

WEEKEND SPECIAL DATA DELAWARE: Saturday, December 21, 2019  
SUBJECT: Lavelle RESPONDS to Townsend (*Podcast transcript*)

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- Dace Blaskovitz: Welcome back to, Money and Politics in Delaware, let me tease this segment: Lavelle hammers Townsend. And he's back, Greg Lavelle has been on a warpath lately in the interview I think we're about to do. The former legislator responds to State Senator Bryan Townsend's News Journal, opinion piece: "Delaware Residents Need the Full Story About Paradee."
- Dace Blaskovitz: Let's find out what Greg Lavelle has to say, but first we get first time listeners Greg Lavelle. You're a many time regulars, so gosh, I started at the beginning 30 seconds briefly about you and 30 seconds about what you do.
- Greg Lavelle: Sure Dace. Lifelong Delawarian, and work for a small financial consulting company in Delaware, I'm married and have a couple of almost grown children at this point. But this is the Christmas season, so I'm not hammering Bryan Townsend, to be clear, in the spirit of the New Year's resolutions. This is just offering another opinion, which is what we do in America, right?
- Dace Blaskovitz: I guess you call it what you want. When he gets off his knees, we'll let him decide. Are you ready to go?
- Greg Lavelle: I'm ready.
- Dace Blaskovitz: Very good. You have to do three primers so that everybody can participate in the conversation. I don't want to turn it into inside baseball, and then I'll let you respond to the story. Are you ready?
- Greg Lavelle: Sure thing.
- Dace Blaskovitz: Very good. You have to give us a 60 maximum 90 second Delaware Turf recap.
- Greg Lavelle: So Delaware Turf is the multi-sports complex in Kent County. It's on Route 1 on the left as you get down past Frederick, a little bit north of Milford. It's been in operations for a couple of years now. Had a lot of state funding to get up and going, and a lot in private money, the overpasses aren't cheap that were built there. Also, got some private funds and the theory is to bring in sports tournament's, regional tournaments, fill up hotel rooms, may have people eat at restaurants, and youth sports travel leagues, which I knew for some parents is nothing short of Hades, but that's what the Delaware Turf is.
- Dace Blaskovitz: Second one in our pre-interview, I'm going to break confidence and tell a little secret here. You were chuckling, belly laughing, all this dialogue about ethics. The News Journal calling for an ethics investigation, ethics, ethics, ethics, ethics, Greg Lavelle you served nearly 20 years in the legislator as a legislator. You have a different perspective, share it.

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- Greg Lavelle: So for your listeners who may not have followed this, so the other part of the Delaware Turf was that back in late June, a bill was passed to levy a hotel tax in Kent County. And that money was directed to the company or the organization that runs the sports field. And that followed on the heels of many other municipalities getting hotel taxes passed, yet they had to come to the General Assembly to get them passed. But the difference on this one was that it directed the money to the Delaware Turf organization for their use, where all of the other hotel taxes went to the government that levied them...What the General Assembly said is, you have the ability to levy this tax, you have to do it and you have to vote to do it up to no more than 3% and then the local government has to act on it."
- Greg Lavelle: So Senator Paradee ran this bill late in June, there was no public notice or typical sort of stuff for the end of the General Assembly. And, as it turns out, Senator Paradee's brother has some investment interests where we don't have time to get into all of it, but that is sort of the background. And Senator Townsend came to the defense of Senator Paradee based on the News Journal article when he was asked if he would instigate an ethics investigation.
- Greg Lavelle: And the reason I laughed at that because the way ethics investigations are initiated and handled in Delaware General Assembly, they have to be initiated by a member of the General Assembly. So this op-ed that Senator Townsend did went through all the reasons that this was an outrage, how he wasn't quoted properly. And I laughed because there's no way that a member of the General Assembly is going to instigate an ethics investigation against another one.
- Greg Lavelle: I spent 18 years there, and the only one that I can recall was John Atkins when he had some issues back in the early 2000s...he instigated that against himself in an effort to clear his name, which obviously didn't work.
- Greg Lavelle: So that's what I thought was funny. And even in, even in the article, and I know you want to talk about that a little bit, but one of the lines in the article, the op-ed, as you know this, there's no reason to have an ethics investigation. Nothing was done wrong here, don't look behind the curtain. And it would contrast, and I quote, "Contrast with the type of conduct that would warrant an ethics investigation," but that's never explained. So I'm not sure what warrants an ethics investigation. Whether or not this does, I'm not sure about that either. But Senator Townsend clearly doesn't put the paper around what would warrant an ethics investigation.
- Dace Blaskovitz: And you got to do this one briefly, but touch on some of the players, McBride, Townsend, who are we talking about?

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- Greg Lavelle: So talking around to some folks still down there and in the know, it was kind of strange because the dog was sleeping at this point. Why bring this up again? The old saying, stop digging when you're in the hole. And Senator Townsend sort of brought this all back to the forefront with this kind of questionable piece. And some people were speculating that this is an effort for a Senate leadership fight in 2020, and an effort to get Senator Paradee's vote for that leadership fight after the next election. That's way inside baseball. But the piece otherwise, as we've talked about is sort of nonsensical.
- Dace Blaskovitz: All right, let's talk about that piece, time limitations. But the first one my take away, and again, if you're playing along at home, it's Sunday's News Journal, "Delaware Residents Need Full Story About Paradee," and it is written by Bryan Townsend, who is a State Senator, and the bill passed.
- Dace Blaskovitz: Here's my question to Greg Lavelle, as I read this piece, the bill passed pure in intent and open in its intention. Wink, wink. What's Greg Lavelle say?
- Greg Lavelle: It didn't. It clearly didn't. The bill was introduced, substituted and Senator Townsend points out, he throws Senator Bonini under the bus that Senator Bonini, in my opinion, wrongly tried to get this into the bond bill.
- Greg Lavelle: So good for the bond bill chairs that they rejected it. And the difference on this bill, again for your listeners, this is the only one who directed the money to another organization and not to the local government. So the bill was introduced on June 26th at 12:51 in the afternoon and it passed the Delaware State Senate four hours later, and had a committee hearing within that four hour period. Obviously there's no public notice, there's nothing like that. And then when it went over to the House, because it's the end of the session, they suspended the rules to run the bill. So there was no transparency surrounding this bill whatsoever.
- Dace Blaskovitz: And then the other one that popped out is, I believe the exact word choice is that, "Levy Court requested this." I hope I got that right, or mostly right, I think it's word for word. You have been very vocal on this subject share with the audience.

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- Greg Lavelle: Sure. So actually what the... op-ed piece is, and I quote, "Prior to voting, legislators were told that a majority of Levy Court wanted this bill to support Delaware Turf." I've not seen that, I've not seen any Levy Court Commissioners, except for one, weigh in on this issue publicly. Maybe I've missed it, I don't live on Facebook. And that one person said he thinks that if the bill is going to pass, the money should go to Kent County, and if Kent County wants to give some of this money to the Delaware Turf, that would be within practice of other passages of other bills that have passed. So I've not seen that. And my experience is if they really wanted it, they would've passed it by now.
- Greg Lavelle: It's kind of blew up on the whole thing, and I tip my hat to the Kent County Levy Court being bullied quite frankly by the Delaware General Assembly. Not all the members, and a lot of the members have no idea what's going on cause it's a busy time of year, which is again why you don't do this sort of stuff at the end of the year. But if they have to vote to levy the tax, I would think that it seems to make sense that they should have the ability to spend that money, not have it forced to go to another organization. And if they made a decision for an economic development reason, for the reasons that many argue for Delaware Turf, and I get it, the market's changed a little bit, then let them do that because this bill was different than all the other bills that did the hotel taxes. And that's why it tried to get snuck into the bond bill; and that's why again, credit to the bond chairs, they said no go run the bill like every other hotel tax bill.
- Dace Blaskovitz: You've got 50 seconds.
- Greg Lavelle: The usage of epilogue language is just abusive, and this is a great example of it.
- Dace Blaskovitz: Yeah, you've got 50 seconds. Wrap it up. 50 seconds.
- Greg Lavelle: Well, the saga continues. The General Assembly comes back in January. Senator Paradee has said he's going to, he's sort of moved the ball around, that where he is now he's going to retract this legislation so it can't happen. He's going to refuse to sponsor legislation for Kent County to do a hotel tax. So we'll find out more about this in January.
- Greg Lavelle: But again, I think he doth protest too much, and the simple answer, and it would pass, is give Levy Court the ability to levy a tax. They can pick if it's a 3%, and then the issue's gone. I mean, this is just a circus with no end, and a lot of people like you and me are quite entertained by it.
- Dace Blaskovitz: Greg Lavelle, fascinating guy. When we come back, Copeland does the year in review.