

MINUTES  
Wilton Democratic Town Committee  
February 2, 2010, Room B at Town Hall

PRESENT: John Kalamarides, Sharon Grace, Tom Burgess, Alysia Benzinger, Richard Creeth, Carol Ball, David Borglum, Lois Alcosser, Ernie Loser, Charlie Lewis, Fred Herot, Paul Burnham, Mitchell Hirsch, Kelly Franklin, Dan Troph, Barbara Massy-Bear, Ernie Ricco

GUESTS: State Representative Peggy Reeves, Registrar Carole Young-Kleinfeld, Louise Herot, Ron Kashden, George Jepsen, Tom Dec, Valerie Rosensen

At 7:32 pm Chair John Kalamarides calls the meeting to order.

SPEAKER George Jepsen for Attorney General

John Kalamarides introduces George as a friend of the Wilton Democrats, who we have seen often at our events and who knows us. George was the Senate Majority leader and chairman of the Democratic State Central Committee.

George Jepsen says that Attorney General Richard Blumenthal has set the bar high for his successor and showed how important the Attorney General's office is to the people of CT. This job is so important we should nominate the person who can do the best job for the people of CT. George has broad legal qualifications, including 26 years as a practicing attorney and a record fighting for the issues important to the people of CT. He is an honors graduate from Harvard; has a Masters in public policy and worked for Archibald Cox. He was staff council to the carpenters union in southwestern CT and during his 10 years as staff council to the carpenters union in southwestern CT, he fought for fair wages, health care benefits and against discrimination. He went after unscrupulous contractors so honest contractors could compete. At his law firm he has worked at every court level in CT, including the Connecticut Supreme Court. George has a real-world understanding of the impact of law on every citizen in CT and will be ready to serve on day one.

He has been a leader in fighting for consumer protection, civil rights, the right to choose, the ban on assault weapons, open space preservation, clean air and clean water. He has written many of the laws on the books now and on most of these laws he had to thwart entrenched interests and lobbyists.

Like Richard Blumenthal, George pledges that, if elected Attorney General, he will not run for the Senate in 2012, or governor in 2014. He will be committed, instead, to building the relationships withing the Attorney General's office, pushing legislation and focusing on the legal work of the office. CT needs full time attorney general, not someone who is running for their next office.

George is asking for the DTC's support tonight and will bring all experience to bear to be best AG possible. We should do right by the people of CT; choose the best person for the job.

Richard Creeth asks about candidate eligibility and the need for 10 years of active practice as a lawyer. George Jepsen responds that he has no comment on whether Susan Bysiewicz's 8 years of private practice in NY and CT in addition to her service as Secretary of State constitute active practice. George's concern is that this question of her credentials could make it more difficult for her and the Democrats if she is the Democratic Nominee for state Attorney General – if the court proceeding on the issue is

protracted, then there is a cloud over her candidacy, but even if she is deemed to be qualified, the Republicans can attack her on this and it may raise questions among voters.

Peggy Reeves asks what happened to the funds from the tobacco settlement.

George says the tobacco litigation may have been Richard Blumenthal's finest hour: it was a lonely fight where few thought there was a chance of success. George as majority leader fought to put the settlement money in a trust fund. Other state leaders, concerned about the budget, used that money for the general fund.

Answering Carole's question, George says he has a good relationship with the media; and working with the media as a public advocate is an important piece of the job of Attorney General.

Kelly asks whether the U.S. Supreme Court ruling on corporations and campaign finance has changed politics. George says it is going to be difficult: what the court did in terms of corporate free speech will trump any state law going in the other direction. Ironically, Justices Roberts and Alito came in banging the table about stare decisis and now we see they have a different standard for laws they don't like.

Mitch asks what generally George thought about taking action to protect consumers against financial and insurance firms.

George says Richard Blumenthal has done a good job; but it is like whack a mole and so the Attorney General has to be vigilant. To the extent there are state regulatory bodies, you are working closely with these agencies.

Tom Burgess asks if the Attorney General's office is adequately staffed. George Jepsen does not think there is an issue and says the AGs office is profit center for state government.

Sharon asks what area George thinks is particularly important to pursue as Attorney General. George says that given the fiscal and economic problems, he would like to find the revenues and go after scammers. Thus, his short-term priority would be to take action that helps economy and helps revenues.

Regarding the governor's race, George supports Dan Malloy, though he likes Ned and thinks Ned would do a good job, too. Dan, however, is particularly suited to be governor because he is a proven leader who has dealt with the complexity of government at a high level; he understands attracting business, economic development, making budget cuts while improving services, the importance of a strong economic development plan that interrelates with tax policies.

#### APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Motion to Approve the minutes from December and January; second; unanimously carries.

#### TREASURER'S REPORT

John assures us there is money in the bank.

#### A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

John Kalamarides states that though these are difficult times for our country and our party, we must remember that there is strength in our people and our leaders, such as Peggy Reeves, Richard Creeth,

Ted Hoffstatter and Karen Birck, who are all working so hard for our town. Jim Himes and President Obama are likewise working hard for the people. We are going to re-elect Peggy and Jim

SPEAKER Cam Staples for Attorney General

Peggy Reeves introduces Cam Staples

Cam represents Hamden and New Haven and lives in New Haven. He is a state representative since 1993 and is house chairman of Revenue and Bonding. Cam has been a leader in the party and has a B.A. from Wesleyan, A masters of government administration from the University of Pennsylvania, a J.D. from UCONN Law School.

Before 1993, Cam served on the New Haven Board of Alderman – an amazing place to learn politics as there are 30 members and every neighborhood is well-represented. He first ran for the legislature because of a real concern about the quality of public education and he chaired the education committee for 8 years until he moved to the finance committee, which is challenging in other ways: people need their rights protected and to get access to services they need in their lives. It is also the bonding committee – we completely reshaped UCONN, which is an investment in our future. Professionally, he has been a lawyer at a law firm, where he battles insurance companies to get treatments approved, general council for a medical society; and for 5 years was the person people around the country came to with complaints about Insurance companies, which has given him a glimpse about health care.

Cam is running for the Attorney General because he has an abiding belief that that is the place where people who can't fight for their rights can get help.

Being attorney general presents the opportunity to make things happen and advocate for people. 2 – 3 weeks ago, Cam decided it was time to run and formed a candidate committee, not an exploratory committee. He will use public financing and is giving up his house seat.

Connecticut's Attorney General should be someone who has an investment in the job because it takes years to get the respect of people and make the office work the way it should; it is not a place to go in order to run for another office.

Richard Blumenthal thought outside the box – Sharon hospital almost closed several years ago. And private company offered to run it as a for-profit hospital. The community wanted hospital but was not sure about a for-profit hospital. The AG brought together the community and the company to create a nonprofit foundation. Cam wants to be that kind of AG.

Carol Ball – mentioned background in education and healthcare – do you see yourself doing something about education early on and what would it be:

1. Cam says there is a lawsuit pending in CT about equitable public education funding and the decision will come down soon. The AG will be involved in fashioning a remedy if state loses; Dick Blumenthal was involved in Sheff v. O'Neill. Ultimately he got involved in negotiating with the Sheff plaintiffs. If lose and can fashion remedy Cam will be involved.
2. Regarding the federal government – can make sure US govt does provide the funding promised.

Kelly asks what would be different about Cam's approach from the other candidates: Cam doesn't know exactly what they are saying. One candidate hasn't committed to a full term; but Cam thinks we should insist on a full term.

Cam has more extensive experience in being an advocate in the legal process; job is advocating for people's rights day in and day out; he is well-trained to use office as an advocate. For Cam it is about depth of experience; understanding of health care issues, which will be a dominant issue in the next few years.

Tom Burgess asks what do you think role of AG is in dealing with fraud (medicare/Medicaid); what can we do better.

Cam responds the first job of the Attorney General is to advise the departments within the state and being proactive if an agency has a problem developing. The AG's office advises Social Services about all medicaid issues, for example, and Cam would be interested in having the AG's office engaged with investigations to make sure they are vigilant against fraud.

Carole – last year Gov. Rell suggested we get rid of the Health Care advocate; and other positions and can be absorbed in AGs.

Cam believes these positions are not expensive as they are just a few people. If you are consolidating, but the people will still be in the positions, then it is just window dressing. Having an independent consumer advocate, for example, is probably a good thing.

Many advocacy groups feel we have squandered the tobacco settlement, smoking ads to health care, could AG have set it up better? Is it the legislature? What do to make sure that does not happen in the future.

Budget pressures lead to using special funds for special purposes. Richard Blumenthal fought to restore the monies raised by Long Island Sound plates for use to preserve the sound, rather than balance the budget. With the tobacco settlement, it was taken over the years despite Richard Blumenthal's efforts. You probably can, when negotiating a settlement, think of better ways of keeping the money separate from the state budget.

#### REPORT FROM State Representative PEGGY REEVES (143<sup>rd</sup>)

1. She is working on: Revising the campaign finance laws to address issues raised in the District Court Decision: lower the threshold for minor parties, reduce the amount of grants, and keep the grants at \$3 million for the governor's race. She hopes the state senate will support the revisions since 79% of people of Ct are for public financing.
2. The estate tax cliffs were eliminated in the budget passed in August. Charlie says the cliffs were the most objectionable aspect of CT's estate tax; and Paul says Connecticut's Estate Tax was the worst in the country before the elimination of the cliff which Peggy fought for.
3. The Supreme Court decision on Public Finance weighs on everything.
4. Election day registration may be considered this term, in answer to Carole's question, but this is a short session, so the major focus is on budget matters, so few other bills are considered.

## CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. Susan Bysiewicz will talk to us at the April Meeting
2. Denise Merrill (running for SOTS) is coming March 3<sup>rd</sup> and we are meeting at Comstock.
3. March 10 in Westport– chairs in district put together program with all gubernatorial candidates.
4. Dan Troph – Democracy for America is concerned about campaign finance so trying to call everyone connected to DFA about a meeting tomorrow night 7pm at the Silver Star and on the following Monday Jim Himes is coming to answer questions.
5. Carol Ball talks about Green Project – Green Festival is in Wilton on Sunday, May 2 at Wilton Center – a good place to meet and greet for candidates. The thrust is about environmental issues, she proposes we have a booth and do some sort of outreach perhaps related to the plastic bag ordinance – perhaps a contest for a bag design.

## SELECTMEN'S REPORT

Richard says that the current focus is on budgets of the town departments and they are coming in with tight budgets and doing a good job. There may be a 2% property tax increase, but we are waiting to see what the Board of Education budget will be. Richard is on the Tri-Board and they are trying to come up with cost savings; they are looking at procurement, for example.

Ted reports that he is working on the dog ordinance related to playing on fields. Parks and Recreation wants a 25 foot ban on all fields and Ted hopes there can be some compromise.

On the plastic bag ban: such a ban will not cost the town money, and it only bans bags at the check-out, not for fruits and vegetables, for example. The Board of Selectmen seems positive about this. Ted wants to work with merchants and educate the public.

Peggy hopes that the end result of this is that people will use reuseable bags, since even paper bags have a huge carbon footprint

Richard says it is the environmental damage that is a problem – the plastic bags will be here 100 years from now. Ted says you there are recycled plastic bags, but the recovery rate is only 1.5%.

Tom Dec mentions a Fairfield University study on paper bag consumption, and it is not completed yet. It seems that paper bag consumption is reduced

David asks about biodegradable plastic bags. The Village Market has biodegradable bags, but they need to be exposed to sunlight to biodegrade.

Ernie Ricco asks about health concerns about reusing bags and germs. Ted will look into this.

John says the Board of Selectmen seem to be unified on moving forward with this.

Carole hopes the Board of Selectmen understand that there is not a lot of room for cuts because there are statutory requirements and staffing needs to ensure fair primaries, elections and town meetings. The budget must increase this year over last, because last year was a municipal election and this year there will be primaries and a state election.

Paul asks that the Board of Selectmen keep in mind that it is not their job just to make the budget lean, but to preserve services. It is a balancing act; be mindful of what you are cutting.

#### FAT CAT PARTY

200 people attended and Ted had all the major leaders of the state there. They all spoke. Ted did a great job organizing this event.

#### WEBSITE

Kelly and Carol suggest we expand and build the website to have a Twitter feed, facebook group and an informative, worthwhile monthly newsletter in order to communicate with the larger group of registered Democrats and get them involved. We need to make a concerted effort to let them know what is up in the near term from our town officials. At the state level, the constituents need to know about the results Peggy is getting. Generally, we need an editorial calendar, talk about issues and people; have surveys. Brevity will be important. The RTC has a twitter feed.

Motion to adopt Kelly and Carol's plan to create a Twitter feed and integrate the website and Facebook and shepherd content from officials on a regular basis; second. Motion carries with one abstention.

#### Paul reports on the Nominating Committee Report

Daniel Darst, Alternate on ZBA, had to resign for family reasons. Stephen Davidson, a criminal defense lawyer in Westchester has lived in Wilton for 5 years and the Nominating Committee puts his name forward. Motion to nominate Stephen Davidson; second. Motion carries unanimously.

#### SPRING FUNDRAISER

Barbara Massy Bear reports

Breakfast on May 1 at Trackside, 9-11:30. Speakers will be invited. Budget is \$450, \$30/ person, teens \$5. Barbara anticipates having tickets to everyone in March. It would be helpful to have a list of speakers and topics we have information other than date time, place. Marianne Wilson. Discussion.

Motion to adjourn, second.

Adjournment at 9:42pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon Grace

Secretary