DTC Briefing: March – April 2017

 Major political debate continues at Washington over a variety of controversial issues. Political issues in contention on the federal level include Trump’s recent airstrikes in Syria, which numerous Democratic politicians have questioned and criticized, the passage of Senate Joint Resolution 34, which allows for the selling of customer internet history to broadband providers, and the confirmation of Neil Gorsuch as Associate Justice of the Supreme Court. Several democratic politicians are also proposing a bill that aims to reduce the cost of college tuition. William Tong has been concerned with protecting individuals against hate crimes, of which there have been an increase following the 2016 election. Meanwhile, Senator Duff has focused on fostering the growth of the bioscience industry and on protecting Connecticut from Senate Joint Resolution 34. It can further be said that the Democrats have universally opposed almost all of Trump’s most recent moves, whether it be in foreign policy, in the Supreme Court, or in Congress.

Bob Duff, State Senate Majority Leader

* March 8, 2017: Senator Duff denounced the Republican vote against a plan to change state statutes to give municipalities more definitive information and time to adopt local budgets. Duff hopes that the republicans can “break their habit of reflexively voting ‘no’ on budget matters, and instead work with the Democrats and town leaders.”
* March 16, 2017: Duff supported a proposal to strengthen Connecticut’s hate crime laws. This was done in face of many incidents of hate like murders, assaults, bomb threats, and vandalism against ethnic and religious minorities.
* March 21, 2017: Duff proposed a transportation lockbox under Senate Joint Resolution No.5, which won approval from the General Assembly’s Transportation Committee. Funds deposited into the transportation lockbox would be used for public use or benefit, including but not limited to the payment of debt service on obligations incurred by the state. Any funds in this fund cannot be used for any other purpose besides transportation. The following bill will be an amendment to Article Twelve of the State Constitution, and will be entering the Senate for debate.
* March 28, 2017: Senators Duff and Hartley called for Connecticut to become a national leader in biomedical research. Senate Bill 959, Senate Bill 962, Senate Bill 968, all of which aim to promote the bioscience industry in Connecticut, were approved by the Commerce Committee and received bipartisan support.
* April 5, 2017: Duff and Hartley will introduce a legislative amendment preventing any telecommunications company, provider, competitive video service provider, or internet service provider from providing its services to a customer if that customer has not approved collection of their personal information.

Carlo Leone, State Senator

* March 15, 2017: Leone thanked Senator Kennedy’s support for his Paramedicine bill, a bill that would allow emergency medical services personnel to provide community-based health care services.

Jim Himes, US Representative

* March 9, 2017: Himes introduced the Reclamation of War Powers Act, a bill that would return the power to declare and wage war back to Congress. It states that Congress will not fund the introduction of US armed forces into hostilities without a declaration of war, specific statutory authorization, or a national emergency created by an attack or imminent threat of attack upon the US, its territories or possessions, or the Armed Forces.
* March 14, 2017: Himes announced his opposition to Trumpcare, which would strip health care from 24 million Americans and harm low-income people and seniors.
* March 28, 2017: Himes announced his opposition to Senate Joint Resolution 34, which would allow broadband providers to access customer data without seeking their users’ consent and would release Internet providers from obligations to increase protections of customer information against hackers and thieves.
* April 7, 2017: Himes stated that he accepts the airstrikes the Trump has ordered to be delivered against a Syrian airbase, though he has concerns about its implications for future US foreign policy. He has questioned Trump’s ordering of military action without authorization from Congress and questions whether this move will pull the US deeper into Middle Eastern conflicts.

William Tong, State Representative

* March 7, 2017: Representative Tong announced his support for HB 6200, an act that would require individuals who openly carry a firearm in public to show their permit upon the request of an officer.
* March 22, 2017: In an appearance on the WNPR radio show Where We Live, Tong proposed legislation to make the committing of a hate crime a felony and increase potential penalties upon a conviction. It would also make gender-based violence and threats prosecutable as a hate crime and make threats against religious facilities a more serious felony charge.
* April 5, 2017: Representative Tong, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, praised his committee’s approval of legislation that increased penalties for trafficking of humans, strengthened laws against hate crimes, reformed the judicial bail system, and facilitating investigation of criminal conduct involving abuse of governmental authority and financial fraud.

Senator Blumenthal, US Senator

* March 19-22: Blumenthal served as one of the questioners for the appointment of Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court. However, he stated that his refusal to support important Supreme Court rulings on topics like women’s health, contraception, and marriage equality to be troubling. He has since announced that he is against his appointment.
* March 23, 2017: Blumenthal introduced the Department of Veterans Affairs Appeals Modernization Act, a piece of legislation that would expedite the veterans’ appeals process.
* March 23, 2017: Blumenthal voted against Senate Joint Resolution 34, which would permit the selling of broadband Internet history to the highest bidder.
* March 28, 2017: Blumenthal co-sponsored the Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse Act of 2017, which would strengthen oversight of athletic organizations like USA Gymnastics and ensure victims can report incidents of abuse.
* April 4, 2017: Blumenthal joined Senator Murray and Congresswoman DeLauro in reintroducing the Paycheck Fairness Act, which would challenge pay discrimination and hold employers accountable.
* April 4, 2017: Blumenthal introduced the College for All Act, a bill to make college more affordable. It mandates that the federal government will provide 2/3rds of the cost of college tuition for all students while the state will provide 1/3rd of the cost. This will be done for families earning up to $125,000 per year, covering about 80 percent of students. It also allows students to apply Pell Grant awards to non-tuition costs, like fees, books, and housing, and cuts student-loan interest rates in half for new borrowers.
* April 5, 2017: Senator Blumenthal announced his support for the removal of Chief Strategist Stephen Bannon from the National Security Council, who he claimed “should never have been on the National Security council in the first place.”
* April 6, 2017: Senators Blumenthal and Murphy denounced the Republicans for their “nuclear option” to advance Neil Gorsuch for the Supreme Court. Republicans used their majority to change the rules of the Senate to allow Judge Gorsuch to be confirmed by a simple majority.

Senator Murphy, US Senator

* March 23, 2017: Murphy announced his opposition to Trumpcare, claiming that it would give the wealthy a huge tax break and hurt less wealthy individuals. He further complained that it would cut billions of dollars from welfare programs for the disabled, poor children, and people in nursing homes.
* March 25, 2017: Murphy criticized Trump’s sending in of 500 troops to Syria to assault ISIS’s stronghold of Raqqa. He stated that it could draw the US into the Syrian Civil War. He further criticized the fact that there was no political plan for the future of Raqqa following the taking of the city.
* March 27, 2017: Murphy introduced the Honoring Our Commitment Act, a bill that would ensure veterans struggling with mental health issues will receive health benefits. It would require the Department of Veteran Affairs to provide mental health and behavioral health services to diagnosed former combat veterans who have been other than honorably discharged.
* March 31, 2017: Murphy announced the introduction of a bill that would overturn Trump’s executive order dismantling initiatives to cut carbon emissions and curb global warming.
* April 4, 2017: Murphy joined Bernie Sanders in support for the College for All Act, a bill that aims to expand access to college education.
* April 7. 2017: Murphy, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, criticized Trump’s strikes in Syria, claiming that he may have violated the US Constitution by launching an airstrike against a Syrian airbase without first engaging Congress.
* April 7, 2017: Senator Murphy announced the creation of Fight Back CT, a grass-roots activist group that will mobilize opposition to Trump and congressional republicans. He will be hiring professional staffers to link up with existing grass-roots activist groups in CT that have formed since Trump was elected.