DTC Briefing April-May

The document below is the political briefing for the month of late April to early May. Major issues in contention on the federal level include controversy over links between the Trump Administration and Russia, which has rapidly increased due to Trump’s firing of James Comey, the director of the FBI. Connecticut’s politicians on the federal level, including Blumenthal, Murphy, and Himes, have all worked hard to overturn Trump’s executive orders and have vociferously voiced their opposition to the GOP health bill. On the state level, new legislation has been passed further criminalizing hate crimes. Debate continues over the organization of the state budget.

Senator Richard Blumenthal

* April 27: Blumenthal introduced the MY DATA (Managing Your Data Against Telecom Abuses) Act to ensure that the FTC has jurisdiction over broadband providers. It would grant the commission authority to establish safeguards for privacy and data security across the Internet.
* May 1: Blumenthal announced 5 million dollars to help construct the National Coast Guard Museum in New London.
* May 2: Blumenthal reintroduced the Clean Ocean and Safe Tourism Anti Drilling (COAST) Act that would ban offshore oil and gas drilling in the Atlantic Ocean. It was introduced in reaction to Trump’s signing of an executive order that would allow offshore oil and gas drilling along the East Coast.
* May 4: Blumenthal criticized the passage of the American Healthcare Act by the House of Representatives, claiming that it would “wreak havoc on our healthcare system.”
* May 8: Blumenthal introduced the Equality Act, which would ensure full federal non-discrimination equality by adding sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes in existing federal laws.
* May 9: In reaction to the controversy over Trump’s connections with Russia, Judiciary Committee Democrat Richard Blumenthal promised to introduce legislation to appoint a special prosecutor. He stated that “not since Watergate have our legal systems been so threatened.”
* May 15: Richard Blumenthal introduced the “Accurate Workplace Injury and Illness Records Restoration Act,” which would reinstate the Occupational Safety and health Administration’s (OSHA) recordkeeping rule that was overturned by a Resolution of Disapproval under the Congressional Review Act and signed into law by President Trump. The proposed bill would reinstate OSHA’s authority to require employers maintain accurate workplace injury records and enables OSHA to issue a citation in cases where the violation of the recordkeeping requirements continues for more than six months from the date the employer should have first recorded the injury.

Senator Chris Murphy

* April 30: Murphy pushed for gun reform laws during a “Voices of Victims” address at Washington, DC. He called for measures such as background checks, stopping illegal weapon sales, stricter license requirements and keeping guns out of the hands of criminals.
* April 30: Murphy denounced Trump’s foreign policy decision to slash funding for the state department and foreign aid, arguing instead for boosting spending on diplomacy and assistance programs.
* May 6: Murphy denounced the Trump budget to cut about 95 percent of funding for the Office of National Drug Control Policy, ending its mission as the lead agency in combatting drug epidemics.
* May 8: Murphy denounced the repeal of an Obama-era retirement rule designed to help states create retirement saving programs.
* May 10: Murphy promised to slow down the proceedings of the Senate if a proper response from the Republicans is not received over the recent firing of FBI Director James Comey. He further added that investigations are pointing to the direction of more collusion than expected between the Trump campaign and Russia, though “smoking gun” evidence has yet to be found
* May 15: Murphy introduced his Mental Health Reform Act, which expanded federal resources and improved coordination for mental health and substance abuse treatment programs. He also joined the Connecticut delegation in securing a 5.5 million dollar federal grant to support Connecticut efforts to combat the opioid epidemic.
* May 16: Senator Murphy called on Trump to drop his attempt to cut the federal civilian workforce at the Department of Health and Human Services and his attempt to cut its budget by 18 percent.

Representative Jim Himes

* April 28: Himes applauded the passage of legislation to amend the Death on High Seas Act, an antiquated law that enables cruise companies to avoid accountability when there is negligence that causes a death at sea.
* May 2: Himes applauded the House’s decision to ban gay conversion therapy.
* May 3: Himes introduced the Equality Act in the House of Representatives, which amends the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to include protection on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.
* May 4: Himes vociferously protested the GOP health bill, stating that it gives an enormous tax cut to the wealthiest Americans by making insurance much harder to get for poor or sick individuals or families.
* May 9: Himes stated that he was “deeply troubled” by President Trump’s firing of FBI Director Comey in the middle of an investigation into possible links between Trump and Russia.

State Senator William Tong

* May 9: Tong led the House in unanimously approving House Bill 5743, which makes the commission of a hate crime a felony and increases potential penalties upon a conviction. The bill also makes violence and threats based on gender prosecutable as a hate crime and makes threats against religious facilities a more serious felony charge.
* May 10: Tong applauded the passage of An Act Concerning Hate Crimes to combat the recent surge in hate crimes.
* May 10: Tong applauded the passage of a law to prohibit anyone under the age of 16 from getting married in Connecticut.

State Senator Carlo Leone

* May 4: Leone announced that the State Senate approved a bill which increased by 5 dollars the administrative fee individuals must pay for certain motor vehicle infractions. The additional fee will go directly to the city or town where the infraction occurs to help enforce safer streets.
* May 11: Leone voiced his support for a Senate Democratic Budget Predictability plan that would help Connecticut avoid future revenue volatility while reducing the chance of unpredictable budget deficits and paying down some underfunded liabilities. The Senate Democrats’ plan caps the amount of revenue the state collects from its portion of the state income tax at 3.1 billion dollars per year. Any revenues collected above the 3.1 billion dollars in future years would be dedicated to increasing the state’s budget reserve or making payments in unfunded liabilities.

State Senator Bob Duff

* May 3: Duff applauded the Senate’s passage of a bill that removes barriers to employment by reforming the state’s occupational license laws. It phases out occupational licenses for jobs that do not have educational or professional prerequisites. It will now move into the House of Representatives for passage before becoming law.
* May 4: Duff denounced Republican efforts to dismantle the Affordable Care Act.
* May 5: Duff joined scientists, doctors, and legislators at the Yale Center for Genome Analysis at the ribbon-cutting ceremony for two gene-sequencing machines that can map an individual’s genes, revealing the cause of a genetic illness.
* May 10: Duff applauded the overwhelming bipartisan passage of a bill that would prohibit the practice of conversion therapy in Connecticut.
* May 16: Duff applauded the release of the updated biennial budget proposal for fiscal years 2018 and 2019 because it did not increase state tax rates, invests in Connecticut jobs and critical infrastructure and makes responsible budget cuts implementing significant structural changes and efficiencies.