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The League of Women Voters of Norwalk invited all candidates for State Senate and State Representative in Norwalk's districts to submit responses to a six-item questionnaire, a photo, and a campaign URL.

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**Connecticut State Senate District 25**

<b>Bob Duff* (D)</b>	<b>Ellie Kousidis (R)</b>
	
<a href="https://bobduff.com/">https://bobduff.com/</a>	<a href="https://www.kousidis4ctsenate.com/">https://www.kousidis4ctsenate.com/</a>

\*incumbent

**1. Considering your education, employment experience, political involvement, and personal attributes, what qualifications do you have to be a good State Senator?**

**Duff:** My public service career began at age eight. I had written a letter to the mayor of Norwalk concerned about the future of Duffy Field. We still have our Duffy Field, now renamed

Veteran's Park. My parents had instilled in me a belief that activism is a civic duty. In college I earned a degree in political science while interning with former senator Chris Dodd. I learned how "the system" works and how to make it work for my future constituents.

My years as a long-term substitute teacher in Norwalk and as a real estate professional taught me the value of listening and understanding people's needs, wants, and don't wants.

As a member of the state legislature since 2001, and currently Senate Majority Leader, I've been very effective at building consensus among my colleagues, regardless of political affiliation or personal ideology, to move Connecticut forward.

**Kousidis:** Just as I have always had a student-first approach to education, I will have a citizen's-first approach to legislation and issues that concern our community.

I am an educator, a mother and a wife of a small business owner. I hold a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology, as well as two Masters degrees; one in Teaching and the second in Educational Technology. Additionally, I hold three State of CT teaching certifications including, Secondary Social Studies, Library Media Studies, and Technology Education. I am passionate about making sure all children have access to the tools and resources they need to be successful. In 2018, I was the proud recipient of the Stamford Public Education Foundation Excellence in Education Educators Award.

Throughout my years as an educator, I've seen what it takes to make positive educational experiences that lead to improved outcomes for students and extra bureaucracy is not the answer.

**2. In the July 2020 special session, the General Assembly passed a new police accountability bill, which the governor signed into law. Do you support or oppose that bill? If elected, how – if at all – will you change state laws about police accountability?**

**Duff:** There are people on both sides of this issue who view police accountability as anti-police. Not so. This is not an us vs. them issue. It's about improving public relations through increased transparency and enhanced professionalism. That is what I support.

Nothing in our recently passed legislation hinders a police officer's ability to control crime or enforce laws, two of the three primary responsibilities of police. And it does aim to enhance that third responsibility, one the public has cried out for – maintaining order, or as we used to say, keeping the peace.

Police work is tough. It's often dangerous. Every officer wants to go home in one piece at the end of their shift. My hope is that this new legislation makes for renewed public trust in and community support for the police, making a police officer's job easier and safer.

**Kousidis:** The police accountability bill is a sweeping piece of legislation that will drastically change policing practices in Connecticut and overturn decades of Supreme Court precedent. Connecticut Democrats rushed this bill through the House and the State Senate during a special session with little comment or analysis. Many legislators, police officials, and officers have voiced their concerns about how this bill will severely damage police retention and recruiting. This will make our communities less safe and it is not necessary in Connecticut.

I think we need community solutions for community issues. The one-size fits all approach taken by our current administration creates more problems than it solves.

Connecticut ranks 8th best in the nation on the U.S. News Safest States report. USA Today ranks Connecticut ninth best, noting in particular safety in Connecticut schools. The Norwalk Police Department has been accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement since 1995.

**3. Affordable housing is an ongoing concern in Norwalk and surrounding towns. What changes, if any, to state laws and/or programs will you support to address this issue?**

**Duff:** The challenge at the state level is crafting policy that's workable in diverse communities, from urban, to suburban, to rural. We've made good progress in affordable housing in recent years. Look at just about any mixed-use development and you'll see provisions for affordable housing. By far the biggest issue is a community's opposition. That's the current issue at many proposals.

We've had legislation in place since 1989 to promote affordable housing. But today we still have too many families, elderly and young people, all with limited incomes, who are locked out of the housing market. If we are ever to achieve economic class and racial integration, we'll need to change people's hearts. And that's something we can't legislate.

**Kousidis:** Connecticut is ranked 48th in the nation for fiscal health. It is no surprise that our community is struggling with affording housing. We are saying goodbye to businesses regularly. Connecticut was once one of the largest manufacturing states. We need to bring these jobs and businesses back to Connecticut. Our answers to affordable housing must include a broad approach to becoming a thriving state that is conducive to businesses. State control of local zoning is a narrow approach and does not address the true problem. The state should stay focused on creating policies to ensure thriving communities.

**4. What is your view on statewide laws and mandates, as opposed to local autonomy for Connecticut's municipalities? Is the balance about right, or should there be more statewide consistency, or more local autonomy? Give one or more specific examples that apply to our local area.**

**Duff:** The word “regionalization” has been co-opted – transformed into a divisive political term. It means nothing more than sharing services between communities. The goal is to maximize dollars spent in order to save taxpayers their hard earned money. With 169 municipalities and 162 school districts, we have a lot of duplication in our state. Approaching housing, transportation and other municipal functions with an eye toward maximizing efficiency and saving taxpayer dollars is a goal we should all share.

**Kousidis:** Top on my agenda for state legislations is to promote local control of our communities and schools, and stop forced regionalization. Forced regionalization will add levels of bureaucracy to our schools that is just that...an extra level of bureaucracy. It will not bring better education to our schools and I have seen first hand of how local control benefits our children.

Every community has different needs and the more local the solutions, the better outcomes we can expect.

**5. If elected, will you support or oppose the State Constitution being amended to allow the General Assembly to provide for early voting or no-excuse absentee voting?**

**Duff:** I am support all efforts to make the right to vote as convenient and expedient as possible. Amending the state constitution is a lengthy process that requires a good deal of thoughtful consideration. However, Connecticut is behind where many other states are in this area and we should provide easier access so everyone can participate in our democracy.

**Kousidis:** I believe it is a right and a privilege to vote. We are in unprecedented times but we are a people that can solve problems. We should be able to find the balance between having the safest and most secure election process. And as with so many items, it will take input from the local towns and municipalities.

**6. Considering the state's response to and recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, what will your top priorities be in this regard if elected?**

**Duff:** Continue leading with science and facts to ensure the health of our people. That we open up responsibly, not repeating the mistakes of many states. We've had one of the lowest rates of infection in the country. At the same time we've opened 95 percent of the state's economy, with an over 85 percent economic recovery rate.

And rather than closing the 2020 fiscal year with a COVID related deficit, we had a small surplus. That money goes into our "rainy day" fund, now at a record high. In fact, it's more than 15% of our budget, so the extra is adding to our efforts to pay down long term debt.

As a legislator, I know we'll have to work on helping our small businesses, non-profits, arts organizations get back on their feet. With our strong fiscal position, we're better prepared to be a good partner.

**Kousidis:** We are currently in Stage 2 of reopening in our state. COVID-19 cases have been brought under control, schools are reopening, the move to stage 3 continues to be a long and drawn out process.

We need our legislators back at work participating in these conversations and representing the people they were elected to represent. It is critical that the people have a voice in this process.

We must work together to keep our citizens informed and educated with clear benchmarks. Transparency is key to building trust in our community.

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