CHAIRPERSON: Representative Ed Vargas

SENATORS: Duff, Formica, Moore, Kushner

REPRESENTATIVES: Davis, Phipps, D'Agastino, DiMassa, Yaccarino, Perillo

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Some of our colleagues will probably be coming in and out but under the Freedom of Information law, we have to log in by 9:15. So, it's 9:15 so we're logging in. The -- my name is Ed Vargas. I'm the House Chair of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. So, we do the vetting for two branches of government. We don't do the Judge -- the Judges to be a Judge or an arbitrator or something of that nature, they're done by the Judiciary Committee but we do the Executive and Legislative nominations. I'd like to ask my Clerk to please read the safety instructions.

CLERK: In the interest of safety, I would ask you to note the location of and access to the exits in this hearing room. The two doors, which you entered the room, are the emergency exits and are marked with exit signs. In the event of an emergency, please walk quickly to the nearest exit. After exiting the room, go to your right and exit the building by the main entrance or follow the exit signs to one of the other exits. Please quickly exit the building and follow any instructions from Capitol Police. Do not delay and do no return unless you are advised that it is safe to do so. In the event of a lockdown announcement, please remain in the hearing room, stay away from the exit doors
and seek concealment behind desks and chairs until an all-clear announcement is heard.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Madam Clerk. As I explained to a couple of the nominees before the meeting began, we have a Committee that's very, very engaged in many, many issues here. About half of our members are in the Finance Committee which is still working. The other half are on the Appropriations Committee and many of the members of this Committee are part of the leadership of either the State Senate or the State House. But they do get all the materials on each one of the nominees and they do pop in from time to time.

And my Senate co-chair is very busy, very busy because he's also the majority leader of the State Senate. So, but once in a while they're in their office and they do watch us on closed caption TV or on their smart phones because I've heard comments from colleagues about, you know, the presentations of several of the nominees. So, don't take it personal.

We usually ask each nominee when they come forward here in the hot seat before they sit down to raise their right hand and promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth. We allow them a few minutes to make some introductory remarks. Then we open it up for questions if there are any Committee members that would like to ask questions of the nominee. And after we finish with all the nominees of this public hearing, we open it up to the public. Any individual of the public that would like to either weigh in pro or con on any of the nominees is allowed to do so. We usually allow them three minutes to do that unless there is follow up questions from Committee members.
And at that time, I enter any written communications that we've received regarding the nominees into the record. And after the conclusion of the public hearing, we have a business meeting at which we take action and if some of the Committee members are not here present to vote, we do announce over the PA system the votes are held open. Today we can only hold them open until 10:30 because we have session coming up. It may be a good thing we don't have a lot of Committee members here because we have to kind of move this meeting a little quickly.

I'd like to announce that we have with us my colleague, Representative Jonathan Steinberg from the 136th House District who’s been joining us. It is the policy of this Committee to allow members who are not -- legislators who are not members of the Committee to come in when somebody from one of their towns or an appointment that touches upon one of the Committees that they are a member of is being interviewed today. So, he does have a nominee of interest to him, so welcome, Representative Steinberg. He represents the great city of Westport.

So, let us begin. Our first item is a Senate Resolution for review. And the first resolution is a RESOLUTION CONFIRMING MELISSA KANE OF WESTPORT, TO BE A MEMBER OF THE CONNECTICUT COMMUNTER RAIL COUNCIL. Will Melissa please step up. And before you take a seat, please raise your right hand. Do you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth? You may be seated. And as is customary with all nominees, the floor is yours for your introductory remarks.

MS. KANE: Okay. Good morning Chairman Vargas, and I would say if anyone is watching, Chairman Duff and
Ranking Members Fasano and Perillo and distinguished members of the Executive and Nominations Committee and Representative Steinberg. My name is Melissa Kane and I am honored to have been nominated by Senate President pro tempore Looney to serve as a member of the Commuter Rail Council. I appreciate the opportunity to come before you to answer any questions you may have regarding my nomination to the Council.

As a longtime resident of Westport and one of its select women as the Chair of the downtown Steering Committee which created and is implementing a new downtown master plan for Westport. And as a former small business owner and as both the wife of and daughter of New Haven line commuters, I am well aware of the crisis Connecticut is facing with regard to transportation infrastructure and its effects on our economy.

I also recognize the importance of working collaboratively and creatively and getting much needed public feedback and buy in in order to effect real change on this or any other large scale public concern. Connecticut is home to one of the most heavily traveled and critical sections of the Northeast Rail corridor, as you know. Facilitating excellent commuter rail service along this corridor is fundamental to our economic and environmental sustainability and to our success.

The Commuter Rail Council has an important role to play in helping to make that happen. We obviously have significant transportation infrastructure issues that need to be solved in Connecticut, commuter rail being just one with the speed and safety of the Metro North line being of particular concern to me.
My 87 year old father who still commutes to his law firm in New York, reminds me over and over how much more quickly and comfortably he was able to complete that commute in the 1970's, '80's and '90's than he can today. There are certainly many factors which have led to this, some of which were beyond the control of the state, but it is nonetheless an untenable situation and it is disruptive and dangerous to the economy of Fairfield County and the rest of the state.

I believe my experience and background give me the perspective, insight and skills to be a leader and agent of change as we look to fund and better address these and other urgent commuter rail issues. And I believe that the Council can be an excellent vehicle for making that change. I am particularly focused on initiatives to speed up commuter train service in the near term.

I know and look forward to working with members of the Governor's administration and the Transportation Committee who have begun to address this. We also have a real opportunity to work with municipalities, local business councils and large employers on potential alternative funding in addition to the state and federal funding we must secure.

As a member of the Council, I look forward to working with Commissioner Giulietti and the DOT, Metro North, members of the General Assembly, municipalities, commuters and others to find solutions, secure funding and get urgently needed projects off the ground and finished in a timely and cost effective manner. I welcome the opportunity to serve and thank you for your time. Happy to answer any questions.
REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you very much for that presentation. First of all, let me congratulate you on my behalf on behalf of the Committee. I know they'll all want to extend their best wishes to you on your appointment by Governor Lamont to the Commuter Rail Council.

MS. KANE: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And as we were speaking before the hearing began, many of the members, especially those that are being reappointed and have had an opportunity to serve have educated us on many of the issues of Metro North and what's going on. And I really want to thank you for your willingness to serve. I know this is an unpaid position and it does involve a time commitment but as a person that lives in that community who uses public transportation, I know you'll have a lot to add.

We've been joined by Senator Moore. Good morning, Senator. And Senator Moore, we've also been joined by Representative Steinberg who is from Westport and the nominee is from Westport. So, I'd like to afford Representative Steinberg an opportunity to speak if he'd like to do so.

REP. STEINBERG (136TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Do you need to swear me in too or the truth is not as important, okay.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): You're sworn ahead of time.

REP. STEINBERG (136TH): That's a fair point, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm here in incredibly strong support for the candidacy of Melissa Kane for the Commuter Rail Council. As anyone who is a student of Connecticut history knows Westport has been a traditional commuter town way back in the days of
men in the great flannel suit or even mad men. We have been a community in which commuting is part of our entire fabric.

And I know that Melissa, because she's third select person, because she has been so invested in our community with the downtown Plan Committee, is a doer, is somebody who is going to take action, who is strategic, who brings a lot of perspective about how things can be done better. I don't think you could have a better candidate for this role because, not only because she'll be very effective but because of the importance of the Commuter Rail Council now going forward.

You know, presuming that we approve a tolls plan, that will free up funds to do some of the things we've talked about doing on Metro North that will have a huge impact on our ability to grow our economy because our travels will be more reliable and better mass transit is better for everyone. So, I'm very excited to have Melissa on the Council so we can move forward with many of the initiatives we've talked about for a long time and really need to act on in the near term. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And thank you, Representative Steinberg, for taking time from your busy schedule to come and give us that testimonial regarding Melissa Kane's abilities. I was reading her resume and, you know, anyone who's been a town chairman, that I had the -- that role here in the City of Hartford and I know it's like herding cats. So, you know, you have those abilities to work with people and as a select woman, you know, politics is a great training ground for these policy boards, so I know you'll do a great job. Senator Moore, any questions or comments?
SENATOR MOORE (22ND):  No, but good morning.

REP. VARGAS (6TH):  Good morning.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND):  And as we do this transportation, I'm hoping they put a lane in for legislators to bypass some of the traffic. But I want to welcome you. I do know you and I've met you a couple of times. I'm so happy to be here at this moment in time to be here for you to support you. Everything that I know about you says that you're the right person for the job so congratulations.

MS. KANE:  Thank you so much, thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH):  And before we let you go, there's a question we ask of all our nominees so don't take it personal.

MS. KANE:  Okay.

REP. VARGAS (6TH):  But is there anything in your background that you believe might prove embarrassing to this Committee, to the Governor or to the State of Connecticut?

MS. KANE:  No, not to my knowledge.

REP. VARGAS (6TH):  Well, thank you very much.

MS. KANE:  Thank you. Thank you for the opportunity to serve.

REP. VARGAS (6TH):  That brings us to our second nominee which is this is a RESOLUTION CONFIRMING THE HONORABLE JAMES W. ABRAMS TO BE A MEMBER OF THE JUDICIAL REVIEW COUNCIL. Your Honor, before you take your seat, please raise your right hand. Do you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth?
MR. ABRAMS: I do.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Very well, please be seated and the floor is yours.

MR. ABRAMS: Representative Vargas, Senator Moore, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Jim Abrams. I've been a Superior Court Judge for the past 12 years and have been nominated by Governor Lamont to serve on the Judicial Review Council. Which investigates and resolves complaints against state judges, family support magistrates and workers compensation commissioners.

I currently serve as both the Chief Administrative Judge for the civil division state wide and as the Administrative Judge for the New Haven Judicial District. I also sit as a civil trail judge and mediate cases as part of the judicial alternate to Speed Resolution program.

During the course of my judicial career, I've also presiding over housing, foreclosure, family and criminal matters in the New Britain, Middletown, New London and Waterbury judicial districts. Several years ago, I served a term as president of the Connecticut Judges Association.

By way of background, I am a 1974 graduate of Hamden High and received a BA in Theater Arts from Trinity College in 1978. After college, I spent several years as an actor and in the special education field before attending the evening division of UConn Law School from which I graduated with honors in 1988.

Prior to becoming a Judge, I worked as an attorney in private practice, concentrating in civil litigation and as a corporation counsel for the City
of Meriden. Immediately prior to my appointment to the bench, I spent several months as chief counsel for the House Democratic Caucus. From 1995 to 2005 I was a State Representative representing the communities of Meriden, Wallingford and Berlin. The highlight of my legislative career came in 2004 when I served as one of the ten members of the Bipartisan Select Committee and investigated the impeachment of former Governor Rowland.

I live in Meriden with my wife Mary who recently retired as a school administrator and serves in the State Senate. Our son Nicholas lives in Miami and our daughter Madelyn and son John live in Cambridge, Massachusetts along with our granddaughter Rose. Thank you again for providing me with the opportunity to appear before you and I'm happy to respond to any questions you might have.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you very much for the introductory remarks. You have quite a resume there, quite a varied career with acting and the theater and then the law. And I see that you've practiced in the City of Hartford, a city I'm proud to represent and you had, I guess some association with my good friend Peter Kelly.

MR. ABRAMS: Oh yes, I worked at Updike Kelly my first two years out of law school.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Very good. So, I'm sure you're more than qualified to serve on this body and congratulations on your appointment by Governor Lamont. I really have full confidence in your abilities to do a good job on this council. At this point, all right Senator Moore?

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): Thank you, welcome. That is an impressive resume but there's something that
stands out here that's really special. I think the name is Mary. I'm proud to serve with her. Welcome.

MR. ABRAMS: I've been hearing a lot about that lately what's going on out there.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, she was -- your wife was an educator and I was in the -- well I'm an educator because I believe it's a vocation. You're born an educator, you die and educator. In your acting career, ever get up to Province Town up there in Cape Cod?

MR. ABRAMS: Not as an actor, no.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): No, all right. Just wondering, I think their theater is called O'Neill too, right?

MR. ABRAMS: Yeah well there's one down in -- there's one down in the Waterford which is the O'Neill Theater Center.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Right.

MR. ABRAMS: And at O'Neill, I was a theater major so O'Neill did a lot of his plays in Province Town when he was writing.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): That's right, I kind of recall that. So, as I said before, I think that there's really, we have full confidence in your abilities to discharge the responsibilities. But there is one final question we ask of all nominees.

MR. ABRAMS: Understood.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And that is, do you believe there's anything in your past that might prove embarrassing to this Committee, to the Governor or to the State of Connecticut?
MR. ABRAMS: No.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you very much.

MR. ABRAMS: Thank you very much.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Congratulations again.

MR. ABRAMS: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): That brings us to our third item on the agenda. RESOLUTION CONFIRMING THE HONORABLE LAURA F. BALDINI TO BE AN ALTERNATE MEMBER OF THE JUDICIAL REVIEW COUNCIL. Please raise your right hand. Do you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth?

MS. BALDINI: Yes.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Okay, please be seated and feel free to make your introductory remarks.

MS. BALDINI: Good morning, Representative Vargas and Senator Moore. I'm Laura Baldini. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you. Thank you also to Governor Ned Lamont for nominating me to serve as an alternate on the Judicial Review Council.

I was appointed to the bench in 2010. Since then, I've held assignments in the Hartford, New Britain and Tolland judicial districts. The matters that I have handled have been almost exclusively criminal matters. I am presently the presiding judge of parte criminal matters in the Hartford judicial district and I am also the assistant Administrative Judge.

My job is challenging and it's fulfilling and it's been a privilege to serve the citizens of the State of Connecticut for the past nine years. Outside of
the courtroom, I've served on the Judicial Branch Education Committee, been a faculty presenter at the Connecticut Judges Institute and served as a judicial mentor.

I have also been called upon to serve as a voting member of the Judicial Review Council since taking my oath to serve on November 27, 2018. I am mindful of the Council's purpose and the importance of public confidence in the courts and the integrity and independence of the judiciary. It would be an honor to serve as an alternate to the Judicial Review Council if so approved by your Committee and the General Assembly. I'm happy to answer any questions that you might have.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you very much for your initial comments. It's very obvious from your background that you're very qualified and not only being on the bench but also being in a supervisory capacity. It more than qualifies you. I want to congratulate you for your appointment as an alternate. And it's a great thing that the Governor has placed confidence in you and I'm sure that we as members of the Committee have equal confidence in you. I really don't have any questions unless my colleague Senator Moore has something she'd like to add.

Well, actually this hearing is moving a lot quicker than I thought which is good because we have session coming up at 10:30. I hope we don't get another one -- an all-nighter like we did with the minimum wage. I'm still trying to recover from that 14 1/2 hours of no sleep. We have one question that we ask of all nominees and is there anything in your background that you believe might prove embarrassing
either to the Committee, to the Governor or to the State of Connecticut?

MS. BALDINI: No.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you very much and congratulations again.

MS. BALDINI: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): This brings us to our third item which is -- no, our fourth item of the agenda which is a RESOLUTION CONFIRMING THE HONORABLE ANNA M. FICETO OF WOLCOTT TO BE AN ALTERNATE MEMBER OF THE JUDICIAL REVIEW COUNCIL. Will you please raise your right hand? Do you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth?

MS. FICETO: I do.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): You may be seated and the floor is yours to make your initial remarks.

MS. FICETO: Thank you. Well, good morning Chairman Vargas and Senator Moore. Let me begin by thanking Governor Lamont for nominating me to serve as an alternate member of the Judicial Review Council and for the honor of being here before you today.

I was born in Brooklyn, New York and moved to Connecticut when I was 9 years old after having lived in Italy for a year. I have been a resident of Wolcott for over 22 years and live with my husband Robert and our two sons Christopher who is a high school junior and Nicholas who is a high school freshman. And by the way, Nicholas is responsible for most of my white hair.

It has been a privilege to serve the people of Connecticut since 1996. Serving in various roles at the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority, the
Office of the Governor, the Departments of Consumer Protection, Public Works and Administrative Services.

I was nominated to the Superior Court by Governor Malloy in 2012. And I began my legal career as an attorney in private practice for approximately six years. I am currently the assistant administrative judge for the Waterbury judicial district and the presiding judge for family matters. I am in my third term as the presiding judge for family in Waterbury. My prior assignments have included almost four years in Hartford family and a year in the Hartford GA.

I find my work both challenging and rewarding and I strive each and every day to treat everyone with the utmost fairness and respect. I served on an interim basis on the Judicial Review Council since December 2018 and believe it's imperative that we promote public confidence in our judiciary.

I believe the course of my legal background has been varied in my experience in private practice, administrative law and agency administration will serve me well on the Judicial Review Council. If appointed, I will serve the people of Connecticut with fairness and integrity. Again, it's an honor for me to appear before the Committee and I look forward to answering your questions. Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you for your introductory statement and as I can see from your resume, you have a strong background in history which is a passion of mine. I taught American history for many years but I have a passion for world history too. And you also had an opportunity to live a year in Italy which means that you have a perspective also
of an international perspective. So, you bring a lot and have a lot to offer so I want to congratulate you on your appointment by Governor Lamont.

We had an opportunity to speak a little before the hearing began and, you know, I have a Waterbury connection through my wife. I also have an Italian connection through marriage. My aunt married an Italian and she had an opportunity to live in Rome for years too before returning to Manhattan. And I always think that that broadened -- the perspective seeing how other people live and how other cultures deal with issues is something that makes us all better rounded individuals.

And I appreciate the way in which you approach things and your -- and I've seen this in most of the people in leadership positions here in Connecticut approach their jobs with dignity, with humility and a spirit of service and I see your part in that Connecticut tradition. So, it isn't quite, you know, from Brooklyn either, so you have my full support. Any remarks from Senator Moore?

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): I'd just like to congratulate you. Thank you.

MS. FICETO: Thank you very much, thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): We've had a few people that have actually said yes that there is something that might embarrass the State of Connecticut, their golf game or something to that effect. And they've made a joke out of it. We've never had any real true confessions here, I must admit. I don't know what I would do if we ever had one of those. Is there anything in your background that you believe would
prove embarrassing to this Committee, to the Governor or to the State of Connecticut?

MS. FICETO: No.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you very much.

MS. FICETO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And that brings us to our final on the agenda which are the House Resolutions for review. We have one House Resolution. RESOLUTION CONFIRMING KAREN WELCH OF SOMERS, TO BE A MEMBER OF THE ADVISORY BOARD OF THE WORKERS' COMPENSATION COMMISSION. Please step forward and before you take a seat, please raise your right hand. Do you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth?

MS. WELCH: I do.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Please be seated and the floor is yours.

MS. WELCH: Thank you. Good morning Chairman Vargas and Representative Moore and any members of the Committee who are participating remotely. My name is Karen Welch and it is an honor and a privilege to be nominated by Governor Lamont to the Workers' Compensation Advisory Board. My sincere thanks to this Committee for the opportunity to appear before you to speak to my desire to continue to serve on the Workers' Comp Advisory Board.

I believe my perspective will be valuable to the Board. I have deep roots in Connecticut. I've lived or worked in Connecticut since 1973 and my youngest son Andrew actually teaches international studies and the history of Hartford at Buckley High School.
I've been practicing nursing in the state my entire career, 30 years of which have been in the field of occupational health. I've worked in the power industry, in manufacturing and in healthcare. While I've enjoyed being a nurse at the bedside, my passion is to help the working population.

In my current role as the Director of Employee Health and Absence Management for Hartford Healthcare, I oversee programs directed towards injury prevention and the management of disability related absence for close to 20,000 lives of people who work and for the most part, live in Connecticut.

As I'm sure you know, Hartford Healthcare provides care to the residents of our state and others throughout the continuum of care including primary, specialty, inpatient, acute and long term care. We also employ our own public safety officers, laundry staff, housekeeping staff and engineering staff.

I'm familiar with the hazards of these various occupations. My team and I are partnered in mitigating those hazards, providing the best care for those who become injured and improving return to work rates with transitional duty at full pay.

As an interim member of the Committee since November 2018, I've engaged collaboratively with the chairman and other members of the Board to address issues that come before us. I believe that my professional experience and current engagement with the Board qualify me to continue in this role and I appreciate the opportunity to continue to serve. I'll answer any questions.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you very much for your introductory remarks. The -- so, this is a reappointment for this Commission?
MS. WELCH: Yes.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And having served, do you have any insights you'd like to share with the Committee having served on the Advisory Board to the Workers' Compensation Commission?

MS. WELCH: Well, my tenure's been brief so since November of 2018. From where I sit, the Commission is doing a fine job of moderating all the issues that come before it. Certainly, any challenges are being brought to the forefront and deliberated and addressed appropriately.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Yeah, workers compensation is very dear to the hearts of many working people in the State of Connecticut. I serve on the Labor Committee and I remember all the different reiterations of workers comp that have occurred here in the State of Connecticut over the years.

And I'm glad that you're -- that the Governor has appointed you or reappointed you to the position and I'm sure that your voice will be one that will carry some weight having been a practicing nurse and being involved in the healthcare field. Which I believe people involved in those fields, you know, have a heart for people.

MS. WELCH: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): So, that's very important when you're dealing with a sensitive issue like workers comp. I really have no questions, I think you'll do a great job and I want to thank you for your willingness to serve again on behalf of myself and the Committee members. At this point, I'll open it up if Senator Moore has -- Senator Moore has no questions of the nominee, then I want to
congratulate and wish you well on your reappointment.

And before I let you go, I'm going to ask you the question I ask of all nominees. Is there anything in your background that you believe might prove embarrassing to the Committee, to the Governor or to the State of Connecticut?

MS. WELCH: No, sir.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you very much.

MS. WELCH: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): That concludes the interviews with our nominees and that brings us to the public. We open up the hearing for any members of the public that may wish to weigh in. Any members of the public? If seeing no members of the public, I will say that we did receive one written communication.

And this was a letter from Senator Will Haskell. And basically, Senator Haskell represents the 26th District and his letter is a letter in support of Melissa Kane's confirmation as a member of the Connecticut Commuter Rail Council. He expressed his support and confidence in Melissa's case, ability to serve on the Committee. This letter will be entered in the record. And any further communications? Seeing no further written communications and no members of the public wishing to speak, that concludes the public hearing. (Gavel)