

State Senator 28th District

For More Information on Candidate Positions:

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Philip Dwyer (Democratic, Working Families)

1. Why are you running for this office?

I've dedicated my entire life to community service. As the former CEO of one of the largest YMCAs in Connecticut and as Chairman of the Fairfield Board of Education, I've made the tough decisions necessary to balance budgets, while preserving important services for those in need. My career has been committed to public service, with a focus on youth, families, and better schools.

Education funding will be the central issue of next year's budget debate. My knowledge and experience, having served on two different Boards of Education, makes me uniquely qualified to help the legislature find an honest school funding formula. With a lifetime of advocacy for children, my voice will be listened to by Hartford politicians.

2. What are your top 3 legislative priorities?

1) I will make it easier to foster innovation in the state and make sure Connecticut has the best educated workers. I will work to turn the state's Universities into hubs of innovation and research, with universities and businesses working together, so Connecticut can continue to grow industries with good paying jobs in alternative energy, healthcare, bioscience, and technology.

2) I will fight to fully fund our public schools. I will work to keep class sizes from growing by working to restore the cuts to Connecticut's public schools and making sure education isn't on the chopping block in the future.

3) Every day, the legislature needs to ask itself what it can do to prevent gun violence. We have some of the most responsible gun violence prevention laws in the country, but we must do much more.

3. Do you believe there are barriers to voting in Connecticut? If so, what would you do to eliminate them?

Yes. The right to vote is the most fundamental exercise of control a citizen has over government, and any barrier to voting should be heavily scrutinized. Requiring a specific, enumerated reason to vote by absentee ballot is one such barrier. We should continue to pursue no-excuse early voting and no-excuse absentee voting, which is already allowed in the majority of states. We also need to make it easier for residents to register to vote; which the state has begun to address through the "Motor Voter Act."

We must also fight against discriminatory voting laws, such as requiring photo identification in order to vote. These types of laws are shown to have a disproportionate effect on low-income families.

4. What do you propose as specific, achievable strategies for balancing the state budget?

Discuss up to three such strategies.

As the former CEO of one of Connecticut's largest YMCAs, I had to make the tough decisions allocating limited resources and asking more out of our staff. I will take a close look at what

additional state programs can be by using results-based accountability metrics, and will cut programs that are no longer working.

But we can't just cut our way out of the budget deficit. We must grow the tax base, by focusing on expanding tax credits for Connecticut-based small businesses so they can grow and succeed. And I will also work to incentivize businesses that hire and employ Connecticut workers so more people will live and work in Connecticut.

Finally, I will work to foster innovation in the state and make sure we have the best educated workers. We can incentivize partnerships between the state's universities and businesses to continue to grow industries with good paying jobs, like bioscience.

5. What achievable strategies do you advocate to address CT's underfunded liabilities, such as bonded indebtedness, and state employee and teacher pensions and post-employment benefits? Discuss up to three such strategies.

We absolutely need to reduce debt, because the state needs to have the resources to provide services to our most needy. Connecticut has one of the largest per capita debt ratios of any state in the country. We simply cannot be spending more than we make. Republicans have been saying this for years, but have been ineffective. My voice will be one that the majority will listen to.

A pension is a promise to employees—we ask for loyalty and a lifetime of work, and in return, we promise them that they will not retire in poverty. This is a promise we need to keep. As Chair of the Fairfield Board of Education, I know first-hand how hard our teachers work. They have earned and deserve their pensions.

6. Some businesses claim state tax codes and regulations are a bigger headache for business owners than state tax rates. Do you agree? What specifics would you propose to tackle the issue near term in ways that aid business and spur job growth?

When I was leading the YMCA, the business owners we partnered with would tell me about their struggles with state government. State departments don't work together, and business leaders are not at the table when regulations are being negotiated.

Many regulations are necessary, many are important. Regulations on the purchase and sale of firearms, for example, are critical to preventing gun violence. But there are some regulations that are burdensome and unfair to small businesses.

When new regulations are proposed, business and industry representatives should have a seat at the table. There should be an ongoing dialogue between industry and government, so future regulations will make sense to businesses.

Tony Hwang (Republican, Independent)

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1. Why are you running for this office?

I am running for re-election to continue the commitment to community that has been my top priority for the past 10 years in public service.

While I'm proud of what we've accomplished, I believe we can do more to make a meaningful impact in our community.

I believe in the greatness of our state and our country, and am grateful to represent you in

Hartford. Together, we can create a more prosperous Connecticut. By controlling spending and reducing our high tax burden, we can create a friendly business environment that fosters job growth and economic vitality. And by reducing the size and scope of our state government, we can allocate resources to address critical challenges such as improving transportation infrastructure.

We must have a predictable, sustainable, and transparent state government that puts the well-being, health and safety of citizens first. You can count on me to put people before politics.

2. What are your top 3 legislative priorities?

1. Taxes & spending
2. Jobs and the economy
3. Transportation

All 3 require immediate action and, fortunately, addressing one, in essence, addresses the others. We must end excessive borrowing & decrease spending in smart, responsible ways, to send a strong message that we can create a predictable, sustainable and transparent government. Simultaneously, by making the necessary investments to improve our transportation infrastructure via roads, rails and waterways, we create a sustainable economic ecosystem that will help create jobs and grow our businesses.

We can achieve the above improvements by: privatizing certain state social services; moving to a defined contribution pension plan for state employees; eliminate excessive and burdensome bureaucracy and taxes that hurt businesses.

Most importantly, you have my commitment that I will address these issues in a predictable and transparent process, an open mind and in a true and genuine bipartisan manner.

3. Do you believe there are barriers to voting in Connecticut? If so, what would you do to eliminate them?

I support measures that protect ballot access while maintaining the integrity of our electoral process. Everyone deserves the right to participate in a free and fair election. We must respect the electoral process by taking every precaution to ensure that one person gets one vote, and that voting rights are protected against voter fraud.

I believe we should amend the state constitution to remove those restrictions that limit voting by absentee ballot to better reflect changing lifestyles. Additionally, I believe that we have an obligation to instill a sense of civic duty in our children through educational programs and community outreach.

Ultimately, it is incumbent upon elected officials to maintain strong relationships with their constituents. When elected officials remain committed to public service and actively engage their constituencies, the younger generation is more likely to appreciate their right to vote, and ability to contribute to society.

4. What do you propose as specific, achievable strategies for balancing the state budget? Discuss up to three such strategies.

My plan for a balanced budget includes common sense initiatives that reduce spending and create a leaner, more efficient government, consolidate redundancies and privatize where appropriate.

For example, measures like cutting the number of legislative committees from 27 to 15 would significantly reduce administrative costs, but also encourage state government to function more effectively.

In many cases, the private sector does a better job delivering important services at more competitive costs. I propose privatizing duplicated dual delivery services. The state could

reallocate the savings and provide additional funding to programs offering services directly to our communities.

Finally, we must respect the state Constitutional Spending Cap and fulfill the promise made to taxpayers two decades ago when we introduced the Personal Income Tax. By enacting the required definitions identified by the CT Attorney General, the state can uphold its end of the bargain and be accountable to taxpayers.

5. What achievable strategies do you advocate to address CT's underfunded liabilities, such as bonded indebtedness, and state employee and teacher pensions and post-employment benefits? Discuss up to three such strategies.

To address Connecticut's underfunded liabilities, we must reform state employee pension programs to restore balance to the system. This can be achieved through a variety of measures that both increase employee contributions and decrease the state's financial burden that exacerbates the deficit.

Non-hazardous employees would contribute 4% of their salary to their pension benefits. Today, those on the bottom tier contribute only 2%, and top tier employees don't contribute at all. This adjustment, coupled with modest increases to health insurance premiums and copays, suspension of longevity bonuses and other incremental reforms, would help to close the gap significantly. We must also prioritize better oversight and more stringent accountability. By spiking overtime in the last three years of employment, some state employees make more in retirement than they did as an employee. I would work to impose common sense restrictions aimed at preventing this and other forms of waste and abuse.

6. Some businesses claim state tax codes and regulations are a bigger headache for business owners than state tax rates. Do you agree? What specifics would you propose to tackle the issue near term in ways that aid business and spur job growth?

Connecticut businesses of all sizes agree: predictability, sustainability and transparency in state government are critical to their success.

To insulate business from unfair or cost-prohibitive mandates, I recommend that newly proposed regulations undergo an evaluation process where a standardized set of criteria is used to determine whether the laws are necessary and justifiable. This due diligence would ensure lawmakers have the ability to make well-informed decisions that take economic impacts into consideration in addition to public health and safety.

We need to cultivate a cooperative, as opposed to punitive, relationship between businesses and government. In cases where businesses have been found to be in violation of state regulations, but then take remedial action to comply, their fines should be adjusted accordingly. I would also review occupational licensing laws to remove any potential barriers or red tape – such as exorbitant fees or exclusive educational requirements - which disproportionately impact low-income populations.