



State of Connecticut

SENATOR LEONARD A. FASANO
SENATE MINORITY LEADER

34TH DISTRICT

SUITE 3400
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591
www.SenatorFasano.com

HARTFORD: (860) 240-8800
TOLL FREE: (800) 842-1421
FAX: (860) 240-8306
Len.Fasano@cga.ct.gov

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Senator Martin Looney
President Pro Tempore
Legislative Office Building, Room 3300
Hartford, CT 06106-1591

Representative Brendan Sharkey
Speaker of the House of Representatives
Legislative Office Building, Room 4100
Hartford, CT 06106-1591

President Looney and Speaker Sharkey:

I am writing to request a special session of the Connecticut General Assembly to tackle two issues that have recently come to our attention: 1) the recent raises that have been given to University of Connecticut top staff members, and 2) the state's application for federal funding to launch a mileage tax pilot program.

UConn Raises

The recent raises that have been handed out to the University of Connecticut's top staff members are extremely concerning and completely tone-deaf to the serious financial problems our state is facing and the sacrifices that are being made throughout state government. As lawmakers, it is our responsibility to do more than voice our concerns. We must act to protect taxpayers and students. Therefore, **I am writing to request that we immediately enter into a special session so that we can eliminate the University of Connecticut's exemptions from the state personnel act which have allowed the university to abuse the freedoms granted to them.**

Based on your comments in the press, I believe that we are in agreement that UConn's raises are outrageous and inappropriate at this time, especially as tuition skyrockets at the university. I hope you also believe that we must do more to protect students and taxpayers from this complete disregard for the state of Connecticut's finances. While I understand the good intentions of those who have suggested a public hearing be held by the legislature's Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, we don't need more discussions. We know these issues, we've discussed these issues before, and we know and understand the problem. We need to take action.

As you know, UConn has successfully lobbied for and received special exemptions from state controls that apply to other state agencies. UConn is exempt from the State Personnel Act and from general state procurement policies. This means UConn is free to hire personnel, set and raise salaries, make major purchases, enter into contracts and lease property without state oversight. These exorbitant raises show that these freedoms have been abused.

While I have many concerns about these many exemptions, at the very least we must go into special session to remove UConn's State Personnel Act exemption immediately. There is no reason why UConn should be allowed to hand out huge raises at a time when thousands of employees are expected to be laid off. The

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university has shown that they need more oversight, because clearly the decisions being made by those in charge and supported by the governor's administration are not the right choices for the people of this state.

In special session we should eliminate the exemptions contained in Sec. 5-198 of the State Personnel Act pertaining to UConn's president, librarians and professional and technical staffs of the constituent unites of higher education.

It is not enough just to voice our complaints. Simply holding yet another public hearing is not good enough at this point. We know the issues and we have an obligation to act.

Mileage Tax

The state of Connecticut has sent the public mixed messages when it comes to a proposed mileage tax. After the mileage tax was proposed in Connecticut in July 2015 at a meeting of the Governor's Transportation Finance Panel, the public outcry was fierce. Republicans immediately spoke out against the tax and Democrat lawmakers eventually followed, denouncing the tax and telling people it was off the table. However, as you know, the idea reappeared in January 2016 in the Governor's Transportation Finance Panel's final report which included proposals to pay for Gov. Malloy's \$100 billion transportation plan. The report discussed Oregon's voluntary mileage-based user fee pilot program and recommended that "State agencies should be directed to design a volunteer pilot program that looks to potentially one day replace the state fuel tax with a manageable VMT system" (Page 53 of the final report).

Now this week we learned that the state has actually applied for federal funding to establish a pilot program for a mileage tax here in Connecticut. We have heard the Department of Transportation, the governor's office, and even some Democrat lawmakers try to downplay this application. However, the application indicates that Connecticut plans to participate in both the initial phase of the program as well as a pilot program. The application also indicates that Connecticut will have to contribute \$300,000 in state funds for the program.

If Democrats oppose the mileage tax as Republicans do, we must immediately go into a special session and vote to prohibit the state from participating in any pilot program for a mileage tax. Our state cannot afford to contribute a single dollar to such a program that would only add more burdens to taxpayers. I ask that you include this prohibition of any mileage tax pilot program in a call for special session.

Thank you for your time and attention. I hope we can work together to make a positive difference on these two very important issues.

Sincerely,



Len Fasano
Senate Minority Leader