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Election 2018, Labor

Unions Rally To Boost Lamont

by **Christine Stuart**

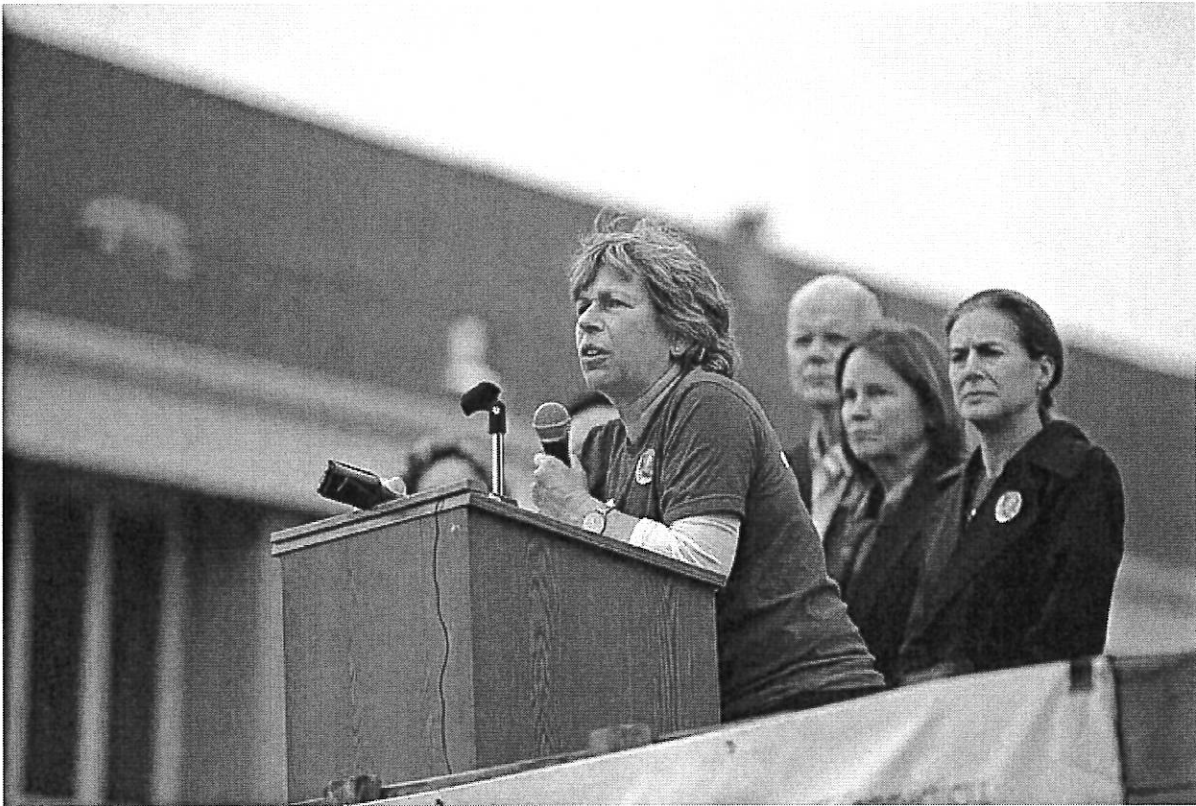
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Sal Luciano holds an AFSCME for Lamont sign (Christine Stuart / ctnewsjunkie)

NEW BRITAIN, CT — The head of one of the largest teacher unions in the country said she wishes Democratic gubernatorial nominee Ned Lamont had beat Gov. Dannel P. Malloy eight years ago because “we would not be in the situation we are in right now.”

Lamont lost to Malloy in the 2010 Democratic primary and Malloy went on to beat Republican Tom Foley by one the of the smallest margins in Connecticut history — 6,404 votes.



Randi Weingarten of AFT (Christine Stuart / ctnewsjunkie)

“We got lucky enough for him to run again,” Randi Weingarten, president of AFT, said to more than 100 union supporters in the parking lot of a union hall Friday. The event, one of several in the closing days before the election, was sponsored by AFT Connecticut and AFSCME Council 4.

Malloy, the first Democratic governor in a decade, won the 2010 election with the support of labor, who he asked for \$2 billion in concessions from **immediately** after taking office in order to help close a \$3.2 billion budget deficit. A bitter battle ensued, but they eventually were able to ratify a concession package in 2011, and **another in 2017**, which included a four year no-layoff clause that will tie the hands of the next governor for at least two years.

Republican gubernatorial nominee Bob Stefanowski has said he would seek to make changes to the states relationship with labor. He said a recent Supreme Court decision, Janus v. AFSCME, would give his administration more power to get rid of the current agreement.

"The nice thing about it is it gives us a lot more power with the union leadership to scrap the SEBAC agreement," Stefanowski said before the primary. "It takes them out right at the knees. When I saw that decision come through I was clicking my heels three times."

Weingarten said Lamont is the "exact opposite of Stefanowski."

"He is for children. He is for workers. He is for fairness. He is for democracy," Weingarten said.

She equated Stefanowski to Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker and warned that it could happen if they don't turn out the vote.

Lamont, who thanked workers for doing their jobs Friday, has said he would want to work with the State Employees Bargaining Agent Coalition Agreement which has two-year more years of a no layoff clause and a health and pension benefit package that doesn't expire until 2027.

"I'm pro-each and every one of you," Lamont said.

He said his administration is going to be fighting for the workers each of the next four years.

Citing the polls, which have him up for the most part, but down by 2.4 percent to Stefanowski in at least one, Lamont said the only thing he can't understand is the number of undecided voters.

"How in God's name can you be undecided? One guy blames labor, blames the nurses, blames the teachers, blames each and everyone of

you. I say thank you," Lamont said.

"I support labor. I support their right to organization. I support collective bargaining," Lamont said.

Lamont said Stefanowski wants to give a \$1.3 billion tax break to the **wealthiest 400 residents** in the state and hurt the middle class.



Ned Lamont (Christine Stuart / ctnewsjunkie)

"They're jack up the property taxes, they're going to hit education, they're going to fire teachers," Lamont said.

Stefanowski said he will cut taxes over eight years and the state's economy will grow. He hasn't said exactly how that would happen or what revenue stream the state would be able to use to capture that economic growth. He said he wouldn't cut the income tax in the first two years while he finds billions of "waste, fraud, and abuse," in the two-year \$40 billion budget, which is running \$4.6 billion in the red.

At a meeting **earlier this year** of retired teachers, Stefanowski said he wouldn't seek to change their retirement benefits, but would seek to move active teachers into a 401K style retirement plan.

As for the state employees, it's unclear what he has in store. Danbury Mayor Mark Boughton has handed Stefanowski a plan that offers retirees a lump sum payment. Stefanowski hasn't said whether he's in favor of the proposal.

Connecticut has actually seen an increase in its union membership over the past year.

According to information from the state Comptroller's office as of Sept. 28 there are about 46,000 members paying union dues and about 5,962 who are not. That's after the Janus decision, which allows members who benefit from union negotiations to not pay union dues.

The campaigns have been criss-crossing the state this weekend making their final pitches to voters.

Lamont will be at a get-out-the-vote rally Sunday in Waterbury with Democratic congressional candidate Jahana Hayes and U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy. And Stefanowski will end his 52-stop nine day van tour in Wallingford at United Concrete.

Ned Lamont and Susan Bysiewicz rally at union hall.

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