

Just before Christmas, FSA representatives interviewed the two candidates for the upcoming special State General Assembly election for the 132nd District seat recently vacated by First Selectwoman Brenda Kupchick. The election will be held on Tuesday January 14. We discussed the importance of State-wide level actions to retain seniors and other key areas of FSA's advocacy.

Here are the highlights of our conversations with Republican State Representative candidate Brian Farnen and Democratic State Representative candidate Jenn Leeper.

FSA: *What are important issues that affect seniors here in Town?*

Both candidates agree on the need to make Fairfield more affordable, with local property taxes being a major concern. Brian indicated that there are ways to better control spending on a State level in a "smart way" with businesses and residents working together to grow the tax base and make living more affordable. Jenn indicated that health care costs/benefits, including prescription drug cost relief, is also among the top concerns for seniors.

Providing more affordable senior housing options are priorities for both candidates, with each citing personal examples that have better informed them of the importance of this issue. Brian advocated for identifying more additional 55+ housing options, feeling that most residents would prefer to stay in the town in which they grew up and/or raised families. He also cited Branford's success with affordable housing options as perhaps providing guidance for similar efforts in Fairfield.

Jenn also agreed on the need for and value of supporting more affordable housing options for seniors and supports FSA's efforts to simplify regulations on accessory dwelling units. She suggested that zoning commissions be more proactive in identifying properties that may be suitable for development of senior housing.

FSA: *There are three CT programs particularly important to seniors on which we have communicated frequently with State representatives over the past three years. Would you support their retention if continued State funding is challenged? These programs include:*

- 1. Raised the income threshold for elimination of the State income tax on Social Security income;*
- 2. Implemented a "rollout" of exemption from State tax on pension and annuity income. (This affected 14% of income in 2018, with additional 14% increments each year thereafter until reaching 100% of income.); and*

3. Preserved eligibility levels for the Medicare Savings Program for low income individuals (that covers Medicare premiums, deductibles and co-insurance).

Both candidates agreed they would support these programs should their funding be reviewed by the State, and underscored their importance in protecting vulnerable seniors. Brian commented that the Medicare Savings Program needs preservation, and that cutting programs like these are “penny wise and pound foolish”, causing more harm than good. He also maintained that local senior/disabled property tax relief efforts can be improved, citing Westport’s program as an example.

Jenn reiterated her support of these three programs, indicating that it is “the [State] Government’s job to protect vulnerable people” and that she will work to ensure that the State holds the line in these areas.

FSA: *Any closing comments that you’d like to share with our membership?*

Brian described how his parents are among many State residents who struggle with affordability issues, and that reining in State spending should be a priority. He also indicated an interest in the State Transportation Committee and Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee, as well as possibly serving on the State Aging Committee. In closing, Brian reiterated that “we have a moral obligation to help seniors . . . You hurt seniors, and you hurt the State.”

Jenn reiterated the need to focus on policy and solutions with “a tone and tenor of civility . . . and restore a way to have difficult discussions while acknowledging differences of opinions” on State issues related to seniors. Like Brian, she expressed an interest in holding regular feedback sessions with her constituents upon election, and would elicit FSA’s support in possibly co-sponsoring sessions on key State legislative issues that impact seniors.

FSA appreciates the candidates’ time in meeting with us during the busy holiday season, and reminds residents of the special 132nd District election on Tuesday, January 14.

In February FSA will hold a public meeting to further explore 2020 State legislative issues affecting seniors. Next month at the Fairfield Woods Library (Thursday, January 30, 6:30 PM) and Bigelow Center (Wednesday January 29, 10:00 AM) we’ll drill down on local senior demographic trends, what these mean for the greater Fairfield community and how effective responses can make our town even more attractive to seniors who wish to retire here. We invite you to join us for these sessions.