

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; (3) coordinate the state's employment and training programs; and (4) develop and maintain a comprehensive inventory of all the employment and training programs, including a description and the results of each ([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 2007-2009 recession, the unemployment trust fund became insolvent and the state subsequently borrowed approximately \$1 billion from the federal government in order to continue paying unemployment benefits. For years afterwards, the state's employers faced annual special tax assessments and annually increasing federal unemployment taxes

to repay the federal loan and its interest. While the loan is now paid off, is there anything that can be done to help avoid such a situation from happening again? Are there any changes that you would advise the state to take in order to help the trust fund withstand future economic downturns?

3. Recently, [CTHires](#) (Connecticut Helping Individuals and Employers Reach Employment Success) replaced CT.Jobs as the Labor Department's comprehensive workforce system for helping employers find employees and prospective employees find jobs. How is CTHires different than CT.Jobs and is there evidence that it does a better job of helping match employers and employees?
4. In 2017, the legislature raised the threshold for new construction projects under the prevailing wage law from \$400,000 to \$1 million (for renovation and repair projects it remained unchanged at \$100,000). What impact do you believe this increase has had on municipalities and municipal construction project workers? Has it presented any new challenges for the department in administering the law? The legislature also extended the prevailing wage law to certain private-sector jobs with companies that receive financial assistance from the state (e.g., through DECD programs). How has the department handled this expansion of the law?
5. Electric Boat officials recently said they hired more than 2,000 new employees last year. They expect to hire another 900 this year with continued growth in the following years. Do you believe that the system is producing the workers with the skills the state's employers will need? Are we prepared to fill the jobs that will be needed in the coming years? What do you consider the major strengths and weaknesses of the state's current workforce development system?
6. Over the past few legislative sessions, the legislature has considered creating a program to provide wage replacement benefits to employees taking family and medical leave from their employers. These proposals have typically tasked the Labor Department with administering the program, which includes collecting employee payroll contributions and processing claims for benefits. Is the department currently capable of handling such a task? What infrastructure and personnel upgrades would the department need to do so? Has the department done any preparation in anticipation of such a program?
7. Prior to your initial appointment as labor commissioner in 2018, you served as the department deputy commissioner, and before that you held leadership positions with the Service Employees International Union. How does your career with a union either help or

hinder your ability to serve as labor commissioner? As commissioner, how do you balance the interests of employees and the interests of employers?

8. The previous governor's revised FY 19 budget called for cuts in a number of Labor Department budget lines. These included the following programs: Jobs First Employment Services, Youth Employment Program, Healthcare Apprenticeship Initiative, Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative, and the Second Chance Initiative, to name a few. The legislature restored most of the proposed cuts. Can you describe how services will be affected if these programs were cut? 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?
9. According to a department official quoted in a recent [article](#) in the CT Post, staffing cutbacks have caused the department to become "more reactive than proactive," particularly in its ability to enforce and punish employers who commit wage and hour violations (e.g., not meeting minimum wage and overtime pay requirements). Do you agree with that statement? How has the size of the department's wage and hour enforcement staff changed over the past 10 to 20 years? If the department had a larger enforcement staff, what kind of "proactive" steps could it take to ensure that employers were not violating wage and hour laws?
10. Looking ahead, what are the biggest challenges facing the department?

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