



CRCOG Weekly Legislative Report

2019 Legislative Session

April 18, 2019

Weekly Legislative Feature Issues:

It has been relatively busy at the Capitol this week even though all but two legislative committees have finished their work. While the Appropriations and Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committees continued working on developing a legislative budget proposal, the nonpartisan offices were busy in the background drafting, researching, and analyzing all the bills that have made it out of committee.

Additionally, the Connecticut General Assembly convened on Wednesday, April 17th to not only approve the remaining executive nominations, but also to take action on a number of substantive bills. Both the House and Senate got right down to business debating, amending, and voting on bills. Moving forward, there will be an increasing number of session days scheduled for the General Assembly to take action on the myriad bills that await legislative action.

Special Election for the 19th House District Seat:

On Tuesday, April 16th, a special election for the 19th House District comprised of parts of West Hartford, Farmington, and Avon was held. Tammy Exum, a West Hartford Democrat, prevailed over Republican Robert Margolis with a final vote count of 2,407 to 1,391. Ms. Exum is a former member of West Hartford' Board of Education. Connecticut Democrats now have a 90-60 advantage in the House, with one vacant seat left to be filled. Representative-elect Exum is succeeding Democrat Derek Slap, who resigned from his House seat after winning another special election for the state Senate in February.

This past week has revealed new developments of particular interest to you:

Anti-Toll Rally Has Grassroots Organizers Wondering If They Can Stop It

When the Libertarian Party of CT decided to hold a rally on the steps of the Capitol protesting tolls, they were surprised to see a turnout of only 125. Many were angry that Lamont flip-flopped since his time on the campaign trail, from a “truck-only toll option” to an “all-vehicle toll option” that would affect citizens daily. They were also angry about “another tax” on Connecticut’s citizens, and many rally attendees said they did not trust Connecticut legislators to spend toll money wisely. Others were critical of Lamont, saying that tolls were about “giving a huge windfall to his rich friends.” The proposed toll implementation would raise about \$800 million annually. The alternative plan proposed by Republicans is to use general obligation bonds to pay for transportation infrastructure.

“The people who attended today’s rally aren’t saying no to tolls,” Rob Blanchard, a spokesman for Lamont said Saturday. “They’re saying yes to taking out a \$30 billion loan, as proposed by the Republicans, recklessly adding to the state’s deficit and requiring Connecticut taxpayers to foot 100 percent of the bill-plus interest. In contrast, the governor’s plan ensures 40% of the bill will be paid by out-of-state drivers.”

[CT News Junkie: Anti-Toll Rally Has Grassroots Organizers Wondering If They Can Stop It](#)

The First Hundred Days of Ned Lamont

Governor Ned Lamont and Lt. Gov. Susan Bysiewicz, now 100 days into their new tenure, met with their transition team to discuss the administration’s achievements so far. Among those achievements was the filling of almost every agency head position, with only the Department of Social Services and the Department of Education heads awaiting appointment. Included in these appointments was the contentious confirmation of David Lehman, a former Goldman Sachs partner who now serves as Lamont’s commissioner of economic and community development. Legislatively, Lamont has seen few big victories, but that is not uncommon this early in the legislative session; Lamont did manage to get a bipartisan deal through that helped give financial relief to unpaid federal workers during the shutdown.

Many of Lamont’s major initiatives, though, have yet to come to fruition. The toll debate quickly became a controversial partisan issue, and the issue of expanding the sales tax is also still up for debate. Lamont has yet to fully outline his preferences for a paid family and medical leave bill, but we do know that he plans on funding the program through a half-percent payroll tax on employees and that he’d prefer a privately-managed program. Lawmakers have been open to Lamont’s congenial, open-door style of governing, but it’s yet to be seen if this style will get important bills passed.

[CT Mirror: The First Hundred Days of Ned Lamont](#)

California is the Most Innovative Economy in America

According to Bloomberg's 2018 U.S. State Innovation Index, Connecticut ranks number four among the most innovative economies. Connecticut was beat out by California, Massachusetts, and Washington. These rankings are based on six equally-weighted metrics: research and development intensity, productivity, clusters of companies in technology, "STEM" jobs, populous with degrees in science and engineering disciplines, and patent activity. Connecticut has a score of total score of 79.7. For comparison, California's total score is 94.0. This score moves Connecticut up three spots from spot number seven in 2016.

[Bloomberg: California is the Most Innovative Economy in America](#)

The Lamont Administration and Senate GOP Leader Len Fasano Exchange Accusations that Each is Trying to Deceive the Public on Highway Tolls

Gov. Ned Lamont is alleging that that top Republican Senator Len Fasano is using an outdated tolling study to garner opposition for tolls. On the front of a recent mailer, Fasano used an image of a Department of Transportation 2018 tolling map to represent Lamont's plan, a map that had 80 gantries. Lamont's plan would only have 50 gantries. Conversely, Fasano alleges that Lamont is deceptively low-balling the cost of toll implementation to raise support. "Their credibility on tolls is severely lacking," Fasano said.

Fasano questions a number Lamont frequently cites that Connecticut E-ZPass frequent drivers could pay as low as 3.5 cents per mile. "Their math doesn't make any sense," Fasano said. "You guys have a right to argue tolls work. But you don't have a right to mislead people in Connecticut by making up numbers." As an alternative to tolls, Republicans are advocating for a plan, known as Prioritize Progress, that would divert bonding money from school construction and other transportation projects. Groups like NoTollsCT.org favor alternatives such as these. A petition on their website opposing tolls has garnered 95,000 signatures, and they are preparing for a rally outside the Capitol on May 18.

[Hartford Courant: The Lamont Administration and Senate GOP Leader Len Fasano Exchange Accusations that Each is Trying to Deceive the Public on Highway Tolls](#)

Tracked Bills:

Please see attached document.