie Margolis says it's really MADD's quest to eliminate drunk driving. She told that when she started MADD in Connecticut in 1984, 252 people were killed that year in our state in alcohol related crashes. Heggie Margolis says they just got the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's statistics for 2014 and 97 people were killed in alcohol related crashes in Connecticut. So she says they have had a significant decrease ... but she added that for every person who is killed in a drunk driving crash, they leave behind a family. Heggie Margolis says that's a family of loved ones who no longer have that person at their Christmas holiday table or at weddings or graduations. So she says for MADD even one fatality is too many, and that's why they want to eliminate drunk driving ... and their theme right now is "No More Victims."

Janice Heggie Margolis of MADD Connecticut says in order to eliminate drunk driving it starts with educating our young people about the crime of using alcohol under the age of 21 and preventing underage drinking. She says they also talk to parents on a daily basis about their responsibility in teaching their young people not to use the drug alcohol.

At this time of year of course there are holiday parties and if you are the one

December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015 - Mick Bolduc - Epidemiologist for the State Department of Public Health.

Subject Matter: On this week's show Mick Bolduc, Epidemiologist with the State Health Department discussed the flu season ahead. He told that the Centers for Disease Control recommends that everyone 6 months of age and older get an annual flu shot. Bolduc says it is especially important for young children and the elderly to get a flu shot, because these are the age groups who are most susceptible to flu disease and can have severe complications and even die from influenza disease. So he says it's vitally important that people get their flu shot each year. Though Bolduc admitted that a lot of people have a big aversion to getting a flu shot.

Mick Bolduc of the State Health Department explained that every year scientists from the World Health Organization in February take a look at what flu strains are circulating in different parts of the world in trying to come up with a flu vaccine for North America. He says it's an inexact science and unfortunately sometime what they feel is going to happen doesn't always work out ... as last year the flu vaccine they recommended missed the mark on the flu strain that actually occurred in our region. But Bolduc says that doesn't happen very often and he's confident that this year's flu vaccine will match up better with the flu strain going around. So he encourages everyone to get a flu shot.

State Health Department Epidemiologist Mick Bolduc says one of the reasons why they strongly urge people to get a flu shot is because given the severity of the flu ... you don't ever want to get it. He says many people when they don't feel good in the wintertime will just automatically say they have the flu and then be better in a day or two. Bolduc says if that's the case, then it's not the flu they had. He says if you get the flu you'll feel like you've been run over by a truck. Bolduc says you won't be able to get out of bed as you'll be sore, achy, and just feel plain awful. He says this is different from a bad cold where you can still function ... but with the flu you'll be in bed. Bolduc says if you feel like this call your doctor immediately and get prescribed Tamiflu which will help ease some of the symptoms and possibly shorten the time you have influenza.

Mick Bolduc told that the yearly influenza vaccine is normally available to the public in August ... but that most people don't think about getting their flu shot until the fall or winter. He says the flu in our area normally spikes just after the New Year when it's cold outside and because people are inside the flu germs can

December 27<sup>th</sup>, 2015 - (Wrice continued) - less pay, so they are having to make tough choices like pay for food, pay for medicine, or skip this month's rent in order to stay warm. Wrice says these are choices no one should have to make because they are life or death choices in many instances.

Pat Wrice says they put out the Energy Affordability Gap report each year to let policymakers know to what magnitude this problem is in Connecticut ... with the hope that they'll do something about it. She says according to the gap study there are households in Connecticut paying half of their income for energy costs. Wrice says in order for energy to be affordable no one should be paying more than 6% of their income for energy costs. She feels there's a need for a discounted utility rate in Connecticut, which would be an affordable rate based on income. Wrice says that is the humane way to do that. She told that other states do that with Connecticut being the only state in the Northeast that doesn't have a program like that which is offered to low income customers.

One way the general public can help Operation Fuel's Energy Assistance Program told Pat Wrice is through the add-a-dollar program on their utility bills, to add an additional dollar (or more) to their payment which will go to the fund. Wrice says they are seeing an increase in the donations to that program which is heartwarming. She told that two of the utility companies match the add-a-dollar program, and it has now risen to a half a million dollars. Wrice says the great thing about the program is that 100% of those dollars go to energy assistance. She also told that people can donate directly to Operation Fuel to their energy assistance program to help those less fortunate by sending a check to Operation Fuel, 75 Charter Oak Square (Suite 240), Hartford, CT 06106. Meantime she told for those listeners struggling to pay their heating bills to call 211, and they will let them know what program they are eligible for, for energy assistance.