



QUESTIONS FOR THE LABOR COMMISSIONER NOMINEE

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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. He 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 (CGS § 31-2).

The labor commissioner is appointed by the governor and confirmed by either chamber of the General Assembly, as determined by the governor (CGS §§ 31-1 and 4-5 to 4-7).

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 you aware of any evidence that claimants who fraudulently claim and receive unemployment benefits present a widespread problem? Should the state take steps to make qualifying for benefits more rigorous?
2. During the recession several 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. While the loan is almost paid off, 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 you would advise the state to take in order to prevent this from happening again?
3. 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. As the former mayor of Hamden and



member of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities Board of Directors, what effect do you believe the state's prevailing wage law has on municipal budgets? How do you think your experiences in these positions might influence your oversight of the state's prevailing wage requirements?

4. By law, employers on municipal public works projects must pay the prevailing wage if the project's cost exceeds \$100,000 for renovations or \$400,000 for new construction. Last year, the legislature considered, but did not enact, a bill that would have increased these thresholds for the first time since 1991. What impact do you believe increasing the thresholds might have on both the municipalities and the workers on municipal construction projects?
5. 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?
6. Last year the legislature required the Labor Department to contract with consultants to create an implementation plan for a paid family and medical leave program and perform an actuarial analysis on the funding needed to sustain such a program. The law required the department to submit a report on the plan and actuarial analysis to the Labor and Appropriations committees by February 1, 2016. Can you advise us on the status of the report? If the plan recommends that the department administer such a program, do you believe that it could handle this task with its current resources? What else would it need to successfully implement this program?
7. Prior to your appointment as labor commissioner, how much interaction with the Labor Department did you have, as both a municipal or state official, and as a private citizen? How do you think your experiences might shape your leadership of the department?
8. Several of your most recent predecessors came to the department with backgrounds in organized labor and representing employee interests against employers. Once you are labor commissioner, how will the department balance the interests of employees against the interests of employers?

9. The governor's new budget proposes collapsing a number of Labor Department budget lines into one overall department operations line. If the legislature adopted this method, how would you allocate the money to various programs? Would there be any public input in your decision making process? How would the legislature and the public know where the money is spent? Do you see any advantages or disadvantages to this approach?

10. The proposed budget cuts Labor Department funds by more than \$7 million. These cuts could affect the following programs: Jobs First Employment Services, Youth Employment Program, Incumbent Worker Training, Apprenticeship Program, Veterans' Opportunity Pilot, and the Second Chance Initiative, to name a few. Can you describe how services will be affected if the legislature adopts these cuts? Is it possible these programs partially pay for themselves because they add people to Connecticut's workforce? Could cutting these services negatively impact the state's economic development?

11. Looking ahead, what do you hope to be able to say was your greatest achievement as labor commissioner?

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