

## Our Businesses

## Chamber maps out legislative agenda



**Michael Nicastro**  
Chamber  
Chatter

The chamber held its annual Legislative Breakfast on Jan. 26.

While there are numerous issues that we could present for a column, we will take what our legislative committee has developed and refine it to four major categories. For this coming session, those will be: The State's Budget; Unfunded Mandates on Municipalities; Avoidance of Anti-Business legislation; and, A focus on repairing our rapidly eroding roads

and bridges.

Here's a little more detail around each issue:

**State Budget:** The truth be told the state's budget was balanced on the backs of the taxpayers (both individuals and small businesses) in 2011. Current forecasts are now showing a significant risk that despite a significant tax increase a deficit will be realized. This is due in large from weaker income tax revenues but also from the lack of any real cost savings.

Unrealistic expense reductions such as the hope that state employees will take better care of themselves and thus generate health-care savings have not been realized.

To complicate this issue further, we are once again trapped by a multi-year no lay-off provision. In order for Connecticut to achieve actual fiscal stability, the legislature must develop a plan that implements real cost reductions in lieu of further tax increases.

**Unfunded Mandates on Municipalities:** The leg-

islature must take action on relief of unfunded mandates on municipalities this session. The chamber supports the efforts of the Connecticut Conference on Municipalities. This can no longer be all talk and no action.

There is so much "low hanging fruit" to be harvested in unfunded mandates that it is ludicrous that the state has failed to act. Just the simple step of a temporary suspension of certain mandates would have provided some level of relief. It will be unconscionable if this simple issue goes another session without being addressed.

**Avoidance of Anti-Business Legislation:** The First Five Program and the proposed Innovation Ecosystem appear to have the potential for positive growth and for diminishing Connecticut's reputation for being anti-business. For these and other programs to be effective, the legislature must avoid the passage of blatant anti-business legislation such as Paid Sick Leave.

Even the mere introduction of legislation (i.e. Captive Audience which was shelved) can be detrimental. professional site selectors are very savvy and they know a truly pro-business state from one masquerading as one. The administration and DECD can attend all the conferences in the world to no avail if in the end we have a legislature that continues to send up legislation that crushes small business, the heartbeat of the economy.

**Road and Bridge Improvements:** The legislature must push DOT to focus its efforts on improving Connecticut's status as one of the worst in the maintenance and repair of our roads and bridges. Have we learned nothing from the Mianus River Bridge?

To aid in road repair and congestion relief, the legislature must also push DOT to act quickly on the strategic rail plan as it relates to the expansion and reclamation of freight lines across the state. Getting truck traffic off of

our highways is crucial to the competitiveness of the state.

As stated previously, there is much more to the chamber's Legislative Agenda, which we will have shared with the legislators on Jan. 26. If addressed, the items above, (just the "tip of the iceberg") can go a long way to helping business prosper.

**Congratulations to Bristol Hospital:** On behalf of the chamber's staff and Board of Directors we offer our congratulations to Kurt Barwis and the entire team at Bristol Hospital for another successful year. The hospital, which is a critical economic engine for the City of Bristol and many of the surrounding communities, continues to grow and diversify in an extremely challenging marketplace.

We would also like to thank and congratulate outgoing Bristol Hospital board chair, Nancy Blanchette for her years of voluntary service to the hospital and the community at large. We can tell you

firsthand that whenever a community organization needs help or guidance Nancy jumps right in with both feet.

At the same time, the chamber joins the rest of the business community in welcoming Marie O'Brien as the new board chair for Bristol Hospital. Having worked with Marie in the past, there is no doubt that her business acumen and "get it done" approach will be a critical resource to Kurt Barwis and hospital leadership as they navigate the rapidly changing tides that now affect the community health institution industry.

We wish Marie the best of luck in her tenure as board chair.

Michael D. Nicastro is President and CEO of the Central Connecticut Chambers of Commerce. He can be reached at [M.Nicastro@CentralCTChambers.org](mailto:M.Nicastro@CentralCTChambers.org)



From the left, Kim Hampson, customer service manager of Stop & Shop on Farmington Avenue, and Diana Esposito, membership director Central Connecticut Chamber of Commerce.

## Raffle winners announced by Plaza

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