My laboratory has worked for over 25 years on the basic biology of cancer—how cancer cells differ from normal cells, and how we can use those differences to develop better and more precise therapies. Over the years my lab has been supported by millions of dollars of grant funding from the NIH, but recently that funding has been much more difficult to obtain. One reason is that at UConn Health, we can support fewer people per grant dollar due to extraordinarily high fringe rates. That means my lab is less productive than labs at other institutions, and it also means I can hire fewer of the high-tech workers we should be encouraging to live in Connecticut.

As you know, a major reason for our high fringe rates is that UConn Health is charged by the state to help pay down the unfunded pension liability. I will provide one example of how this impacts our work. Postdoctoral fellows (research trainees who have a PhD but not yet a faculty position, roughly equivalent to residents in the medical education system) are the backbone of a productive research lab. They make modest salaries and at most institutions have low fringe rates, because they are young, healthy, and as trainees usually not covered by pensions. They stay a maximum of 5-6 years, and thus will never vest in SERS. Yet because at UConn Health their fringe rate includes costs for the unfunded pension liability, those rates are now almost 70%, several times higher than at most competing institutions. Thus the misguided effort to use their fringe rate to bolster the pension fund costs my lab grant dollars, makes it less competitive, and costs the state good jobs is sorely needs.