Report on Local Democratic Leaders January 2017- February 2017

The time period of late January to early February can be said to have been a particularly politically dynamic time period, especially on the state and federal level. Major issues in contention on the federal level involve the qualifications of President Trump’s nominees for cabinet, particularly the nomination of Betsy De Vos as Secretary of Education, as well as the President’s attempts to repeal the Dodd-Frank Act and the Clean Power Plan. Chris Murphy, Richard Blumenthal, and Jim Himes have all firmly protested Trump’s nominees, his recent executive orders, and his attempts at repealing the Clean Power Plan and the Dodd-Frank Act. The biggest issue in contention on the state level is the restructuring of the state budget. Governor Malloy has focused on lowering the state’s pension payments by shifting some of the burden of paying these pensions to local cities and towns. He has also focused on redistributing state aid to more impoverished communities with poorer educational systems and on releasing stalled municipal aid.

Bob Duff, State Senate Majority Leader

* January 31, 2017: State Senate Majority Leader Bob Duff and local pro-abortion groups held a press conference at the state Capitol to declare their opposition to any Trump choice for the US supreme court.
* February 6, 2017: Bob Duff criticized education secretary nominee Betsy De Vos as being completely unqualified and lacking in knowledge for the position.
* February 7, 2017: Senator Bob Duff joined with special education advocates and parents to fight several proposed bills that could force parents to prove that their school district’s special education decisions are insufficient for their child. Duff has stated that such an action could be a major difficulty for parents, who may not have the resources present to appoint attorneys to prove special education decisions are insufficient.
* February 7, 2017: Duff has stated his opposition to Senate Bill 409 and House Bill 5710, both of which limit special education due process hearings to three days.

Chris Murphy, US Senator

* January 26, 2017: Murphy announced his intention to vote against Betsy DeVos for Secretary of Education.
* January 28, 2017: Senator Murphy vociferously reacted to President Trumps’ immigration order banning Syrian refugees from entry into the US by tweeting a photo of a dead Syrian child. He has also declared that the Muslim ban from countries Trump perceives to be dangerous plays into ISIS’s mission to depict an “imagined global struggle of civilizations between Christians and Muslims…[thus] handing ISIS a path to rebirth.”
* February 2, 2017: Senator Murphy responded to senior advisor Trump Kellyanne Conway’s remarks about the Democrats as “crybabies,” stating that Trump will need to learn to cooperate with the Democrats if he desires to move beyond executive orders and pass legislation.
* February 6, 2017: Murphy hosted a meeting at the University of Wesleyan to discuss sustainable policy with local students, academics, and activists, and to ask for individuals to continue to fight against climate change.
* February 7, 2017: Murphy has stated that it could be possible that Putin has been ‘pulling the strings’ of the Trump administration.

Carlo Leone, State Senator

* January 20, 2017: Carlo Loene and Duff announced a 500,000 dollar grant for a new Darien bioscience company

Richard Blumenthal, US Senator

* January 28, 2017: Blumenthal, Murphy, and Himes all welcomed Stamford Mayor David Martin’s bid for re-election. Blumenthal, Murphy, and Himes all offered an endorsement.
* February 7, 2017: Blumenthal announced his decision to vote against appointment of Jeff Sessions as US attorney general, and the appointment of Betsy De Vos as Secretary of Education.

Jim Himes, US Representative

* January 28, 2017: Himes has strongly opposed Trump’s plan to build a wall across the US-Mexican border.
* January 28, 2017: Himes announced his opposition to Trump’s trade policy and his desire to break up or significantly rewrite NAFTA, citing that it could hurt Connecticut’s jobs, as approximately 23 percent of jobs are tied to trade.
* February 2, 2017: Himes and members of House Republican moderates met to try to make a compromise on issues regarding infrastructure, the budget, taxes, and other issues. Himes aims to make the alliance between the “Tuesday Group” of House Republicans and the “New Democrat Coalition,” which will collectively count as 108 members, or a quarter of the House’s 435 seats. During the meeting, lawmakers agreed to meet more often to make a common agenda.
* February 7, 2017: Himes urged Trump to preserve Dodd-Frank, which was signed into law as a response to the 2008 recession.

Dan Malloy, CT Governor

* February 2, 2017: The CT legislature approved a deal refinancing the cost of meeting Connecticut’s pension obligations, spreading the burden over a longer period of time and eliminating some payments tied to employee pension plans. Payments will peak in coming years at 2.2 billion dollars, drop to 2 billion dollars until the 2040s, and then begin to shrink.
* February 2, 2017: Malloy stated that as many as 25 communities, namely those with Alliance School districts, may be subject to state oversight under the legislation he will propose to the General Assembly on February 8. Under his proposal, a new state accountability system will mandate state intervention to support troubled communities.
* February 3, 2017: Dan Malloy proposed a new way of funding CT teacher pensions with towns and cities contributing one third of the costs, or roughly 407 million dollars. These costs will rise in the coming years, increasing from 407 million dollars to 420 dollars. Joseph Delong, executive director of the CT Conference of Municipalities, stated that the proposal would be a major cost transfer, equivalent to a $1 billion bill to property taxpayers in Connecticut. In the face of this shift, numerous towns are looking to approve new revenue sources to ease the dependence on the property tax, like raising sales tax to 7 percent. Other taxes, like taxes on fuel, electricity, or motor fuel, are being considered.
  + Malloy stated that some of the $407.6 million would go into closing the state’s deficit and to the most impoverished school districts.
  + Malloy also released a series of proposals to reduce state mandates for towns like raising the prevailing wage threshold, and allowing towns to negotiate contributions into the municipal employee retirement system.
* February 3, 2017: Malloy stated that the two-year budget he will present to the General Assembly would propose eliminating the $200 property tax credit in the income tax system, which would cost nearly 875,000 middle class households as much as 105 million dollars per year. However, he also said he would not propose any major tax increases to balance finances next year.
* February 6, 2017: Malloy has stated that a major part of his budget proposal will be to reduce personnel costs, which account for about 1/3rd of the CT budget. His administration is negotiating new contracts with the state employee unions, and will also push for pension reform.
* February 6, 2017: Malloy released plans for redistributing existing levels of state education aid to help the most impoverished school districts. He will change the Education Cost Sharing formula to create a grant pool of 575 million dollars to help towns pay for special education.
* February 7, 2017: Malloy released proposals to release stalled municipal aid. Republican legislative leaders released a plan to restore 18.9 million dollars of the education grant funds. Malloy has also released a new biennial budget plan to recommend 125 million dollars in new bonding to replenish the Local Capital Improvement Program grants.