



QUESTIONS FOR THE LABOR COMMISSIONER NOMINEE

By: Lee R. Hansen, Associate Analyst

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

The labor commissioner administers numerous labor laws, including those on wages and working conditions, family and medical leave, unemployment insurance compensation, paid sick leave, and the prevailing wage. She must also (1) collect and publish data on employment, unemployment, and employee earnings; (2) provide the governor with analysis of current and anticipated employment needs; and (3) coordinate the state's employment and training programs.

The labor commissioner is appointed by the governor and confirmed by either chamber of the General Assembly, as determined by the governor.

QUESTIONS

1. What role does the state's unemployment system play in the state's economy? Are there any statutory, regulatory, or administrative changes to the state's unemployment system that could help encourage economic growth? Are claimants who fraudulently claim and receive unemployment benefits a widespread problem? Should the state take steps to make qualifying for benefits more rigorous?
2. During the recession a few years ago, the unemployment trust fund became insolvent and the state subsequently borrowed close to \$1 billion from the federal government in order to continue paying unemployment benefits. Since that time, the state's employers have faced annual special tax assessments and annually increasing federal unemployment taxes to repay the federal loan and its interest. Is there anything that can be done to help ease or reduce these increased costs to the state's employers? Are there any steps that the state can take to prevent this from happening again?

3. Last year, the labor department chose not to apply for an exemption that would have kept the federal unemployment taxes paid by the state's employers from increasing an additional 0.5%. Can you explain why the department chose not to apply for this exemption and describe the process used to reach that decision?
4. Officials in many Connecticut towns believe that the state's prevailing wage law significantly increases their construction costs and limits their ability to fund additional projects. What effect do you believe the state's prevailing wage law has on the state and local economies?
5. Last year, the legislature enacted a law (PA 14-44) that allowed the payroll and other records required under the prevailing wage law to be electronically filed. Has the department been able to implement the necessary technical and administrative upgrades to provide this service?
6. What do you consider the major strengths and weaknesses of the state's current workforce development system? Do you believe that the system is producing the workers with the skills the state's employers will need? How much does the system rely on federal vs. state funding?
7. Last year the Task Force to Study Family Medical Leave Insurance recommended establishing an employee-funded insurance program to provide short-term benefits to workers who are unable to work due to pregnancy or the birth of a child; a non-work related illness or injury; or the need to care for a seriously ill child, spouse, or parent. The task force's proposal recommended that the labor department administer this program. Could the department handle such a task? What resources would it need to successfully implement such a program?
8. In your two years as labor commissioner, what steps has the department taken to make Connecticut more "business friendly?" What other initiatives will you pursue in the future to help achieve this goal? How does the department balance the interests of employees against the interests of employers?
9. Do you believe that the department has adequate resources at its disposal to fulfill its many missions and goals?
10. How well informed is the general public, both employers and employees, about what the department does, and can do for them? Can the department do more to raise the public's awareness?
11. Looking ahead to four years from now, what do you hope to be able to say was your greatest achievement as labor commissioner?

LH:jk/tjo