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Education funding battle brewing

Lamont, state legislators to debate spending on magnets, charters, child care in coming months

By Christopher Keating
Hartford Courant

State legislators and educators say they will not give up in one of the biggest battles at the state Capitol this year, pitting Gov. Ned Lamont against school advocates over funding for kindergarten

through grade 12.

Legislators maintain they had a solid agreement with Lamont's administration last year as part of the two-year budget for an additional \$150 million for K-12 public education, but that total has not been placed into the latest budget recommendations for the fiscal

year that starts on July 1.

Instead, lawmakers say Lamont's administration is breaking that promise by reducing the original \$150 million by taking away increases for charter, magnet and vocational-agricultural schools. At the same time, Lamont is calling for \$43 million in increases for early childhood amid a strong need for day care.

Each side has its own statistics and arguments in a battle that will

be fought in the coming months as lawmakers scramble to complete the overall \$26 billion state budget before the regular legislative session ends on May 8.

Kate Dias, president of the state's largest teachers union, joined fellow advocates during a press conference last week against the proposed cuts and said the state historically has fallen behind in education.

"At the end of the day, the crit-

ical thing to remember is we've never fully funded education," Dias told a standing-room-only crowd at the Capitol complex. "It's never happened — or my teachers wouldn't have a starting salary of \$48,000. So I think we really need to understand we've never actually done the really hard things that we need to do that would allow our teachers, our pre-K, everyone to

Turn to Education, Page 3



A plane is tied down at Brainard Airport in Hartford on Friday. **AARON FLAUM/HARTFORD COURANT PHOTOS**

Showdown looms on Brainard's destination

Hartford mayor has 'serious questions' on viability of development at airport

By Kenneth R. Gosselin
Hartford Courant

As a showdown on the future of Hartford-Brainard Airport looms in the legislature, Hartford Mayor Arunan Arulampalam isn't showing his cards just yet, and last year's consultant's report didn't go far enough in helping him take a position on the issue.

"It's a really significant decision and shouldn't be made hastily," Arulampalam said. "I always support further development of properties that we have here in

Hartford. But I have real serious questions about the viability of development on the Brainard parcel."

A consultant's \$1.5 million study late last year concluded that the 200-acre airfield in Hartford's South End could be used for industrial or mixed-use redevelopment. But it could cost tens of millions to rid the airport of contamination and take years to decommission it before fully reaping property tax and economic development

Turn to Airport, Page 2



The Hartford Jet Center at Brainard Airport in Hartford.

A health group run by doctors

Windsor-based SoNE says patients benefit from independence

By Ed Stannard
Hartford Courant

When doctors run their own practices, patients benefit, according to those involved in the consortium known as SoNE Health, which recently became independent.

Previously allied with Trinity Health of New England, Southern New England Healthcare, known as SoNE, went independent as of Jan. 1 to help its medical providers bring what's known as value-based health care to their patients.

Based in Windsor, SoNE is "100 percent owned and governed by physicians," according to Lisa Trumble, president and CEO. "And the primary work that we do is value-based care and population health. We contract with payers and employers to provide services to them that help improve the cost and the quality of care that they're receiving."

The members of SoNE are independent practices, totaling 550 physicians, from Waterbury north to Springfield.

"We believe strongly that the physician-patient relationship is critical to overall value-based care success, that physicians drive the decision-making," Trumble said.

"They drive how patients view health care, what they get done as part of their overall health, and we believe that's the wave of the future," she said. "The feds and the states are going to continue to look to put pressure on the health care system ... and we believe physicians are front and center for that."

Turn to Doctors, Page 2

Invalid signature alleged in Hartford party leadership fight

A lawsuit threatens to upend a Hartford primary contest where Democrats are vying for party leadership. **Sunday CT, Page 1**

Opinion..... **Insight, 1-3**
Obituaries..... **Insight, 4-9**
Lottery..... **News, 2**
Classified..... **News, 9**
Puzzles..... **News, 11; Arts, 7**
Success..... **Sunday CT, 4-7**

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House Speaker Mike Johnson, seen Thursday, said he won't be "rushed" into approving aid. **HAIYUN JIANG/THE NEW YORK TIMES**

Johnson holds key on US aid to Ukraine

But House speaker has yet to chart path ahead

By Lisa Mascaro
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — When Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy spoke with congressional leaders in Washington late last year he told them privately what is now public: With U.S. weapons, they could win the war against Russia, but without them Russian President

Vladimir Putin would be victorious.

In a subsequent meeting with new House Speaker Mike Johnson, a looming deadline for the supplies came into focus.

Now, with U.S. aid for Ukraine teetering in Congress, it's up to Johnson to decide what happens next.

The Republican's leadership will determine whether the House will agree to approve

Turn to Ukraine, Page 3

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FROM PAGE ONE

Airport

from Page 1

potential, according to the report.

Instead, the Brainard Airport Property Study recommended keeping the airport open and extending one of its runways.

But this alternative — one of four outlined in a final report — calls for the closing of a lesser-used runway and redeveloping the area primarily for warehouse and industrial uses. That would build on what already exists in and around the airport in the city's South End, according to the report, prepared by BFJ Planning of New York.

A hearing on the study is expected — but not yet scheduled — in the legislature. State lawmakers then would have to decide whether the century-old Brainard should be closed.

The state-financed study, conducted over eight months, has drawn sharp criticism from Sen. John W. Fonfara, D-Hartford, a longtime proponent of closure and mixed-use redevelopment. Fonfara, who unsuccessfully ran for Hartford mayor last year, has said the study relied too heavily on previous studies that assessed environmental clean-up and economic development prospects for the airport.

Arulampalam said he is concerned about the depth of BFJ's assessment on underground contamination and the impact on the dike along the Connecticut River.

"And then, there is the timeline for deactivating and going through that process," Arulampalam said. "The challenges are significant. If they are outweighed by the potential for redevelopment, then I would be very open to it. But, as it is now, given the level of information we have, I think serious questions still persist."

If state lawmakers decided to close Brainard, the approval of the Federal Aviation Administration would still be needed.

Arulampalam's caution stands in dramatic contrast to his predecessor, former Mayor Luke Bronin, who was a strong supporter of redevelopment and campaigned on the issue prior to the first of his two terms as mayor.

But Bronin also became one of the targets of a lawsuit from businesses at Brainard. The lawsuit argued that all the talk of closure hurt profits and stymied expansion and attracting new customers. The lawsuit is pending.

Decades of debate

The debate over the future of Brainard has resurfaced periodically since the 1950s when half of the airport was taken for redevelopment. The current push for redevelopment of Brainard comes at a time when towns along the Connecticut River in Greater Hart-



Hartford's trash-to-energy plant, which is adjacent to Brainard Airport, is being decommissioned. COURANT FILE PHOTO

ford are renewing their focus on mixed-use development along the riverfront.

The most ambitious is a sweeping, \$850 million, mixed-use redevelopment of East Hartford's Founders Plaza into as many as 1,000 apartments over a period of years.

In Hartford, the debate over Brainard also comes as the state examines what should be done with an adjoining 80 acres that will become available with the decommissioning of Hartford's trash-to-energy plant.

"You have 300 acres on the Connecticut River," Fonfara said. "Imagine what we could do there for young people who want to stay, who want to work here. But they don't have much to do in the nightlife. We don't have anything comparatively."

In addition to housing, Fonfara's vision, which would unfold over a period of years, includes entertainment venues, restaurants and other attractions. The development also would provide a sorely-needed boost to the property tax base, Fonfara said.

Fonfara disputes the contention in the BFJ report that there isn't enough housing demand to support a mixed-use redevelopment of Brainard. He points not only to an aggressive push in downtown Hartford for more apartments amid high occupancy, but also in East Hartford and West Hartford. "But our proposal — this proposal

— makes no sense?" Fonfara said.

The quasi-public Connecticut Airport Authority, which owns and oversees operations at Brainard, issued a statement, saying it will be watching for any further action by the legislature.

"The recent consultant report speaks for itself, and it is now up to the legislature to decide if it deems it appropriate to act further on this matter," the CAA's statement reads. "In the meantime, the CAA plans to continue operating a safe airport for the benefit of its tenants, users and the regional economy."

Options in the report

The BFJ report said the recommended option would dovetail with the industrial nature of the area surrounding Brainard Airport, which includes a wastewater treatment plant. The alternative also could be achieved swiftly, potentially in one phase, the report said.

The proposed structures under the recommended option include a 100,000-square-foot building split equally between flex industrial and advanced manufacturing spaces; another 100,000-square-foot structure dedicated to industrial or manufacturing purposes, and a 20,000-square-foot retail area.

The three other options are: ■ Keeping the airport open with limited development with a runway extension, new air traffic control tower, hangars and 94,000 square feet of aviation-related space.

■ Closing the airport and pursuing the addition of 2.6 million square feet of industrial space, 140,000 square feet of office space and 100,000 square feet of "accessory retail."

■ Closing Brainard for a massive, mixed-use redevelopment that could have 2,700 units of rental housing, 105,000-square feet of retail, 262,000 square feet of industrial space and 255,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor recreation venues.

According to BFJ, total development costs range from \$46 million for the recommended option to \$14 billion for the mixed-use alternative. These numbers do not include the use of public subsidies in the calculations. Typically in the Hartford region, projects such as these receive subsidies of at least 20% of the total project cost in order to be financed due to market conditions and cost of construction, BFJ said.

Organized opposition to closing

The latest push to close and redevelop Brainard has spawned significant, organized opposition — giving rise to the Hartford Brainard Airport Association.

The association, whose members include pilots, Brainard tenants and others, have pushed back against airport being cast as a "playground for rich folks" with single- and twin-engine planes. The associ-

ation also argues that Brainard is crucial for its pilot training schools and should be invested in as an asset to promote economic development in the region. The airport could be a center for developing new aviation and transportation technologies.

The association also predicted the findings in the BFJ report would be no different than a legislative study conducted in 2016 that recommended Brainard stay open. That study never came to a legislative vote, dismissed by those who support redevelopment, including Fonfara. Fonfara has argued the 2016 report was not conducted by those who had the specialized expertise that was necessary.

While the association was happy the BFJ report recommended Brainard stay open, it opposes the closure of one of the runways, a move that the association would hobble further growth.

The association "continues its position of keeping the airport open and growing it substantially to make it an economic benefit for the city of Hartford and the greater Hartford region," Michael Teiger, a Hartford pulmonologist, who leads the association, said. "We certainly don't want to decrease the size of the airport by closing a runway. We want to see it grow to its fullest potential. We believe the potential is huge and needs to be encouraged."

Kenneth R. Gosselin can be reached at kgosselin@courant.com.

Doctors

from Page 1

Having physicians in control "allows us to have more flexibility and more innovation" and "the ability for physicians to do what's in the best interest of their patients," she said.

Dr. David Howlett, partner in East Granby Family Practice, who has been with SoNE and its predecessors for years, said independence is key to giving patients the best care. It also brings the best value in terms of time spent with the patient, he said.

"We are physician-led and physician-directed, and that's what we like about being independent, that we make our decisions," said Howlett. "This is what we do. We give our patients a lot of time so that we can take care of their medical problems and do their preventative care, many times at the same time."

Howlett, who is on SoNE's board, said his practice is what's known as a patient-centered medical home, "a concept where a practice proves ... that they provide access to



Trumble



Rodis

patients, that they do quality care, that they look at the data, they identify high-risk patients, that they do cost-effective preventative care, that there's patient satisfaction and patient education."

That is much more possible in his practice, which is composed of eight physicians and five nurse practitioners, he said, because it's independent. Its caregivers are able to see 12 to 14 patients a day, versus 25 or more possible in a practice owned by some large health care organizations, which also sets other expectations. Larger health care organizations have argued they offer economies of scale for some expenses, expertise in more specialties and more resources, among other benefits.

"We are owned by the four partners here," Howlett said. "We have an association with SoNE. We're a part of SoNE. But we actually make our own decisions in terms of medical care in our practice."

Dr. John F. Rodis, president of Arista Health, said in more corpo-

rate-like health care systems, "There's a lot of pressure to keep patients within the health system. Now, one could argue there is some benefit in an integrated system to stay within the system. Your records are all there, your labs are all there, etc.,"

However, Rodis, former president of St. Francis Hospital, said those systems may tend to push patients into the hospital more quickly than an independent doctor would.

"Sometimes the best care for patients, the most efficient care, the less expensive care might be, for example, keeping patients out of the hospital," he said. "Don't send them to the Emergency Department after hours, but have some after hours call-in. Don't necessarily reflexively order an MRI for knee pain, but maybe examine a patient and maybe have outpatient physical therapy before you rush to see a surgeon."

He said value-based health care is "transformative, because the focus really shifts from the quantity of service. ... When I ran the business, the more we did the more we got paid — and more about the actual health of people."

Trumble added that the health care system can be like "a fix-it shop": "If something breaks, fix it, like a car repair shop. If your

knee's bad or you've got a problem, in a lot of those interventions, to fix it occurs in a formal setting like a hospital," she said.

She said SoNE's focus is to "flip it, to where there's more focus on prevention ... to avoid needing those services to begin with." She said they call their approach population health.

"We look at the conditions and prevalence of conditions of the population and we figure out interventions that in some cases they are hospital based but in many cases they are not, to ensure that patients are getting their PCP visits, that they're being seen annually even if they have no problems ... that they get their regular screenings done to avoid disease," Trumble said.

"The biggest expense in health care is hospitalizations," she said. "So if we can avoid hospitalizations to begin with, that helps employers, that helps the patients, it helps our community and it's better for everybody all the way around. The patients have a better quality of life."

Trumble said independence will be a trend away from that of the past decade, when physicians were selling their practices to hospital-based health care systems.

"I think there's going to be a big tidal wave over the next several years," she said. "Previously, there was a big move for physicians to

be employed. And a lot of that was generated by just the economics and the challenges and the regulations with running your own practice."

However, she said she sees providers no longer seeking to be employed by a health care system and wanting "to be able to maintain that independence so that they can make their own decisions, manage their practices the way they choose to manage their patients. And we just help facilitate that."

One way is in managing electronic medical records, Trumble said. Another is dealing with regulatory requirements.

"I think when you're employed by a health system, it does stifle the natural entrepreneurship that many physicians already have in their DNA," Rodis said.

"I think what's happening is, you're seeing a lot of newer primary care practices coming into the state," he said. "Folks like SoNE offer physicians an opportunity to stay independent if they're independent or, frankly, if those are somewhat frustrated being in health systems say, listen, I want a way out, how can I do it?"

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LOTTERY

Saturday, Feb. 17

PLAY3 DAY 4 0 0 WB: 2
PLAY4 DAY 4 2 3 6 WB: 7

The late numbers were not drawn in time for this edition. For results, please visit courant.com/lottery.

FRIDAY'S LATE NUMBERS
PLAY3 NIGHT 1 0 9 WB: 3
PLAY4 NIGHT 8 7 7 3 WB: 6

CASH 5 2 8 17 21 28
LUCKY FOR LIFE 4 12 15 36 46 LB: 17

LOTTO 6 17 22 28 33 43
Zero first-prize ticket(s) sold.

MEGA MILLIONS 19 23 39 42 67 MB: 18 MP: 4
Tuesday's est. Lotto jackpot: \$1.5 million
Tuesday's est. Mega Millions jackpot: \$493 million