

Council schools legislators

Towns send message back to Hartford

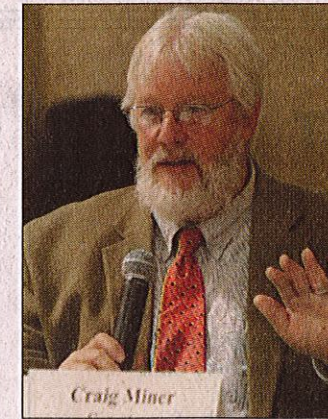
BY JOHN MCKENNA
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

LITCHFIELD — Legislators representing the municipalities making up the Northwest Hills Council of Governments and preparing for the 2020 legislative session received an earful from the council's chief elected officials on Monday.

The council presented its list of legislative priorities for the session during a breakfast meeting at EdAdvance and made it clear that it wants state aid to municipalities maintained at current levels.

"We don't have the money to do anything extra, but we get things done efficiently and we don't need the state coming in and trying to change the landscape by telling us what to do," Harwinton First Selectman Michael R. Criss told the six legislators in attendance. "Please do us no harm. Taxpayers are at their max."

Legislators on hand were state Sen. Craig Miner, R-Litchfield, state Sen. Henri Martin, R-Bristol, and state Reps. Maria Horn, D-Salisbury, David T. Wilson, R-



PHOTOS BY JOHN MCKENNA, REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

Left, Harwinton First Selectman Michael Criss presents the legislative priorities of the Northwest Hills Council of Governments during a meeting with legislators at EdAdvance in Litchfield on Monday. Right, state Sen. Craig Miner, R-Litchfield, comments during the breakfast.

Litchfield, Jay M. Case, R-Winchester, and John Piscopo, R-Thomaston.

With a short legislative session due to open Feb. 5, the legislators paid a traditional visit to the COG, which represents 21 municipalities, to discuss issues the session will address and receive the council's list of legislative priorities.

Partnering with municipalities to control local tax increases is the top priority of the council, which remains opposed to state teacher pension costs being shifted onto municipalities and supports a higher prevailing wage for municipal construction projects.

"Every year we ask you to do us no harm so we can hold

down our expenses, and yet every year, we are harmed," Goshen First Selectman Robert P. Valentine told the legislators.

Lawmakers are also being asked to develop legislation addressing the rising cost of municipal solid waste and recycling and to support voluntary regionalization and shared services.

"We all know you're preaching to the choir when it comes to regionalizing services," Wilson said. "You folks know how to manage your communities and don't need the state telling you how to do it. It's my belief that you're being over-legislated."

The council is asking that

Town Aid Road funding, which has been withheld by Gov. Ned Lamont during the debate over trucks-only tolls on state highways, and other state funding that is critical to municipalities be released in a more timely manner.

As for truck tolls at 12 locations on state highways, the Republican legislators expressed opposition, while Horn said tolls would be a modest way of addressing problems with roads, bridges and other transportation infrastructure.

"We have to find a way to seriously address this crisis," Horn said. "We need to be open to solving it in a fiscally responsible way that doesn't involve taking money from the rainy day fund."

Republican legislators have proposed taking \$1.5 billion from the rainy day fund of \$2.5 billion and using it for infrastructure improvement. Trucks-only tolls would raise an estimated \$170 million a year.

Tolls, Case said, would be the equivalent of a tax increase because truck tolling would lead to an increase to consumers in the cost of goods, services and commodities being carried by the trucks.

"Don't be fooled by this plan," Case said. "Everything comes on trucks."

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