CHAIRPERSON: Representative Ed Vargas

SENATORS: Fasano

REP. VARGAS (6TH): [Gavel] I hereby call the public hearing to order. Madam Chair, can you read the safety instructions, please?

CLERK: In the interest of safety, I would ask you to note the location of and access to the exit in this the 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 the Capital Police. Do not delay and do not return unless you are advised 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 very much, Madam Clerk. Since this is the last public hearing and last meeting of the, of the Committee I would just like to thank my Clerk, Wendy Fritz, for an outstanding job and all the staff including Nick Bombace who have helped this Committee through its work throughout this legislative session and my aide, Milagros Acosta, although she's not part of the staff of the Committee, has always been very helpful in keeping us organized, and I want to especially thank my colleague, Senator Fasano, for taking the time to be here when we don’t really have
session yet and it's kind of early and we have people from all over the state but I'd just like to say that we keep the votes open and every member of the Committee has received a resume and every member of the Committee is aware of the vote and it will be announced through the PA system and our Clerk, Wendy Fritz, will make sure that every members of the Committee casts a vote. Just quickly, the way this operates, the way the Committee operates, we have a public hearing where nominees come. They, we allow them to give a brief presentation, opening remarks and then we open it up for questions of the Committee. Members then, if there's any member of the public after the nominees are finished, we ask if any member of the public wants to speak pro or con. We allow them three minutes to make their remarks and we also read into the record any written communication we may have gotten pro or con. Then we proceed to our business meeting where we take the vote, keep the vote open, and then that's, the recommendation goes to the floor and we've never had a Committee recommendation overturned on the floor, at least not in the four terms that I've served here and so that's a good thing. We want, we want our leadership to have the team that they want in place but before we have testimony, this is a resolution confirming Michael Ajello of North Haven to be a member of the State Elections Enforcement Commission but before you make your initial statement, would you please rise and raise your right hand. Do you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth?

MICHAEL J. AJELLO: Yes.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Please be seated and the floor is yours.
MICHAEL J. AJELLO: November 2013 and I've now served in this capacity for the past six years. I found that time to be rewarding and interesting and look forward to continuing to serve. Now having been through three full CEP election cycles and two full municipal cycles, I feel I have the experience to continue executing my duties as commissioner for this upcoming election and more in the vehicle. It has been a privilege to serve the State Elections Enforcement Commission and if approved by the General Assembly, I look forward to my continued involvement in the matters regarding election law. I appreciate your consideration and welcome the opportunity to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you very much, Mr. Ajello, and congratulations on your reappointment.

MICHAEL J. AJELLO: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): To the State Elections Enforcement Commission. Now as a Commission on the State Elections Enforcement Commission, when staff let's say finds irregularities or violations of State Election Laws, do they typically come before the Commission?

MICHAEL J. AJELLO: Well there's a process I believe that takes place once a complaint is filed. It gets investigated. We have staff investigators that go through the process of gathering information. That information is then processed by staff attorneys and the staff attorneys, I think, determine if there is in fact a violation or not which they come to us to vote on if it is necessary to do further investigation of a particular issue. Once that is voted on, I believe the attorneys will then contact
the parties involved and see if they can work out an amicable resolution. Uh, if they are, which I think the majority of times an amicable resolution is worked out, in the event it's not, it would be set down for a contested hearing, a hearing officer would be appointed which is one of the lawyers that are on the commission, I'm one of them, and then we would have an official hearing. A decision would be issued and if the party obviously has no objection to that decision, fines could be penalized or you know henceforth telling them to comply with particular statutes. If not, they could also appeal that decision to the superior court.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well and do you believe that the role is satisfactory or do you think that the role of the commission should be either enhanced or reduced? How do you feel about that?

MICHAEL J. AJELLO: I think the process is a good process. I think it's a fair process. I know that recently a limitation has been put on the length of time with which that process has to be completed. It is a one-year time limit that this has to be completed. We're kind of in the initial stages. It seems that that might be a difficult task based on the volume of complaints we received on a regular basis so at some point, I think it may be helpful to consider expanding that one year a little bit, but I think the process itself is sufficient for equal kind of consideration.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well thank you for that clarification and we have the individual that nominated you for reappointment, Senator Fasano, with us. Would you care to make any remarks, Senator?
SENATOR FASANO (34TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First, before I ask Mr. Ajello some questions, I do want to also thank the staff for exec noms. You guys do a great job especially seeking out people who can't get to the meeting from time to time and I want to thank you very much for all of your efforts on that. You do a phenomenal job and to you, Mr. Chairman, I'm not saying this cause you're here, I've said this to other people who have asked about exec noms. I think you run a very fair meeting in respect to the issue of the candidates before us and give us all the opportunity to speak our minds and sometimes that has not happened on this Committee. I've been on it for quite a few times, quite a few years, but I want to thank you also for the graciousness with which you treat and the respect for which you treat every member on this Committee and that also from time to time is rubbed with various chairmen, but I think you’ve done a great job so I just want to thank you and let you know my thoughts on that. So I have about 35 questions to ask you [laughter]. Actually just two quick questions. One, do you see more filings from, you’ve been in six years, would you say that there are either A, more filing or B, more contested hearings over the years that you have been there or about the same or less?

MICHAEL J. AJELLO: I would say about the same. I think there's kind of a certain amount that tends to level off at. We're doing the same amount of hearings. I mean I think I have been hearing probably three to four contested hearings per year. There's three attorneys, Steve Penny is also a licensed attorney on the Commission, Andrew Cascudo is a licensed attorney on the Commission so they also have the responsibility of taking up these
hearings, the other hearing officers too. So I think on average we'll probably each do three or four if that's what it requires. I think it's roughly about the same amount. Obviously I think it ebbs and flows based on what's going on. If there's an electing coming up, I think people obviously tend to get more detailed about what not only their own election is doing but what their opponent is doing to make sure kind of everybody's T's are crossed and I's are dotted so every once in a while you'll get a little bit of an increase in the election complaints at that area.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): And those would be the ones that get to your desk. I mean obviously Mr. Brandy has to deal with the issues that may not rise to your level or put out there and then all of a sudden for whatever reasons, but the ones that actually probably maybe, it's unfair for me to say this, have a little more merit.

MICHAEL J. AJELLO: Yes.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): Get to your level.

MICHAEL J. AJELLO: Yes.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): And then maybe you do or do not have a view on this, but there's two bills that deal with campaign consultants to register with the SEEC. Do you believe, do you have an opinion on that based upon what you've seen in terms of hearings? Do you run across any issues where campaign consultants, when you do your hearings, gee, you know, perhaps if they'd registered this probably wouldn't have happened or we would have known more or what have you?
MICHAEL J. AJELLO: I believe the issues that we have with campaign consultants is, you know, obviously every campaign has an obligation to report where the money is coming in from and how that money is disbursed. With the campaign consultants, sometimes they just issue one particular bill which is not a detailed invoice that says basically we've paid a campaign consultant $30,000 dollars and they feel that's an obligation that has been completed when we really need the detail behind how did the campaign consultant spend that money. Is it long signs, is it mailers, is it air time? That's information that tends to get a little more difficult to obtain from these people when they're not perhaps registered. If they were registered, I think that we would be able to get more information and obviously I think the more information and transparency we have in elections, the better and more fair the election process is.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): Thank you. I appreciate those answers and congratulations as the Chairman said. I'm very proud to have put your name up and I'm very proud that I've known you for so many years and you've done a great, great job.

MICHAEL J. AJELLO: Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Senator Fasano, and thank you for the kind remarks and I'd just like to say that there is some overlap between your resume and mine. I served ten years on the Planning and Zoning Commission for the City of Hartford.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): Oh, okay, a few late nights.
REP. VARGAS (6TH): And that takes a lot of courage because that's [laughter] that's one commission where you can't duck the issue.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): No, not at all.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): You’ve got people that want something built, you’ve got people that don’t want it built, and you have to come down on one side or the other unless you can get the parties to go out in the hall and work it out so anybody who serves successfully on a Planning and Zoning Commission is not the kind that will prevaricate on any tough issue so thank you for your willingness to serve.

MICHAEL J. AJELLO: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): I know this is a voluntary position and you have to dedicate some time and energy to something to help the State of Connecticut run its elections and enforce its election statutes in a fair way and with your legal background, I'm sure that you'll continue to do a great job as Senator Fasano said so I really don’t have any further questions. Just once again, I want to congratulate you on your reappointment.

MICHAEL J. AJELLO: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And that does it for the hearing. At this point, we can excuse you and I don't believe we have any member of the public that wishes to speak on this nominee either for or con but I do have a written communication from Representative Yaccarino who wanted to make sure we entered into the record his strong support for your renomination.

MICHAEL J. AJELLO: Thank you.
SENATOR FASANO (34TH): Dave Yaccarino, who's from North Haven, threw out his back yesterday so he called me last night. I don't know if he's coming up today at all because he had significant pain in his back but he just wanted to let you know that he supports you --

MICHAEL J. AJELLO: Oh, thank you.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): And as I said, he called me last night. He was in significant pain so he just, that's the reason that he is not here. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Senator. That will be entered into the record as his communication of support for your renomination and without further ado, this is to declare the public hearing closed and we'll open our regular business meeting at this point and ask Madam Clerk to please come forward.

CLERK: Mr. Chair, did you want to ask your final question?

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Yes?

CLERK: Your final question of the nominee before --

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Oh, that's correct. I'm sorry, Mr. Ajello, I forgot to ask you the final question. Don’t take this personal but we ask this final question of all our nominees. Do you believe there's anything in your background that might prove embarrassing either to this Committee, to the Governor, or to the State of Connecticut?

MICHAEL J. AJELLO: No, sir.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well thank you very much. And thank you, Madam Clerk, for reminding me and at this point [gavel] we're convening our meeting.