

MINUTES OF THE 1/23/09 SPECIAL MEETING
OF THE SOUTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
AT SCCOG OFFICE, 5 CONNECTICUT AVENUE, NORWICH, CT

PRESENT: Council Representatives: William Ballinger, Bozrah; Linda Hodge, Colchester; Paul Formica, East Lyme; Harry Watson, Town of Groton; Fred Allyn, Ledyard; Joseph Jaskiewicz, Montville; Nicholas Mullane, North Stonington; Robert Congdon, Preston; Robert Ross, Salem; Edward Haberek, Town of Stonington; Gilbert Grimm, Voluntown; Daniel Steward, Waterford. Council Alternates: Mark Oefinger, Town of Groton; Martin Berliner, New London; Alan Bergren, Norwich; Gerald Grabarek, Preston. Tribal Liaison: William Satti, Mashantucket Pequot Tribe; Chuck Bunnell, Mohegan Tribe. Staff: James Butler, Richard Guggenheim, Richard Serra. Other: Senator Christopher Dodd, Senator Dodd's staff; Merrill Gerber; Robert Mills, NCDC; two reporters.

SCCOG Treasurer Congdon opened the meeting at 1:12 p.m. and led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance. He then introduced Senator Christopher Dodd.

Senator Dodd addressed the local economic picture as a backdrop to what is happening with the national economy. The Senator stressed the need for bi-partisanship in fashioning ideas to resolve the national fiscal crisis. He said he had received word that President Obama intended to convene in March a discussion on health care, and he noted the importance of health care coverage to those who are losing their jobs.

Senator Dodd then reported on the proposed economic stimulus package, which he said could be \$800 Billion, including \$360 Billion in direct spending and a sizeable portion in tax cuts. He said that nationally renowned economist Martin Feldstein thinks that this still may not be enough in spending. The Senator then said he is concerned with the "shovel ready" requirement for projects, and responded to SCCOG members expressing similar concerns. He said that another economist has predicted that 2010, 46,000 jobs could be created in Connecticut as the result of the stimulus package. He noted that the President has stated that it is imperative that the package does not include any earmarks. Senator Dodd said that the President wants both Chambers to submit their proposed stimulus packages to him by the middle of next month.

Mr. Ross said he was glad that the Senator recognized how tricky the shovel ready requirement is. He asked Senator Dodd to consider Governors and their states to expedite their permit processes for stimulus package funded projects.

Mr. Mullane raised the issue of prevailing wage, which he said could be an impediment to small companies bidding on projects.

Mr. Grimm stated he was concerned about tax relief and tax breaks as part of the package.

Mr. Jaskiewicz asked who is actually going to set guidelines for how the funding gets distributed. Mr. Mullane responded that Governor Rell informed him last week that guidance will be forthcoming from the federal government.

Mr. Allyn commented on education reinvestment and asked if the state could hold education funding to towns back because these federal dollars will be received.

Mr. Haberek commented upon the difficulty businesses are having in securing credit.

Mr. Oefinger stated that all municipalities are now preparing their budgets, and that as much uncertainty that could be removed from the state budget process by the national economic stimulus package would be of tremendous assistance to cities and towns. He also commented on the shovel ready issue, citing the numerous requests for projects that Connecticut cities and towns have been asked to generate, calling the whole process flawed. He said he is concerned with all of the funding going first to the state to dole out, because the infrastructure to do so is not there and it introduces politics into the process.

Senator Dodd agreed with this concern and said this program should not be one that any one person or group can take credit for.

Mr. Congdon said the COG was asked to provide lists of shovel ready projects and struggled to do so. He said he too is uncomfortable with this large amount of funding going to the bureaucracy of the State of Connecticut, and said he would be more comfortable if municipalities could deal directly with Congressional and Senate offices.

Senator Dodd thanked the COG members for allowing him to come and meet with them.

Mr. Congdon thanked Senator Dodd for this meeting and briefing.

The meeting adjourned at 2:25 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Daniel Steward, Secretary