

Commission on Economic Competitiveness

MEETING MINUTES

Friday, April 8, 2016

10:30 AM IN ROOM 2D OF THE LOB

I. CONVENE MEETING:

The meeting was called to order at 10:35 AM by Chairman Rep. Tong.

The following commission members were present:

Rep. William Tong, Joseph McGee, Commissioner Kevin Sullivan, Commissioner Catherine Smith, Seth Ruzi, Rep. Cristin McCarthy Vahey, Jeffrey Hyde, Heather Somers, Lori Pelletier, Ellen Shemitz, Brian Flaherty for Joseph Brennan

Absent were:

Steven Glazer, Rodney Williams

II. REMARKS BY THE CHAIRS:

Before analyzing specific pages of the diagnostic both co-chairs, Rep. Tong and Mr. McGee, explained that the official document was composed from publicly available data, including data/information from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The chairs stressed that no “hard” data was created for the purposes of this report, the information had already been gathered prior to the report this diagnostic simply condensed the material into one document. The co-chairs also explained their belief that this diagnostic is not the solution to improving the state’s economic competitiveness, it is simply a fact based comparative analysis, it is the commission’s job to use this information to develop a plan to improve the state’s economic competitiveness.

Christopher Bruhl, President and CEO of the Business Council of Fairfield County, explained that the Business Council welcomed the opportunity to assist the General Assembly and, by extension, the people of Connecticut, by serving as the recipient of this pro bono study of the state’s economy and to convey it to the Commission on Economic Competitiveness. Mr. Bruhl further explained that the process to arrive at this document included (a) extensive gathering of information from public, state and national sources that relate to the subject of Connecticut’s competitiveness; (b) individual interviews with public and private sector leaders; (c) a public presentation and working sessions involving 200 economic development professionals; and (d) working sessions with the commission and its’ co-chairs.

III. A PRESENTATION OF THE DIAGNOSTIC OF CONNECTICUT'S ECONOMY BY THE BUSINESS COUNCIL OF FAIRFIELD COUNTY BASED ON THE WORK OF MCKINSEY AND COMPANY

A copy of the diagnostic can be found at the following link:

http://cga.ct.gov/fin/tfs/20150904_Commission%20on%20Economic%20Competitiveness/20160408/CT%20Diagnostic%20Presentation.pdf

A motion was made by Rep. McCarthy Vahey and was seconded by Commissioner Sullivan to accept the diagnostic.

Co-chair McGee proceeded to read the executive summary of the diagnostic entitled **Connecticut Economic Competitiveness Diagnostic**. This summary can be found on the commission's web-page at the following link:

http://cga.ct.gov/fin/tfs/20150904_Commission%20on%20Economic%20Competitiveness/20160408/Connecticut%20Economic%20Competitiveness%20Diagnostic%20Executive%20Summary.pdf

The commission then went through most of the document as the co-chairs highlighted several topics which were discussed. These topics of discussion included but were not limited to:

- Context for the Connecticut Economic Competitiveness Diagnostic
- Connecticut's long run of strong economic growth
- Recent trends that have created a new economic normal
- Connecticut's distinctive assets
- Five potential themes for further exploration

The Co-chairs then solicited feedback from members regarding their reactions to the information presented through the diagnostic.

Co-Chair Rep. Tong explained that in his opinion one of the most important themes for the commission to consider exploring in the future is the idea of public-private engagement. He further expressed that in order to improve the state's economic competitiveness there has to be a strong working relationship between these two sectors.

Brian Flaherty explained the importance of Connecticut addressing its pension and budget challenges in order to restore business confidence and overall fiscal confidence in the state.

Heather Somers expressed that while expanding and investing in the tourism sector of the economy will certainly benefit the state, it is her belief that addressing the overall fiscal confidence of the state is the most important theme for the commission to explore going forward.

Jeffrey Hyde explained that addressing both the fiscal confidence as well as the public-private engagement in the state will help support long-term growth in the state's economy. He further

explained that breaking the negative narrative that currently exists regarding the state's economic position is key to moving forward.

Lori Pelletier also remarked the importance of addressing the overall fiscal confidence of the state. She also explained that streamlining the many regulations which businesses are forced to deal with may only prove to be more challenging as the threat of increased layoffs of state employees looms.

Commissioner Smith explained that changing the negative attitude which currently exists across the state, especially by its older population, is a key factor in improving the state's competitive position. She further expressed that improving the fiscal confidence throughout the state will lead to a more competitive economy.

Rep. McCarthy-Vahey stated that the commission should first attempt to address the most changeable aspect of the economy that will have the greatest short term benefits so that citizens and businesses alike can begin to see results.

Commissioner Sullivan exclaimed that while it is imperative for this commission to realize the importance of growing the state's population and encouraging economic growth and diversity we must keep in mind that any changes that are made must be of a qualitative manor and not simply quantitative.

IV. ANNOUNCEMENT OF TIME AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

Rep. Tong explained that the commission administrator will be sending a notice of the next meeting to all members once a date/time is selected.

V. ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 12:55 PM by Chairman Rep. Tong.

Tom Spinella

Administrator