



2018 Voters' Guide: State Senate Candidates for 25th

Welcome to the League of Women Voters of Norwalk (LWV-N) Voters' Guide! The LWV is a national, non-partisan organization that believes an educated voter is a motivated voter. Each year, local leagues throughout the state put together guides to help voters understand where their candidates stand on the issues that impact their city or town. The League solicits information from the candidates by asking them questions that can be answered by all candidates, regardless of their party affiliation. The answers come directly from the candidates and are printed unedited by local leagues.

As candidates may cover more than one municipality – as in this case – answers from the candidates may be shared between leagues in other towns that the candidate represents. We thank the LWV of Darien for collecting responses from these candidates (with the exception of the ECS question that was added by LWV-Norwalk).

Here are the unedited responses from the two candidates for the 25th, in alphabetical order:

Candidate Marc D'Amelio

LWV: What are your top three legislative priorities? Why these?

MD: It no longer makes economic sense for people and companies to stay in Connecticut. Norwalk and Darien are too expensive to live in; our highways are gridlocked, we have fewer job prospects, rising property taxes, and stagnating home values. Reversing these trends is the priority.

Improving our competitiveness and reducing the uncertainty raised by our fiscal problems are vital to growing our job market and attracting businesses. We must work to retain existing companies without using a failed corporate welfare program. Every senator should work on bipartisan measures to close our deficit and looming unfunded liabilities. Expense cuts and structural changes coupled with tax reform, innovation and a more business-friendly environment are the real solutions.

We must fund our infrastructure while acting more strategically to tackle its extraordinary cost. Fairfield county generates over 40% of the state's revenue; therefore, we need to prioritize investing in our local infrastructure to keep this engine moving. Shorter commute time to NYC would be a game changer. We also need to address congestion, not with tolls or more roads, but with investments in mass transit and new innovative shared-transportation made possible by technology. We need to look at creative out-of-the-box ideas like underground travel as pioneered by The Boring Company.

Finally, we must find a solution to Norwalk's unfair treatment under the Educational Cost Sharing formula. The ECS formula is broken, but we also need to look at other means of funding education, so we may achieve results and provide relief for local property owners.

LWV: What alternative revenue streams are you suggesting to keep Connecticut fiscally sound for years to come?

MD: The answer to Connecticut's fiscal problems cannot be resolved with increased taxes. The tax and spend model of the last eight years has proven a disaster. We rank 46th in economic outlook and 49th in economic performance. In contrast, from Maryland to Maine, there are robust recoveries. All those states cut taxes, introduced reforms, and tightened their belt during the economic downturn. We raised taxes at record levels and spent freely on expensive projects we could not afford or need.

Fiscal recovery for Connecticut starts with cutting spending and prioritizing expenditures that produce real returns for our State. Not a week goes by without an article in the news about abuse, fraud or waste. We need to tackle the Legislative Auditors' report which identified over \$500 million in potential savings. We must cut \$1 billion in annual operating expenses by eliminating redundancies across agencies and reducing the \$400 million in administrative costs across dozens of state agencies. We also should evaluate opportunities to privatize services and implement zero-based budgeting.

As far as increasing revenues. I support the Commission on Fiscal Stability and Economic Growth's recommendation to eliminate exemptions and deductions from current taxes. We need to level the playing field and would generate an additional \$750 million per year in revenue.

However, the largest source of additional revenue will be generated by increased economic activity from restructuring taxes and creating a business-friendly environment where it makes economic sense for people and companies to stay in Connecticut.

LWV: Would you support establishing an independent citizen's redistricting commission-- similar to California's to draw new legislative district lines after the 2020 Census? Why or why not?

MD: It is my understanding that CT has an established redistricting process that is transparent, very explicit and bipartisan. There would have to be a good reason to change it.

As far as California is concerned, the redistricting commission is under fire, especially from Hispanic groups such as the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, which are considering suing over inadequate Latino representation. It doesn't appear that a citizen's commission is not a foolproof solution and runs the danger of adding another cumbersome layer of government.

LWV: What are your ideas on how to increase Norwalk's share of Educational Cost Sharing (ECS) funding?

MD: My very first bill will be to further re-balance the ECS formula. House Representative Fred Wilms has been successfully leading the charge modifying the ECS formula with a more favorable percentage for Norwalk based off of the grand list. There is a consensus that other factors more closely determine the actual funding needs of a municipality. The weight of the grand list in the recently revised formula has moved from approximately 90% down close to 70% benefiting Norwalk. We need to reduce that percentage down further to just over the legal percentage of 50%. More important factors to weigh are the percentage of students on free or reduced lunch, English Learners, and SPED. Income determinations should also include the percentage of households at or near the poverty line and the median income of the community, not the average which can hurt poor communities in municipalities with high-income disparity, such as Norwalk. There is ample evidence that all the above factors are meaningful drivers. Senator Duff simply has not had the political will to rally a coalition to execute these changes, but I will make it my priority.

However, I believe that we need to look for answers beyond the ECS formula to bring new funding mechanisms to our municipalities. We should be looking into a separate funding mechanism for SPED. I also support the Commission on Fiscal Stability and Economic Growth's recommendation to allow a municipal sales tax. This recommendation would provide local funding and reward cities for the economic activities they provide to their neighboring towns.

Candidate Bob Duff (D)

LWV: What are your top three legislative priorities? Why these?

BD: In a broad sense, I'd say growing our economy, fighting for the middle class and holding true to our values. They're all interrelated. Here's what I mean:

I support Earned Family Medical Leave, a livable minimum wage, an affordable college education and affordable health care, especially for our seniors. Each affects how much we earn and how much of that we get to keep. Economies grow in lockstep with a citizen's ability to learn, apply that knowledge in the workforce and earn a fair wage. The great middle class was built on these principles.

A closely related issue is my focus on small business growth and the strengthening our communities. All of this — the growing of our economy, the fight to preserve our middle class and holding true to our values — can be realized by investing in workforce-ready education, modern transportation systems and affordable housing.

Of course there are other issues — ones that didn't make the top three — that are no less important. Net Neutrality and Internet privacy are important to nearly everyone. There's a

need to get a handle on prescription drug costs, ensure everyone who's qualified to vote gets that opportunity, and preserve and protect our natural resources.

LWV: What alternative revenue streams are you suggesting to keep Connecticut fiscally sound for years to come?

BD: My record shows that I've always been a fiscal conservative. I loath the thought of raising taxes unless the most dire situation requires that. Expanding our tax base is the most practical and painless way to increase State revenue streams. And right now we're in the best possible position to do this.

There are over 25,000 high-paying jobs available at just three Connecticut defense companies. There are many more open positions when you include their local suppliers. Then there's the IT sector. Tack on another 4,000 job openings.

You can see why I support investments in education, transportation and affordable housing. We need a trained workforce to fill these jobs. We need the transportation infrastructure and readily-available housing to attract workers from out of state. And we need all three – education, transportation and affordable housing – to attract established and startup businesses to Connecticut.

LWV: Would you support establishing an independent citizen's redistricting commission-- similar to California's-- to draw new legislative district lines after the 2020 Census? Why or why not?

BD: An independent commission is something to consider since we've all seen the negative effects of gerrymandering across the country. For example, most Congressional seats are considered "safe" for one party or another. Who holds those positions are not decided by the broad electorate, but rather party. insiders, based on maps drawn by state legislatures. Of course, this is a root cause of Washington's gridlock.

The residents of our state should be proud we have a redistricting commission that is evenly drawn between Democrats and Republicans, with the final outcome approved by the full legislature. The process is fairer because both parties have an equal voice at the table.

LWV: What are your ideas on how to increase Norwalk's share of Educational Cost Sharing (ECS) funding?

BD: I can offer Norwalk something better than ideas – a concrete solution that's already being implemented. For the first time in a generation, Connecticut has a solid education funding formula.

After the Superior Court handed down its decision in CCJEF v. Rell, I seized the opportunity with other like-minded legislators. We designed a formula to promote investment in our urban

areas, reduce the achievement gap and recognize the different needs of our students all across our state. This was my top legislative priority in 2017. A lot of work went into this effort - writing and submitting legislation, getting input at public hearings, hashing out the details with my colleagues and finding common ground with all the stakeholders.

In our bi-partisan budget, we fine tuned the wealth ratio. This helped cities like Norwalk — ones with high property values but with people who struggle to make ends meet. We included extra funding for concentrated poverty and English language learners. These were all firsts.

Just this fiscal year, Norwalk received more than \$400,000 over and above the tens of millions of dollars allocated for school construction and repairs. Municipalities contribute the bulk of local education funding and the state has definitely been a strong partner. That's how it should be.