

## Connecticut: “At a Price” at Mark Twain

Last Tuesday evening NBC Connecticut and the Mark Twain House & Museum partnered to host a forum titled Connecticut: “At a Price”. They brought together five panelists, Gary LeBeau, former CT State Senator, Joe DeLong, Executive Director, Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, Wildaliz Bermudez, Hartford City Council Minority Leader, Brendan Sharkey, former Speaker of the House, Jonathan Costa, Assistant Executive Director, EdAdvance and moderated by NBC Connecticut Chief Investigative Reporter Len Besthoff.

The program began with video from NBC CT interviewing people who have left CT and moved south for a lower cost of living with one example of comparable home with property taxes of less than half.

The panelists were then asked several questions about the causes, and what could be done. While everyone agreed that the cost of living in CT is too high and that there are inefficiencies that are largely responsible, how to solve the problem was another matter. Some very good points were raised, mostly ways in which CT is an outlier compared to other states. Clearly having 169 municipalities in a state of this size, with all the duplications of administration and services was a common theme. But several facts helped bring this into focus. CT has 110 independent 911 Call Centers. California has 10. One of the panelists, a recent arrival to CT recounted how on a snowy night driving on I-95 near the Bridgeport-Fairfield line he saw a tractor trailer slide off the road. He immediately called 911 to report it. When he began to report it he was transferred from the Bridgeport 911 Center to the Fairfield call center, who then transferred him again to the State Highway Patrol Center when he mentioned I-95. There were other equally obvious examples of inefficiency, including a school system with 100 students.

Ideas on how to fix the problem also abounded. Some of the best suggested the legislature should take the lead, others that the next Governor should make it a priority. Incremental change was suggested with several places to start, but everyone agreed that it had to begin at the ballot box.

A good time to begin the process, just before the primaries and the November elections. NBC Connecticut *Investigates* will be airing a program from this forum. Stay tuned.