

From: Susan Kniep, President
The Federation of Connecticut Taxpayer Organizations, Inc.
Website: <http://ctact.org/>
email: fctopresident@ctact.org
860-841-8032
February 5, 2007
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Public Hearing on Municipal Ethics Bills to Include Lobbying
Sponsored by the State of Connecticut's
Government Administration and Elections Committee
Monday, February 5, 2007, 12 Noon
Legislative Office Building, Room 2B, 300 Capitol Ave, Hartford, CT

My name is Susan Kniep. I had served as the Mayor of East Hartford from 1989 to 1993. I had also served for several years on East Hartford's Town Council. I am currently the President of The Federation of Connecticut Taxpayer Organizations, Inc.

I want to thank this committee for your efforts to end the serial culture of corruption which has been running rampant in our State and municipalities. We ask that you pass Ethics Laws which will establish sound ethical standards for municipal public officials and employees. For more than a decade, the Federal government has interceded in Connecticut and exposed corruption which has resulted in the conviction of not only state but local public officials and their friends to include former Bridgeport and Waterbury Mayors Ganim and Giordano.

Local municipalities with political parties which have reigned for years without interruption, and which have little opposition from opposing parties, are a breeding ground for corruption. Common sense tells you that local elected officials cannot police their own. For this reason, State standards must be implemented reflecting on the fact that local ethics boards are appointed by the very same local elected officials the Ethics Boards are charged with overseeing. The Federation would also ask that consideration be given to establishing Regional Ethics Boards.

Recently, Governor Rell and some members of the State legislature have suggested that Eminent Domain legislation should include a required 2/3rd vote by a local legislative body before taking someone's home. In some towns it is not uncommon to see one party in control of 2/3rds of the local legislative body for decades. East Hartford is one such town. The nine member legislative body is comprised of 6 Democrats and 3 Republicans, as it has been for over 40 years.

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The Democrat candidate for mayor in 2006 was also a State representative. Although State law would prohibit her from receiving campaign donations from a lobbyist if she were running for State office, it did not prevent the lobbyist from donating to her local election for Mayor. The Lobbyist who donated was the very same lobbyist who was instrumental in the New London taking of Susette Kelo's home. Therefore, it would be naive of us to believe that the 6 Democrats who sit on the East Hartford town council and who for years have voted in unison would do otherwise on Eminent Domain issues. Further, lobbyists who rely upon these takings should be prohibited from donating to local elections.

In Waterbury, the Mayor has recently announced development plans in which he is a participant not as Mayor but as an investor. This should be prohibited for obvious reasons and State legislators should recognize that fact and enact legislation to prohibit it. Certainly, the Mayor of Waterbury would not be expected to propose such legislation.

In East Hartford, the former Mayor after leaving office returned after two months to convince the town's legislative body to join in a lawsuit which ultimately proved unsuccessful, cost East Hartford taxpayers several thousand dollars, but generated several thousands of dollars for the former Mayor and his law firm.

Secrecy breeds corruption. Elected officials have choices. They can become involved in private development deals and make substantial profits or they can serve the people who elected them without conflict. But they cannot do both. I ask that State legislators recognize that fact and prohibit these conflicts.

Further, lobbyists whose jobs rely on taking our homes or acts against the taxpayers should not be allowed to donate to State legislators running for municipal office nor should they be allowed to donate to municipal mayors or legislative bodies. Certainly, at minimum these donations by lobbyists to municipal officials should be exposed along with the clients they represent.

Thank you for your consideration of my request.