

NEW HAVEN REGISTER

Jonathan Harris: Despite GOP's claims, Connecticut is making progress

By Jonathan A. Harris

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A recent Forbes.com [op-ed](#) by contributor Jim Powell [caught the attention](#) of some folks in Connecticut, especially some in the state's GOP.

We should address a few things up front. First, the piece is the opinion of Mr. Powell, not the opinion of Forbes. Second, Mr. Powell is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, the right-wing attack machine funded by the Koch brothers.

Put it another way: Mr. Powell makes his living by promoting the ideology of right-wing extremists.

No one is refuting the fact that Connecticut has many long-standing, structural problems that need to be dealt with. But cherry-picking information to prove a political argument, as Mr. Powell does, won't solve any of them.

Mr. Powell points out that "between 1970 and 2000 Connecticut's state payrolls grew 6 times faster than the overall population."

That may be true, but he fails to mention that payroll for state employees in Connecticut FELL by more than \$100 million last year.

In fact, in the last fiscal year, spending from the General Fund as a whole only increased 1.6 percent. Under previous governors, spending increased an average of 7.6 percent.

He also talks about the problems with the State Employee Retirement System. If you follow state government, you probably know that our pension system is among the worst funded in the nation. It's a problem that took decades to create. And it's a problem Gov. Malloy is addressing, with nearly \$500 million in additional dollars going toward the system.

Why should you care about that? We estimate that by paying toward the system today, we'll save taxpayers about \$6 billion. We'll also avoid a one-time payment

of more than \$4 billion that would force a host of terrible cuts to education and other basic services.

We've been fortunate in Connecticut. While there is no shortage of disagreements in the state Capitol, we have come together on the most important issues of our day. We passed a jobs bill that is remaking the state's economy. We passed an education reform bill that is turning around chronically under-performing public schools. We passed meaningful gun violence prevention legislation that will save lives, regardless of whether Jim Powell thinks so or not.

These are substantive accomplishments for which everyone in our state should be proud.

But time and again, we see this same tactic from the state Republicans. They have no strategy to move the state forward, only criticism from right wing groups that are more interested in pushing an agenda than improving the quality of life in Connecticut.

The mantra of Reagan Republicans was "trust but verify." Mr. Powell and some in the state party have taken another tact: "slander and vilify."

The people of Connecticut are looking for solutions, and they're getting them from Gov. Malloy. You can't say the same thing about the state's GOP.

Harris is executive director of the Connecticut Democratic Party.