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Ehlers: Senate Majority Leader Bob Duff Sells Out His District — Again

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This is an op-ed by Greg Ehlers, the GOP challenger who ran against state Sen. Bob Duff in the 25th district in 2016:

Every family who lives in Bob Duff's district and every business operating in Fairfield County needs to be aware of what their elected state senator just did to threaten their livelihoods this week.

The labor contract agreement that just passed and will now become law is another in a long line of sweetheart deals with unions negotiated by Governor Malloy that has prolonged the fiscal crisis and created the poor economic climate our families and businesses suffer in every day.

It should no longer be a surprise to anyone in Connecticut that our state remains mired in a devastating fiscal crisis that has resulted from a cycle of spending money we don't have, raising taxes to cover the differences, and then suffering the consequences of taxpayers leaving for more tax-friendly states — this cycle has been repeated for decades and has stunted economic growth in this state.

If you closely observe this economically disastrous cycle, you will notice one troubling fact about Connecticut's government that has given wake to years of awful budgets — the basic fact that state government is just too expensive.

In particular, state employees receive benefits so luxurious, and so unprecedented, that as bureaucracy balloons and employees retire it has brought the state to the brink of insolvency. Public sector jobs and benefits in Connecticut are unparalleled in other states and would make most private sector workers seethe to know what they pay for.

For example, did you know that some state employees pay \$0 into their pensions? Or that employees can factor overtime pay into their pension calculations? Healthcare co-pays are insidiously low. U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal chose to keep his state health care plan versus what was offered at the federal level. It's a recipe for fiscal disaster.

If Sen. Duff were truly interested in allowing Connecticut's economy to recover and solving our budget crisis — as he repeated throughout the 2016 campaign that he was “working hard and standing up for you” — then he should have addressed the inordinate amount of power that state employee unions wield in government.

Sen. Duff should realize that his duty as our state senator and responsibility as Senate majority leader is to summon the political courage to curb their power in order to balance our budget.

Sen. Duff also needs to be aware his district contains relatively few state workers. What he does have in his district are overworked and underpaid municipal workers — these include teachers, police officers, firefighters, and librarians. If you are a teacher, police officer, firefighter, or librarian, you are among the losers of this union deal and of the budget crisis in general.

These invaluable jobs depend on responsibly-managed municipalities who raise revenue, most prominently, via property tax receipts. Cities and towns also receive funding from the state in the form of municipal aid, which is really just the state returning a portion of income tax receipts that they collected from their residents.

In helping the labor deal pass, Sen. Duff decided protecting unions, state workers benefits, and Governor Malloy was more important than making sure towns have sufficient funding to pay municipal workers.

Make no mistake about it — this union deal is a tax increase. Although its supporters will point to the \$1 billion it saves, it is hard to be cheerful when the actual budget deficit is \$5.1 billion. To claim this deal

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helps out is completely disingenuous. The state is going to have to make up for that extra \$4 billion somehow, which they will do by cutting off town funding (so towns will have to increase property taxes) and by raising state taxes.

I shudder to think of what this means for Norwalk parents, since Norwalk is perhaps the most underfunded school district in the state because of an unequal ECS formula.

If Bob Duff were truly interested in helping out his district, he would have stood up to Governor Malloy and the unions and steered the State Senate to reject this horrible deal. Then, he would get to work on a budget that actually advocates for the people who *fund* government rather than the people who *work* for government.

On that note, has anyone asked Sen. Duff where the state's budget is after a painful month of the governor running the state through executive order? It's really a stunning abandonment of duty.

Sen. Duff needs to look himself in the mirror and decide who he represents — state workers in Hartford or hard-working families in Norwalk and Darien. He needs to decide if he wants to grow the bureaucracy or grow business, because he really cannot do both at this stage in the budget crisis. Right now, he is taking his orders from union bosses and Governor Malloy.

And, no, taking selfies at Calf Pasture and posting them on Twitter does not qualify as representing your district, Bob.

If you are reading this, I urge you to call his office at [860-240-8600](tel:860-240-8600) and demand he work to pass a budget that benefits taxpayers rather than special interests.

Every day that passes without a budget is another death knell for family finances and business prospects in this state and our state senator stands right in the middle of the process.

We are waiting, Bob.