

CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY

SENATE

Thursday, June 3, 2021

The Senate was called to order at 4:37 p.m.,
President in the Chair.

THE CHAIR:

Good afternoon, almost evening. Will the Senate please come to order? Members and guests, please rise and direct your attention to Ms. Kathy Zabel back by popular demand from Burlington as our guest Chaplain.

ACTING CHAPLAIN KATHY ZABEL:

In these difficult times, may our leaders find in their hearts the guidance and wisdom to do what is best for the people of Connecticut.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you so much Kathy, and now I'd Senator Will Haskell to please lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH):

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator, and good afternoon Senator Duff.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Good afternoon, Madam President. Good to see you today. Madam President, is there business on the Clerk's desk.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk.

CLERK:

Good afternoon. The Clerk is in possession of Senate Agenda No. 1 dated Thursday, June 3, 2021.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Duff.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, I move all items on Senate Agenda No. 1 dated Thursday, June 3, 2021, and be that, they be acted on as indicated and that the Agenda be incorporated by reference into the Senate Journal and Senate Transcripts.

CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Senate Agenda

No. 1

REGULARSESSION

Thursday, June 03, 2021

REPORT(S) RECEIVED - to be referred to committee(s) indicated.

Report - Auditors of Public Accounts - Tweed-New Haven Airport Authority Fiscal Years ended June 30, 2017, 2018, and 2019. (Pursuant to Section 2-90 of the Connecticut General Statutes.) Date received: June 2, 2021.
Referred to the Committee on Transportation.

BUSINESS FROM THE HOUSE:

HOUSE BILL(S) FAVORABLY REPORTED - to be tabled for the calendar.

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

SUBST. HB NO. 6496 AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN SOIL-RELATED INITIATIVES. (As amended by House Amendment Schedule "A" (LCO 8796))

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

SUBST. HB NO. 6559 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD. (As amended by House Amendment Schedule "A" (LCO 8543))

BANKING COMMITTEE

SUBST. HB NO. 6372 AN ACT EXEMPTING FROM EXECUTION CERTAIN FUNDS IN A JUDGMENT DEBTOR'S ACCOUNT. (As amended by House Amendment Schedule "A" (LCO 9541))

FINANCE, REVENUE AND BONDING COMMITTEE

SUBST. HB NO. 5027 AN ACT REQUIRING THE BANKING COMMISSIONER TO ESTABLISH A FIRST-TIME HOMEBUYER SAVINGS ACCOUNT PROGRAM AND ESTABLISHING A TAX DEDUCTION FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO FIRST-TIME HOMEBUYER SAVINGS ACCOUNTS. (As amended by House Amendment Schedule "A" (LCO 9745))

LABOR AND PUBLIC EMPLOYEES COMMITTEE

SUBST. HB NO. 6381 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE REGARDING THE STATE WORKFORCE AND RETIRING

EMPLOYEES. (As amended by House Amendment Schedule "A" (LCO 9738))

PUBLIC SAFETY AND SECURITY COMMITTEE

SUBST. HB NO. 5164 AN ACT CONCERNING INSTALLERS OF RESIDENTIAL VERTICAL PLATFORM LIFTS.

DISAGREEING ACTION - to be tabled for the calendar.

JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

SUBST. SB NO. 925 AN ACT PROHIBITING THE IMPORT, SALE AND POSSESSION OF AFRICAN ELEPHANTS, LIONS, LEOPARDS, BLACK RHINOCEROS, WHITE RHINOCEROS AND GIRAFFES. (As amended by Senate Amendment Schedule "B" (LCO 8888) and House Amendment Schedule "A" (LCO 9812))

THE CHAIR:

So ordered sir.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Thank you Madam President. Madam President, I know we have a point of personal privilege and Senator Martin, I'd like to yield to him, please.

THE CHAIR:

Good afternoon, Senator Martin. Do you accept the yield, sir?

SENATOR MARTIN (31ST):

Yes, thank you Madam President. I rise for a point of personal privilege.

THE CHAIR:

Please proceed.

SENATOR MARTIN (31ST):

Thank you. Today, I want to take a few minutes to remember a true hero from the 31st District. His name was Wallace Barnes. He passed away this past December, and he was a former Connecticut State Senator as well as he was a Connecticut Gubernatorial Candidate from Bristol, but while he was a member of the Barnes family, the first settlers of Bristol. His top priority like most of us were his family and his, he and his wife Barbara Hackman Franklin, she was a former US Secretary of Commerce celebrated their 34th wedding anniversary before his passing. And he left behind two children, six grandchildren and 15 great grandchildren.

Wally graduated Phi Beta Kappa cum laude at Williams College and was honored as the commencement speaker in 1949. From there, he entered in graduated law school at Yale where he was a member of the Yale Journal Editorial Board. Wally was also the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Barnes, of the Barnes Group, a global manufacturer of aerospace and industrial components. Today, the company's symbol is B on the New York Stock Exchange.

Wally served as our State Senator for 12 years including leading the republican super minority, funny story, to clop for proper treatment and consideration for, of, of the smaller caucus, Wally pounded his shoe one day on the Senate Chamber's podium to make his point; much, much like Russian leader Nikita Khrushchev had done at the United Nations. In a sign of support, the next day, a flood of shoes arrived at the Capitol lawn. Wally, although Wally sometimes had to really stomp his feet to get his fair shake at the legislative discussions, went inside or outside the Senate Chambers, Wally would conduct himself with great dignity, self-awareness, and fierce commitment to doing the next right thing.

He practiced law and served on boards of numerous public and private companies. Wally also engaged in several philanthropic efforts such as the, he served or excuse me, such as on the Connecticut's Employment and Training Commission, the Board of Regents, Chairman of the University of Hartford where he received also an honorary degree. A founder of the National Conference for Community and Justice, Chair of the Metro Hartford Chamber of Commerce and the Connecticut Business and Industry Association, and a longtime member of the Bristol Boys and Girls Club of Bristol, and as well as many other posts.

Wally enjoyed or enlisted in the army and served as an airman in the Army Corps until the end of World War II. Wally was also loved flying. He, his dedication to his hobby was recognized in 2012 by the Federal Aviation Administration when he was awarded the prestigious Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award for safely flying for 70 years.

Through all his professional and personal experiences, he showed a depth of dedication and character that are unmatched. So Madam President, I asked the circle to, to rise and take a moment of silence to remember him today. And I know that I've been blessed to have known him personally. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, and I would ask Members and guests to please rise and join in a moment of silence, remembering the remarkable business leader and political leader from Bristol, Wally Barnes.

Thank you, Senator Martin. Senator Duff.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Thank you Madam President for our first go list.

THE CHAIR:

Please proceed.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Thank you Madam President. On Calendar Page 46, Calendar 428, House Joint Resolution No. 58, I'd like to mark that item go.

THE CHAIR:

So ordered.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

On Agenda 1, No., Calendar 164, Senate Bill 925; like to mark that item go.

THE CHAIR:

So ordered.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Thank you Madam President, on Calendar Page 45, Calendar 248, Senate Bill 999, like to mark that item go.

THE CHAIR:

So ordered.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Thank you Madam President. On Calendar Page 13, Calendar 347, Senate Bill 940, like to mark that item go.

THE CHAIR:

So ordered.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

And would stand at ease a moment.

THE CHAIR:

And the Senate will stand at ease.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Madam President?

THE CHAIR:

Yes Senator Duff.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Thank you Madam President. On second item Agenda 1, Calendar 164, Senate Bill 925; just ask for suspension to bring that item up.

THE CHAIR:

And so ordered.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Thank you Madam President. The Clerk can now call the first Bill please.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk?

CLERK:

Page 46, Calendar No. 428, Substitute for House Joint Resolution No. 58, RESOLUTION PROPOSING A STATE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO ALLOW NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING. There are amendments.

THE CHAIR:

And good afternoon, Senator Flexer.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Good afternoon, Madam President. Madam President, I move for acceptance of the Joint Committee's Favorable Report and adoption of the Resolution in concurrence with the House of Representatives.

THE CHAIR:

And the question is on adoption. Will you remark?

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Yes, Madam President. Madam President, the Resolution before us, I believe is one of the last important pieces of legislation we're going to be debating this year with regard to our system of voting in the State of Connecticut.

Madam President, the Resolution before us will allow the people of the State of Connecticut to determine whether or not our state's constitution will be amended to allow for early, excuse me, for no excuse absentee voting to take place. Madam President, our current Constitution sits, has very strict limits with regard to absentee ballots and how voters can choose to vote by absentee ballot and under what circumstances. The Resolution before us would eliminate those, and it would allow for people to vote by absentee ballot if they simply do not appear at the polling place on election day.

Madam President, if this Resolution were to pass today by a simple majority, it would have to pass again by the next elected General Assembly, and would then be potentially voted on in November of 2024 by the people of the State of Connecticut.

Madam President, this Resolution received bipartisan support in the House of Representatives.

Unfortunately, it did not receive the required bipartisan support that would have allowed this Resolution to be on the ballot in November of 2022 along with the companion resolution that this Chamber has already debated, which would allow for early voting.

Unfortunately, given that vote in the House of Representatives, we will not be able to have the voters of the State of Connecticut to decide whether or not we can have no excuse absentee voting until November in 2024 as a result of that vote. But Madam President, I am hopeful here today that perhaps we'll have an even more bipartisan vote on this Resolution in this Chamber.

Madam President, I believe that many of my colleagues want to see voters in Connecticut be able to exercise their right to vote using an absentee ballot outside of the very restrictive confines our state Constitution currently has.

Madam President, as we've discussed here before, over the course of the last 15 months, we've seen a lot of changes in our society in the pandemic, and no matter was more urgent outside of health and public safety last year than figuring out how to ensure that people could exercise their franchise, exercise their right to vote, and still protect themselves during the course of the pandemic. And we saw an unprecedented number of people choose to vote by absentee ballot last year in an effort to both participate in our democracy in a very important critical election. And also do so while and during the pandemic and trying to keep themselves and their families safe.

Madam President last year, this Chamber and this Legislature came together in a bipartisan way to allow for that type of voting to take place. And as I mentioned, we saw more voters vote that way than ever before. Now, I understand that some people may think Election Day should just be Election Day, and

I understand that. It was a rare occasion that I had ever voted by absentee ballot before. I like going to vote on Election Day. I like the interaction, I like seeing people, I like waiting my turn. Luckily in Connecticut, most places, you don't have to wait too long, unlike some of the awful things we see in other jurisdictions in the country.

So I understand why some people think Election Day should simply be Election Day to a point. But I also think this is one of the most fundamental rights that we have as Americans, it's the right to vote. And as we've also talked about here before, Madam President, our state, I think is doing the work to be a beacon of light when it comes to election reforms through this Resolution and some of the measures we've already considered in this Chamber.

Far too many states are rolling back their existing provisions that allow for no excuse absentee ballots. As we stand here today, 34 states allow for some form of no excuse absentee balloting. But I'm afraid that by the time this year is done, and by the time the voters of the State of Connecticut actually get to decide on this Resolution, that will be very different because the tone has shifted and it's become a partisan fight.

But here in Connecticut, as I mentioned, we've had bipartisan conversations about opening up access to absentee ballots, we did so last year. I'm hopeful we will again with regard to this Resolution. I know we will have some difference of opinion, but I do think we need to bear down on the fact that we need to make it easier for people to participate. The more people who participate in our electoral process, the more confidence there will be in our electoral process when everyone feels like they have a fair shake and a fair opportunity to vote, just like their everyone of their neighbors that are citizens of this country, the better and stronger

our democracy will be. I'm scared for our democracy right now, Madam President. And I'm hopeful that my colleagues will support this Resolution here today in an effort to have even greater participation. We saw record breaking turnout in many communities in the State of Connecticut last year, and I believe that some of that was because it was so much easier to participate, it was so much easier to vote.

That's why I believe this Resolution is so important, Madam President. I'm hopeful that my colleagues will choose to support this in a strong bipartisan way. I understand there are some differences of opinion and there are some things that some of my colleagues wanted to add to the Constitution in an effort to garner their support, and I respect what they wanted to do, but I also respectfully disagree. And so what we have before us today is a simple Resolution that will empower the people of the State of Connecticut to say yes. Connecticut will join 34 other states and allow voters a right to vote using an absentee ballot. Thank you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Flexer. Will you remark further?
Good evening, Senator Sampson, Good evening.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH):

Good evening Madam President. I rise for the purpose of debating this constitutional amendment that we have before us, which would make a significant change from the current law, which establishes a set of guidelines for which eligible voters are able to vote in absentee by mail for specific reasons, and replace that with a new policy that would allow someone to vote without an excuse.

On the surface, that seems like a very simple change, and one that we might all agree would provide additional access to voters going forward.

I was struck listening to my colleague, the Chairman of the Government Administration and Elections Committee just how much we have in common on how we view elections, and our desire for access to the voters. That is something that we all agree on. And in fact, I doubt sincerely that there are any Members of this Chamber or even the House that recently voted on this that do not believe that we should provide the maximum access to voting possible.

But there is always another side to that coin, Madam President, and that is the importance of maintaining the integrity of our elections. So tonight, I'm going to go through a lot of questions about this policy, we're going to dig deeper into what really happens during the process, what some of the concerns might be, and what the best path forward is for the State of Connecticut.

It was noted in my colleague's comments that there are states that are rolling back the expanded access to voting that they had created in the past. And I'll just start by saying that is not by accident. That is because that they discovered that as they expanded access, they also created the opportunity for problems and some of those problems have led to a tremendous divide that continues to exist in the political discourse in our country. Something that I believe is our paramount responsibility here to try and correct.

It's no secret Madam President that I probably cast more no votes in this Chamber than anyone. And when people ask me, I usually make a joke; well, it's because I read the Bills. But I know my colleagues read the Bills also. It's just that I think that sometimes I have a belief system that starts at zero, the status quo, what is our current status quo, and before we're going to change something, we should have a good reason to do it. Where I think a lot of people start from the point of "well, why should I say no to this Bill?" I believe the

question more often should be "why should we say yes to this Bill?" It's also because I believe that I put my obligation to the constituents I represent as completely paramount. And I believe my obligation as the oath I took was to help produce sound public policy that is beneficial to the citizens of our state now and in the future.

And I'm worried, Madam President, that sometimes we pass laws that are not sound public policy. And you'll hear me in this Chamber many, many times saying I don't disagree with the idea, but we need to do it better. And that's the case here, Madam President. I am very much in favor of expanding voting access. We had a similar conversation just a few days ago about expanding early voting, which I think is completely relevant to this discussion because I believe the fact that we are going to most likely have early voting in our state, is going to impact the necessity for having no excuse absentee voting.

I guess a good place to start with this is to ascertain where we are right now, the status quo as I mentioned; because I believe there is great confusion about what our current law actually is when it comes to absentee voting in our state.

In previous discussions regarding absentee voting and elections in this Chamber and in Committee, I have gone through the process of discussing pretty much everything that's transpired for the last year-and-a-half with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic and how it's affected our elections. And I don't want to go through that entire process again, but I'll briefly state that there have been many, many hands in the pot, trying to determine what our election law actually says and what the law actually is.

First and foremost, you had the Governor of our state issue an executive order prior to the primary election last year, essentially allowing for folks concerned with COVID-19 to vote in that election by

absentee, that was followed up by memorandums produced by the Secretary of State. There were legal challenges to those decisions. We gathered in this Chamber during a special session to pass a law, which I said at the time and have repeated many, many times since was not very clear to what we were accomplishing by redefining the illness portion of our statute, because we also have an obligation to maintain the constitutional integrity of our laws when we pass them.

And I firmly believe, Madam President, that what happened in the 2020 November election was a mistake. As much as I agree with every one of my colleagues that supported the idea of allowing folks concerned about COVID-19 to vote by an absentee ballot. That is not even possible without amending our Constitution. And I offer as proof of that statement, the fact that we are here today in this room, debating updating our state constitution to provide for no excuse absentee voting.

The Secretary of State originally wanted to expand absentee voting only for those who came into contact with people who had COVID-19. And originally, only for the primary election, she produced a subsequent memorandum expanding that somewhat and then there was a legal challenge. But what's most interesting is that the Supreme Court of the State of Connecticut produced a decision where they essentially said that any illness of any person is reason to have an absentee ballot, effectively making Connecticut a no excuse absentee voting state. We debated that on another Bill, Senate Bill 901. And that Bill came before this Chamber in an effort to expand those protections that were offered during the special session to this upcoming municipal election this November. And I brought up a lot of concerns about doing so Madam President, mostly because I think that we are in a different place with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic today than we were during the last election cycle. And because I'm concerned that if we are going to expand

absentee voting to apply as the Supreme Court said, to any illness anywhere, we are essentially creating no excuse absentee voting.

So, through you Madam President, just a question for the proponent of this House Joint Resolution. What is the current status of our absentee voting law? Is it acceptable to vote by absentee because of someone's illness? Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Flexer.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Through you Madam President, Madam President, the Resolution that we are debating here today has to do with whether the Constitution will be amended in the future. In previous debates, we debated legislation that will, that contemplated changing existing statute with regard to absentee ballots, but the Resolution today is not statutory. It is a resolution and is a question to the voters of Connecticut. So it doesn't speak to the question the good Senator just asked.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Sampson.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH):

Thank you Madam President. I appreciate the gentlelady's response. And I understand completely that I would not want to be in the position of having to answer that question, either. But it is relevant, in my opinion, because if we are going to create a constitutional amendment to establish no excuse absentee voting, that must indicate that we do not currently have no excuse absentee voting. So through you Madam President, if that is the case, I'd like to know, through you, how is it possible

that in the November 2020 election and the primary that preceded it, that the Secretary of State mailed absentee ballot applications to every registered voter that was eligible in those elections, and plenty who weren't; and indicated to all of them, that they were eligible to check the box for COVID-19 whether or not they had COVID-19, came in contact with someone who had COVID-19, just the mere existence of that illness allowed them to, which essentially made it so every person was eligible and without an excuse. Through you Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Flexer.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Through you Madam President, last year, this Chamber debated at length statutory changes to allow for voters in Connecticut to vote by absentee ballot because of the pandemic. Those statutory changes were evaluated by our state Supreme Court, which is the ultimate arbiter as to whether or not state statutes or constitution within the confines of our Connecticut Constitution. And again, what we're debating here today is a resolution to change our constitution so that frankly, the conversation that the good Senator is attempting to have will no longer be necessary. There will be absolute clarity. If the voters of Connecticut adopt this resolution after this Chamber does today, and a subsequent General Assembly adopts a resolution to allow for no excuse absentee voting, the, the debate that we're having right now and the debate that happened in our State Supreme Court last year, and the debate we had around statutory changes to our constitution may not be necessary.

I do have to say, though, just for complete clarity, that once the constitutional amendment is adopted by the Senate and by the next General Assembly, and then by the voters in November in 2024; if that does

happen, it doesn't automatically allow necessarily for no excuse absentee balloting. We would again have to evaluate the statutes as we did last year, and, and come up with measures with regard to no excuse absentee balloting, potentially how all of that would work, we would look at our current system and see what ways our current system might need to be refined because of the change in our state's constitution. Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Flexer. Senator Sampson.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH):

Thank you Madam President. I appreciate the answer once again, and I don't wish to continue the, the line of questioning any longer. But I did want to make sure that I did get it on the record that I believe that something transpired in this state with regard to our elections in both the primary and general election of 2020 that should not have happened. And I believe that it's never been thoroughly debated, investigated, or followed up on in a way that is satisfactory to me as someone who knows our election law intimately, and knows just exactly how it was abused in that case.

I am fearful, Madam President, not about the policy of no excuse absentee voting, but just how a broadly written constitutional amendment might be abused and that is why I'm standing here today. This might be a good point to reiterate something that I said during the previous debate on early voting, which is a desire to admonish the press, and also any of my colleagues who would like to mischaracterize anyone's position for or against this Bill. Because this debate is not at all about whether or not someone is in favor of expanding access to voting, every person is in favor of access and increasing that access to voting, including me. And any suggestion about Republicans wishing to suppress the

vote or somehow standing in the way of progress of misplaced, it is wrong and in fact, I would say it is just beyond the pale, because I am here in good faith, Madam President, for the purpose of trying to develop a good public policy on this subject with my colleagues any way possible.

If there is in fact, a problem with access in our elections, I would say that the No. 1 problem is the lengthy lines that exists in our major cities on Election Day. It's something that I brought up repeatedly in Committee and have offered attempts to resolve and that is something that we don't seem to address. So while there are many, many comments made by folks about increasing access, there are also failures in our current system that I think would be much more easily corrected. And that's where I would start.

Just to clarify the policy change that exists in the document itself of the Resolution before us, it's very simple. We are essentially removing a section that says that those folks who are qualified voters, who are unable to appear at the polling place on the day of election, which I presume would be the days of election, assuming early voting does go forward at the request of our voters because of absence from the city or town, which they are inhabitants of or because of sickness or physical disability or because the tenants of the religion forbid secular activity. So essentially, it covers quite a bit of ground. It covers people that are working, it covers people that are out of town, it covers people that are disabled, it covers people that are sick, it covers people in the military. I would suggest that the vast majority of situations that would preclude someone from being able to vote in person on Election Day are covered by our current no excuse absentee voting policy, which I will add last for 45 days. And I would point out, even though this body sought to it to pass a constitutional amendment for early voting, which we do not know the length of time that might end up being, 45 days of early

voting is essentially what our current absentee ballot policy creates. This proposal eliminates that and replaces it simply with people who quote in the Bill will not appear on the day of election.

It was mentioned early on that there are some people that believe Election Day is one day and that people should appear in person because it's that important. There are many people that I represent that believe that and in fact, that's my immediate response as a relatively young and fit person. But I am well aware that there are people that have other difficulties that might preclude them from being able to have access. Although I think that over time, this legislature and the good citizens of the state have saw fit to put together a constitution that covers those concerns in a fairly detailed way. What's happening here today, Madam President, is a massive expansion of that situation. It is not simply adding another excuse or coming up with a reason that we had not contemplated before, but rather replacing the idea that the way we should vote is on election day in person with an election that could last for a significant length of time, at least 45 days given this Resolution before us, there would be early voting not in person, but by mail for 45 days if this passes. That's not a small change. And I just think that people should be able to view it in the clearest light possible.

And all of this boils down to one very, very important point, which is that in-person voting will always be more secure than by mail voting. I started this conversation by suggesting that our paramount responsibility to our constituents is to preserve the integrity of the election and the faith, the faith that the voters have that the election that they are participating in is legitimate and that the results can be trusted.

If you turn on the various national news networks, you will get varying opinions about what has happened in the last several presidential elections.

In 2016, Democrats nationally claimed that the election was not legitimate because of interference from outside sources, helping then President Trump become elected. In 2020, President Trump claimed that elections across this country were illegitimate because of unsolicited mailing ballots, failure to properly identify voters, unscrupulous voting machines and various other things.

As I have pointed out time and time again, Madam President, I don't know the details about any of those things. I can only speak to what I know about which is the election law and the circumstances in our state. But what I do know about those two claims and those situations that continue to permeate the discussion and the discourse of politics in our country, which is hopelessly divided is that we should be working here every day to get rid of any doubt that either party or any person in this country has about whether our elections have integrity.

All election laws should pass unanimously. That's what I believe, Madam President. Every time we pass a law regarding election policy, it ought to pass unanimously. I don't believe that about anything else. We pass a lot of laws through this Chamber and through the House of Representatives, and many of them pass unanimously, and many of them do not. But election laws are the rules of the game by which we are all here debating the other Bills that become law. And that's something everyone should agree on. When you sit down with your family and friends to play cards, don't you establish the rules of the game together? Yes, you do. And you do that because you want everyone to be on the same page about what those rules are.

So Madam President, I just want to draw attention to the fact that this Bill today is not going to pass unanimously. And that should raise a red flag for everyone here and everyone watching. That means that someone doesn't agree with these rules of the

game. And when you're talking about what is so important, which is the process by which our constituents, the citizens of the state, make their determinations about who they want to represent them, it should be absolutely beyond any doubt that the right person was chosen and elected and they receive the proper number of votes.

I've said repeatedly today and throughout the entire process by which brought us here to debate this proposed constitutional amendment, that I would gladly support a constitutional amendment to expand absentee voting, to in fact even pass no excuse absentee voting, provided of course, there were safeguards in place. And I'm going to get into what those safeguards are in a moment. But I want to make it very clear that the process for changing our constitution for anyone listening is very simple.

A constitutional amendment must be brought before both Chambers of the General Assembly, the House, and the Senate. If that proposal passes by 75% in both Chambers, it will then go on the ballot for voters to have their say and if it passes, the constitutional amendment will become effective. If a proposal is presented to either or both Chambers and does not reach the required 75% threshold, but does reach a 50% or more threshold, then it must be carried over to a new legislature, not just the next year necessarily, but after the next election, because we also serve two year terms, that means that if it happens in the first year of a biennium, that means that you'd have to wait two years to get to the first year of the next biennium where there is new legislators seated. Otherwise, you could do it in the second year and then the first year.

As it stands today, Madam President, this proposal passed the House of Representatives already, but it did not reach the required 75%. So what happens in this Chamber today really doesn't mean a lot unless the Amendment fails entirely, in which case, the process would have to begin again. But assuming it

passes by any margin over 50% all the way to 100%, the two years will still have to go by because the 75% was not met in the House of Representatives.

There is one exception to that that was not mentioned by my colleague when she opened her remarks. And that is, we have the power, Madam President, in this Chamber to modify this proposal. We can change this constitutional amendment right here in this Chamber, and if it were to pass by a 75% majority, it would go back to the House of Representatives to be voted on again. And if it reached that 75%, this constitutional amendment could happen immediately.

I want to make it clear, Madam President that I have worked very, very hard to try and find a way for us to find common ground in a bipartisan fashion that will get us to 75% this year. And I'm going to offer several amendments, which any one of might be caused to increase that threshold to a point where we are that much more likely to get to that goal. But if none of the amendments are adopted, Madam President, it does not matter what happens in this Chamber and even if every person voted for this, we would still have to wait two years.

So I'm saying all this because I want to make it completely, utterly clear to the majority party, that if they want to see no excuse absentee voting, they can see it happen this time. But they need to work with the minority to change this Bill in a way that's acceptable to us, and ultimately the House of Representatives when the, the Bill goes back before them. But it is entirely 100% possible, Madam President, and I would encourage them to think very hard about the amendments that I offer in that light.

And the amendments that I'm going to offer are all focused on maintaining voter integrity, which I said is the other piece of the puzzle. People in this Chamber are apt to walk around and say one person,

one vote is so important. And in fact, when we had the debate on the national popular vote, that was the rallying cry, despite the fact that the national popular vote is in fact the exact opposite of that, since it encourages us to give away our votes to voters as a result of things that happen outside of our state. But I believe that one person one vote is the standard we should be operating by. And that, that means that every person should have their right protected and their vote counted. But anything that happens that undermines the sanctity of that vote, someone having their vote disenfranchised, someone failing to have their vote counted, someone voting who is not supposed to be or voting multiple times or in multiple locations; all of those things go to undermine the concept of one person and one vote, which is why I stand before you encouraging not just the expansion of access to voting, but the protection of integrity of voting.

And don't take it from me, Madam President. The President of the Senate, Martin Looney himself said in a debate on early voting just a couple of years ago, "the subject of absentee balloting", he was referring to when he said is legitimately controversial because in reality, we never really know for sure who is casting an absentee ballot.

I will also remind this Chamber that a democratic colleague of mine got up during that debate on absentee voting and described his own personal experience with absentee vote fraud occurring in the City of Bridgeport. There are Members of this body, who have been in numerous newspaper articles concerned about the legitimacy of absentee ballot voting in their own elections and other elections in their city. It is not something that is unknown to the people in this room.

I'm going to take a moment just to go through a few examples to point out that the discussion of voter fraud may not be as expansive as some people who follow President Trump might claim, but it is also

not non-existent either. It is a real thing that needs to be taken into consideration when we're here making public policy.

This is from an article that appeared in the Waterbury Republican American in October of 2020; 2018 Stafford, Troy Stevenson was convicted of making a false statement on an absentee ballot as well as second-degree forgery. He committed the crime in connection with a mayoral election in Stafford. Betty Chapel was convicted of making a false statement on an absentee ballot as well as secondary forgery, excuse me, again on a mayoral election in Stafford. I want you to just point out that as I read these, almost none of these folks face any significant penalty, some were fined, but I don't know that anyone served any jail time. And that's something that might be viewed favorably or unfavorably by those concerned about protecting the integrity of our elections.

2013 Hartford, the State Elections Enforcement Commission ruled that State Representative Minnie Gonzalez was knowingly present while four voters fraudulently filled out absentee ballots at City Hall during the 2006 election, and she was fined \$4500. 2011 Bridgeport, Councilwoman Lydia Martinez admitted to illegally assisting in the filling out of absentee ballots. I'm not making these things up, Madam President. These were in one newspaper article and I've only scratched the surface of what is here. She was ordered by the Connecticut Elections Enforcement Commission to pay a \$500 fine. Not the first time she was fined by the Commission.

2009 Stafford, Lillian Cummings Stephenson agreed to a consent order after the SEEC found her guilty of illegally signing and submitting two absentee ballot request forms on behalf of her sons who were living in Europe. She was fined a whopping \$200. 2005, Hartford, again all from the same article and I could have pulled out several other articles also. Prinzing Holloway voted using another voters

absentee ballot in the 2004 Democratic Primary, ordered to pay a civil penalty of \$2,000. 2003 Hartford, former State Representative Barnaby Horton was charged with absentee ballot fraud after he was caught inducing elderly residents to cast absentee ballots for him. After a lengthy court battle, he pleaded guilty to felony charges of ballot fraud and so on.

2001 Bridgeport, Sibil Allen while serving as a Democrat on the Bridgeport Town Committee engaged in a range of absentee ballot related fraud. Allen completed ballot applications in the name of residents, forged signatures and on at least one occasion got a voter to forge a ballot registration form for a family member who no longer lived in the community. Warren Blunt, a city councilman pleaded guilty to being present while people cast their absentee ballots and subsequently taking those ballots while running for reelection in the town's Democratic primary. Paulette Park while working for a candidate in the Bridgeport's 2000 Democratic Town Committee Primary Election illegally persuaded voters to list false reasons for requesting absentee ballots.

2001 Bridgeport as part of the get out the vote campaign leading up to the 2000 election, Ronald Cabinas admitted to distributing absentee ballots being present while people filled them out and then collecting them. After an investigation, he agreed to resign from the Democratic Town Committee, not seek reelection for two years and pay a fine of \$4000 which was eventually reduced to \$1000.

Just a few examples to point out to folks that no one here is claiming that elections were stolen, that there is massive voter fraud. No one is claiming that at all. I'm simply pointing out that it is a reality and it is a substantial reality in the sense that when there is any type of irregularity that has to do with elections or anything that might fit into the category of voter

fraud, it is almost certainly having to do with absentee balloting. Because as Senator Looney said, you never really know who is filling out something that is sent in the mail; a big difference from someone appearing in person at the polls.

Just following up in that vein, there is an organization in the state called Fight Voter Fraud, and they have been investigating the 2020 election. And there is the couple of folks, they don't have a big, you know, base of support or, you know, employees working for them. You've got just a couple of folks who are going through the data from our November election. And they've uncovered numerous irregularities.

On March 16, 2021, they put out a press release, indicating that the Fight Voter Fraud analytics team, and I think that's funny because I happen to know Dominic and Linda, I think that's their analytics team; has discovered 103 Connecticut citizens of the same or similar name, birth date and address that voting records show have as having voted twice. Printed and electronic versions of the data were delivered directly to the Secretary of State's Office. I do not believe they've even got a response to this inquiry as of yet.

April 30, 2021, they also issued another press release. And this one really took me by surprise, especially since some of the policy that we've passed in this Chamber this year, relates directly to these concerns. New research indicates 56 inmates serving felony sentences voted in 2020. State records appear to indicate that 56 incarcerated felons voted in the 2020 election. And just reading down, I highlighted a section which woke me up. I was falling asleep, I was tired when I was reading this and this brought me to light faster than a high caffeine cup of coffee. It says inexplicably, inmates can register to vote and apply for an absentee ballot, which are sent to prison addresses as evidenced in the state voter files,

often with the six digit inmate number as part of the address.

Madam President, if we do not have the ability to determine that someone who is completely ineligible to vote, because they are in fact serving a felony sentence and are actually inside the prison, asking for an absentee ballot to be mailed to them there; that how can we tell the voters of this state that we have the ability to expand absentee balloting exponentially? And when I say exponentially, that's what I mean, Madam President.

Prior to the most recent election in the state, a fraction of voters, a tiny percentage, a couple, 2% or to 3% is all that ever requested an absentee ballot under the parameters that were afforded under our Constitution and statutory requirements. But in the most recent election in 2020, that number skyrocketed and so did the cost to taxpayers, which is another concern that I have, and will address in a moment. It's not just fraud either. People are often disenfranchised in the process of absentee ballots, something that concerns me greatly.

During a previous debate, I discussed my concern over the drop boxes that were installed across our state, mostly outside of town halls, but in some other locations too. Because those drop boxes are not monitored as thoroughly as I believe something that contains the ballots for an election should be. And in fact, sometimes those drop boxes are ignored over an entire weekend and there are no cameras on them. And I've described them before as an attractive nuisance to someone who wanted to disrupt an election. And I am very thankful, Madam President, that we did not have this problem in the previous election, but I am fearful it could happen.

But one of the things that was interesting is that I had a photo sent to me by someone showing one of these absentee ballot drop boxes overflowing with ballots. And I didn't know what to make of it, so I

passed this information on to the State Election Enforcement Commission, who investigated, and were very pleased to explain to me that that was a result of people who had voted after Election Day and their votes were not counted.

Now, that might have satisfied some people who were single minded in their focus to discredit any argument I might make about the potential for fraud. But I don't believe it even occurred to them, that those people thought they were voting in that election and that their votes counted, but they did not. That concerns me, Madam President. I want people's votes to count.

There is also the concern over whether someone might be able to change their mind. This constitutional amendment does not spell this out. But based on the previous policy that we used in the most recent election, the timeframe that someone was allowed to reverse their ballot and choose a different candidate was changed from the day of the election at 10 A.M. as a deadline to the Thursday before Election Day, which I believe is a significant change, and one that might disenfranchise someone who comes up with a different determination on what they want to do as far as the election, as things get closer to the end.

I think people are understanding my point here, Madam President, which is that this is not as simple as it seems. It is not just changing the policy from getting rid of the limited number of excuses, which I don't consider limited, because I think they cover just about everything that you can think of, to no excuse whatsoever. There is a lot of other concerns. And there are other things that I will mention briefly, but are worthy of entire debates and discussions on their own. Like, do we properly audit absentee ballots? No, we don't. I mentioned the security of drop boxes, but there is far more to it than that. Our entire process relies on someone filling out a document, signing the outside of a

ballot envelope and returning it to be counted, which works great in states that actually have the person's signature on file. But in Connecticut, though some towns do have some signatures on file, there is no approved process to verify those signatures at all in Connecticut, none whatsoever. And in fact, the town poll workers across our state were told during the last election that as long as there is a mark on the outside of that ballot, it doesn't matter if it matches a signature, whether that signature is on file or not. It doesn't matter whether the name matches, it doesn't matter whether it's an X or a line or dot or a stray mark, that ballot is to be counted.

There is also concerns about the chain of custody when you expand absentee ballots substantially, where they will be stored, when they will be counted and so on. These are all things that I believe Madam President should be developed in conjunction with opening the door to no excuse absentee balloting.

So as a result, I'm going to offer a few amendments. The first one is in direct response to the concerns I just made. The Clerk has Amendment, I believe its LCO 9848. I ask that it be called and I am allowed to summarize it for the Chamber.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk, if you would please call LCO 9848.

CLERK:

LCO No. 9848, Senate Schedule "A".

THE CHAIR:

Senator Sampson.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH):

Thank you, Madam President. This is a very straightforward amendment. It simply adds a requirement that a signature verification process will become part of our constitutional amendment to provide for no excuse absentee voting. That's all it does. I move adoption. I will remind my colleagues that if this Amendment is adopted, it may help us reach a higher threshold of votes in this Chamber and give us the opportunity to go back to the House. And I hope everyone votes for it. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator. Will you remark further on the Amendment before the Chamber? Senator Flexer.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, I rise in opposition to this Amendment, and I have several things to say about that. But first of all, Madam President, I'd ask that when the vote is taken on this Amendment, that it be taken by roll call.

THE CHAIR:

And it will indeed be taken by roll.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Thank you Madam President. Madam President. The Amendment before us is a bad idea, and I'm happy to explain why in detail. And I've been sitting here listening to the good Senator, the Ranking Member of the Government Administration and Elections Committee for, for some time, and I think through this, well not this debate just yet, but throughout this legislative session, you have seen the Ranking Member and I try to navigate a very wide philosophical and political gap between us on these issues. And I have tried to respectfully listen to his suggestions and concerns, and I would say that

there was a, a piece of legislation we debated earlier this year, where I think very graciously the, this side of the aisle agreed to try to study the issue of signature verification in a gesture of goodwill. However, this being before us right now, it, it should not be in the Constitution. It's unnecessary. What we are trying to do is make our Constitution less restrictive and changing the Amendment before us would not only put in parallel its possibility for passage this year, given the, the date in the session and, and how little time is left. It's also in my opinion, just not appropriate to be in our state's constitution.

We are working towards making a change where the provisions around elections and voting are statutory in nature, and they are not enshrined in our Constitution and we do not have to go through this very difficult process that we're going through right now in an effort to change the Constitution.

Madam President, I, I do just want to take this opportunity that I have right now to rise and, and speak against this Amendment. To first emphasize, I want to listen to everyone's concerns and thoughts and ideas on how Connecticut should move forward with regard to our election laws. But this Amendment is a bad idea and some of the narrative we just heard is simply wrong, specifically with regard to signature verification. First of all, we know that people's signatures change over time. I'm sure many of us have been following the National News. There are so many headlines right now about election reform laws, things happening in other states. And one of the things that came out was how much people's signatures changed. There was a really interesting story about the Governor of Florida and how his signature would not meet signature verification standards.

Signature verification is something that should not be in our state's constitution. We just heard extensively about the issue of voter fraud in our

state. And again, I believe the good Ranking Member sincerely wants to try to open up access to voting and try to find a way to support no excuse absentee voting. However, some of the things that we just heard about just simply are, are not, are not accurate.

First of all, the long list of voter fraud enforcements by our State Elections Enforcement Commission, in my mind just prove how the system we have in place works. We should be lauding our State Elections Enforcement Commission, they have a very difficult job with very limited resources. They have a wide area of the law that they are charged with enforcing and that laundry list you heard of offenses here in Connecticut over the last 20 years shows that when you break our election law, you face a penalty. However, it also showed that the restrictiveness of our State Constitution doesn't work. Some of the offenses that we just heard about in other states, those behaviors are encouraged, helping someone fill out an absentee ballot, for example. These are things that Connecticut is just really far behind on and while we want to make sure that people are influencing voters in a way that's inappropriate, we want to make sure we have strong protections in place to ensure that, that people are voting freely of their own free will, how they want to cast that ballot. We also want to make sure that more people can participate.

Madam President, we also heard about, I believe the number was 103. We heard about an organization that claims to be fighting voter fraud. The fact of the matter is, many of the claims that we just heard about have been rejected by that same State Elections Enforcement Commission. So on the one hand, the State Elections Enforcement Commission has found all of these levels of voting fraud in our state, but on the other hand, this organization that claims to be fighting voter fraud that just happened in our state in the last year, the claims about the inmates, the other things; it's been reported in our

media repeatedly here in Connecticut that the State Elections Enforcement Commission has not only told that organization that thus far of the investigations they've concluded of those complaints that they were not true and that they are abusing the process. I think it's important to state that for the record, Madam President, and again, I am very hopeful that we are going to have a bipartisan conversation on this resolution. I genuinely hope that when this Resolution passes, because the voters of Connecticut choose to support it that we can continue to have bipartisan conversations about what our election laws should look like so that all voters in Connecticut can have confidence in our election law. But I just think it's really important that the things that simply aren't true aren't just left sitting out there.

I'm very concerned with the way some people who are very important to me who don't share my political beliefs are beginning to not have confidence in our system. And they will only believe people who have an "R" next to their name when it comes to these issues. And there are people on our side of the aisle who will only believe people who have a "D" next to their name when it comes to these issues. I would implore my colleagues to reject this Amendment today, not because we shouldn't have the goal of having this Resolution pass in a bipartisan manner, but because it just simply doesn't belong in our state's constitution. Thank you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator. Will you remark further?
Senator Champagne.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH):

Thank you Madam President. I stand in support of this Amendment. Like anything, we should always make sure that our voting is accurate and, and this is a way of verifying that. Now when I, when I

stand and, and I listened to all this whole or when I was in the other room, I was listening to this whole list of what was found. And, and being in Law Enforcement for as long as I know, if you caught some, you didn't catch them all. And it's a small number. I don't think it was going to influence anything, but we should have, we should have double check all our signatures if that's the way we want to do it. I support absentee ballots, no excuse absentee ballots. But I also support making sure that we do it in a manner that is protected and safe. And we can do this because this does not limit who can come and who can apply for these. What it does is after the votes are taken, it verifies that the signatures match. And if I remember correctly, in, in the last legislation we talked about, we're going to have state agencies that we're going to verify this. In fact, I know I go get a license and I have to re-sign when I get this license. There is my new signature, it's now in the system and can be verified.

So the whole thing about you know, your, your signature changing that, that, that can be taken care of over time. But we need a system that we can make sure we can follow up on and protect our voting, not, that's something that we're just going to throw out there and say, yep, well, you know, maybe we'll verify, maybe we'll look into it. No, no, we, we need to make sure that everything is. When you walk-in in person, there is somebody there that's going to double check the list and they're going to make sure that yep, you live there and, and, and you bring in an ID or you bring in some form of mail. For the mailing, you have to mail it back and there is no in-person or you can drop it off in a drop box if there is nobody around or you can bring it back in person to, to the town clerk's. But to, to not have a verification, I think is wrong. And, and this does not slow this down, it does not stop people from voting. This is a verification that the signatures match and the

person voting is the one that turned in that ballot.
Thank you Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Champagne. Will you remark further? Senator Cicarella.

SENATOR CICARELLA (34TH):

Thank you Madam President. I also stand in support of this Amendment. Before I get to the Amendment specifically, I stand in support for the no excuse absentee ballots more so than, than anything. I think it's imperative that people that are citizens, that are legal voters have that right. And I think it's our job to make it as easy as possible so they can, they do it where they feel safe, comfortable. And we make it easy, because it is important that everybody has a voice and it makes what we do in this circle that much more relevant. And having a signature verification process does not stop anybody from voting. It's a checks and balances, it's going to allow there to be security and confidence in this process.

If somebody signature may have changed, it's just going to alert the registered voters to say, wait a minute, this doesn't look right, let's look into it. Let's make sure the person is who they are and then they'll get the ability to vote if it is correct. I stand in support of the signature verification because it's just one step in the right direction of making it easier and secure for our residents and citizens to vote. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator. Will you remark further on the Amendment before the Chamber? Senator Formica.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH):

Good afternoon Madam President. I rise in support of the Amendment as well. And listening to the, to the debate and, you know, we're talking about not only the subject of absentee balloting today, but the relevance of what goes into the Constitution.

Madam President if you read the question that is going to be put to the voters. Part of it talks about the existence of what the requirements are for absentee balloting currently as written in the Constitution, and I believe it, it speaks to because of absence from the city or town in which they're inhabitants or because of sickness or physical disability or because the tenants of their religion forbid secular activity. This Amendment seeks to just add, and whose signatures on the materials used to be, used to vote can be verified.

Just as the other requirements, Madam President, doesn't mean that we are going to check or someone is going to check each of the absentee ballots to make sure that people who marked that they were absent doesn't mean that people are going to go knock on their door and say, hey, you're going to be absent to the 5000 or so. It just means that should there be a need or an op, there is an opportunity.

And Madam President, I think that this Amendment does the same thing as to some of the requirements that are already in the Constitution; gives the opportunity for signature verification should there be a question. So I stand in support, and I thank you for the opportunity.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator. Will you remark further on the Amendment? Will you remark further on the Amendment? Senator Flexer.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Thank you Madam President. Madam President, I rise for a few questions to the proponent of the Amendment.

THE CHAIR:

Please proceed, and Senator Sampson, prepare yourself.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Thank you Madam President. Madam President, through you, could the good Senator please tell me what the process would be for verified, as outlined in this Amendment if it were adopted into the Constitution?

THE CHAIR:

Senator Sampson.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH):

Thank you Madam President. As has been suggested, many times when we are debating constitutional amendments, the individual statutory language of a policy and procedure is not contained in the document, just simply the overall requirement for a person's signature to be part of the process. That is all that is being asked by this amendment, through you Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Flexer.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Through you Madam President, so the process of verification is not outlined in this Amendment?

THE CHAIR:

Senator Sampson.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH):

Thank you Madam President. No, it does not.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Flexer.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Thank you Madam President. Madam President, if this Amendment were adopted, who or what entity would maintain the voters or the person as is described in the Amendment and it says person's signature. What entity would maintain the person's signature?

THE CHAIR:

Senator Sampson.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH):

Thank you Madam President. I do not know the answer to that question. I'm sure that the, the good Chairwoman knows that the Amendment would require the General Assembly to develop a policy in concordance and an agreement with what the constitutional amendment reads. So we would as a House and Senate develop what that policy is, and it may in fact go even beyond us to, you know, regulations review to determine the exact policy. All this would do is set up the parameters much like the debate we had on early voting the other day, where it was described to me repeatedly that just early voting is good enough Senator Sampson, we'll figure out the number of days later. I'm simply suggesting that we make signature verification a part of the process and that we can fill in the blanks more specifically later. Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator. Senator Flexer.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, if this Amendment to this Resolution were adopted and passed by this State Senate and again by the House and by a subsequent General Assembly or by the voters in 2022 or 2024, depending on how this debate all shakes out. Madam President, what would happen to a voter that doesn't have a signature?

THE CHAIR:

Senator Sampson.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH):

Thank you Madam President. I don't know the answer to that question. I presume that when the General Assembly sits down to draft policy to comply with the requirements laid out in the constitutional amendment, we will develop a, a way to respond to that situation. Through you Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Flexer.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Through you Madam President, but the Amendment says a person's signature.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Sampson.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH):

Thank you Madam President. Forgive me. I don't, I don't know if the gentelady is attempting to be

obtuse. I think it's quite clear that the General Assembly will develop a policy in accordance with a broad requirement that signatures become a part of the process. And I'm quite certain that it would not be in direct, you know, conflict with the Constitution if there was someone that for physical disability or some other reason could not produce what we consider a written signature, something else would suffice. And I'm quite certain we would come to an agreement on that. Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Flexer.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Through you Madam President, so just to clarify, the proponent of the Amendment is confident that it would be constitutional if this Amendment to the Constitution were adopted, that a person could not have a signature and still be eligible for an absentee ballot despite there being language in the Constitution that requires a signature of a person to be verified.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Sampson.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH):

Thank you Madam President. Yes, I am. And I'm also more than willing to be open to a modification of this Amendment. I'd be delighted if we voted it down and we could draft another moment together and pass it on in a bipartisan manner that accommodates that exact situation. Through you Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Flexer.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Thank you Madam President. And I appreciate the, the Senator's responses, and I'm not sincerely trying to be obtuse. But I asked these questions in an effort to demonstrate why this is the kind of language that needs to be debated in a legislative debate, in a debate around our state statutes and not debated with regard to an Amendment to our Constitution. Because if there is an error, if this inadvertently does make it difficult for someone who doesn't have a signature to be able to vote, that's just one example of why this should not be the language within our Constitution and instead needs to be language that's debated with regard to our statutes. And again, I would offer that this is a debate that we're open to having in a bipartisan fashion, but not in our Constitution. Thank you Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator. Will you remark further?
Senator Anwar.

SENATOR ANWAR (3RD):

Thank you Madam President. I rise in opposition to the Amendment. I wanted to speak of a few thoughts with, through you Madam President, say a few things. I do not have questions, I just wanted to make some remarks.

I think the premise of the Amendment is, has a major challenge and then, and the conversation that we are having is based on a prism which is missing a big point, which is missing a point of probabilities. Probability is a very critical piece that I come and speak about very frequently and I think I probably should do that much, much more frequently until we start to look at those probabilities and in real sense.

We have a lot of data. The State of Connecticut is far behind in adopting what many parts of the country have already adopted. And, and the rest of the parts of the world of our country, Washington State, Oregon, Utah, Colorado and beyond, they have data that have been able to look at the probability of fraud. And Oregon State data shows that the risk is at 0.002%, and, and Washington State, their data shows is the risk is 0.002% case of fraud as well from Washington State. To put this in perspective, i.e., an individual is 12 times more likely to be hit by lightning, and individual is 12 times more likely to be hit by lightning rather than being able to commit voter fraud.

Let's look at the Connecticut data when it was looked at. Now, it was not looked at from one of the articles that was suggested. But the, the, the data that was looked at was in the State of Connecticut when this data was looked at, it was 0.0006% chances. I'll repeat that just so that if people did not miss that, it's all about probabilities, it's by 0.0006% chances of an individual committing voter fraud. And to put this into lightning numbers, you're going to be likely to be hit by lightning 55 times more likely to be hit by lightning before a person in the State of Connecticut would do that.

So if we are going to be making policies and making amendments based on the probability analysis, then maybe we should just live in this room because the probability of falling down when we're walking up or, or being hit by another car is far more than some of the, the policy that we're looking at. So I just want to put this in perspective because we will spend a lot of time arguing about this, but if you put this in perspective, then you realize that there is more, there is much more to why this is being suggested. And that is the echo of what we are hearing in the rest of the country. I'll just leave it at that, and then if somebody wants to explore

that further, I will ask them to see what's happening in the rest of the country.

With that, Madam President, I would urge people to reject this Amendment as well. Thank you so much.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Anwar. Will you remark further on the Amendment? Senator Sampson.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH):

Thank you Madam President. Forgive me for getting up a second time. I, I just want to make sure we get back to the point of the Amendment because I know there has been a lot of dialogue in between. I, I, I want to just express my concern about some comments suggesting that some of the information I provided was not true or accurate. Everything I provided was reported in the public news. The items of voter fraud regarding all absentee ballot circumstances were all from one newspaper article. And trust me, a simple Google search will find you dozens more. And I would dispute the suggestion that we are far behind other states in many respects. Connecticut, essentially if I'm what I'm hearing from folks describing our security situation as being, you know, less than being struck by lightning that would, that would say that we're far ahead, not far behind.

The point of this Amendment is simply whether or not we believe that a signature verification process which is used in virtually every state, and in fact maybe every state that has expansion of no excuse absentee voting should be part of this process or not. A yes vote means yes. You believe a signature verification process is necessary if we are going to have no excuse absentee voting, and a no vote means you don't believe that we should be maintaining the integrity of our election through a signature verification process. It's very simple.

Final point, it was brought to my attention that a mark, any type of mark can be considered a signature, and I think that would satisfy most people's concerns. Thank you, Madam President. I encourage adoption of this Amendment. As pointed out, if we improve this Bill to the point where we can get it out of this Chamber in excess of 75%, it can go back to the House and maybe acted upon in the same way. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you. Will you remark further on the Amendment? Will you remark further on the Amendment? If not, the machine will be opened and Mr. Clerk, could you please call the roll?

CLERK:

Immediate roll call vote has been ordered in the Senate. Immediate roll call vote has been ordered in the Senate. House Joint Resolution 58. This will be Senate Amendment "A" of House Joint Resolution 58. Immediate roll call vote has been ordered in the Senate, Senate Amendment "A" House Joint Resolution 58. Immediate roll call vote in the Senate on Senate Amendment "A" House Joint Resolution 58. Immediate roll call vote in the Senate.

THE CHAIR:

Have all the Senators voted? Have all the Senators voted? The machine will be locked. Mr. Clerk, please put the tally forward.

CLERK:

Senate Amendment "A" of House Joint Resolution 58:

Total number voting	35
Those voting Yea	12

Those voting Nay	23
Absent and not voting	1

THE CHAIR:

Amendment fails. Will you remark further on the Bill before the Chamber? Will you remark further on the Bill before the Resolution, before the Chamber, pardon me? Senator Sampson.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH):

Thank you very much Madam President. I'm certainly disappointed that that Amendment failed. I thought that signature verification was a relatively universal, universally accepted form of identity verification. It's used in at least 16 other states that I've found in a short search of the internet, signature checked against voter registration record. And I know in fact that this Legislature has recently adopted legislation that begins the process of collecting an electronic record for signatures. And in fact, our automatic voter registration, I believe will also have a provision to hang on to that data. So it, it seems to me a no brainer to, to make that a requirement if we were to expand no excuse absentee voting.

But there are other concerns as, as well, Madam President. One of the most significant things that happened in the most recent election, which gave pause to a number of folks who are concerned about making sure that our election process is above any potential consideration of being less than perfect is the process by which the Secretary of State took it upon herself to mail unsolicited absentee ballot applications to every person listed on the voter rolls across our state. And even casual observers have probably seen the news about how out of date those voter rolls are. And the significant volume of returned mail that the Secretary of State received in just the primary alone, I don't remember the exact number of primary voters, I, I want to say

it was somewhere around 700,000, something like that, that were sent ballot applications. And over 100,000 of them will return a significant, significant number, and something that's completely unacceptable.

During a previous conversation in this Chamber, I went through a list of concerned citizens who had contacted me, letting me know that they had received unsolicited absentee ballot applications for folks that they don't know or for people that had moved on, or for their children or for their parents, or people that had passed and so forth. I, I'll just read a few of these. I have these items. This is from July 4 right after the, you know, right around primary time. Yesterday in the mail, I received at my home in Meriden, two absentee ballot applications, one in English and one in Spanish. I took the census, so I assumed that it would be on the record that this is an English speaking household should I have received two of these ballots. It's a good question because, could someone conceivably have completed two of them and sent them back even innocently, and I would say that that's a distinct possibility. Theresa Corbin contacted me, last week I received an absentee ballot application, but I did not request it. People were confused by the mailing of absentee ballots. Also, they erroneously had me listed as a Democrat. So she, you know, didn't understand why her party affiliation had changed.

There is one from Deborah Durbin. My dad got an application for an absentee ballot today, but he died in 2011. I, I have dozens of these. Alexandra Anderson from Southington, my dear friend Chris Kaia and his Walker friends are curious why a person may receive two absentee ballots for the same individual, one with her maiden name, one with her married name, and then she attached copies showing the, the names and addresses right on there. And these are honest mistakes, Madam President. I'm quite certain that this is not happening because

someone is purposely trying to defraud, you know, the registrar, voters are registering multiple times. It is because of the nature of our process in this state where now we are registering people every chance we get, and people end up registered more than once. And if there is some small distinction between whether they use a maiden name, a married name, a middle initial, Chris versus Christina, who knows. They can end up on the voter rolls more than once and therefore will receive multiple absentee ballot applications.

Jeff Weiss, there is zero procedure in the town clerk's office to verify applications. Jason Webb, State Senator Rob Sampson, I received multiple absentee ballots to my address and names that I have no idea who they are. I contacted my local election office and notified them. All I got was nothing they can do about it. I got dozens of these Madam President, and this was only during the primary. I put a Facebook post saying if anybody got an absentee ballot application that they shouldn't have or they have concerns about it, let me know. The number of responses is staggering. There is probably a hundred of them here.

Susan Albert, my grandfather has been dead for 25 years and received one; unreal. TJ Hegley, I received mine and one for my son who moved out of state over five years ago. Andrew Vignola Jr., we received ours the other day. They sent my youngest son an application, but he hasn't lived in Connecticut for four years. Many of these people made a point of saying that they wanted to vote in person, that they did not trust this process as a result of what had happened.

So Madam President, as a result, I think it is important and incumbent upon us, especially in response to the comments made by the Chairwoman of the Government Administration Elections Committee, and Senator Anwar, who expressed concerns over making sure that the integrity was not challenged in

any way by our process, and that we maintain that better than getting struck by lightning record. I think it makes sense to prohibit the process of allowing for absentee ballot applications to be mailed, unsolicited to everyone on that voter list, at least for the foreseeable future, and until that list is cleaned up in some way.

Also a reminder that we all recognize how important it is to allow people to vote in person if that is their wish, and that it is much more reliable of a process that I think everyone in this Chamber can simply see that someone voting in person, you're going to know who that person is.

So Madam President, I have another Amendment for you. This one is LCO No. 9908. I ask that it be called and then I'd be allowed to summarize.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk, if you would please call LCO 9908.

CLERK:

LCO No. 9908, Senate Schedule "B".

THE CHAIR:

Senator Sampson.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH):

Thank you Madam President. This Amendment is quite straightforward and adds a Section 12 that reads neither the Secretary of the State nor any Registrar of Voters, Town Clerk or other or excuse me or any individual appointed thereby may mail an unsolicited application for an absentee ballot to any person. The point being that if we expand absentee balloting to no excuse whatsoever, that would be fine, but someone would still be required to request that ballot rather than having it being mailed to them in

an unsolicited way. And I will move adoption in just a moment, but I want to just point out that I have in front of me the cost of doing so.

The Secretary of State spent \$7,140,000 in the printing and postage and processing of absentee ballot applications just in the primary from the last election in July of 2020. You can imagine how much it might have been for the general election. This is an unnecessary expense Madam President. I move adoption of this Amendment. There is no reason to spend the taxpayers' money sending out unsolicited applications for plenty of people who plan on voting in person and know that they can simply ask for an absentee ballot at any time. I move adoption again, and I would ask for a roll call vote. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Sampson. And we will have a roll call vote. Will you remark further on the Amendment before the Chamber? Senator Flexer.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Thank you Madam President. Madam President, I would ask that when the vote was taken on this Amendment, it be taken my roll.

THE CHAIR:

And now we have both of you are requesting it, so we will have.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Just making sure.

THE CHAIR:

Definitely, indeed.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Thank you Madam President. Madam President, I rise in opposition to this Amendment. Again, I would say my basic premises, these sorts of things, first of all do not belong in our state's constitution. Something like this should be statutory in nature. However, I also want to stand up and say very strongly that I, I, and I don't think I've had occasion to do this, although we have discussed this a great deal in, in the Committee and on the floor in the Senate on various pieces of legislation and resolutions that have been before us. This notion that the unsolicited mailing of the absentee ballot applications last year was somehow a, a terrible thing. I, I just want to stand up and just really strongly refute. Again, I urge my colleagues to reject this Amendment, but I also want to say I think, last year in particular, it was critical that people know that this option was available to them.

There were so many things to be concerned about last year. People had to be concerned about getting really basic things like their groceries or caring for their elderly parents or their children or so many things that didn't need to be so worrisome in a non-pandemic world, but in the midst of a pandemic, so many things going on. The fact that our Secretary of State Denise Merrill took the initiative to have these federal resources and to make sure that every voter in Connecticut knew that they could exercise their right to vote for the first time in our state using an absentee ballot, I think was really valuable. And I, I, I feel it's unfortunate that others think that was somehow a negative thing that it was nefarious, it's just a difference of opinion I guess. But I think it was absolutely critical last year when there were so many complicating things going on.

And it's also complicated for a voter in Connecticut to sit at home and read the newspaper or watch television and see that there are so many other ways

to vote in other states. And there is confusion sometimes, like how come we can't do that here. I think the way that the, the applications were mailed out is something we should be proud of. We should be grateful to our Secretary of State. I could see such angst about this, if she only mailed them to Democrats, you think that was the case. But instead, she mailed the applications to every registered voter in the State of Connecticut so that every registered voter in Connecticut would know that they have this new opportunity to exercise their franchise. I'm grateful to her for that. I believe a measure like this should be debated in the statutory context, not in the context of our State Constitution. And I urge my colleagues to reject this Amendment. Thank you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Flexer. Will you remark further?
Senator Champagne.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH):

Thank you Madam President. I'm, I, I would like to comment. You know, I rise in support of this Amendment. But one of the things that, that I, that I just heard said was basically leaving it up to the, you know, basically to the Legislature to make the rules for the legislator and keep it out of our State Constitution. But I have an issue with that because the party in-charge can change the rules every single election. Same thing we just rejected the other one. Now, we should leave it up to the Legislature. Well, then the party in-charge, no matter which party it is, can change the rules as they see fit, in fact change them to help themselves win elections. By putting this in the State Constitution, they can't do that, they can't change the rules every single election.

One of the amazing things I heard when, when, when I was, when we heard all of those problems with the

voter fraud that was, that was just recited from that article, in fact we missed one that just recently happened again, was the party that was listed, and then the rejection of the, the, to make it more secure. I believe that the secure election needs to be in our Constitution. So those in-charge can't change it whenever they think it will help them win an election. Thank you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator. Will you remark further?
Senator Cicarella.

SENATOR CICARELLA (34TH):

Thank you Madam President. I also stand in support of this Amendment. As I stated before, I do wholeheartedly feel that unexcused absentees is a necessity. And I think the proponent of this Bill is just trying that that much harder to also push this over the finish line and get it done as fast as possible while still trying to make it a little bit better. I think I've said this on the floor before while running for the seat, we were able to make calls to people who requested absentee ballots, and mailed them back in. And I spoke of a person, a 91-year-old person from North Haven, requested an absentee ballot. And when I called to speak to the person, it just was an awkward odd phone call, triggered me just to do a little investigation, it could be my background. And I looked and realized that he was inactive on the voter registry.

And, you know, for this process to be so important and make sure that every vote counts, it's the most important thing that we can do. It's, it's one time -- bless you. It's a onetime vote that has a lot of meaning, a lot of weight. And I think that it needs to be, it needs to be taken with a sense of confidence that it matters. You know, the person makes a vote. If somebody does put in an absentee ballot or votes twice or maybe doesn't have the

ability to vote for whatever reason, that would disqualify somebody from, from being able to vote in a Connecticut election or whatever the case may be. It takes away the value of that person's voice that can vote legitimately. And when I did my investigation and dug a little further and realized that it kind of blew my mind, that somebody would request a ballot. And this individual Ramen was not able to vote or did not vote. And that's why I think it's important that we pay attention to this Amendment and we take it serious. We're , we're trying so hard to get the ability for people to vote easily, safely at their comfort level and that everybody around this circle wants that to happen. But, you know, we need to learn from our mistakes.

We heard in this circle just a short time ago that in that crazy time, actions were taken and, and these ballots were sent out. We saw that there was mistakes there, we saw there was things that could have been done better. We saw that there was a lot return, therefore there was wasted of cost to the taxpayers. We saw that people got multiple ballots. And if we don't take action now and put this into the Constitution, we're not going to fix it. Right now is the time to do it and for that reason, I stand in support of this Amendment. Thank you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator. Will you remark further on the Amendment? Will you remark further on the Amendment? If not, a roll call vote has been requested, so I will open the machine. Mr. Clerk, please announce the tally, or the roll call vote rather.

CLERK:

Immediate roll call vote has been ordered in the Senate. Immediate roll call vote has been ordered in the Senate, it is Senate Amendment "B" of House

Joint Resolution 58. Immediate roll call vote has been ordered in the Senate on Senate Amendment "B". This is House Joint Resolution No. 58. Immediate roll call vote in the Senate, Senate Amendment "B" on House Joint Resolution 58. Immediate roll call vote in the Senate.

Immediate roll call vote has been ordered in the Senate. Immediate roll call vote in the Senate, Senate Amendment "B" on House Joint Resolution 58. Immediate roll call vote in the Senate.

THE CHAIR:

Have all the Senators voted? Have all the Senators voted? The machine will be locked. Mr. Clerk, please announce the tally.

CLERK:

Senate Amendment "B" of House Joint Resolution 58:

Total number voting	35
Total voting Yea	12
Total voting Nay	23
Absent and not voting	1

THE CHAIR:

The Amendment fails. Will you remark further on the Bill before the Chamber, the Resolution before the Chamber? Will you remark further on the Resolution before the Chamber? Senator Champagne.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH):

Thank you. Rob, are you done?

THE CHAIR:

Like to yield to Senator Sampson?

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH):

Yes. Thank you Madam President. I didn't think he was done, that's why I stood up, I didn't want it to go away.

THE CHAIR:

I see. Thank you. Will you remark further?
Senator Sampson.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH):

Thank you Madam President. Forgive me, I was waiting to hear the tally announced, then I was going to march back into the room and I must have missed it. So we've now been through two amendments, and sadly they were rejected on party lines. And unfortunately, you know, I, I feel like those amendments were something that would have improved the Constitutional Amendment before us in ways that I don't think take away from the desire to pass no excuse absentee voting, but do provide reassurance for those who are concerned about maintaining the integrity of the vote. And as I had pointed out earlier, go a step further in trying to heal the divide in this country between those that believe the 2016 or 2020 election was stolen.

The argument that was made in opposition to both of the amendments was that, that content doesn't belong in the Constitution. Now, I was going to take a moment to go through the Constitution and find some other items that are in there that I think are relatively specific, but I didn't have to go too far because even the current statute about no excuse absentee, or excuse me, the excuses for absentee voting are items that could have been left out of the Constitution and then determined statutorily, but in fact they were added to the Constitution. Because the folks that put together this document felt strongly enough that we should specify these reasons right in the Constitution, and they were

very specific, because of absence from the city or town of which they are inhabitants of or because of sickness or physical disability, or because of their tenants, or religion, and so forth; these are items that we could have legislated and done via the General Assembly.

And I want to thank a couple of my colleagues for pointing this out earlier that we do put specifics in the Constitution and we do put protections in the Constitution for one purpose that I think was illustrated very clearly by Senator Champagne. Because what we are doing today, Madam President, is we are about to vote on a proposition that will be put in front of the voters. And that is the only chance the voters will have to decide what the constitution will read as far as no excuse absentee voting. And the reason why I'm standing here offering these amendments is because I don't want to leave it up to the next legislature to decide whether or not they think that signature verification or any of these other security requirements are necessary, I would rather leave that up to the voters.

And in my opinion, the reason why these amendments are being voted down is because the majority doesn't want to see those in front of the voters, because they will be adopted. I believe that the things that we are suggesting here as amendments are very popular. And the next amendment that I have, which I will call in a moment has to do with photo identification. And we've debated this in this Chamber in the past, but if you poll people on the street, you will find out that very, very many people are extremely much in favor, I'm sorry, that's bad English, extremely in favor of requiring photo identification to vote. There is memes on this subject. There is a, a joking meme that someone reminded me of today, where a gentleman is being pulled over in his car and he says, sorry officer, I don't have my driver's license, I'm on the way to vote. That's how ludicrous it is, the

idea that we would not require someone's identification.

If you actually care about the concept of one person, one vote and the value of each and every citizens voice being heard when it comes to determine who their legislators are and what the laws we will live under as a society are, then you must believe that we have to determine and make sure that our elections are legitimate. And the way you do that is by making sure of the identity of the people who are voting. It's not that complicated. Even third world countries get it. Think about somebody holding up their blue finger, that's their form of voter identification. To make sure that that person was eligible, that they voted only one time. And that's all we're after here, Madam President. We're not trying to suppress anyone's right to vote. And the argument that is often made in opposition to photo ID is exactly that. Oh, those Republicans, they want to suppress people's right to vote by requiring voter ID. That is a ridiculous and offensive statement, point blank. It's as simple as that, Madam President. It also implies that some people in our society simply are not capable of obtaining a photo ID and I find that offensive also.

Think of the things you have to have a photo ID for in our society, Madam President. To buy alcohol, you have to be able to prove your age, you've got to have photo identification. To buy cigarettes, to open a bank account, even to apply for food stamps or to apply for Medicaid or Social Security, which is an example I hear often that seniors or folks that often do not have access to photo ID. No one, republican or otherwise wants to prevent senior citizens from voting, it's ridiculous. The idea that somehow putting a requirement that they have an ID is some kind of incredible impediment to voting is just false, and it's a deception, Madam President; it's that simple.

To apply for unemployment, you need photo ID; to rent a house, to buy a house, to rent or to buy a car, they will ask you for ID; to get on an airplane, to get married. Obviously, things like, you know, applying for a pistol permit or buying a firearm or even adopting a pet. I recently went with my mom, and she had to go through an incredible process to adopt a cat. And one of those things was she had to provide proof of identification. Renting a hotel room, getting a hunting license, or a fishing license, getting a cell phone, getting in the 21 and over age at the casino, donating blood, buying a mature rated video game. Up until recently, you had to have photo ID to buy nail polish at CVS. And you still do to purchase several types of different cold medicines. And you also need to have a photo ID to get into many state and federal buildings across the country.

The notion that this is some ridiculous unheard of requirement is just false. And the idea that it somehow equated with voter suppression is also false. It is not a significant requirement. And what it will do, Madam President, is, it will restore the faith in people who are concerned about the integrity of our election process as a result of what happened in the 2020 National Presidential Election.

I have an Amendment, Madam President, that would add photo ID and that Amendment is LCO 9888. I ask that the Clerk call it, excuse me, and I be allowed to summarize the amendment.

THE CHAIR:

The Clerk is in possession of LCO 9888. Will the Clerk kindly call and the Senator has asked leave to summarize.

CLERK:

LCO No. 9888, Senate Schedule "C".

THE CHAIR:

Senator Sampson.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH):

Thank you Madam President. It's a very straightforward amendment. It basically says that in Section 4, "law shall be made to support the privilege of free suffrage by electors who present state issued photographic identification prior to voting." It goes on to say in Section 21 that "every citizen shall be entitled to state issued photographic identification acceptable for voting purposes, which shall be free of charge if such citizen does not already possess a state issued motor vehicle operator's license or state issued ID card."

A similar Amendment was offered in the House, but it was picked apart by the majority because the implication was made that somehow this was creating a massive expense to the state that everyone would have to be issued a new state voter ID. So I take, took great care in crafting this amendment to make it clear that if you have a driver's license, that will work just fine. If you already have a state issued ID, that will work just fine. So we're talking about a small population of folks that don't possess one of those already. And then going further to say, if you cannot afford it, one will be provided to you. This is my answer to the argument that it's a hardship. I'm trying to find any conceivable way to overcome that hardship.

I believe truly, Madam President, that if we ask our constituents on this question, should we maintain the integrity of our elections by requiring photo identification? We would have an overwhelmingly positive response. This Amendment is very simple, Madam President. It simply says if you vote for the Amendment, it says I want no excuse absentee voting,

and I also want to ensure the integrity of elections by requiring photo identification. If you vote no, you say you don't care about photo identification or maintaining integrity by verifying the identity of voters. It's an easy choice and it's an easy yes vote.

And a final reminder that if we can pass this Amendment with more than 75% in this Chamber, the possibility still exists that this no excuse constitutional amendment could actually go back downstairs to the House, pass again, and happen this year without forcing us to wait two years. I move adoption, Madam President, and I'd like a roll call vote. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

The question is on adoption, and there will be a roll call vote. Will you remark further? Will you remark further on the Amendment? Senator Champagne.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH):

Thank you Madam President. Although this was not my first choice for verifying these, the first choice was shut down. So I stand up looking for a way to somehow secure this. And this is an excellent idea from Senator Sampson, because then we have these photo IDs where somebody is going to go in and they're going to sign form. There is new, new signature is going to be on file. I wish I could say they can compare the signatures. But if a future legislation, legislative body wants to do that, they'll be there. But then they'll have the IDs and, and can request their absentee ballot.

You know, I believe in one state, they just have to send in a copy of that ID with their, with their registration. But I, I still believe that we need to have some form of security in doing this in the state constitution, whether somebody believes that there is, there is, there is voter fraud or not. We

should have a way to secure it. Instead of saying, I hope somebody doesn't break the law, let's make it so it's tough for them to do that. And again, leaving it up to the Legislature to change this at a whim is not responsible. Thank you Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Champagne. Will you remark further on the Amendment? Senator Flexer, you have the floor madam.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Thank you Madam President. Madam President, I rise for a few questions to the proponent of the Amendment.

THE CHAIR:

Please frame your questions, madam.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Thank you Madam President, and by the way, nice to see you up there.

THE CHAIR:

Good afternoon.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Madam President, could the proponent of the Amendment please define for me the term "state issued?"

THE CHAIR:

Through the Chair to Senator Sampson, you have the floor, sir.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH):

Thank you Madam President. I believe that means issued by the State of Connecticut.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Sampson. Senator Flexer.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Thank you Madam President. And Madam President, I appreciate that answer. So through you, Madam President, if we were to adopt this Amendment to the Resolution today and put forward to the voters an amendment to the State Constitution to require a state issued, state issued meaning from the State of Connecticut as the good proponent of the Amendment just said, that would mean photographic identification from the federal government such as a passport or a military identification would not qualify; is that correct, Madam President?

THE CHAIR:

To you Senator Sampson.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH):

Thank you Madam President. I believe that would qualify also.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you sir. You have the floor Senator Flexer.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Through you Madam President. Madam President, I'm just confused. I thought the good proponent of the Amendment just said it was issued by the State of Connecticut. That is the question.

THE CHAIR:

Question to you, Senator Sampson.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH):

Thank you Madam President. I don't know specifically what state issued, creates a limitation other than to say that it is official issued by the government. The state could, can be construed as the State of Connecticut or the federal government, and potentially another state. I believe that much like the previous amendments, these are guidelines that will be filled in by the legislature when we write the actual policy that goes with the parameters. And I believe it could be taken in the broadest sense possible, which is that, a government issued identification would suffice. Through you Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you. Senator Flexer, you have the floor.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Thank you. Thank you Madam President. And I believe that concludes my questions for the proponent of the Amendment, and I appreciate his answers. But Madam President, we see just in that brief conversation, why it's very important exactly what words we put in our state's constitution. And it's why I urge my colleagues to reject this Amendment this afternoon. Madam President, I sincerely believe that the good Ranking Member of this Committee and, and colleagues from every district that is represented in this Chamber want to address these concerns, these initiatives around voting and elections in a bipartisan manner, and I want desperately to continue to do that. And we've heard a lot of conversation this afternoon about frustration that certain things aren't being adopted by the majority party as the, as the, we've been described and, and frankly, Madam President, I'm

frustrated by continuing to have to have this conversation around photo identification and, and in fanatically say, again and again, what the real concerns are of people in our state around this issue. And I'm frustrated because I feel like that's not being listened to. And I know that some of my colleagues feel at other moments that they're not, should've listen to.

But, Madam President, we heard a great deal in the lead up to this Amendment being offered about all the things you need an identification to do. And I tried to listen very carefully, but I'm pretty sure that none of those things were rights that are enshrined in our Constitution. None of those things were rights that people had to fight for. That our Constitution, our United States Constitution had to be amended, again, and again, and again, to expand the franchise. The 15th Amendment had to be adopted to give black men the right to vote. And then of course, Jim Crow was instituted to ensure that that franchise could never actually be exercised for nearly 100 years.

The 19th amendment was adopted in 1920 to give you an eye, Madam President, the right to vote. People shed actual blood for those rights. The effort it took to adopt the 15th Amendment and the 19th amendment and the 24th Amendment that fully realized the enfranchisement of all citizens of this country. It's unlike anything else that you need some sort of identification for. And I am telling you, Madam President, as we have discussed in this Chamber numerous times, photo identification requirements limit the rights of citizens to vote.

Madam President, we also amended our Constitution with the 26th Amendment to allow people who are 18 and over to vote and that change was made Madam President, because too many people in my father's generation went to war like my father did, and wasn't able to vote for the people who made the decisions to send him there.

Madam President, voting is unlike anything else. It is not like buying things at the pharmacy or signing rental agreements or all of the other things that were referenced when it comes to photo identification. Requiring this in our State's Constitution will limit the ability of our citizens to exercise their right to vote.

I feel a little bit like a broken record, Madam President, but I did discuss in a previous debate that we had on this Senate floor that in conversations in the Government Administration and Elections Committee, both in Public Hearing and in Committee Meetings and leadership conversations, both myself and the Esteemed House Vice Chair of the Government Administration Elections Committee, Representative Stephanie Thomas, detailed experiences of our mothers being unable to vote, being turned away because they did not have voter ID. I don't know how much clearer I can say that there are actual people out there who want to participate in our democracy, who this would disenfranchise.

Madam President, this initiative today is an attempt to this broader resolution that we're debating is an attempt to stop Connecticut from being one of the most restrictive places to vote in some ways in the country. Madam President, if we adopt this Amendment and change this Resolution, we will just be putting more restrictions in place and doing the opposite of what I believe our goal has been this entire year, which is to expand options for voting and to allow more people to participate in our democracy and exercise that unique constitutional American right to vote, Madam President. I encourage my colleagues to strongly reject this Amendment.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Flexer. Will you remark further on Amendment "C" If not, will the Clerk please announce a pendency of a roll call vote, the machine will be open.

CLERK:

Immediate roll call vote has been ordered in the Senate. Immediate roll call vote has been ordered in the Senate, it's Senate Amendment "C" of House Joint Resolution 58. Senate Amendment "C" of House Joint Resolution 58. Immediate roll call vote has been ordered in the Senate. This is Senate Amendment "C" House Joint Resolution 58. Immediate roll call vote in the Senate. Immediate roll call vote has been ordered in the Senate. Immediate roll call vote in the Senate, House Joint Resolution 58.

THE CHAIR:

Have all the Senators voted? Have all the Senators voted? If so, please check the roll call machine that your vote is properly recorded. If so, machine will be locked, and the Clerk will please announce the tally.

CLERK:

Senate Amendment "C" of House Joint Resolution 58:

Total number of voting	36
Total voting Yea	12
Total voting Nay	24
Absent and not voting	0

THE CHAIR:

Amendment fails. Will you remark further on the Bill? Senator Sampson, you have the floor.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH):

Thank you very much Madam President. I have a pit in my stomach after the last vote on the Amendment. That makes three party line votes in a row where I made legitimate attempts to work with my colleagues across the aisle to find a way to pass legislation we all advocate for in a bipartisan and common sense way. I don't believe I was asking for much to be honest with you. In fact, I would suggest that the policies that I offered as amendments are some things that would have been overwhelmingly approved by the public given their opportunity to weigh in on them.

I tried to first offer an Amendment to require signature verification for absentee ballots. Knowing full well that that's how the process works in virtually every other state that has a significant absentee ballot or mail in voting situation. It's not a lot to ask for, and it's not too much to put in the Constitution itself. It's a couple of words. It says that if we were going to do no excuse absentee voting, we've got to include a signature verification process. That is not an overwhelmingly detailed restrictive requirement. That is a broad requirement suggesting that we have some guardrails we have to fall within.

I then said we cannot send out unsolicited ballot applications at great expense to taxpayers without them asking for it, because that's common sense given the circumstances and the very, very notorious nature of our voting roles in the state.

And finally, I offered something that is wildly popular across our state and across our country that everyone knows is a valuable tool, which has been adopted by I think a majority of states. And that is photo identification, to verify a voters' identity. It's not a ridiculous requirement. It is not something that should not be in the Constitution because it's too specific. It is just a simple plea from the minority to say, we want to do this with you, we want to pass this Bill together.

I started my comments tonight, Madam President, by saying every vote we take on election policy ought to be unanimous, because we all should agree to the rules of the game. Any press that is watching tonight, I want to help you write your story. Your story is very simple. The minority party tried desperately to work with the majority party to pass no excuse absentee voting in a bipartisan way and actually get it on the ballot sooner rather than later, and offered numerous amendments in an attempt to get us there. The majority party rejected every Amendment on a party line basis, and they did so because they know that they have the power to pass it any way they want, disregarding the concerns of the minority completely and they were willing to do so Madam President, even though it's going to take an extra two years to get this policy on the ballot if ever. I cannot tell you how frustrating I am, frustrated I am rather. I made every last good faith effort this entire session to try and come up with a solution so that we could do these policies affecting the rules of how we are elected on a bipartisan basis. Partly because I think that's how we should make policy. I've always held that belief when I come to this Chamber. The greatest frustration I have is when I'm offering an Amendment and I feel like no one in the majority is even listening to me because it's already understood it's a Republican Amendment, the answer is no. And we're actually going to have Bills come back to this Chamber, making changes that were requested by the minority at the time, but were rejected.

It wouldn't hurt to just say once in a while, especially when we're dealing with a Senate Bill. Maybe we should listen to those guys, maybe they might come up with something good, we can make it better, we could do this as a team as a Connecticut General Assembly. Maybe we could heal the wounds that are left in our country over two brutally divisive presidential elections. We could work together to do that. We could have done that

tonight. We could have passed no excuse absentee voting unanimously out of this Chamber if we just included photo ID, something that the public overwhelmingly wants. I'm going to go to bed frustrated tonight, Madam President, because I came here in good faith to do a good job for my constituents. I stand for things that I believe in and I don't think when I asked for it was too much. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Sampson. Will you remark further? Senator Kissel.

SENATOR KISSEL (7TH):

Thank you very much Madam President. Great to see you there this evening.

THE CHAIR:

Good evening to you sir.

SENATOR KISSEL (7TH):

Clearly, I care about voting. Once upon a time years and years ago, I was the Ranking Member on the Government Administration and Elections Committee. Back at that time, our current Lieutenant Governor, then Secretary of State Susan Bysiewicz, was kind enough to appoint me to serve on a working group, which task was amongst other things, but primarily to increase voter turnout by our youngest constituents here in the State of Connecticut, and we met across the street in the Secretary of State's Office, and it was very rewarding, and I felt that it was a really good cause.

As we debate this proposal before us and I very much admire and respect the passion shown by Senator Sampson, as well as the great depth of historical knowledge expressed by my friend and colleague,

Senator Flexer, the good Chairwoman of the Government Administration and Elections Committee; this is not necessarily an easy question for me. First of all, for any number of years until I basically threw up my hands and gave up, I put forward proposals for initiative and referenda, basically saying that I believed in the will of the people. I thought creating a construct where individuals could go out and gather so many signatures on petitions to put something on a ballot, and that led, and then let a State or Commonwealth as a whole vote on that initiative was a good idea. It was about as close to Democracy as one can get drilling down as deep as one can get. And indeed, it was being utilized and I believe still utilized in states similar politically to Connecticut. And by that, I mean, tending to be coastal states and registrations more Democrat than Republican for whatever reason.

I live in Enfield, grew up in Windsor, North Central Connecticut. It would probably take about a half hour just to take a walk from my front step to be in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. I believe they have initiative and referenda and you fly thousands of miles out west and you land in California. And I believe that large state that is not noted for huge republican conservative initiatives lately, although can we not forget the home state to folks such as Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan and, and others; very diverse state, but also trusting in the will of the people to conduct referenda.

When we go back and look at voting and I don't have the historical depth of knowledge as Senator Flexer, who has studied mightily I believe, probably well before becoming Co-Chair of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. But just by way of just having studied history throughout the years, you know, I don't know what prehistoric world look like, probably some element of survival of the fittest. The notion is that women were, were the gatherers and the men were the hunters, but I wasn't

there thousands and thousands of years ago, and I believe that our folks involved in those studies probably glean a lot from remains that they find, and maybe writings on cave walls and, and other large efforts to try to study the world and the development of mankind prior to writing down various histories.

I guess if I had to just reach back and think about where I sort of believe this, this notion of voting came from, I was always taught in high school in our western civilization classes of which I took to, because it only got you so far, if you just took the first one, and if you wanted to try to cover the whole march of Western civilization, it was good to take both over a full year period. But we were always told, when we always sort of hearken back to Rome, as the foundation, no, no, it was really Greece. If you really want to go back to first foundations, you have to go back to, to Greece, to Athens, and indeed if you look at a lot of the efforts in ancient Rome, a, a lot of the folks that were acted as tutors and teachers and were very much highly respected were individuals from Greece that were brought into Rome.

And if you look at the history of those nations and it's not nations as we would perceive them today, but close enough to give us a general idea. I believe that the notion of casting a vote probably emanated from a gathering in Athens, and whether they decided to build something. I don't know, is that how they decided to build the Acropolis and dedicate all those resources to such a major structure that stands to this day at least in part, and as a sense of huge pride in that part of the world. Could they have decided whether they were going to go to war by casting a vote? I believe that's the case as well.

And so in that ancient time, you have the, the, the, the seeds of what we, unfortunately I would say today almost take for granted in our country,

although I think in the last as Senator Sampson pointed out, divisive presidential elections. But there were divisive elections even before recent times. I mean, if we just take a step back, we have former Vice President Al Gore versus George W. Bush, and now all of a sudden it seems to all hang on that swing State of Florida and they got hanging chads and you know, is the Secretary of the State of the State of Florida going to; okay, the recount, I mean, up to the Supreme Court. And, you know, that was a while ago and the feelings at that time lasted a while. I would dare say that during much, if not all of then President George W. Bush's first term, there was that underlying feeling of, "hey, was this a fair election" especially for those individuals that backed again at that time, former Vice President or at the time I guess it was sitting Vice President, Al Gore, and who was his running mate low and behold, our own Joe Lieberman, our US Senator and prior to that State Attorney General, and I think prior to that probably sat somewhere over there, not exactly sure what seat but there we go.

Again, with her historical knowledge, Senator Flexer points out the exact seat. And as Senator Martin pointed out, there is, this circle is the cradle for many folks that went on to lots of other great things, politically and historically in, in our state and so we have much, much to be proud of here.

But as I talk about sort of the background of how I came to my conclusion regarding the Resolution before us this evening, I hearken back, you know, to some of the historical underpinnings. And clearly, this was a major sea change as to how individuals looked upon themselves. Now, as Senator Flexer so eloquently pointed out, even in the great Nation of the United States of America, it's been fits and starts all along the way. A huge, and I don't want to jump too far ahead, but just taking a quick glance to around where we are now. The three-fifths compromise where African Americans and slaves, were not considered full human beings. I mean, how, you

know, imagine the, the turmoil that the founding fathers felt in coming to that solution, and there was a lot of hair pulling, and I'm sure there was a lot of sleepless nights, but to try to cobble together those 13 colonies that are represented by the stripes on our flag; how are you going to bring over the south? That was part of that compromise eventually, though, I would say, if not solely, because one of the other things I learned historically is that the Civil War or the war between the states was not initially initiated by the freeing of the slaves, the Emancipation Proclamation by President Abraham Lincoln.

But certainly, when the southern states decided to rebel and form their own Confederacy, I think, behind all of that was deep seated concerns about their economic survival. And the way they worked, the way their economy worked and relied so much on a slavery system and if not slavery, you had these indentured servants and farmers that were tied to the land, just really demeaning ways of, of having an economy. But the Civil War is where more Americans died than any other war that we've ever fought. That includes World War I, World War II, I mean, just horrific, horrific.

And even after that, as again Senator Flexer pointed out, there were real impediments put in front of people from exercising the right franchise, the whole notion of reconstruction. Those in the north didn't really want to, I mean Abraham Lincoln to his great credit and, and what a horrible tragedy, but I don't know God's will and I'm a firm believer in God. That's just me; I'm not proselytizing, Father, Son, Holy Ghost, that's me. And what may seem something today who knows what it's going to look like 100 years from now. And you do hear about those tales where something looks so tragic today and some really good happens that blossoms out of that. So its life is in many respects a mystery.

But, you know, the north, many of the politicians, many of the folks up there really didn't want to embrace the south. They took great umbrage, they wanted the south punished and punished hard. To his credit before he was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth, and I know there is some question as to that too; there always is around presidential assassinations. But he wanted to reconcile. He wanted to like let's move on, let's, let's unite this country and march forward. And when he was of life stage, the powers that be in the north were able to impose terrible retribution in subtle ways upon the south, in many respects causing the south to fall behind economically for decades and decades and decades. And that had ramifications on former slaves and other disenfranchised individuals ability to exercise the right to vote.

You know, quite often, we just naturally gravitate towards the plight and horrific treatment of slaves in America, but Asian Americans, in particular the Chinese, used as laborers in the West, treated horrifically. You know, even the beloved Franklin Delano Roosevelt putting Japanese Americans in internment camps during World War II. This is the beloved Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The history of America has never been a straight line. And again, it's been fits and starts.

So when I was first, even, well, I went to college at the University of Connecticut and then onto law school at Western New England College School of Law, now it's Western New England University. But along that line especially in law school, we were taught that two great pillars that hold up our, our society here in the United States had given our English traditions as well, is the pillar have the right to vote and the pillar have the right to be a juror. In law school in particular, they did focus a lot on juries and their importance, I believe in Connecticut, where I practice or wanted to practice and was living, I commuted from Windsor to Springfield. We have [inaudible] in Connecticut,

it's my understanding they don't have [inaudible] in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. So when you go to a law school in a different state, there is nuances that you have to be mindful of. But it always was impressed upon me that those were the two great pillars that hold up our society, and that one must be reverential and respectful of both of those, and, and I believe that. If we have cracks in those pillars, that ultimately will cause the, the destruction of the society as we know it.

Now, I think we all in this circle and throughout this building have the utmost best of intentions for those who we represent. Not everyone agrees with everyone else. I'll be quite frank, catch me at the morning, and I may give you an answer regarding a, a philosophical question. And by evening, I may have a different perspective, and may have been something that happened to me, maybe a conversation I had with someone, maybe my mood has changed. I hate to think that, you know, my, my decisions regarding important matters rely on mood, but mood impacts your observations and things like that.

So, you know, it's okay. That's why we're here. Democracy is a messy business. I think it was designed that way. It was designed to be pokey and slow. When I go to my constituents, and they say, oh, my God, I mean, in my son texted me today, my 25-year-old son Nathaniel, and I'm so proud of my 25-year-old Nathaniel and 17-year-old Tristan, back in the old days for those of you that remember that we used to come up around the last week of session, but time marches on and everything's ephemeral, and people have jobs and things like that. And let's face it. Businesses have been open in this building just very recently and I'm, you know, you don't see lobbyists and everyone else clamoring at the doors because we're not fully open, we've just graduated to not having to wear masks in this building at all times and in all places.

And at the risk of causing a jinx and I don't want to sound too superstitious, but I am in many respects. Despite my firm belief, and Father, Son and Holy Ghost, one of my friends and colleagues informed me that thus far Connecticut has not had one single COVID death. I hope that continues throughout the day, past midnight and on into the following days and weeks and months ahead.

I would like to thank that we're breasted the edge of the clouds, and we're going to start to see more and more blue skies. I don't know about you folks, and not everybody's availing themselves of the opportunity to just, just walk in front of this Chamber without a mask on. It's how it feels, you know, vaccinations and all of that. But it occurred to me just an hour and a half ago, like, oh, I almost feel like I'm doing something in school, I'm not supposed to be doing; it's just been so long, how nice will it be? And for those of us lucky enough to have lived through this without too much damage to our loved ones and neighbors and friends and constituents and our lives and livelihoods, we're always going to remember what we've, we've gone through together.

So how lucky are we? How lucky are we to be in the circle debating this issue, a Resolution, whether it will be worded this way to change our State Constitution? Why do we turn this matter over to the voters, and again if it's a simple majority, and in light of the way the laws are constructed, and given the fact that the House has already determined by a certain vote percentage, certain direction, assuming that this goes forward this evening, which I do believe it will, it'll be two years before things start to get put into motion.

Going back to Athens and Rome, even though the seeds were planted at that time and that there were various assemblies where major decisions were done by a vote. And again I would probably end up deferring to Senator Flexer for some of the

historical foundations, but I, I recall that sometimes voting would take place by a marble. If it came down to let's say one marble, was like, someone would have to go off and do something or you know, the short straw who drew the short straw, well, that's a form of voting right? Here, draw a straw, a long straw, a long straw, a long straw, a short straw, straw is bad. The marbles, again poor, poor colors being assigned certain notions and there can be negative ramifications with that. There is no reason why a black marble always has to be described as bad or a white marble is good, I get it. And it's good that we start thinking in those terms, but the old adage or the old phrase, someone has been blackballed was because you didn't want to get that one black ball as opposed to all the others. Whether it's joining a club or something, I'd have to go back, Wikipedia, or Google it or figure it out. But I know enough of history that that was not a good thing, just like getting the short straw was not a good thing, but a variation of voting, right?

What we're talking about is the wholesale sort of almost justice being blinded and the scales of justice, and you put all these votes on one side and all these votes on the other side for, for all of us because we've all been in. You would not be here in this circle if you were not there watching the votes come in, at least on one evening where your name was on the ballot, right, and probably more than once for many of us. And I know, first time I saw those votes rolling in, I was losing. I was losing bad. But I can hold my head up high, didn't do anything that I was ashamed of, and, you know, that's, that's how life goes. You go and you plough back into your community, join community groups, get to know as many people as you can, and who knows what's going to unfold before you, who knows what God's magic plan is? But we do know that those votes come in and they're written, the numbers are written or now nowadays and believe it or not, when I started in this building, there were no such things as laptops.

I went to an office and there was no computers. That was all a couple years down the road. So we didn't have any of that stuff.

But that being the case, you know, depending where you are on election night and you could be there this fall for friends and loved ones that might be on the local ballots, there may be an initiative in your town that you care about passionately. Who knows, but the votes are going to pour in and there is going to be yeas and nays, just like we have before us here. And there is going to be the name of this candidate, the name of that candidate, and there may be multiple. And sometimes it gets very complex, it may be a town council race where the top so many vote getters get, so, get so many seats. And so in a race like that, it's sort of a race not to be the lowest vote getter, because everybody else and then that large ticket will get a seat on the Town Council, for example.

And then as an Enfield, where I live, there is districts, so in the districts of which Enfield has four, I don't think it's probably that unusual in Connecticut to have a similarly situated situation. Those are typically one person versus another person or more than one person. I've been in elections where there were four different candidates, libertarian, if you recall a Connecticut party that was originated by Former Governor Weicker when he was running for Governor. All sorts of interesting permutations of how these things can go.

But again, fundamentally, the mechanism that underpins all of this is one person one vote. And so it is not unusual for us to feel passionately about this process and I hesitate to even use when I talk about elections, one person against another person, we're not against each other, we're all championing what we want to fight for and what we feel is best for those whom we wish to represent. And so you can use versus or running in opposition to, but let's face it, we all at the end of the day,

and I hate to use that hackneyed phrase as well. But we go back to the same communities that whomever we ended up running against, live in, and how neat in so many respects that the person who we were working diligently to juxtapose our view of the future and our dreams for our constituents in opposition to their vision, they are now, they now become our constituent. And you know, it's not unusual, in fact I, I try very hard to make sure that after every single election, there is communication because that person who ran against me and God willing, I've been lucky enough to win some elections by fairly large margins and others by, you know, when 40,000 votes are cast and I won by 380 votes, that's scary. At least from my perspective, if you're waiting and waiting and waiting and it's the last votes that come in that sort of tell you what's going to happen or if your opponent never calls you up to concede because they don't accept that result, which has happened. But long ago and we've become friends since then.

But all of these things are real life things that can happen. And how lucky are we? Again, one of the things that I said is that sometimes this can be perceived as we take this for granted. But I think for all of us, whether you want on your first try for elected office or whether you took, it took a number of times, I think it's very difficult to sit in this circle or serve in this building whether you're in the House or in the Senate, or whether you work in this building and not hold this building in reverence. You don't have to go far in this world, just stumble into nations where it is simply not like this. In fact, when now Justice Andrew McDonald and former Undersecretary of Criminal Policy at OPM and then Representative Michael Lawler, were Co-Chairs of the Judiciary Committee, there were opportunities. We're all familiar when you serve on a Committee, there is opportunities for downtime while you're waiting for LCO or something. And actually, it was Mike Lawler and I were chatting and we were talking about how it works here in

Connecticut. And no disparagement whatsoever, because I really love and have the utmost respect and admiration for our, our former colleague, former Senator, admire who, you know, we would tussle philosophically on a variety of issues. There was always that wonderful moment at three in the morning or two in the morning where I was waxing on a particular Bill and talking about a one-armed fisherman. And he objected, saying it was not germane. And then Lieutenant Governor Mike Fedele made a determination that it was not germane. But I continued to pace and Senator Meyer went to his caucus room, and I didn't see him again for many hours. But anyhow, that, that was a good memory.

But in talking to Chairman Lawler, there was another situation in which, in which on the Judiciary Committee, Senator Meyer was very frustrated with what the Republicans were doing and it didn't have to be Republicans. I've been around long enough, I've been in the Majority, where the then Majority Democrats led by Kevin Sullivan, who went on to become Lieutenant Governor in his own right after becoming President of the Senate. But back in the day when I, those two years, when it was 1970 when I was in the Majority. And he was very clever and it was not easy. One of the quotes that I had in caucus at one point in time, I'm sorry, but I have to go into some of this stuff before I forget it all in my old age. We were in there and it's one thing to be colonists and be behind trees, so to speak: passionate, and, and, and, and rightfully so, but in the Minority. And you know, how many of us sitting in the Minority look at that screen and just pray every day? I, you know, is it going to be 12 hours, 12 again, is it going to be 12, it's 12 again, where that magic number is going to change, occasionally it does. That big day when something surprising happens and all of us, it doesn't go the way everybody thinks it will. That does occasionally happen. But few and far between I heard it happens more in the House, but that may not be the case anymore as well.

But Senator Meyer at that time got frustrated on the Judiciary Committee and wanted to call the question. And amazingly, the two democratic Co-Chairs of the Judiciary Committee just said, absolutely not. Now, was it a reverence for tradition? Yeah, in huge part, but it was also, there is a certain methodology, there is a certain way we do things in the government of the legislature of the State of Connecticut, their justice. And they pulled him aside and they said, Senator Meyer, we're going to, you know, just pull, withdraw that motion or we're going to have to rule you out of order and we you don't want to do that. And he sort of hemmed and hawed and he was not happy, but you know, and it doesn't matter, Republican Democrat, you know. Does any one of us in this circle say that we've never gotten frustrated in this building? Now we all have. You know, it just depends on the day, the time, there is a Bill that you really care about, there is a Bill that you really don't like; it's just the nature of the business. And again, I think it's sort of planned. I mean, if something happens too fast with a magic wand, bad things happen. I think if it's slow and progressive, then you know, you get to look at it and hold it up to the light and look at in darkness, look at in a light, different colors. I think the end product may not be exactly what you want. But as I said yesterday, if everybody is a little unhappy, then it's probably the best product you could have come up with. It also can be conversely everybody's a little happy; that's also a great sign. It's you know, if somebody is always getting something all the time 100% that's when I get suspicious like what's going on here. Not that anything nefarious is going on, but one never knows.

So in any event, in talking to then Representative Lawler, he said, "hey, I'm familiar with how things are operated just across the way in New York." He goes, "it's not like this at all." In Mike's opinion, Representative Lawler, Under-Secretary

Lawler, and he had the knowledge, I don't, I haven't been to Albany, but he said that there is the heads of each caucus and they are essentially given X amount of dollars from their budget and each Members sort of told you get this to allocate throughout your district. Now it's not illegal or anything, it's not even unethical or anything like that. To me, it sort of sounds like oh, you know, that's sort of like too much power, but that's how they operate.

Now you're not, you know, obviously unethical and illegal, you don't want to give your brother-in-law that road contract or stuff like that, and occasionally you'll read about stuff like that happening in other states. And, you know, bad things can happen in our state. But in a system like that, I think it's much more likely that, you know, things may happen that aren't obvious to the eye. But in exchange, it's sort of like a knee jerk reaction when it comes to legislation. If the head of the caucus says you're going to do X, Y, Z, there is more of that. And I guess the point that Mike was stressing with me is, "yeah, it can be cumbersome. Yeah, I understand Senator Meyer's frustration. Yeah, you do make us crazy at times, you Republicans." By the way, then he confides and "yeah, there is Members of my own party that on occasion if I've asked four hours worth of questions at a Committee Hearing, and then a Member comes floating in at three o'clock in the afternoon, and starts asking in the exact questions" you know, it's great to be king, I've been Chair. It's wonderful. But if someone's just redoing the same line of questioning for another hour, you have to be diplomatic, you have to be nice. You don't want to stomp, especially if it's someone you're going to depend upon for votes. They are in your own party, you like them. But it's like, you know, in the back of your mind, you're saying, we all got here on time, you could have gotten here on time or at least ask if these questions have been asked, and don't ask all the same questions again, because now you're just killing time. And if that person does it over

and over and over again, now, they're just killing a ton of your life. And it's like, oh, my god. These are all the little things that happen whether you're in the Minority or the Majority.

The point that I'm making is here in Connecticut, we actually have a sloppy, messy, cumbersome, friction laden system that I think is one of the best in this, in the United States. There is no fast tracking how the money gets devolved into individual's districts. I think whether you're in the Majority or the Minority, you can have open and honest discussions with your leadership, may not always agree. There may be bumping heads. I've seen it. I've seen people take strong stance and yes, was there, I wouldn't say retribution, but was there some element of message being relayed or a price to be paid. But if you cared about what you believed in and you weathered that storm and you can hold your head up high and we all grow. It's not necessarily linear, it's turns around and around and around.

So you go back historically, and you see these wonderful seeds being planted and then they vanish. The dark ages come marching in, feudalism, monarchs. And you know, I don't know, some people think it's myth, the Knights of the Round Table. Some people think that it's predicated on some fundamental historical fact; depends on what show you watch on cable television, I guess. But certainly, during the Middle Ages up until the Renaissance and in some respects to the present day, monarchies were out there and the rule of the king or the queen, that was it; that was it. It's funny. You'll think that it was so long ago and not so much. I saw historical show the other day, had those snippets of different things like mysteries at the museum. And a woman was found accused of being a witch in England, just an old, an older, elderly lady. And they quickly found her guilty because crops were failing and animals were dying; no connection, no causality, none of those things were of evident.

And it happened to be in the early 1700's, and the monarch at that time was Queen Anne, who was very much involved and a, and a believer in the Enlightenment, which was a major movement away from medieval thinking, and to what we would call the age of science and reason. And she was the queen and she with a stroke of her pen said, "no more in England will we recognize that anyone can ever be tried as a witch." It was like early 1700's. It's not that long ago.

So when Senator Flexer points out that women in America just got the right to vote in 1920, and I saw a whole special on that, that was not easy. I mean, that women started fighting for that like crazy in like the 1880's. Up and down and up and down, car trips across the country getting stuck in the Rockies. And you had the problem of like, how do you, how do you get one state to go in your direction? You know, because let's face it. Whenever the franchises attempted to be expanded, there is always this notion that the prevalent powers don't want to give up the powers that they have. It's not that there is an inherent distrust of someone new getting the right to vote, but it's the people that are in power have this fear that if you brought in the franchise, their power base will be diluted. And mathematically, you can look at it that way. I'd like to believe that the larger the franchise, the better off we all are. The more people that have an idea and we listen to those ideas, the better off we all are. That is fundamentally what Senator Sampson was arguing. That we are in the Minority party, despite our numbers of 12, listen to us Majority party. We're not all daft, we have good ideas, and they're not poison. Now, if you want to take them, put your name at the top of the Amendment, run them as yours, but include our names on there; I'm cool with that, I don't have any, you know, possessory interest in an idea. We're all here to have the best ideas for the betterment of our state. And that would also mean that philosophically I come to this Resolution

thinking well, I do want people to access the ballot box. I don't necessarily see that the current absentee ballot voting system is bad. Cumbersome, yes, not necessarily straightforward, at times. But it's not like I've had huge complaints from my constituents, maybe tomorrow that'll change regarding the fact that they have to do certain things to cast a ballot through absentee balloting.

So where does that bring me after more than a half hour here on, in the circle? It brings me to this point. I agree with the laudable goals of Senator Flexer and those that will vote for this Resolution. That's (a). I don't think anybody here on the circle has any bad intentions whatsoever. I've said it before, I'll say it again; I'm a hopeless optimist and I really love working with each and every person in this circle, and it is a tremendous honor. It always will be and always has been. (B) I very much believe in my constituents and the decision making and thoughtfulness of the people of the State of Connecticut, whether they are Republican, whether they are Democrat, whether they are the largest registered party or group unaffiliated, or some other party, Libertarian, Green Party; there is all sorts, independent.

I believe their collective wisdom is worth following. And so should this pass and it eventually get on the ballot whatever they decide, I feel comfortable with.

But the last part of the puzzle for me is I don't know what the end result will be, assuming this gets put on the ballot and the public votes yes. I don't know the details. I don't know if no excuse absentee balloting and that's a catchy phrase, it's easy to get your mind around what that means. I don't need an excuse, I'm just going to vote by absentee ballot. But I don't know if I can do that two days before the election, two weeks before the election, two months before the election. And once I sort of take it out to an extreme, people sort of

chuckle and say, "well, that one never happened." I don't know what would never happen, I just don't. And maybe I haven't studied it enough; I just don't know what the parameters are. And we'll, you know, let's say somewhere it's written somewhere that it can never be more than two months. Okay. Does it mean that it's going to land two months minus one day or does it mean that it's going to land one week before the election? You know, that's a big zone. I don't know what the zone is and I don't know what the details of how this is going to be done.

You know, there was concern about the Secretary of State sending out, you know, applications for absentee ballots to everybody and then huge amounts of people were not around, they have either moved, they don't exist, they died, who knows. So, you know, the old adage, the devil is in the details; well, the devil is in the details. So I think it's a laudable goal to bring people into the franchise and to not make voting cumbersome. But fundamentally in my heart of hearts, this is one of the two great pillars that hold up our, our Republic, our Democratic Republic. The right to serve as a juror and the right to vote, and I don't want to see any cracks in that pillar of the right to vote. Do I believe that there's a lot of fraud? Not a lot, but I think it exists. I mean, we have laws against it. People take advantage in certain situations and it's not necessarily urban, suburban, rural, and look around the country, crazy stuff happens. You can look at any profession, any trade, any gender, anybody, there is good and bad in everything; it's out there. But I think that we can walk before we need to run, and that we can do this in a way that we could all hold hands, sing Kumbaya, and be very happy about where we go. Is that too much to ask as Senator Sampson said, I don't think so. And I don't feel confident enough at this point in time to afford essentially carte blanche as to what the next step is in this wonderful journey of expanding individual's ability to vote. Do I necessarily believe it's going to land flat on its

face and there is going to be a lot of miscarriage of justice at the polling places; no, I hope not. I have enough faith in the people of Connecticut not to think the worst. But I think that we have an opportunity here to do it so much better, to really tell people this is our vision and we love it. And to look at the 49 other states and sort of pick and choose what we feel is the best of all of them so that we can be No. 1, the genius of Connecticut, our wisdom, our soul, our spirit. And for that reason, Madam President, after careful consideration, I will, I will be voting no. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Kissel. Will you remark further on the Resolution? Senator Champagne.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH):

Thank you Madam President. I rise about this, this Bill. There was an occurrence in my hometown, where a gentlemen running from the law from Canada moved into my town and somehow registered. He registered as a Democrat, and he voted for years until the Federal Law Enforcement arrested him and sent him back. And I remember the day I found out about this and then learned about his voting record. And the fact I looked at this as this person canceling out my vote for years, that's how I viewed this.

So one person canceling out my vote for years, and every time I go and vote, I think about that. I think about the fact that there may be somebody out there again who shouldn't be voting, canceling out my vote. And that's why I am so adamant about protecting my vote. That's why, when we tried the amendments and they failed, all I kept thinking about was the time I learned that this guy canceled out my vote for years.

You know, voting is, is a protect, it needs to be protected in every way we can. Last year, when the

Secretary of State mailed out or sent out these, these boxes, the voting boxes, and, and told everybody you have to put this up. And this is before we voted in this circle to actually make those legal. And I wasn't going to put that box up until that happened. What happened got attacked. And it was all centered from the Secretary of State's Office. It was very disheartening to watch the whole process happened. And to think that that office is the one that protects our votes. And the day after this, if that box became law, we voted on it and made it law; it got put into place, while we tried to put it in place we had to order it.

Anytime somebody interferes, whether they're trying to do something where they, they lied, they're a felon, they came in from Canada, lied about their identity, somehow was able to get identification, if that's what he used, and, and took away my vote, or when somebody tells me I have to do something that is clearly not legal. We have to protect our votes from beginning to end. And you know, my, my first choice was not an ID, mine was signature verification. Signature verification, put it in the Constitution, protect it just like we had in the Constitution, we vote on one day, we had it ruled in there one day. So they couldn't be changed year after year after year. This, we put in the, we wanted, we wanted the verification. And if the legislature wanted to change the way we did that, that's one thing, that's fine, you can change it, but it's still there, we can still verify. It was a Member of this circle who came out and said that they were having issues with the mail in ballots. And that was from the Majority party. And he said in his city, he was having problems with it. In fact, many of the examples that Rob Sampson brought up talked about that. The fact, the former politician was just sentenced in the last month because of irregularities.

To protect our vote and to prevent a party from being able to change that, the way we vote to

benefit themselves at any time is very important. Putting it in our State Constitution is that protection, and the people would be the ones voting it in there. And if the people didn't want it in there, they can vote no. But if we had done, I think that tonight, we could have gotten the votes to pass it out of this circle and it probably would have passed in the House, and it would have become, would have been on the ballot in two years. There is a good possibility of that. But instead, knowing that fact, knowing that that's probably what would have happened, it was voted down. And you ask yourself, why would you vote down a protection? Why would you vote down something that is to protect the votes so that nobody comes in and steals your vote away? That's a good question, I'd love the answer to that. I'd love to the, the, the, the answer to the fact that we don't want to protect our votes.

You know, we go through history here in our country. And we talk about you know, when everybody got, when we got our votes, and I, and I think the more we go ahead to future, the more people that are able to vote, the more people that are taking part in it. But some people they don't want to get involved. I remember knocking on a door, the person said to me, I don't vote, I don't want to vote, go away. That's what they said. The only time that's ever happened to me. But it's surprising, surprising when you hear that because I cherish my vote. I cherish the time when I can go out and cast my, my vote. And it, and it saddens me that I'm going to vote against this Bill because it's missing those protections. I want to vote for this today. I want to vote so that people can have a no excuse absentee ballot. But I want to vote to make sure that it's done in a way that it protects everybody else's vote. So nobody is going to go in and cancel out your vote because they shouldn't be voting. And it's for that reason that I will be voting no today, sadly. Thank you. Thank you Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Champagne. Will you remark further on the Resolution? Senator Witkos.

SENATOR WITKOS (8TH):

Good evening Madam President. Nice to you see up there.

THE CHAIR:

Good evening.

SENATOR WITKOS (8TH):

You know, I was listening to some of the previous speakers and their reasoning for votes and how important it was to them. And I recall the first time that I had to vote. I wasn't 18 at the time; actually, I was a, I was a freshman in high school. And we were having elections for our class officers where you could vote for the President, the Vice President, the Secretary, and the Treasurer of your class. I went to school in Granby, Granby, Connecticut, moving here from Peachtree City, Georgia, which is a, a totally different climate, living in the south and then moving up here to the north. And things were done a little differently. And we were just given a slate of the candidates. And it says, all right, we're going to choose off of this.

And so I know there was kind of a large discussion as well, who picked those people as the only candidates to vote for. And it really caused a lot of consternation and discussion in my freshman year in high school. And I still to this day, I don't even remember or recall how we ever overcome that and how we voted. Did we get together as a class in a class meeting and was it by a show of hands or did we fill out a piece of paper and stick it in a, in a box somewhere, and who monitored the box and how many people actually counted those boxes? And I

thought it was interesting though, that once you got in an office, it's almost similar to the General Assembly. Once you get into office, you seem to, as long as you want that position, you get to stay in that position, because we almost really didn't have a change in class officers for the three of the four years that I was in high school and obviously, in our senior year, and I think people were more in tune to graduation. And so they actually had campaigns and I, I, myself had campaign for class president. And then I will say that is the first election that I've ever lost in my life and I was very disappointed about that. But I learned, I guess, from their how to, how to campaign and make sure I did it better because I know that every vote counts, Madam President. And it was important then back in 1982 and it still is important today.

And one of the things that I, I learned from that, and also my senior year about counting, and when you turn 18 years, you have the ability to vote, but also at that time, I had to go to register for the draft. And we weren't, nobody was actively recruiting, but it was still a requirement that you had to go down to the local post office and fill out this card and send it in; and I did that. And you know, one of the few very requirements, minimal requirements that you are required to do as a citizen is status trouble. If you're selected for jury duty, serve in a good capacity, and really exercise the biggest right of a citizen, exercise your right to vote in a democracy. And as I said, every, every vote counts. And I, I know we've done a lot of different things in the General Assembly as it pertains to voting.

As a matter of fact, one of the reasons why I think I was elected to the State House of Representatives, I originally started off my, my political career on my local Board of Education in my hometown of Canton. And the reason why I did that was because I wanted to eventually become a police chief somewhere and my mentor in Law Enforcement was the Granby

police chief at the time and he said, Kevin, if you want to move up in politics, politics is all about votes, and making sure you have the votes. And he said, I would recommend to you to get involved in an elective office, and because a police chief is similar to a figurehead or department head. You're out there in the public and, you know, people will just enamor themselves with you and want to be with you and you can make a difference that way and show that you're, you have the leadership.

So I said, Okay, Chief, I got it. However, at the time I was living in the town that I worked in, in the town of Canton, and according to our town charter, we were not allowed as a town employee to serve on the Board of Selectmen or the board of Finance, one is the one that negotiates the contracts and the other one is the one that approves the budget for those contracts. So the only option available to me was to serve on the local Board of Education. So I wasn't sure about that, but I said, you know, if, if you want to really do something, you got to go for it, Madam President. So I, I, I really wasn't into politics at the time, so I met with Republican Town Committee and as a kind of a side, I registered as Republican because both my parents were Democrats when I turned 18. And I was mad and I don't remember the reason why I was mad, but I, I thought I'd show them by registering as the opposite party from them and became Republican. And, you know, after I got elected to the State House, my parents grew up and changed their party affiliation from Democrat to Republican. It was just kind of a little joke in my, in my house.

But back to the story; and so I ran on the ballot for the local Board of Education, and what an eye opener that was. And I kind of alluded to some of the stories last night when we talked about higher education and why I'm so passionate about education, having served on the Education Committee here in the General Assembly and my freshman year as a State Representative, now as the Ranking Member, once

again on the Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee.

Because education is the foundation for everything that we do. And we talk about educating the people around this circle on how important a change to our Constitution is, Madam President. And unless you understand the importance, it's very hard to, to go out and share that importance to the constituents because ultimately, democracy is going to go back to anybody who shows up to vote, that question on the ballot, if it passes Chamber, and I honestly believe that the measure will pass here tonight at some point, and when we move for further in the debate. But after I served my local Board of Education for five years and I moved my way up to Vice Chairman, I learned a lot.

And I also started monitoring politics in Hartford because I was complaining about all the things that Hartford was telling us that we had to do at our local Board of Education. I was like, why are they telling us we have to do this? You know, what do you know about what's going on in the, in the Cannon Public Schools? And at the time, there was a democratic state Rep that served the district and, of course, you know, you always have the little back and forth between the elephant and the donkey and they said, "Well, you know, why do you want to run, you want to run?" I'm like, no, I don't know. And they said, Kevin, you know, it's, it's your choice. Nobody can beat her. But if you want to run, go ahead. And I said, why don't do these things lightly. Again, I had my one taste of losing an election when I was in, running for class president in high school and I hated it. And I said, I would never allow that to happen to me again.

And so I just, I made the determination that I was going to do it. And so I ran, and I was lucky enough to prevail that night and I'll you it was interesting, because the Town of Canton had one polling location. So you had the results right

there. This is back in 2002. And the Town of Avon so as the 17th House Assembly District, it was all of Canton and three quarters part of Avon and Avon had two polling, three polling locations. So I wasn't sure like where to go and then my hometown was Canton and I said, "well, where do I go on in Avon?" So they said, well, the biggest polling location is at the high school, so I went to the high school and they started calling at the end of the night, you know, eight o'clock, all the crowds would come in and people now back then I guess they still use the cell phones, but not text wasn't as big as actually picking up and talking to somebody.

So I was in the high school parking lot and they started calling up the numbers pretty quick, and I was devastated. Madam President. I, they called up the numbers for the incumbent and then they called that my number and I was down by, like, 130 votes. I was like, well you know, I was bombed. And all my supporters are with me, they, you know, they kind of tried to comfort me and say, you did a great job, you came close to anybody else, blah, blah, blah. And I was like, okay, and my wife was Esther, she was at the Canton Town Hall where they were delivering those so we could have, you know, some real time results.

So like, I don't know how to make this phone call. You know, I was almost crying a little bit because I was so upset. And I really did put my heart and soul into that campaign. And, and to be honest with you, no slight to the House Republicans at the time, but they didn't come on board until like the last three weeks of the campaign because they said this guy's had no chance, so we're not going to waste any resources on him. But then I guess somebody did a poll and they said, well, maybe he does have a chance, so I got the full support of the House Republicans at the time. And so I called my wife and I could hear some yelling going on. She's like, congratulations, blah, blah, blah. And I'm like, I didn't win. I said I lost by, you know, like 130

votes here in Avon. She says, well, you won by like 185 votes in Canton and I think I could, did the high jump right there in the parking lot and I was so excited, I ran back inside the high school and I was just like screaming at the top of my lungs. We won, we won, we won.

And then the whole place kind of erupted and it was a good feeling. And so unbeknownst to my wife, I had planned win or lose a little getaway. And we, election night was Tuesday night. We left Thursday morning for a little four-day cruise. So we flew out and in the meantime, you know, never having served up here actually had never crossed the threshold of the LOB or the Capitol Building because I grew up in Peachtree City, Georgia, so I didn't have the tours when the kids younger kids come here. And so I apparently they had a caucus, I didn't know what a caucus was at the time. Your offices were picked and Committee signs were made. And I missed all that.

So when I got back at the time, it was Minority Leader Ward, called me up and said can we meet with you at the State Capitol? I'm like sure, alright, where do I go, where do I park? You know, give me the rundown. So I came in. And, you know, I, I got the last office, which I thought was the, the nicest thing since sliced bread to be honest with it. Nobody, for whatever reason, wanted to be in the Ranking Senate Office in the Labor Department. Senator Craig was the Chair of Labor, and came in and like, this is an awesome office. I'm so happy to be here. And Senator Craig come over and introduce himself to me and immediately walked away when she found out I wasn't on Labor. She said why are you in this office? I'm like, I guess nobody else wanted it, but I love it. I love being here. And so ever since and that's, that started my friendship with Senator Craig.

And from that point, Madam President, I've always taken voting very seriously because I only won my

election by 31 votes. And there was an automatic recount and I, I prevailed in the automatic recount. And I guess I got the bug, because ever since then, you know, you're running for reelection. And I've served with a few Members in this circle in the House of Representatives. And now again, a good friend, Majority Leader, Bob Duff, served together in the House before he sent it to the Senate before I did, but it's a different animal downstairs than up here. And I don't, I say animal in a nice meaningful gesture, but the tenor is a little bit different.

And I think here in the Senate, we're more collegial and that's what I tell folks. We have the ability, the ability to, to work together to find common ground and move things forward. And I think that's what some of the amendments that were presented before this body earlier this evening, which unfortunately were defeated, attempted to do that and I understand the arguments behind. We don't want to be too constrictive and too detailed without a full debate on what it is because we're amending the Constitution. But I'm hopeful that the conversations that came out during tonight's debate will be looked upon when the, the citizenry vote to approve the, the constitutional amendment, Madam President, to set some kind of a, I don't want to say precedent, but set some kind of a direction of a debate in where we'd like to find common ground on making sure that we, we provide a secure voting method here in the State of Connecticut, and I, and I know it's a big deal for constitutional amendments, because I was a participant in changing the Constitution of the State of Connecticut successfully most recently.

It will along with this body and that downstairs, we passed the Act for land conservation few years ago and I don't believe our Constitution had been changed since 1963 before then, so it had been a long time since our, our Constitution had, had changed and I was glad to be part of that and part

of that discussion. And we actually had to go through an extended process, which we actually passed on a simple majority the first time, but unfortunately the question was drafted in error from what I was told by LCO, nobody's fault in this Chamber. And when it came back, we had to start the process all over again because it was a brand new question. And we, I think it passed out of this Chamber. If it wasn't unanimous, it was very close to unanimous. And then it was added onto the ballot and then the citizenry had the opportunity to vote, vote for the question.

And I felt comfortable a few years ago in 2014, when the question was up for, shall we allow the citizen, and I don't remember the exact question, allow the citizens of Connecticut to allow the General Assembly, I'm paraphrasing it; to change our voting laws. And in my opinion, my heart of hearts, I said, well, we're providing direct democracy to the citizens and State of Connecticut, say, do you want us to have that authority or do you want to just keep it where it is? And at the time, both those questions were defeated. That citizenry said, for whatever reason, no.

And then the Bill came up again in the General Assembly on behalf of the Secretary of State's Office to try to do it again in 2016 or may be off a year or two, in my, in my memory. And I voted against it that time. And I know that the Secretary of State's Office came up and asked me so Senator Witkos, why? You know, you voted for it in 2014 and 2016, now you're voting against it. Why is that? And I said, well, I think the citizens of Connecticut have already answered the question. And, you know, it's like a kid saying, you know, it's time for bed. Well, can I, can I stay up for 10 more minutes? Now, it sound right, can I stay up for 10 minutes? Well, how many times you are going to keep asking when the answer is going to be the same.

But I'm changing my opinion this year, Madam President. I'm changing my opinion in my tune this year on this particular Bill because we've had some changes. And some of those changes I noticed in, in my particular district, I just picked up you know, four of the biggest towns in the, in the 8th Senatorial District. And I compared it with the voter turnout was in 2016, which is, was a gubernatorial year 2018, I mean, presidential year, when the gubernatorial year and then 2020.

And the year of 2016 and 2020, we saw an increase in the number of votes cast and participation. And I will attribute that to the absentee ballot, no excuse absentee ballot, right; for people I think, came out and exercised their right to vote. And we should not stand in the way of allowing people to cast their right to vote.

I know some people they might forget, some people are out of town, I know there is where right now we have very limited circumstances in which somebody can request an absentee ballot, but under the Governor Lamont's Executive Authority or Executive Order, he allowed a no excuse absentee ballots.

And when I was at the polls, it was very quiet. But I when I talked to my registered voters and my, and my town clerk's, they couldn't believe the overwhelming support from the people that said, we like this, we want this to stay this way. You know, they, they got a taste of the chocolate. You know, who can eat just a bite of a candy bar and just put it down and walk away? Not me. You know, you want to eat the whole thing, you want to keep, you want to keep having that, that chocolate in front of you. And I think that's when they've had a taste of how easy it is to cast a vote in the State of Connecticut, they want to maintain that right, Madam President, and I, I can't stand here or sit here and a few minutes today to deny them that right to cast a vote themselves in two years to say two years from now, will the General Assembly be able to come back

and adjust it so we have that? Let the people say we can't do that on every Bill, right.

We know that during the course of the legislative term, there may be thousands of Bills that are proposed from individual legislators and tens, I don't want to say hundreds, but tens of tens of Committee Bills that are proposed and maybe through the pipeline, you know, six or seven hundred Bills may become law out of the thousands, three, four hundreds, somewhere in that range. There is no way we could go back to our constituents and say well, we're going to have you guys vote on everything, because that's why we're elected. We're elected to represent the citizens of our individual Senatorial Districts.

And I know that the citizens of the A Senatorial District want me up here and want me to vote yes on the no excuse absentee ballot, because you give them the right to say we support this or we do not, because there is some people on, on both sides, but let their voices be heard directly. And we can take the marching orders for them. And I will share with you that if this time around, when the, when the, the ballot is taken and the citizens have a right, and have casted their votes and they're all counted up, and I'm honored still to be serving in the Legislature. And they say, no, I won't support another Bill unless we've, we've seen something demonstrably change in our society, like we, we just went through the COVID-19. They had the experience, they like it, they want the opportunities to, to continue doing that. And I'm going to make sure that I give them that opportunity to do that.

So, in closing, Madam President, I think it's so important and so weighted that we are talking about the Connecticut State Constitution, something that really takes a huge majority in both these Chambers to change. It's not taken lightly. Voting is not taken lightly. Nobody believes in fraud. Nobody wants to believe in fraud, nobody would support

fraud. We have laws to protect those against that and I hope if people become aware of any type of fraud or wrongdoing or ballot meddling, then they report that to the authorities and then, then those authorities take that to the highest court and those, and those individuals are prosecuted severely, because once you lose the integrity in the ballot box, I think democracy has taken a hit for that Madam President. So with that, I will stand and pledge my support of the Bill this evening. And I thank you for the opportunity to comment. Thank you Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Witkos. Will you remark further on the Resolution? Senator Martin, good evening.

SENATOR MARTIN (31ST):

Good evening, Madam President. Madam President, this Resolution proposes a constitutional amendment to remove the constitution's current restrictions on absentee voting. And here in Connecticut, one of the few states that require in-person voting on election day, that is Connecticut. In addition, voters can absentee balloting should they be ill or out of town. One, just repeated, I don't think it came out correctly, but it's one of the very few states that still is, is requiring in-person voting and has few, few requirements for absentee balloting.

So some see this and I've heard it this evening, that this voting, this, see our constitutional voting process as being confined restrictive, I've heard, and some said that we're far behind. And, you know, so I asked you how far behind are we? And, you know, I, I try to gather information as much as I can on, you know, all the Bills that come before us, and I think I do better on some than others. And I'd like to know, I guess a little bit more about this, the voting process, and I haven't

seen or haven't come across any, besides a testimony. You know, I guess we're there. You know, what type of obstacles were we would, are we going to encounter should we remove all the restrictions and make it non, no excuse. And you know, how much research or planning I guess, you know, has been done in, in this area. And I'm sure the good Senator, the proponent, she's done her work. But I haven't seen anything, you know, that I'm able to put my arms around. You know, I guess questions and I raised this because I got a text from a register of voters. And she mentioned that you know, our systems our technology is behind. We couldn't possibly keep up with the demands that are going to this type of, of voting system.

So I had, I do have some questions. So, but I guess I see it from a different point of view as well as instead of this being restrictive, I see it more of a secure method right now, secure rather than it being far behind. Like everyone has said here in this circle, I, I want all legal citizens to be able to vote and it's their right. And, but in the forefront for me is I want voter or election integrity. And I think the amendments that were offered tonight, those showed that type of integrity. I think that we would want if we do decide to go down this path. And I think, you know, if we're, you know, I'll use voter ID as an example.

Being in real estate, you go apply for a mortgage, could apply for open up a bank account, you got to show an ID. You, you get married, you got to show an ID. You know, you want to buy a gun, you got to show an ID. So I don't think it was a big ask for us to ask for a photo. Sadly though, you know, the integrity if we go down this path, you know, what I've read is that fraud is a possibility and fraud does happen. And we've been fortunate though here in Connecticut, although that we've had some photo fraud relatively, we've, our elections have been very secure, and while not perfect.

The current voting in-person at pole locations and absentee voting does work here in Connecticut. But most concerning is for me again, is the election security and that the center for me it is at the center in the heart of the matter. And should the resolution move forward, I think we may be risking that security.

What I read, you know, fraud usually does not take place at the polling location. It kind of hard to impersonate a person and say, hey, I am Henry Martin. And somebody stepping up and doing that is probably very unlikely. However, expanding the absentee mailing voting by not requiring an excuse makes it easier to forge a signature and for an individual to impersonate a voter. I think an example of that, for me as with the, with Senator Sampson mentioned earlier, he had received some emails, numerous emails. I had actual people that I came across in my community, constituents that asked me why did my deceased father receive an app, an application for past elections? You know, why did I receive two applications?

So there are constituents wonder as well. Something that was said in testimony was the necessity was obvious that, that we needed to update our voter rolls. And I think what those examples I just gave you accurately reflect eligibility of voters is important for us to have and have secure voter integrity.

Also, I'm told that, you know, is the equipment. Like other states, we don't have up dated technology. So I think that's important for us to wrap our hands, our hands around. So I want to quote something that was written in the Christian Science Monitor by a Warren Richey, and he makes a comment regarding the absentee mail in voting is an unreliable way to cast ballots. And he writes, he argued that absentee ballot, absentee mail in voting is not reliable because ballots may be lost in the mail, good point, or is disqualified due to mistakes

or signature discrepancies. He goes on to write; Despite its obvious convenience, which that was mentioned here tonight, and growing popularity, it can be extremely unreliable way to cast a ballot.

Many people don't know some ballots never get counted, haven't been disqualified for reasons ranging from invalid or lack of signatures on the envelopes to simply being late or being mismarked, marking their ballot.

Madam President, I think that in any election, all ballots are important. And if these are flaws in the mailing balloting process, maybe not in a landslide victory, but on a close election, would that not make a difference? In Bristol, a year ago, in the local election, a Council Woman or excuse me, a candidate lost by five votes. Do you think an absentee ballot that may have been lost or multiple or a discrepancy in one way or form may have made a difference? I think we all can say yes to that.

Madam President, I'm not going to say too much more, but I just want to close by saying the no excuse absentee balloting creates problems. I think that before we gather, before we move forward with this Resolution here, I think we should have, in my opinion, we should have gathered more information so all of us here in the circle could have made better, better decisions. And maybe my vote would have been different. I think we could have provided more information, accurate information to our constituents. I think this Resolution will disenfranchise voters from having their vote count. I think we run the risk of fraud. I've mentioned as well as that not all votes, it is a possibility that not all votes could be counted. And at risk is the election security. And I guess I want to close with this and a weak, you know, I'm going to say the word convenience, because that seems to be the argument here is a convenience of all this. And I, the question I want to leave to everybody with is, are

we going to exchange voter convenience for election security? Thank you Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Martin. Will you remark further on the Resolution? Senator Cicarella.

SENATOR CICARELLA (34TH):

Thank you Madam President. So I support no excuse absentee voting as I stood up and said three other times prior. It is important that we make this process easy and accessible for everybody who wants to vote. There are many ways that we could explore that process. There are other states that utilize certain technologies, whether it is block chain or face IDs. But they have a process and we need to make sure it's secure. We need confidence in this process to make sure that all of the votes matter. For every fraudulent vote, it takes away from a legitimate one and that takes away the confidence in this process.

I've also said before, a few stories about when I was campaigning and there are a few examples that stick out. I've heard many stories before, during, and after my campaign about some of the concerns with the mass mailing out of the absentee ballot and that whole process and some of the concerns of residents and citizens of Connecticut as well as stories that people saw, heard. And there are many examples, some of which, again while campaigning and knocking on doors. In Wallingford, there was a woman who asked me and, and some of the people that I was walking around was, why she got so many of these requests for the absentee ballot? And she said that she, she lived there for over three years now, and I think she said she got seven, is a multifamily house in Wallingford. And I really didn't have, you know, a response for, I really didn't understand the process all that well and I did a little investigating. And, you know, just

like any data collection, if it's not cleaned up, it's not going to be accurate.

People get married and they get one of those books where you write down all the addresses and, and phone numbers; now, it's, it's not written down, it's in a phone or a computer. But as people move away or get new phone numbers or new email addresses, that information is not accurate or correct. Some of the databases I use in my profession are also the same way. It's only as good as the information collected if it is cleaned up as the address book does not tend to happen all the time. My wife still sends out birthday invitations and it goes to an old address for a family member, and it's done multiple times.

And that's exactly what was happening with some of these applications that were going out and people not understanding why am I getting these, why am I getting these. And it's simply put, if somebody moves to a, a college apartment, and they registered a vote in a different town or maybe even a different state, there will be an inquiry within that voter registers office saying that this person is a registered voter. And unless that office cleans it out and does a purge of that information, it will still be there. So someone who lived home with mom at 18 and registered to vote, and then went off to college, registered to vote, when they move back home four years later, and mom and dad are now at a different address within a different town, that person registers to vote there. That person then gets a girlfriend, moves in with that girlfriend in a different town, registers to vote, stays there for a few years. They both then get married, they go to another town, register to vote.

At this point were five, six times registered to vote and that person could essentially get six applications. That's a problem. That is a way as I would call it a vulnerability, a possibility of a fraud and we need to minimize that, that's our job,

is to minimize the chance of the fraud, which will bring confidence to the process. And if checking a signature or an ID is a process that would allow that confidence to remain in this sacred, sacred process, then I think we need to do it.

You know, I heard a story, or I apologize, I heard a comment in this circle that asking for an ID limits a citizen's right when it comes to voting. But if we do not ask for ID to verify if that person is a citizen, really whose rights are we violating; our citizens, because if we allow a non-citizen or someone that should not be voting in the State of Connecticut to vote, it takes away from that resident that is doing it correctly. And I just think that it's imperative that we look out for that person as well.

I do agree and encourage the ability for the no excuse absentee voting, but we need to do it with a sense of responsibility to look out for all of Connecticut's residents. We heard many reasonable amendments today that would help in that process of legitimizing this, and seeing it forward and getting it done earlier. It's my understanding if we could get this back to the House and this passes, this literally can be implemented within a year. And it will be done so with some extra securities for those people that I mentioned in those prior comments a few moments ago and they were very reasonable and legitimate amendments, that the good Senator worked so hard on and work so passionately with counterparts to try to get some reasonable, give and take, reasonable meeting in the middle to get this accomplished, because I think everybody wants to know excuse absentee voting. Again, I reiterate, I'm in support of that. I think it's important people can vote the way they want, and, and, and where they feel safe. And we need to make it easy for people who have the right to vote to vote.

But again, getting back to those reasonable and legitimate amendments, not one Democratic Senator

agreed to not even one of them, not one agreed to not one of the three legitimate and reasonable amendments. And, you know, it almost blew my mind. But, but I got the thinking that I shouldn't be too surprised. This is a lot of what I'm seeing in my first year in this position, I'm seeing a lot of this.

You know, we see Bills that have these titles that are inspiring, that sound really good. And you read the language of the Bill and has nothing to do with the title of the Bill. You know, I just think that that is crazy, crazy. And I'm, I read more and see if there is another page to the Bill and there is not and the title of the Bill has nothing to do with the language of the Bill.

I also see where there is great Bills, great bipartisan Bills that are proposed with a lot of hard work that come out of Committees and then we go to vote on it, and there is four sections that have nothing to do with the hard work of that Committee put inside of that Bill. And again, I'm new to this and I'm trying to look up to mentors or look back at other years and listen to people talk. And I think it is worse now than any other session. And that's from my questioning, people have been around for a while and some of my mentors that have walked in these hallways and have sat in these seats. And I just think that doesn't do justice to our citizens. I don't think we were elected to do that kind of deceptiveness. We'll get a definition for that soon, I think.

But, you know, I think I see why we're doing it. You know, when, when we're forced to vote against a Bill that sounds good in title, what that does is it allows us to vote against it, and then it create a mailer that our, our, our opponents could use against us down the road or somebody could use it as a, a catchy title to a news article, saying that somebody didn't vote for something like, I don't know, youth suicide prevention, right? Senator

Cicarella didn't vote for youth suicide prevention, he has to be crazy, right. But again, there is 30 something sections in that Bill, and one of those sections happen to be taken away the parents right, to be knowledgeable about what their child is going through, whether it's suicidal thoughts, a mental illness, and, and it's taking away the family nucleolus who can be there in the summertime, on the weekends, at night, to know that something is wrong with their child, but Senator Cicarella didn't vote for youth suicide prevention. Again, that's deceptive. I don't think that that does the justice for our residents. I think we need to do what's best for them, and do it with transparency.

You know, another thing that really, it just again blows my mind that there will be a Bill and I'm thinking of, of two stories specifically. I went home and I talked to my father about this just yesterday and, and I'll tell you about him in a minute and how I like to bounce ideas off of and why and it gives me a well-rounded perspective of things. You know, we were given a Bill yesterday of 6100 I believe, I think it had 109 sections, all wrapped up into one, one Bill and there was a lot of different things within that Bill. How can I really do justice for the people that voted me into office if I have to vote yes or no in one vote, in one push of this button for 109 sections that have nothing to do with each other; some are liquors, some are lemon laws with vehicles, some are about consumer protection, others are about, I don't know what, there is 109 sections in the Bill. And, you know, with my frustration, can't sleep, talk to my father. And again, I like to bounce ideas off of him. He is a Democrat, a union president. So I feel that I'm, I'm very well rounded. I was brought up in, in that way. And, and, you know, I went to him and I'm like, this is just blowing my mind that there is nothing I really can do or where I feel like I can't do the right thing for my constituents when it's presented this way. And it's just a little discouraging when you see this unfold in front of,

of myself, because people only see those headlines or short clips, they don't see the whole process here.

And, you know, he told me to, to take it in stride and do what you said you were going to do when campaigning. And I thought about those words. And what I said to people when knocking on the doors, whether a Democrat, Republican, Independent; I'm going to be your voice, I'm going to go and listen to everybody, both sides. It doesn't matter, Democrat or Republican. It's about the Bill, it's about the issue and it's about the constituents, it's about the people in my district. And I still truly believe that. And I'm going to continue to preach that and live that and do that. And I just think we all need to do that. I said, I was going to work hard for everybody and I was going to vote on the independent issues. I just think we need the ability to do so and do so again, with transparency.

Getting back to, to the Bill at hand, you know, the proposed resolution, it's important that everyone gets an opportunity to vote if they should be doing so legally. They should be able to do it whatever way they feel comfortable, they should do it safely. But it's our job to make sure it's done correctly. And we just had that ability a few moments ago with one of the few amendments that Senator Sampson worked so hard on. But instead, 24 no each time. And again, that just blows my mind because we're here to do a job for the people and we're not doing it when that type of stuff happens. When I vote, I don't care who proposed it. I don't care what room it came out of. If it's right for my constituents, I'm going to vote that way. I think more people in this circle need to do that. And I'm going to keep doing that.

But again, back to the Bill at hand. Knowing that this isn't done correctly and I know that it may be a news mailer that Senator Cicarella did not support no excuse absentee voting, and I made sure I said no

excuse absentee voting and how much I support it about seven or eight times, because I do support it. But it's not done correctly, and for that reason, I am not supporting it the way it is being proposed in this Resolution. Thank you Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Cicarella. Will you remark further? Good evening Senator Moore.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND):

Good evening Madam President. Good to see you. Today is my first time out here, but I've been in the back in my office listening to the testimonies of many people. But I rise in support of no excuse absentee ballots. You know, unless people don't know this, I'm a lifelong Bridgeport resident. I've been working on campaigns since 1983 when the first black man ran for Mayor for the City of Bridgeport. I'd like to tell you, I've seen it all. I really have seen it all. Not so proud of everything that's taken place in Bridgeport, but it is a city that has a long standing history of corruption.

In 2019, I ran for the Mayor for the City of Bridgeport. I won on the ballots and I lost to absentee ballots. So you would think that I would be one of the people who would stand here and say I'm totally against absentee ballots, but I'm not. I am about the people having full access because it's not the ballot, the absentee ballot; that's the problem. It is a few bad actors, who for years and years and years have been involved in absentee ballot fraud with seniors, coercing them into signing, offering them little gifts and making them believe they have to sign an absentee ballot.

I heard one of my colleagues mention about the turnout in Bridgeport. The turnout in some of the big cities was the greatest that we've seen in this 2020 election when everyone had access to the ballot

during COVID-19. For me, that was very encouraging. I've run four times for the Senate, and I've been challenged three times. And each time I lose to absentee ballots, but I win at the polls, which carries me in. But that's because of a few people who have access to senior centers, who acts, have access to buildings. And when we don't have equal access to those people, that is when the fraud takes place.

But fraud that we've seen is not about dead people voting, this is not the 70's when it really did take place in Bridgeport, where you could find on a tombstone someone had died but got to vote. This is not Tammany Hall. You know, I'm a big fan of, of the old movies, watching how they used to get the city wards to vote and pay people, give them a drink to go to the polls. I often call Senator Looney after I've watched in O'Brian movie and said, my gosh, I'm glad we're not there now. It's not a perfect system, but it is a good system and it works. And it's about democracy and giving everyone equal access.

I'm, I'm taken back when I hear people talk about historical perspective on slavery and the false rhetoric of what our history has been and how things have happened. When we finally get to a place where everyone gets the accurate information, then I'll talk about the history of the United States, how we got to vote and what happened, but not today, not today.

I believe that I won that primary because of the absentee ballots and everyone having access. And that's what I want for every voter every single year when they go out to vote. The flaws that happened, happened in 80's, they happen when you vote at the polls, they happen when you go to the poll and say I want to vote and they say your list is not, your name is not on the list, or this is not the address that we have for you or you're no longer registered. Those things are not fraud, those things are errors

that people make every single day. But we do have a system in place that you can challenge us, challenge when you're at the poll that you want to vote nonetheless and get your vote counted.

I think all those things are going to happen no matter what we do because we live in a system that is not perfect. We have people who work from six in the morning, having to be at the polls at 5:30 in the morning, until, until 8, 9 or 10 when they're counting the votes, those are going to happen. But that is not voter fraud. That is human error that takes place. And for me to stand here from an urban center and hear people talk about the City of Bridgeport. In 2001 statistics, some of the names that were mentioned are people that I know from Bridgeport, that are no longer living. But when I hear statistics that are 20 years old, show me current, show me current. And then I want to think, want you to think also about the people who have committed fraud, who did pay a penalty, who did not get away from it. There are, there are safeguards in the system. There are safeguards and people that can stop the fraud if it happens. But I truly believe as someone who has been through it, watched it all, been beat up, that allowing people to vote, giving everyone the same access will make a difference.

I heard the other day from a friend who was on WNPR, that I'm the anti-corruption legislator, I am not. I am the lady who ran on integrity, transparency, and honesty. And I believe that is what the people want. And I believe that's who they will continue to vote as long as we all have access to absentee ballot voting, no excuse. Give us all the same chance, give us all the same opportunity and we will come through as a people who believe in democracy every single time.

So I want to thank my colleague for the work that she's done on all these voting reforms because we need to move into a new world under new

circumstances and really make sure that everyone has the same opportunity. Thank you Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Moore. Will you remark? Senator Duff?

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Thank you, Madam President. Will the Senate stand at ease for a moment?

THE CHAIR:

Senate will stand at ease.

Senator Duff?

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Thank you, Madam President. I'd like to yield to Senator Formica, please.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Formica.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH):

Thank you Madam President. Thank you Senator Duff, I accept the yield. Madam President, we have had a long discussion on this initiative and rightfully so it's an important conversation. There has been a lot of thought and effort on both sides, on all sides, to talk about this particular piece of legislation and the impact that it is having on philosophy, and on the voters at large for the members of the State of Connecticut.

I remind myself, Madam President that we're voting tonight on whether the citizens of the State of Connecticut have the opportunity to choose at the

ballot box, whether they want no absentee ballot, no excuse absentee ballot to be the order of the day and to have that, to have that embolden in our Constitution. We are not voting tonight, Madam President, on the absentee ballot process. We are simply voting to let the people have a say.

Now, there are many concerns about the lack of criteria that is not included or the lack of criteria that, you know, is part of this legislation. And there are many people that would like to see this legislation and the question going to the ballot to be more specific. When we were here last week, I believe, Madam President, to talk about the early voting, I had a very nice conversation with Senator Flexer about what happens next. Should the early voting and I have the same conversation tonight about absentee ballot voting without excuse? What happens, how is that implemented? It's voted on generally by the electorate, if they change their mind as they did in 2014 and decided they want to have early voting. And they want to have no excuse absentee ballot voting, then a simple majority at the ballot box in November coming up, I believe the earliest will be 2024. Then the process comes back to the legislature for determination on how that is done. And I think that's where the concern is, Madam President. The concern is how is that done and what conversations lead up to how that is done?

And I think you heard many of the concerns tonight, some of the amendments that were called were specific to making sure that there was significant and proper and secure identification of the person that was voting in any number of ways, through signature or through photo ID. And those are not unique to this circle as amendments or ideas, those are ideas that have been established in states around the country who are ahead of Connecticut on this particular issue.

Senator Sampson, I thought did a wonderful job in preparing his argument, like his argument or not. He was very well prepared, thoughtful, and moved his amendments and I thought a prudent and thoughtful way. So Madam President, the dilemma is this evening we need a majority vote or there is a majority vote here of this body needed in order to pass this forward, because we're not going to achieve the 75% and I'm sure that that's a foregone conclusion.

And for me, Madam President, the timing of this following the pandemic, I think is playing heavily on everyone's minds, not only the minds of us around the circle, but it's going to be significantly recalled when it comes time for the electorate to vote at the ballot box. Because unlike this evening when we're voting on what the process is going to be at the electric, at the ballot box for the electorate; the last few votes we had on no excuse absentee balloting was to try to make life safer and more secure and healthy for people during a pandemic. And so that was when those votes were taken as you know, we all worked hard to maneuver our way over the last 14 or so months, and, and included the election that was taking place in November as the pandemic was in the height of its second wave. Now that we're, we're coming down to people are not required to wear masks if they're vaccinated or more and more people are becoming vaccinated and the, the rate seems to becoming less and less, we're certainly coming into the waning moments hopefully that it's safe to say the waning moments of the pandemic. And so how are we going to, how are we going to move forward?

Madam President, and I think this is an important issue to both sides. I think there are many people on both sides of the aisle that would like to see no excuse absentee ballot voting. I think some would like to see it move forward as a question that we are voting on tonight as the question that would be on the ballot, others would like to have more

criteria attached to it in an effort to be more secure. But as we move forward, should this pass at the ballot box, Madam President, I think the opportunity exists for controls to be put on and conversations to be had further. I think that, Madam President, this is an important issue. And I'm glad we had a good long debate about it this evening, and, and I look forward to seeing how the, the vote pans out. I'm not quite sure how that's going to go, but I look forward to seeing how that pans out. And then we'll wait with the rest of you and the rest of us as we move forward and wait for the 2024 election, Madam President.

I will suggest that as I close my remarks, Madam President, that Senator Kelly is asked to make us a statement after Senator Duff, so just so we bear that in mind and I'll run down and try to grab him. So thank you very much. I'll yield back to Senator Duff.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Formica. Senator Duff.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Thank you Madam President. I will certainly stand at ease while the Minority Leader makes his way to the Chamber for sure to make some closing remarks. Madam President, I rise in support of the House Joint Resolution this evening, and I am very glad that we're here tonight talking about no excuse absentee balloting. As we talked about during the other debate on the other resolution about no, early voting, this is an extremely important issue to the voters of the State of Connecticut. And it's a simple question we're putting to them in 2024. We're saying to them, shall the Constitution of the State be amended to permit the General Assembly to allow each voter to vote by absentee ballot? Simple question, that's all we're doing. Should each voter

be allowed to vote by absentee ballot? It's that simple.

And my hope is that they say yes, because over the last few election cycles, and I'm sure that's true for all of us here in the circle, we get the same question over and over again; why can't I vote by absentee ballot or why can't we vote early, why isn't this, why is this so difficult, why do 34 other states in this nation have no excuse absentee balloting and Connecticut does it? You all pride yourself on being a progressive state and expanding voting access, but you don't allow no excuse absentee balloting; you don't allow early voting. And I think a lot of voters in our state think that is somehow tied up in the legislative process. And that's why we have to explain to them, sorry, this is actually a constitutional issue that we have to once again put in front of the voters to hopefully approve so that we can then ratify their decision.

Where, as one of my colleagues said, we're not a, a state that does referenda regularly where we then ratify those results. So when we do as voters to change the Constitution, which happens very infrequently, these are extremely important issues, and one that I believe will benefit the voters of the State of Connecticut. And again, as I had said during the other Resolution, there have been studies, nonpartisan studies across the country that have shown clearly that there is absolutely no advantage on for either side for more absentee balloting, no excuse absentee balloting; because it encourages Democrats, Republicans, and affiliates whomever to vote and be a part of the process. And that's I think what we should be seeking to do.

Connecticut has always again prided itself on expanded access for voters, whether it's voter registration, whether it's being able to print out an absentee ballot application online, thank goodness, we're catching up to the 21st century here; and, and other means, but no excuse absentee

balloting or early voting, these are issues that we are not breaking new ground on, we are catching up to the rest of the country.

So it, the reason why I, I read what the, what will be on the ballot and I'll read it again, shall the Constitution of the State be amended to permit the General Assembly to allow each voter to vote by absentee ballot? It's such a simple question. But if approved, that's when this legislature comes back, but not this legislature but a future one comes back and will then determine what, what the guardrails are, what the boundaries are on this so that our electorate has, has a, has a sense of confidence that our elections are safe and secure as they have always been.

Senator Anwar was very eloquent when he talked about the amount of voter fraud, which is you'd have to get struck by lightning like 52 times before we had an incidence of voter fraud in this state. It's, it's not a common occurrence. And if one does it and they've been pointed out here in this debate before, they're caught and they're felons. And they go, hopefully, they go to jail for that. We want to preserve the integrity of our elections, want to make sure that the voters have confidence of it. But that doesn't mean that we can't provide them with the convenience and access and ability to vote in a way that makes them a part of the process. Our democracy thrives when more people are participating, our democracy dies when very few people come out and vote on elections. Because that's when the special interests run the show when only a few people come out to vote, and everybody else either can't vote, doesn't want to vote, doesn't have time to vote. This, this is how we ensure that our democracy thrives over the long term.

Last point I just want to make Madam President, is that practically why this is so important, is because right now, if in the State of Connecticut

based on our state constitution, if you want to vote by absentee, you have to be out of town all day on Election Day. And you have to be sick or have a physical disability and cannot make it in-person to the polls. Your religion forbids you from voting. You're an active duty in the Armed Forces or you're an election official. And I have plenty of constituents and I'm sure others do as well.

Let's say well, I might be out of town all day, but I'm really not sure, so can I vote absentee, can I not vote absentee, am I going to be, am I, if my vote going to be tossed out, am I going to be in trouble if I vote absentee? And somehow I come back, I'm back in Norwalk or Darien before 8 o'clock at night, do I have to stay at a town just so I'm abide by the letter of the law. So that frustrates voters and maybe they just don't vote then. Or somebody who says, you know, you know, I got, I got, I may get called for a meeting or I may have a family emergency or whatever the issue is; this gives people choices and you hear story after story after story on a very practical level, about people who want to exercise their American democratic right to vote.

And many times they feel like they can't do it because the restrictions that we have are just so onerous that it, they, they just end up not voting. And so, and I'm sure there is like many of us who have even heard people who go out to vote, I'm sorry, get called out of town even the day before the election, and then they don't even have the chance to vote absentee, because there is no time for them to do that. So again, we're, that's suppressing the vote and we don't want to do that.

So Madam President with the, the legislation that we've done in our, our other resolution for the constitutional amendment, on this constitutional amendment, on the Senate Bill 5 that we passed; these are very specific and strong steps in order to, to promote more participation in our democracy.

And I, and I, now we all may come out a little differently. But I, I know, everybody in the circle feels the same as that's exactly what we should be doing. We want to promote more participation in our democracy and that's how we stay healthy and that's how we stay active, and that's how we thrive in the state and in this nation, and I urge my colleagues to approve the Resolution. Thank you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator. Will you remark further?
Senator Kelly, good evening.

SENATOR KELLY (21ST):

Good evening Madam President, and thank you very much. You know, we're, we're very fortunate here in our great State of Connecticut and in our nation to live in a government of the people, by the people and for the people. That's what it's all about, the people.

While many times our government is not the cleanest, it still is the best. And people who live here, many of whom come from other places recognize that. And they just have to talk family history to know how blessed we are to be Americans and live in this great State. But our democracy is not a passive sport, its work. It requires involvement, it requires engagement. That's why we have the educational system we have so that we make sure that we have an enlightened electorate.

Unlike Senator Duff said, our government is best when we have more people involved in the process, and more people engaged in the process. Because when we have more voices at the table, I think we get not only more diversity, but we get a better product because it instills confidence and faith and trust when people are heard. But getting more people in the, in the process is not the only aspect

of how democracy works. I think we all heard and I think the, the, the act of voting is what is at the center of democracy. It's, it's our civic duty and that civic duty is not only a requirement of responsibility, but it means that we need to be as I said before engaged in this process.

Now, as people become engaged, we need to make sure that that vote that that person is going to cast represents the foundation of what our entire system is based upon. And there is nothing more important in government, in public service, than the concept of one person one vote. That's the way we make sure that every person who is a citizen has the opportunity to participate and have their voice heard, and the voice given the weight that it is accorded. We've all come off the past weekend, and as I've said, in many of the, the Memorial Day events, it's one of, to me it's, it's the most National Holiday because of the service and sacrifice of individuals who have given everything for the concept of not only freedom and liberty, but this notion that we live in a special, special place because of our government and the fact that there is one person one vote. That's why it's so important that everyone has access to that ballot box, and that's important, but so too is the weight, that every persons vote needs to represent 100% of that persons vote that they cast.

Now, when we look at these rules, in order to maintain the trust in the faith and the confidence that every person places in our government, I think when we look at election law, we need bipartisan solutions and, and bipartisan approaches, much the same way we look at redistricting, where we have a bipartisan Committee that evaluates and looks at the redistricting every 10 years. And so too hear, because what bipartisan would do is bring both all voices to the, to the table, just like when we look at the election process we want more, more voices, more people at the table; well, the same thing here. This Bill should be, should be fashioned and created

in a bipartisan atmosphere, not one side versus another. I think if we had bipartisan, if we have a 36 nothing vote, that would instill confidence, that would instill in the people the trust that I think is necessary. And I believe both parties want the same thing and that we want more people to participate in the process. But we want to make sure that when people participate that their vote is not watered down, and thereby the, the weight of that vote disenfranchised.

Now, I grew up in Stratford. I happened to be a resident still in Stratford and I read, well, I started reading the Bridgeport post in the telegram, now it's the Connecticut post. And over the years, living so close to the City of Bridgeport, the amount of absentee ballot issues are amazing. The newspaper has reported many times that absentee ballot, I'm reading an article from October 22, 2011. That absentee ballot fraud has a long history in Bridgeport, long history. There were events in 1988, 91, 94 there were two, 2001, several finds: people filling out ballots for other people. People collecting ballots or, or not delivering ballots, ballots being found after election day and not counting and this is the issue, Madam President, is that we need to make sure that when somebody votes, that it's actually their vote.

One of the most egregious issues happened in 2010, when 250 ballots were found to have been taken out on a vacant parcel of land in the City of Bridgeport. Now, if we go to the one person one vote, and I'm the person casting the ballot, that vote has 100% weight. But if that vote now is mixed in with 250 votes from people who don't live at a vacant lot, now I'm one of 251 and my 100% vote now has been reduced to less than 1%. I've been denied my voice. This Bill has to ensure, this Resolution has to ensure that voice. We need to make sure that that voice is heard. But when you have irregularities like this, it erodes the trust, the confidence that's necessary to make sure that our

government performs the way that we all hope it to, to perform.

In 2019, the Connecticut post did investigation into AB fraud in the City of Bridgeport and it found a number, number of irregularities. Some, some voters felt pressure in that election for voting for the Mayor. Dozens of errors in city records from names misspelling to incorrect birth dates. Over 20 ballot recipients whose names and birthdates as listed by the city do not turn up in the State Voter Registry. The city received ballots from two convicted felons out on parole and ineligible to vote. The city received democrat ballots from at least two voters listed as unaffiliated in state records, but yet still were cast in the Democratic primary. Some voters received absentee ballots that didn't remember requesting them. That's why mailing ballots was, is an issue. And at least one person may have voted twice, once by absentee and once in person.

This is where I think legitimate concerns arise. We need to look at ways to ensure that one person one vote is maintained. And before we move forward, make sure that that happens. Under the Resolution before us, the issue is a constitutional change. It's right to go to the people with the constitutional change, to give them their voice, but where I think the resolution falls down is that the implementation of what that process is going to look like comes back to the General Assembly Committee that is going to be ruled by Majority, rather than embedded objectively in a constitution or even in what I was talking about a bipartisan approach could have instead of going to the GAE Committee, which is going to be dominated by whatever political party runs the Majority here, it could have gone to the constitutionally embedded regulation review, which requires both parties to be part of the process and you need cooperation to get anything through.

Once again, making sure there are checks and balances in the, in the process to make sure that the people, the people's rights and opportunity to be heard is done. Without that format, without that security, just saying we're going to open this up, I think may do more harm than good given Connecticut's record of absentee ballot irregularities.

It's hard to say from my vantage point, living in a town of Strafford, reading the Connecticut post, knowing what goes on in a city adjacent to mine, that there is no such thing or that it's de minimis, because it's happens all the time and I only went back, what 20, 30, 33 years and it's replete. It goes from 1988 to as, as recent as 2019. So it's not an isolated incident here or there, it's more systematic, more systematic. And I think more conversation between parties would have rendered a better result. This Bill, this Resolution was aimed at getting more voices in the process from a electioneering perspective, but it was created without all the voices in the General Assembly. And we saw that tonight when every single Resolution that was put forward was shot down. So it's hard to believe that, that this is going to do what it's going to do as a Constitutional Amendment when the creation of it wasn't born from the same concept.

Madam President, I have serious reservations and this is not a decision not taken lightly. Because I do believe that the folks across Connecticut, the voters want more access. They want ease in voting, they have very, very stressful, I mean, living in Connecticut, whether you have kids, work, whatever, there is a lot of things going on and to make the, the voting rights easier, accessible, I think is a goal; and it's what we want. But at the same time, we need to make sure that their underpinnings of our democracy are maintained and that every vote has their rightful weight given to it. This Bill doesn't do that, this Resolution doesn't do that. And, and we know, based on the facts of what have happened over the past 31 years that there are

irregularities in this area. I'd certainly hope that we could have gotten to a bipartisan solution, but in the absence of that, Madam President. I would urge my colleagues to think as I did and to look at this, it's an important concept, but I can't support it in the manner that it's written. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Kelly. Will you remark further?
Good evening, Senator Looney.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH):

Good evening to you, Madam President. I rise in support of the Resolution embodying the proposed constitutional amendment. And Madam President, I want to first begin by, by commending Senator Flexer, who once again with the Government Administration Elections Committee has taken on an issue of great substance and importance and has, have studied it, and evaluated it and done a sophisticated policy analysis and brought it before us this evening with all of that learning and research combined in her presentation.

But Madam President, I think that a lot of the discussion this evening about objections to, to no excuse to universalize that absentee balloting and what, what the dangers might be or the like the security problems. I think much of that is premature, Madam President, because that will probably, properly be before the General Assembly in 2025 if they proposed constitutional amendment is adopted in 2024. So Madam President, we have, there are, when a constitutional amendment is, is proposed, there are either four or six key decision points in the process. And we already know this one will be six potentially rather than four because it's only four if the General Assembly passes the Resolution by three-fourths margin in each Chamber the first time through, then it, it's on the ballot,

the next general election. And if adopted, this one would then go to the General Assembly for its consideration after that, but because of the house vote falling seven short of what three-fourths would be, we know this will have to come back even if it passes this evening by whatever margin. It will have to come back to the 2023-2024 General Assembly, assuming it passes again there, that will be in a total of four debates on the Bill, two in each chamber in two different sessions. Then it goes before the voters in 2024. And then if it succeeds, there, the final decision on implementing it would be made by the 2025 General Assembly, which can, there is no guarantee about what that outcome might be, whether any change might result at all.

But what the constitutional amendment will do is, I think properly placed in the hands of the General Assembly should the people so choose in 2024, the authority to make laws regarding the extent of the use of absentee ballots, rather than have that control by the Constitution to make it a legislative matter, which I think is appropriate, which most other states do where they don't have the restrictive provisions in their state constitutions, but allow their legislatures to adopt rules regarding absentee balloting as well as other rules regarding voting. I think it's appropriate. That's what we are asking the people to do, should they adopt the constitutional amendment in 2024. And that would be a yes vote, is not necessarily a vote in favor of any particular change. A yes vote means, do you think the General Assembly should be able to use its expertise to decide what the proper procedures on absentee balloting should be? That's what a yes vote would mean on the 2024 constitutional amendment just for the, all the Members of the General Assembly voting on it, on, in the House and Senate this year and again in 2023 or 24. A yes vote doesn't mean necessarily an endorsement of any particular outcome. A yes vote means that we want to put a question before the public to see if they will agree to allow the

General Assembly to adopt legislation in this area and to, to make this part of our representative democracy.

Now, Madam President, we know that in many areas, there are, many states have different rules regarding ballot provisions and ballot initiatives so that the whole process of the so called direct democracy started in the Western States during the Progressive Era, more than a 100 years ago when there was so much concern that the state legislatures were under the, under the thumb and under the fist of some powerful vested interests, like mining interest and railroads, that those states, that grassroots activism rose up and amended their, their state constitutions to provide for, in some cases, initiative, in some cases referendum, and in some cases recall of elected officials. And sometimes people confuse initiative and recall, initiative, and referendum. But they're two very different things.

Initiative allows by petition a question to be placed on the ballot that would allow the creation of a law without an action of the state legislature or in some cases, in addition to that, to amend the Constitution of that state by a petition campaign to put a question on the, on the ballot. So some states have initiative regarding legislation, some states have initiative regarding constitutional amendments, some states have both referendum on the other hand which is sometimes confused with initiative is something entirely different. It gives the, the voters a chance again through the petition process, to seek to repeal an act of the legislature after its passage. So some states have both of those, some states also have the recall of elected officials, some states have one of the two, two of the three or whatever. Connecticut has chosen to in effect double down its bet on representative democracy, but we don't have any of those. Our soul ballot provision is when there is an amendment to the Constitution proposed and it

first requires the General Assembly to take action as by either a majority or by three quarters, depending on how long it will take to get the question to the ballot.

So all of the debate about what the changes could be or might be I, I think is very much premature. Because what the question really is about tonight is should the voting public be given an opportunity to decide whether the Constitution should be amended to allow the General Assembly to regulate in this area, rather than have it so prescribed that it is governed exclusively by the Constitution. That's the narrow question being that's before us tonight and before the House and will be before the General Assembly again in the next term, to try to prepare for the ballot question in 2024.

And earlier, Madam President, as you know, we, we adopted an, an earlier proposed constitutional amendment that came before us for the second time after having been approved in the 2019 General Assembly because that was approved again, this term that will be on the ballot in 2022 regarding early voting, enabling the 2023 General Assembly to take action adopting legislation to implement early voting, to make decisions about how far in advance of the election early voting should begin, how many early voting day sessions will there be, how many polling places will they be required to be, what will the hours of voting be, will it be the same as the 6 A.M. to 8 P.M. voting on regular election day; all of those will be questions for the legislature to take up in 2023. And presumably if that all passes, early voting could be implemented in 2024.

So it is a much people who are raising questions about alarm, about what broader and no excuse absentee balloting might mean, in terms of policy. All that is, is premature because what is actually really before us, really is none of that. It is just the issue of should the public have the right to choose that they will interest the General

Assembly with the power to make decisions in this area of voting, as most other states do. So it is, it is an issue that we are saying, will the public allow the 2025 General Assembly to legislate in this area where it is currently preempted from legislating?

So I think none of the other concerns about, the alarmist concerns about what no excuse absentee balloting might or could or feared to be; none of that is relevant now and won't be unless the issue is before the General Assembly in 2025 after approval of, of this again, by both Houses of the General Assembly in the next term, and then approval by the voters in, in 2024. So I ask for a positive vote Madam President, tonight to enable this process to go forward. We know it already must come before the General Assembly again, before the new General Assembly that will take office in 2023. And yes vote tonight is a yes to the request of allowing of having the voters be given the opportunity to allow a future General Assembly to legislate in this area. It is no more and no less, and I hope that this process can go forward. Thank you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Looney. Will you remark further? Will you remark further? If not, I will open the vote. Mr. Clerk, please announce the roll call vote.

CLERK:

Immediate roll call vote has been ordered in the Senate. This is House Joint Resolution 58. Immediate roll call vote has been ordered in the Senate on House Joint Resolution 58. Immediate roll call vote in the Senate on House joint resolution 58. Immediate roll call vote in the Senate, House Joint Resolution 58.

THE CHAIR:

Have all the Senators voted? Have all the Senators voted? The machine will be locked. Mr. Clerk, please announce the tally.

CLERK:

House Joint Resolution No. 58

Total number voting	36
Total voting Yea	27
Total voting Nay	9
Absent and not voting	0

THE CHAIR:

(Gavel) And the Resolution is adopted. Mr. Clerk?

CLERK:

Senate Agenda No. 1, Calendar 164, Substitute for Senate Bill No. 925, AN ACT PROHIBITING THE IMPORT, SALE AND POSSESSION OF AFRICAN ELEPHANTS, LIONS, LEOPARDS, BLACK RHINOCEROS, WHITE RHINOCEROS AND GIRAFFES as amended by Senate Amendment Schedule "B" LCO No. 888 and House Amendment Schedule "A" LCO No. 9812.

THE CHAIR:

And good evening Senator Cohen and we throw you to the lions again, Madam.

SENATOR COHEN (12TH):

In the jungle, the mighty jungle, Madam President. Good to see you tonight. Madam President, oh my. Madam President, I move acceptance of the Joint Committee's Favorable Report and passage of the Bill in concurrence with the House.

THE CHAIR:

And the question is on passage. Will you remark?

SENATOR COHEN (12TH):

So, Madam President, this is a Bill that we recently passed out of this Chamber and went down to the House. There has been an Amendment to the penalty provision under this Bill, which, you know, as, as I went through last time, is a Bill that addresses trophy hunting. We want to ensure that we're protecting these species affectionately known as our Big 6 from Africa. So the penalty provision that has been changed now adds as a first offense and infraction. It's a graduated penalty. The next offense as a misdemeanor and third offense would be a Class D felony. And so I move adoption, Madam President. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Cohen. Will you remark further on the Bill that is before the Chamber? Will you remark further on the Bill that is before the Chamber? And I think perhaps we should stand at ease for a moment.

All right, so we have the legislation on the board. Senator Berthel, would you like to remark on the legislation, sir?

SENATOR BERTHEL (32ND):

Yes, good evening. Thank you, Madam President. The Clerk is in possession of an Amendment, it is LCO 8895. I would ask that the Clerk please call the Amendment and that I'd be given leave of the Chamber to summarize.

THE CHAIR:

And Mr. Clerk, if you would kindly call that LCO 8895 sir?

CLERK:

LCO No. 8895, Senate Schedule "C".

THE CHAIR:

Senator Berthel.

SENATOR BERTHEL (32ND):

Thank you Madam President. I move adoption of the Amendment and waive reading and again, seek leave to summarize.

THE CHAIR:

Please proceed sir.

SENATOR BERTHEL (32ND):

Thank you Madam President. Madam President, this is a strike all amendment that I think will ultimately address a very serious concern that has continued to be brought, has been brought before this Chamber before and downstairs and continues to be a problem in Connecticut. And essentially, the Amendment is calling for the Commissioner of DEEP to adopt regulations in accordance with Chapter 54 of the General Statutes to create a hunting season for black bear in Connecticut.

And I know that this has been a contentious issue in the past for many reasons. There are many animal advocates and I am an animal advocate myself, I've said this before. I've owned many cats and dogs and believe that pets certainly have a place, and have adopted animals in the past. But bears are not pets, they never will be. They are dangerous, they are risk to the public safety. We have a persistent problem that gets worse and worse in Connecticut each year. DEEP has reported to us through, through bear sighting reports and through tagging activities that they go through across the state. And we know

that the bear population increases by about 10% every year, and it's a persistent problem that I think the time has come for us to, to address. This should not be a partisan Democrat versus Republican issue. Bears are truly nonpartisan in their behavior. They are going into towns and cities everywhere in Connecticut.

You know, former Senator Fasano used to joke that he couldn't wait to see a bear down in his district. And low and behold, very recently, he informed me that he finally saw a bear down in his district and he's on the coast as you know, on Long Island Sound. We here up in Litchfield County, I represent that fine part of Connecticut with Senator Miner and a few others here in the circle. We hear almost on a daily basis from constituents who are having, having issues with bears. And this is not just, oh I saw a bear in the woods. This is bears that are causing property damage. They are breaking into homes, literally ending up in people's kitchens. They are destroying personal property, beehives, bird feeders going on to decks. I believe that Senator Witkos can talk about a bear almost being in his pool, his swimming pool in his backyard.

More seriously than that, if that's not serious enough, we also have regular occurrences reported to us either in our legislative offices or through our law enforcement about family pets being taken by, by bears, dogs, cats, rabbits. And then I live in a, in a district and represent a district that has a large farming community. And I have my farmers calling me and saying that they are losing small livestock to bears and bears are breaking into their barns where they're, they're supposed to be able to protect their livestock like, like chickens and rabbits from, from being assaulted I guess by a bear.

One of the other arguments that is routinely made with respect to bears is that they were here before us. And I would argue that the bears were not here

before us in our, our towns. They might have been up in the woods and in the, in the hills in the northwest corner, and the, and the northeast corner of Connecticut, but they certainly were not, were not in my neighborhood. And we have evidence of this based upon what's provided to us by DEEP and other experts.

As I understand it and I am not an expert on the habitats of bears, bears will mark out, male bears will mark out a territory and they expand and they protect that territory. So if we continue to do nothing and we ignore this problem, it is very sensible and reasonable to understand that these bears will continue to expand into areas that are not their natural habitat. It's not natural for a bear to live on Capitol Avenue, yet we saw one a year-and-a-half ago. Why was that bear in Hartford, it was looking for a place to create its habitat and to create the area, the territory that, that it defends.

So if we continue to ignore this problem, I think that we, we put into, into play and at risk, the more serious and most serious aspect of not having a properly regulated and administered program for a bear hunting season, like we do for the hunting of deer and certain types of birds and coyotes and whole bunch of other animals in Connecticut that are properly administered, they're monitored by our DEEP. But what we put at risk here is that sooner or later, and I would say probably not, it's not going to be a, an if, it's going to be when, we're going to wake up one morning to a terrible story on the news about a person who has been mauled or killed by a bear. And I don't think that we can, we can continue to make the argument in a responsible manner to say, oh, we shouldn't be hurting, this is, these bears, they were here before us, and we have to learn to adapt and whatnot. The bear is not going to learn from us, the bear knows, and particularly as they come into our more populated neighborhoods that those wonderful recycling and

garbage bins that we put out every week to pick up our garbage become the, the buffet for a bear. I have that at my own house. I have a bear that visits. This bear has figured out when the can is full, knocks it over, and every morning I go out or my, one of my sons goes out, and we clean up after the bear.

And someone would say, well, Senator Berthel, put the garbage can in the, in the garage and get it and so the bear won't come back. Well, the bear will break into the garage if it really wants to. If you've ever seen a full grown black bear in Connecticut, you know that they have the ability to do that. And I think that we have a responsibility to allow DEEP to come back to us using some of the, some of the guidelines provided in this Amendment to come back with us with a reasonable program for the hunting of black bear. This is not for sport, this is not for game. This should be looked at as an opportunity to protect the public, and this should be looked at as an opportunity to enhance and improve public safety. I do not want to be standing before this Chamber at some point in time in the future in an emergency session, where we're called in because now we have to authorize a, a bear hunting season through DEEP.

We have an opportunity to fix this today with something that is very reasonable. We need to get past the notion that bears are friendly, they are pets, that we need to learn to live with them. They don't want to learn to live with us, they're taking advantage of what we're making available through the refuse that we put out, the fact that, that we put bird feeders and some of us have beehives, and we have wonderful things that attract them. And it's unreasonable to say, well, we shouldn't put bird feeders out and we shouldn't put beehives out, and we should completely adapt to allow this bear to be in our backyards. And I can't show you because it's not possible, but I can show you, I could show you if it were possible a video of a bear running

through my backyard, a number of months ago, when my children were outside, my elderly parents were outside and thank God my neighbor saw this and said, hey, there is a bear coming through the yard. And we all went and, and sought safety, refuge from; it was a juvenile bear, but it was still a bear in my backyard.

So Madam President, I would ask that we, we give this consideration. You know, I would entertain a, an option to even perhaps take this Amendment and if we, if we don't want to necessarily strike everything from the original intent of this Bill, that we could add this to a Bill, that we could add this language. Because I think this is so important right now, I, I really am terrified of what is, again, not a when, but an if; I'm sorry, not an if but when, when we're going to see someone get, get terribly hurt or, or killed by a black bear when we have the ability as a legislative body to again allow DEEP to do what it has done for the hunting of other animals in Connecticut for the purpose of population control, which will, which will work. It's been done in other states and it's been proven to help keep the population stable. We have an opportunity to, to fix this today and I think that we should consider this very seriously. So Madam President, I move adoption. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Berthel. Will you mark further on the Amendment? Senator Miner.

SENATOR MINER (30TH):

Thank you, Madam President. I too rise in support of the Amendment. I could probably go on until tomorrow about stories, which are not tales, they're truths of my constituents sending me pictures, telling me of events where they have been, their animals have been harmed, their property has been harmed. And I want to make it clear, my

constituents don't want Litchfield County eradicated of bears. That's not what they're about. They recognized that the population is out of control and because it's out of control, this tool is not available to the agency, it's not available to the public.

Simple story, myself, Sunday morning on the phone with a friend in Long Island. My yellow lab is on the couch, my new puppy is on the floor. The screen door is open to the porch and I can see the back of a bear from here to that emblem, walking in front of the door. And now I got a choice to get to the door before my yellow lab gets to the door because I know what's going to happen. She's going through the screen door and I'd be lucky if she doesn't get killed. So this isn't really about whether they're fun to see, fun to be around; the numbers are out of control. And I think this issue merits a vote. I will ask that the vote be taken by roll. And again, I support the Amendment tonight. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Miner, and we will take a roll call vote on the Amendment. Senator Witkos.

SENATOR WITKOS (8TH):

Thank you Madam President. I also rise in support of the Amendment that's before us this evening. This is not a new issue that has been before this General Assembly. And as a matter of fact, I know a few years ago, we had a very difficult time in trying to get a vote on a Bill. And so subsequent to that, I formed a working group that discussed on how we could potentially handle a bear population here in the state. And I knew at the time that anything that had to do with the euthanization of a bear wasn't going to fly in this Chamber. So we concentrated on creating a, a statewide statute to, to disallow the intentional feeding of bears and there were some other things involved. And I

submitted that to the Environment Committee this year and I was very disappointed that the Bill didn't even get a Public Hearing.

And so as lawmakers, you know, we take opportunities such as one that's being presented to us this evening, to make sure that the voices of our constituents are heard. And I will share with you that in the district that I represent which borders, it's partly in Litchfield County and in the northwest corner, central part of the state. I've boarded of the Massachusetts, my towns border state of Massachusetts. We have the highest reported number of bear sightings in the state. And I think part of that is because a lot of the other towns, they don't report every time they see a bear, they're just so used to it. But depending on the community, they, they do tend to report them. And that is why one of the provisions in the Bill, that's the Amendment that's being contemplated is that if the community sees a 25% increase and the number of reported sightings from the previous year, that's a huge margin; 25% increase, then DEEP has to address the bear population. And I've been to countless forums in my communities where DEEP came out and did a presentation and the citizens are upset. They don't feel that they're being protected, they're looking to the state, they're looking to local law enforcement to do something so they feel safe in their own yards and letting their children go out and play in their own yards. They say a person's home is their castle, except when wildlife is involved. That's certainly not the case. And local law enforcement says well, we're not really allowed to do anything, we're stuck.

DEEP, if they can come out, and police will come out and it's very rare that they make a, that they get there in time to make a relocation, but through the forums, we've been educated that the bears can travel tens of miles every day. And that the bear population in the State of Connecticut doubles in size every seven years, doubles; that's huge. Just

this past few weeks, I've probably seen a bear five or six times in my backyard. And as Senator Berthel alluded to, he was already checking out the pool to go for a swim this particular season. I didn't have any water in it yet at the time, so I just kind of looked and I, I was outside, but I too have small animals. I have a 7-month-old puppy that you know, I was trying to get myself in between the puppy and the bear because I didn't want to lose the, lose the dog. I lost a dog last year to a coyote.

And speaking of coyotes, you know, we're allowed to hunt coyotes in our state year round for, there is a trapping season but then there is also another season for coyotes. We can hunt pheasants, we can hunt deer, and those other than the coyotes don't pose dangers to people, but bears pose dangers. And some of the comments meant, mentioned earlier before that those dangers are entering somebody's home. That's one of the qualifiers where somebody can take action upon themselves. Entering into your car. People think it is funny seeing the videos. That's happened in my district twice within the past three weeks, and I've, I've told my wife make sure you close the garage door when you leave while she swears to God that she only had the door open for less than an hour. My puppy was going bonkers inside the house, so I went inside, opened up the door from the house into the garage and there was a bear, had opened up my garage fridge, ate the macaroni salad, I guess I was a pretty good chef, it ate that, pulled out the gallon of milk, he likes milk, and was taking some soup out heading out into the yard and ate the Chinese food that was in the refrigerator. He doesn't like ribs because he left those alone which, you know, who knows what they're, they're going for.

But the fact that story, the point of that story is that, this is twice now I've had a bear enter my garage on a limited timeframe and opened up a refrigerator. There is not a scratch on the refrigerator. You never could tell that somebody

isn't there if I, if I didn't know any bear, I would have said it was my, one of my kids being lazy and dropped something and they didn't bother pick it up, and they just, they left. But that's certainly not the case.

This morning, my neighbor, emailed, our neighborhood. We actually have a watch for bear sightings that far too often people have to report when there is a bear in the, in the neighborhood because everybody starts to pull their dogs and cats in their home because they don't, they're in fear of losing those animals. And so I think the Bill is, the Amendment is, I keep saying the Bill; but the, the Amendment is well intentioned. We've got to provide some sense of comfort to these, to these residents and give law enforcement and the EnCon officers the tools that they need to protect our citizens.

I was here in this Chamber when we passed a law that barred wild animals for being domesticated animals. If you may recall someone, unfortunate incident, which a woman's face was ripped from her, from her body from, from a chimpanzee. And I don't want to have to vote on something as mentioned by Senator Berthel on an emergency basis because we've neglected to protect and allow law enforcement and the EnCon officers and the people to dutifully protect their own home and their own children.

And I'm going to end with this one story, and this happened about three weeks ago up in one of the Northern towns. A bear came in and ate and killed the gentleman's goats. And then the bear came back, they reported to EnCon. By the time they got there, the, the bear had left. And then the bear came back and killed the chickens a few days later. And so EnCon again came up and was doing an investigation, EnCon meaning the Environmental Conservation Police, part of the DEEP unit. And he says, if I see that bear again, I'm going to shoot it. And then you'll, it'll be here when you get here. And they said,

you're not allowed to do that. And he said, well, I thought I'm allowed to protect my livestock. They said, that would be retaliatory if you see the bear again, you're just shooting because you don't want him on your property.

Now, if that's the, the stance that we're going to be taking, that people feel like they can't even protect their own animals. I, I just, I'm afraid and I will work with anybody who wants to come up with some language that will get us to the point where local law enforcement, EnCon or the homeowner has the right to protect themselves, their property, and their family. And I urge strong support of the Amendment. Thank you Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Witkos. Will you remark further on the Amendment? Senator Martin.

SENATOR MARTIN (31ST):

Thank you Madam President. I am not going to take a lot of time, Madam President, but I have to say it is time. We're hearing these stories from this circle, from people who live and who have experienced what it's like to have a bear in their community. I come from a city that has over 60,000 people. I have personally have had bears in my backyard in two different homes that I, that I own. I have been contacted by friends who live on the other side of town who say, who had notified me knowing that we were addressing the bear Bill up here in past sessions and they were telling me, Henry, you need to do something about it.

I have an 85-year-old mother that lives with me. I am away with my mother or with my wife, we are away and I get a photograph from my neighbor that says, look what is in your backyard? And this bear goes from one slider to the other slider with my mom inside. It is time. My son just bought a house,

not too far away from me, maybe four or five miles. What does he have? He has a bear walking. First week he was there, a bear walking through his neighborhood or through his yard I should say. And the bear has been back again and again.

Madam President, it is time that we do something here today before the good Senator said it's not if but when before somebody gets hurt. It's time. Thank you Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Martin. Will you remark further on the Amendment? Senator Cohen.

SENATOR COHEN (12TH):

Thank you Madam President. I rise in great concern over this Amendment. Yes, our black bear population is on the rise in Connecticut, and folks are seeing them more than ever before. I'm concerned about a number of issues, not, No. 1 are black bear human interaction, thankfully has not ended in a life lost in the State of Connecticut. And that's because black bear generally are docile creatures. They want food, they're looking for bird feeders, they're looking for garbage cans that are filled with food, they're ready to knock them over. They're smart creatures looking for honey and other things of that nature.

And so we've had these discussions before in the Chamber where we've talked about the need to perhaps protect farmland from these creatures that come on our property. What can we do to deter them? Have we done enough in the State of Connecticut to employ non-lethal methods of deterrence, known as aversive conditioning? We had a Bill before the Chamber a couple of years ago, which we passed out of the Chamber, unfortunately didn't get taken up in the House. That would have further explored and had our DEEP implementing more of these non-lethal methods

that are used in other parts of the country and other countries themselves. Rubber bullets, bear dogs, different methods that we are not currently employing here in Connecticut.

I worry about the homeowner that suddenly feels the need to protect themselves or things that they can hunt black bear with no prior experience, simply because they're starting to see bear traveling in their backyard. What does that mean for safety? What does that mean for the safety of others? Inexperienced hunters suddenly feeling that because we have legalized hunting of that black bear, that they can shoot these animals with very little experience, I worry about that.

There are other methods and there are ways in which our farming community and folks can protect their dogs, their loved ones, and they will not be held accountable for doing so. We have nuisance statutes that we've talked about at length in our Environment Committee and we do know that we have self-defense statutes that can prevent folks from being held accountable for killing a black bear.

But these are beautiful creatures that deserve the utmost respect. I just do not believe that they should be killed. I do not believe in a hunting season on black bear. I'm fundamentally against it at this point because I do not believe we have employed all of the methods that we need to in the state to deter these animals. And so for that reason, Madam President, I will be voting no on this Amendment before us tonight, and I would urge my colleagues to do the same.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Cohen. I believe there was a request for a roll call vote, and so I will open the vote on the Amendment. Mr. Clerk, would you please call the roll.

CLERK:

Immediate roll call vote has been ordered in the Senate. This is Senate Amendment "C" on Senate Bill 925. Immediate roll call vote in the Senate on Senate Amendment "C" this is a Senate Bill 925. Immediate roll call vote in the Senate on Senate Bill 925, Senate Amendment "C". Immediate roll call vote in the Senate.

THE CHAIR:

Have all the Senators voted? Have all the Senators voted? The machine will be locked. Mr. Clerk, please announce the tally.

CLERK:

Senate Bill 925, Senate Amendment "C"

Total number voting	35
Total number voting Yea	8
Total voting Nay	27
Absent and not voting	1

THE CHAIR:

And the Amendment fails (gavel). Will you remark further on the Bill before the Chamber? Will you remark further on the Bill before the Chamber? Senator Duff.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Thank you Madam President. Madam President, Senate stand at ease?

THE CHAIR:

Senate will stand at ease.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Thank you. Thank you Madam President. I just wanted to make sure the Senator from Enfield did not want to speak. Thank you Madam President. Since we actually have the opportunity for a second time around on this Bill in the Senate, the first time I failed to thank folks who were so instrumental in bringing this forward.

First and foremost, I want to thank Senator Cohen and Representative Gresko in the Environment Committee for their work in helping with this Bill. I very much appreciate it. It has been a labor of love for many years. And it's gone through this Chamber a number of times and has not passed the House that finally did last night and had a disagreeing action. So it came back up here. But I want to thank them really for their hard work and understanding of why this is so important to many advocates.

Also want to thank Senator Looney for his support as well, because it's been, not been a Bill that is has been an easy one over the years, we've had to do it a few times. Also want to just take a moment to thank Shirley Thomas, [inaudible] Joe Quinn, Courtney Coleman and Vinnie Morrow and others for their help and support and advice on this Bill, as well as the friends of animals and others, Humane Society of Connecticut who have been instrumental in their support as well.

So I want to just take that moment to make sure that I recognize all those who have played such a strong role in this and again urge passage of the Bill. Thank you Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Duff. Will you remark further? Will you remark further? If not, I will open the voting machine. Mr. Clerk, please announce the roll call vote.

CLERK:

Immediate roll call vote has been ordered in the Senate. Immediate roll call vote has been ordered in the Senate. This is Senate Bill 925 as amended by "B". Immediate call vote in the Senate, Senate Bill 925 as amended by Senate Schedule "B". Immediate roll call vote in the Senate, Senate Bill 925. Immediate roll call vote in the Senate.

Immediate roll call vote has been ordered in the Senate. This is Senate Bill No. 925 as amended by Senate Amendment Schedule "B" and House Amendment Schedule "A". Immediate roll call vote in the Senate, Senate Bill 925 as amended by Senate Amendment Schedule "B" and House Amendment Schedule "A". Immediate roll call vote in the Senate.

THE CHAIR:

Have all the Senators voted? Have all the Senators voted? The machine is locked. Mr. Clerk, please announce the tally.

CLERK:

Senate Bill 925 as amended by Senate Schedule "B" and House Amendment "A"

Total number voting	35
Total number voting Yea	31
Total voting Nay	4
Absent and not voting	1

THE CHAIR:

(Gavel) legislation is passed. Mr. Clerk?

CLERK:

Page 45, Calendar No. 248, Substitute for Senate Bill No. 999, AN ACT CONCERNING A JUST TRANSITION TO CLIMATE-PROTECTIVE ENERGY PRODUCTION AND COMMUNITY

INVESTMENT as amended by Senate Schedule "A" LCO No. 8860 and House Amendment Schedule "A" LCO No. 9659.

THE CHAIR:

Good evening Senator Kushner.

SENATOR KUSHNER (24TH):

Good evening Madam President. Madam President, I move acceptance of the Joint Committee's Favorable Report and passage of the Bill in concurrence with the House.

THE CHAIR:

And the question is on passage. Will you remark?

SENATOR KUSHNER (24TH):

Thank you Madam President. House Amendment "A" LCO 9659 made two changes to the Bill that this Chamber passed on May 19. The first change deleted language that would have made a developer.

THE CHAIR:

Senator, we're just going to stand at ease for just a moment until we have the legislation up on the board, because I'm not seeing it yet.

The Senate will come to order. Senator Kushner, we have a Bill, we have your Bill on the board. Feel free to jump right in.

SENATOR KUSHNER (24TH):

Thank you Madam President. I will jump back in where I left off. In describing House Amendment "A" LCO 9659, we made two changes to the Bill that this Chamber passed on May 19. The first change deleted language that would have made a developer who knowingly submitted a certification containing false

information subject to criminal penalties under Connecticut General Statutes Section 53a to 157a, namely a Class D felony.

The second change was deletion of the final section of the Bill, which would have amended that criminal statute to define the crime of false statement on a sworn certification, that being the sort of the certificate required by this Bill. This Bill adds renewable energy projects to our existing prevailing wage requirements codified in general, Connecticut General Statutes Section 31 through 53.

This existing law already contains the same criminal penalty that is under 53a to 157 for filing a certified payroll which the employer knows to be fake. Further, by including these projects in our existing prevailing wage laws, there will be significant penalties for employers who violate those laws including debarment, pursuant to Section 31-53a.

The House voted to remove the additional criminal penalties and to rely on the existing penalty scheme for violations of our prevailing wage law for these renewable energy projects. The substance of the Bill that we passed is otherwise unchanged. I urge my colleagues to pass Senate Bill 999 in concurrence with the House. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Kushner. Will you remark further? Senator Sampson.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH):

Good evening Madam President. So the Bill that we have before us, we've seen before is Senate Bill 999. We've had a, a relatively short but definitely an exciting debate on the Bill and the title and the conflict in those two things. And now it's back before us because the House amended it. I, I'm a

little puzzled Madam President, and why the House would choose to remove a penalty for making a false statement. It seems to me that's exactly the kind of thing that you'd want to have a penalty for. Can you give us some insight, through you Madam President, what the House was thinking when they took that Section out of the Bill, and why it was so important to, to send it back up to us to be debated again? Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Kushner.

SENATOR KUSHNER (24TH):

Thank you Madam President. I think it came back to us because they decided that it was unnecessary to have that additional penalty, and that we could rely on the penalties that currently exist under the existing prevailing wage laws. So I think, you know, obviously anytime they amend something in the House, it's going to come back up to us.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Sampson.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH):

Thank you, Madam President. I appreciate that answer. And I, I completely understand what, what you just described. The only thing I would say is that the penalties that exist in the current prevailing wage, prevailing wage laws that are adopted in this legislation before us are fine. But the whole point of this Bill is to establish a requirement for these folks that want to invest in renewable energy projects to get involved in what is defined as a community benefits agreement in this underlying Bill. And the whole point is that in order for you to do that, they, they have to swear to and attest to various, you know, requirements.

It, it just seems odd to me that we would establish the requirements and then we would go ahead and say, in an action taken in the other Chamber, knowing that it's going to endanger this Bill, to send it back up here by removing the penalty. To me, I often find it puzzling when we put requirements in statute with no penalty at all. It's like, well, now it's just a suggestion, rather than something that is an actual requirement.

But be that as it may, it doesn't change the Bill substantively for me, Madam President. I will just reiterate my comments from our, our previous debate. The first thing I would say is I'm a little dismayed that this Bill comes back to us with the same exact title after I made it completely clear that the title is inappropriate. It is not befitting this Chamber. First off, it says it's an Act concerning a just transition. And I don't like seeing the word "just" in a Bill title because it creates an implication, an implication that only those in support of the Bill are just and anyone that is in opposition is unjust. So that doesn't belong in a Bill title that is before this Chamber, it is not conducive to legitimate debate, it is putting a bias or a spin on the substance of the Bill.

And the other thing that's even more of an affront to my intelligence is that the title of the Bill is in direct contradiction to what the Bill does. The Bill says, "An act concerning a just transition to climate protective, protective, climate protective energy production." And as I pointed out the last time we voted on this Bill, that would lead any person who is reading the title to believe that this Bill is pro-environment, when in fact this Bill is anything but pro-environment. I'm actually disappointed to see that the League of Conservation Voters has not weighed in on this Bill. I'm also not surprised by that.

What it does, Madam President, is it requires all but the absolute smallest renewable energy project

to now fall under the requirements for project labor agreements. So this Bill in fact has one purpose and one purpose only, and that is to make sure that union or organized labor is going to be involved in these renewable energy projects all the way down to the absolute smallest project, which of course is going to have an impact on municipalities and the cost for when they want to enter into these agreements.

And more importantly, Madam President, what it's going to do is it's going to tell people that are in this industry that want to invest in doing renewable energy, that they're not welcome here because they don't get to do it on their terms. They've got to fall into these guidelines. If we were truly interested in increasing the amount of renewable energy and a just transitioned to climate protective energy production as the Bill title says, we would be doing the opposite of the Bill language. We would be trying to encourage people to come here and engage in these projects to create more renewable energy. This Bill does the exact opposite, Madam President, and it's a very simple vote. If you vote in favor of this Bill what you're voting for is you're voting to increase the regulations on people that would otherwise invest in renewable energy projects in our state. If you vote no, you stand for common sense and saying that we don't want to do that because we would like people to get involved in those projects. Thank you Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator. Will you remark further? Will you remark further? If not, I will open the vote and Mr. Clerk, if you would please call the roll call vote?

CLERK:

Immediate roll call vote has been ordered in the Senate on Senate Bill 999 as amended by Senate "A"

and House "A". Immediate roll call vote has been ordered in the Senate on Senate Bill 999 as amended by Senate "A" and House Amendment "A". Immediate roll call vote in the Senate, Senate Bill 999 as amended by Senate "A" and House "A". Immediate roll call vote. Immediate roll call vote has been ordered in the Senate. This is Senate Bill 999 as amended by Senate "A" and House Amendment "A". Immediate roll call vote in the Senate, Senate Bill 999 as amended by Senate "A" and House "A". Immediate roll call vote in the Senate.

THE CHAIR:

Have all the Senators voted? Have all the Senators voted? The machine is locked. Mr. Clerk, please announce the tally.

CLERK:

Senate Bill 999 as amended by Senate "A" and House "A"

Total number of voting	36
Total voting Yea	24
Total voting Nay	12
Absent and not voting	0

THE CHAIR:

(Gavel) Legislation is passed. Mr. Clerk?

CLERK:

Page 13, Calendar No. 347, Senate Bill No. 940, AN ACT CONCERNING STATE AGENCY COMPLIANCE WITH PROBATE COURT ORDERS. There are no amendments.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Duff.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Thank you Madam President. Thank you Senator Needleman. Madam President if we can peaty this Bill, please?

THE CHAIR:

So ordered.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Thank you Madam President. I have two more items to mark please.

THE CHAIR:

Please proceed.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Thank you Madam President. On Calendar Page 2, Calendar 96, Senate Bill 261, like to mark this item go.

THE CHAIR:

So ordered.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Followed by Calendar Page 12, Calendar 335, Senate Bill 1086, like to mark that item go.

THE CHAIR:

So ordered.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Thank you Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk?

CLERK:

Page 2, Calendar No. 96, Substitute of Senate Bill No. 261, AN ACT CONCERNING RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES. There are amendments.

THE CHAIR:

Good evening, Senator Haskell.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH):

Good evening, Madam President. It's good to see you this evening. The, I, Madam President I apologize. We are on Bill 261, AN ACT CONCERNING RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES; is that correct?

THE CHAIR:

We are indeed.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH):

Thank you. Madam President, I move acceptance of the Joint Committee's Favorable Report and passage of the Bill.

THE CHAIR:

And the question is on passage. Will you remark?

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH):

Yes. Thank you Madam President. The Clerk is in possession of an Amendment LCO No. 9956. I ask that the Clerk please call the Amendment and I'd be given leave of the Chamber to summarize.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk?

CLERK:

LCO No. 9956, Senate Schedule "A".

THE CHAIR:

Senator Haskell.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH):

Thank you Madam President. Before I go into the substance of the Bill, let me take a moment to thank all of the many hands that went into this very large piece of legislation before us. First of all, Representative Roland Lamar, the Co-Chair of the Transportation Committee in the House, has been a pleasure to work with on a variety of Bills by including and especially these larger, these larger packages to pass to the Chamber. I also want to thank Senator Somers as Ranking Member, Representative Carney of course, who, both of whom have been steadfast allies as we work on this very bipartisan Bill. And I appreciate the constant stream of communication that has allowed this Bill to become better.

I also want to thank some folks who don't necessarily often get to speak in the microphone or don't get recognized on the Senate floor. But our clerk in the Transportation Committee, [inaudible] has been such a hero as I have tried to take over the Transportation Committee halfway through the session, bringing me up to speed on a whole host of issues and making sure that we are well prepared by the time any legislation reaches the floor.

I also want to thank my, my lifelines over the last 24 hours and the last few months and that's Katrina Stratton from the Legislative Commissioner's Office, Heather Poole and George Myles from the Office of Legislative Research, Patrick Melon from the Office

of Fiscal Analysis. And of course, Millie Torres, who is the liaison from the Department of Motor Vehicles.

With that, Madam President, this is a Bill with, let's see, 66 sections. I will do the Chamber the favor of not summarizing each and every one of them. But I do want to go over just a few highlights.

We know Madam President that one of the lessons learned from this pandemic is that people really appreciate the flexibility to participate in driver's education courses at a time that is convenient for them. Of course, we want to make sure that that driver's education is substantive, that it's interactive. But for those who work jobs, 9 to 5 or perhaps taking on shifts at other hours, it can be really hard and sometimes cost prohibitive to attend in-person driver's ed courses.

This Bill takes the lessons learned from the pandemic and extends online driver's ed availability, so long as it's interactive, making sure that we continue to prepare drivers to operate their car safely on the roads while making sure that that schedule is flexible.

Madam President, I also want to point to Section 17, which I think is critically important. It comes from a recommendation from the Department of Motor Vehicles that we add certain human trafficking felonies to the list of offenses that result in lifetime disqualification in to earn a commercial driver's license in order to conform with federal law. This is an important piece of federal law to address the crisis of human trafficking, and I'm glad that our state can play a small part in that.

A few other pieces that I did want to mention, Madam President, thank you. One of which is allowing the Department of, allowing DEEP Energy and Environmental Protection here in Connecticut to classify certain vehicles as emergency vehicles. We

know that there have been some instances where there is an environmental crisis and DEEP employees need to respond urgently to the scene and unfortunately, sometimes those vehicles have been stuck in traffic, unable to move quickly and respond expeditiously.

Section 34 and 35 addresses that. I want to thank Senator Osten for her work on Section 37 of this Bill, which requires vehicles to yield to the right of way of a bus traveling in the same direction when the bus appropriately signals. I want to thank Senator Hartley for her hard work on addressing out of state registration issues here in the State of Connecticut. We know that communities with high mill rates very often see their residents try to avoid high motor vehicle taxes and we want to make sure that municipalities have tools available to them to crack down on that noncompliance.

I've been going on probably for too long, but we know also that many cities in Connecticut are struggling with catalytic converter thefts. Too many people wake up in the morning, put their keys in their car, and the car won't start. We're cracking down on that by making sure that vehicle recyclers can't receive a catalytic converter unless the seller provides proof that he or she owns the vehicle or is an authorized agent of the vehicles owner.

There is more to talk about Madam President. I look forward to the remarks from my good friend, the Ranking Member, but I, I urge my colleagues to support the Bill. I urge my colleagues to support the Amendment and then the underlying legislation. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you. Good evening, Senator Somers.

SENATOR SOMERS (18TH):

Good evening Madam President. I rise in support of, of this Amendment and I urge my colleagues in the Senate to support this. Obviously, this is a very large Bill with many, many sections, but this is the work of the entire session in a bipartisan fashion with input from legislators from both sides of the aisle to try to craft legislation that is attuned to the people's needs in the State of Connecticut and also somewhat on some level modernizing how the DMV does business here in Connecticut.

I would like to highlight a few other areas that the good Chair did not have an opportunity to, to touch on and some of the things that I think are important in addition to the highlights from Senator Haskell are the ability to now have a save our lakes commemorative plate, that will be for a small charge, and it will allow portion of that sale to defray the costs that will go back into DMV to defray the cost of production and issuance.

We also are trying to make things easier for constituents here in the State of Connecticut, so we have an opportunity to issue credentials without the applicant personally appearing. It'll expand the circumstances under which the DMV can actually renew and duplicate credentials without having the applicant have to come and wait in line at DEEP for, sorry, DMV for X amount of time and take time off from work. We're trying to streamline the availability of services that the DMV provides.

In addition to that, we have looked at doing some extensions on things like emission testing deadlines, when perhaps the emission testing deadline facilities are closed or there is not many available, we're looking to extend those.

We also are allowing boat dealers to register their boats and give you the decal that you need when you register your vote for the first time, that's something new. We're looking at parents or allowing parents or guardians of children of any age with a

disability to be able to apply for accessible parking, which is something that you could place in the windshield of your car. We are also looking at things like veterans license plates in order to issue special plates and I believe this was Representative Borer that was, was spearheading this, and aligning those plates that have to do with defining a period of veteran with the federal standards.

We also have an opportunity again for our veterans to allow DMV to waive license and ID fees for veterans attending these one day events that everyone comes to right now, the DMV does not have an opportunity to waive the fees associated with whatever it is the veteran is looking at where other state agencies have that ability. Under this law, the DMV would also be able to waive those fees.

There is a lot of information in this Bill. But again, I want to say that all of the language had been worked on for a very long time. The stakeholders that these, these sections affect have all been on board for the legislation and it has received full bipartisan support in our Committee. And I urge our, our circle here to support this Bill going forward. Thank you very much, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you so much Senator Somers. Will you remark further? Will you remark further? Senator Duff.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Thank you Madam President. Madam President, I just rise briefly to in support of the legislation and want to thank Senator Haskell, Representative Lamar, Senator Somers, and Representative Arconti for their work on this Bill, and actually, specifically Senator Haskell for his first big DMV aircraft carrier, as we call these things, which were always

bipartisan, which is very good, and that I know it has important legislation for many Members of Legislature. So thank you to both Senators, the Ranking Member, and the Chair for their work on this Bill and I urge support of the legislation. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Duff. Will you remark further? Will you remark further on the Amendment before us? If not, let me try your minds. All in favor of the Amendment before the Chamber, please signify by saying aye.

(MEMBERS):

Aye.

THE CHAIR:

Opposed? The ayes have it, the Amendment is adopted. Will you remark further on the legislation as amended? Senator Haskell.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH):

Thank you very much Madam President. I so appreciate the remarks to the Ranking Member and the Majority Leader. This Bill has been a tremendous amount of work from all stakeholders involved when it, when it's time, I would ask that there be a roll call vote.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you. A roll call vote has been requested. Will you remark further on the legislation as amended? Will you remark further on the legislation? If not, I will open the vote. Mr. Clerk, please announce the roll call vote.

CLERK:

Immediate roll call vote has been ordered in the Senate. This is Senate Bill 261 as amended. Immediate roll call vote has been ordered in the Senate on Senate Bill 261 as amended. Immediate roll call vote in the Senate. This is Senate Bill 261 as amended. Immediate roll call vote in the Senate.

THE CHAIR:

Have all the Senators voted? Have all the Senators voted? The machine is locked. Mr. Clerk, please announce the tally.

CLERK:

Senate Bill 261 as amended

Total number voting	36
Total voting Yea	34
Total voting Nay	2
Absent and not voting	0

THE CHAIR:

(Gavel) the legislation is adopted, is passed. Senator Duff.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Thank you Madam President. I move for immediate transmittal to the House Representatives please.

THE CHAIR:

So ordered sir. Mr. Clerk?

CLERK:

Page 12, Calendar 335, Substitute for Senate Bill No. 1086, AN ACT CONCERNING MENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES. There are amendments.

THE CHAIR:

Good evening Senator Abrams.

SENATOR DAUGHERTY ABRAMS (13TH):

Good, good night, Madam President. Well, past my bedtime but nice to see you. I move acceptance of the Joint Committee's Favorable Report and passage of the Bill.

THE CHAIR:

And the question is on passage. Will you remark?

SENATOR DAUGHERTY ABRAMS (13TH):

Thank you, Madam President. The Clerk is in possession of LCO No. 9994. I ask the Clerk to please call and I be given leave of the Chamber to summarize.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk?

CLERK:

LCO No. 9994, Senate Schedule "A".

THE CHAIR:

Senator Abrams.

SENATOR DAUGHERTY ABRAMS (13TH):

Thank you Madam President. This is a strike all amendment. The components of the, that were in this Bill have all been taken up into other Bills. And this Bill now is an act allowing medical assistants to administer vaccines. The Bill allows medical assistants to administer vaccines only under certain

conditions in any setting other than a hospital setting. They may do so only if they meet criteria of certain education, certification and training requirements and are acting under the supervision, control and responsibility of a licensed physician or an advanced practice registered nurse.

The Bill specifies that it does not authorize employers to require a physician or an APRN without their consent to oversee medical assistants administering vaccines. This was very important because we wanted it to be the decision of the physician or the APRN as to who they would give this responsibility to, because ultimately they would be held responsible.

The Bill also makes a corresponding change by adding to the list of organizations to whom DPH must obtain a list of state residents who are certified as medical assistants. During the pandemic, I was lucky enough to hear from and had heard before that actually from the Community Health Center that they do a lot of really good work in the district that I represent. And one of the few things that they've been asking for is that we pass this Bill. They felt it was very important to the care that they give. And it's been my, my attitude as the Co-Chair of Public Health to allow people to practice at their highest ability in each category of healthcare. And by doing so, I think we offer the best health care we can to the people of our state.

I'd like to thank the other leaders of the Public Health Committee, Representative Steinberg, Senator Somers, Senator Hwang, and Representative Petit who are also co-sponsoring this Amendment. Thank you very much, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Abrams. And I just wanted to make sure that we were, that you moved adoption of the Amendment.

SENATOR DAUGHERTY ABRAMS (13TH):

I move adoption of the Amendment.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you very much. Senator Somers, will you remark on the Amendment that's before the Chamber?

SENATOR SOMERS (18TH):

Yes. Good evening, Madam President. I rise in support of the Amendment that is in front of the Chamber. I just would like to give a little background on medical assistants.

First of all, medical assistants have to go to a two year accredited Bureau of Health Education School. They have to go through a test, they have to be then certified and registered. Their training is really on par with what we used to know as an LPN. In fact, they get more pharmacology training that an LPN does. So they are well trained, they are well versed, and they are trained in vaccines during their clinical rotation and, and training.

So for anyone to think that maybe perhaps they are not qualified, that is just a fallacy. 48 other states allow medical assistants to give vaccines, 48 other states. Connecticut is well behind the times of having medical assistants be able to perform up to their scope of practice. Being able to administer a vaccine is within a medical assistant's scope of practice. And again, this is under the supervision or the delicate story relationship between a medical doctor or an APRN, advanced practice nurse, and the medical assistants.

So the doctor or the APRN has the ability to evaluate that medical assistant and therefore make the decision whether they feel this person is up to their quality standard to be able to administer

vaccines. So why is it important to be able to pass this legislation? It is critically important to pass this legislation because quite frankly and directly, Connecticut is desperate for clinical workers. We don't have enough, we don't have enough nurses. Look at the hospitals in the want ads. We don't have enough medical assistants to be able to support the health care workers that we do have.

If you are a pediatrician, you or your medical office is typically staffed with medical assistants, maybe one nurse, but that nurse you want to do be doing the more complicated clinical analysis, the casework etc., where the medical assistant under the appropriate supervision would be able to alleviate the pressure and the stress of other health care providers and be able to do something simple such as administer a vaccine.

Again, this is under the supervision of an MD or an APRN. This is really what's best for the citizens and the patients in Connecticut. It helps reduce stress, it helps reduce wait time in offices. And as the good Chair, Senator Abrams has mentioned, this is only in a clinical setting such as a health clinic or federally qualified health care centers, are looking for this also, and an office. This is not in the hospital setting where medical assistants are not as widely used within a hospital setting.

This is a Bill that has great support from the Connecticut Medical Society, from independent practices, from our own MDS that are actually within the legislature here. It is one of the most important Bills I think that we could pass because we've seen the voice in our health care system here in the State of Connecticut. And Connecticut is usually great at being the, on the forefront of, of doing new and progressive things when we come to healthcare, whether it be telemedicine or some of the opiate work that we have pushed through in past years being on the cutting edge. And yet again, 48 other states allow medical assistants to do this

duty and Connecticut has not until hopefully today. So I would love to have the circle join me in this important legislation and support this Bill. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Somers. Will you remark further on the Amendment that is before the Chamber? Will you remark further on the Amendment? If not, let me try your minds. All in favor of the Amendment, please signify by saying aye.

(MEMBERS):

Aye.

THE CHAIR:

Opposed? (Gavel) the ayes have it, the Amendment is adopted. Will you mark further on the Bill as amended? Senator Abrams.

SENATOR DAUGHERTY ABRAMS (13TH):

Thank you Madam President. I think that we've summarized the Bill, as, as this now is with the Amendment quite thoroughly. And I would also reiterate what my good colleagues said that we are the only one of, well, actually, I, I think we're the only one but she's saying 48 states are already doing this. And so I think it's time for Connecticut to become the next. So I hope my colleagues will support this Bill, and I'd like a roll call vote please.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you Senator Abrams. Will you remark further on the Bill as amended? Will you remark further on the Bill as amended? If not, a roll call vote has been requested and so I open the machine. Mr. Clerk, please call the roll call vote.

CLERK:

Immediate roll call vote has been ordered in the Senate, Senate Bill 1086 as amended. Immediate roll call vote has been ordered in the Senate on Senate Bill 1086 as amended. Immediate roll call vote in the Senate, Senate Bill 1086 as amended. Immediate roll call vote in the Senate.

THE CHAIR:

Have all the Senators voted? Have all the Senators voted? The machine is locked. Mr. Clerk, please announce the tally.

CLERK:

Senate Bill 1086 as amended

Total number of voting	36
Total voting Yea	27
Total voting Nay	9
Absent and not voting	0

THE CHAIR:

(Gavel) and the measure is passed. Senator Duff.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Thank you Madam President. Madam President, that concludes our business for today. We expect to be in session at noon tomorrow.

THE CHAIR:

Really?

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Really, Eastern Daylight Time. And anyway, I want to thank everybody for all their hard work today and

we will see everybody at noon tomorrow. And with that I move that we adjourned subject to the call of the Chair.

THE CHAIR:

And we are adjourned (gavel).

(On motion of Senator Duff of the 25th, the Senate at 11:11 P.M. adjourned subject to the call of the Chair.)