

DATA DELAWARE: Monday, November 11, 2019

SUBJECT: Lavelle vs. the News Journal

(Podcast transcript)

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Dace Blaskovitz: Welcome back to Money and Politics in Delaware. Former legislator Greg Lavelle is our guest today. By the way, we tape on Friday and air on Saturday, and Friday The News Journal, a story appeared Thursday night online "*It can be hard for lawmakers to keep their day jobs.*" Greg Lavelle takes exception to this piece that was written by The News Journal. Let's get, oh, the critics off your back to start with. The person featured in this, the legislator featured in this piece, is the one that defeated you. You're doing this, they will say, as a revenge act. What does Greg Lavelle say?

Greg Lavelle: They can say whatever they want. It's a free country, and I can too.

Dace Blaskovitz: All right. You're ready to go on this one.

Greg Lavelle: The article is so worth the read, and it is difficult to be a state legislator. It does require juggling of family, and profession, and your responsibilities. But that didn't just start in 2018. Anyone who decides to run for office, and Laura Sturgeon, ran for that office for almost two years. It was no surprise going in that it's a challenge, and it's a challenge for everybody down there.

Greg Lavelle: But really what stands out in that article is her self-importance, and some of the opinions she articulates, and she can articulate those opinions and I will respond to them in kind. One of the things she talks about, for your listeners and for you Dace, so what does a state legislator make? Excellent question. You have a base salary of about \$45,000, or maybe 46,000 by now; there's an expense, there's was no accountability around the expense, it's \$8,000, so that is pay. So you're up to about 53/54, and then if you serve on various committees, and/or you're in legislative leadership, you get what's called a stipend; those stipends run from about \$3,500 a year to serve on joint financings like that, to \$20,000 a year if you're a state legislator, if you're in leadership.

Greg Lavelle: The paper reported that Sturgeon makes \$57,000 a year as a lawmaker, to which she states that she views that as part-time pay, which I find offensive beyond suggestion. The average state employee in Delaware makes \$46,000 a year. She makes 24% more than that, for a six month job. It's more involved than that, but nothing like getting a job and say, "You don't pay me enough for this job, when I got in."

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- Greg Lavelle: We have nurses, and other state employees, the guys on Del DOT, and the ladies at Del DOT who are out standing on cold cement with cars whizzing by. For the last number of years there has been a huge and important discussion around, for instance, prison guard compensation. They'll never \$57,000 a year, short of their overtime. What about the single mom, the married mom, the married dad, the single dad, who's out in the real world in the private sector working two jobs and not making \$57,000 a year? The self-importance of her comment to me was stunning.
- Dace Blaskovitz: Oh, let me pour salt in the wounds here. The paragraph that I found the choker was, assuming the quote is correct, it's not a quote, let me stand corrected. The reporter is Sarah G-A-M-A-R-D. "Sturgeon makes nearly \$57,000 per year as a lawmaker, and another \$93,000 per year as a Brandywine School District teacher."
- Dace Blaskovitz: Let's put that in perspective; as a full-time state employee you get about 30/35% additional to your salary because of pension and healthcare. We've got somebody knocking down \$200,000 a year, whining, help me with that, Greg Lavelle.
- Greg Lavelle: Well, you'd have to have her come on your show and explain it. I just don't get it. It is hard to believe. I think there's a mentality in this country now, and I'll say a quote of hers regarding other legislators, "We have a lot of wealthy legislators who can afford not to work or make their own hours." Who are they? I'd like to know who the wealthy legislators are, in her mind. Let me tell you, you just said, she's making \$90,000/\$100,000 as a teacher, and God bless her, that's the salary. What if I make \$45,000 a year? I think in Senator Sturgeon's mind, anybody, and this is sort of this Elizabeth Warren thing, anybody who makes more than me is wealthy.
- Greg Lavelle: Another important thing that came out in this article, I think it's important to the makeup of the legislature as they make and consider policy going forward, Senator Sturgeon talks about getting more diversity down there and it's so hard and wah, wah, wah. One-third of the people down there are business people, apparently wealthy business people, that means two-thirds aren't. The legislature is moving in the direction of more state employees, more nonprofit sort of employees, union folks, and things like that. The private sector is well underrepresented in the Delaware State Legislature, let me tell you. That doesn't mean it's not a challenging job, but that's a reflection of that.

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Greg Lavelle: I think she's wrong on that, as well. Or it's worth pointing out that there's differences of opinion on that. I've been concerned about that for years. Look at the people running. Another little secret of Dover, Dace, it's not that much of a secret, is that double dipping?

Dace Blaskovitz: Yeah. Stay with me just a minute, because I was offended by two things. One, I got somebody doing \$200,000 hours of taxpayer money being a victim. Then the next paragraph was Sturgeon said she hopes to become a professor, I think it was, at one of the local Delaware colleges. In other words, because she was elected, she became entitled. Did I get that right?

Greg Lavelle: Well, I guess she's interviewing in the newspaper, "Come hire me. I'm a State Senator. Maybe I can get you some more money," or something like that. There are way too many people in Dover who get elected, and then get a state job.

Dace Blaskovitz: But you had some stats yesterday. You were dropping names left and right. How much of that are you willing to put on the air?

Greg Lavelle: Tony DeLuca, John Viola, Helene Keele. It's a history. It's gone down recently, but it hasn't gone away. We ran bills before that say, you cannot get elected and then get a state job. It is common sense. Some people may say, "Well, you shouldn't do either." But if you run for office and you're a state employee, your opponent can criticize your praise you for that, the voters know going in. But to do this little behind-the-door thing, should end. We couldn't get the bill to passed.

Greg Lavelle: Well, I remember one of my colleagues said, "Well, I couldn't become a bus driver." Well, I didn't know you were down here to become a bus driver; bus drivers are important, but it's just nonsense. Senator Blevins, Patty Blevins, when she lost her election, suddenly she's the head of the animal welfare department. Nationwide search, and it goes right back to someone who just lost her election. Helene Keeley just got a job at the state lottery office as she walked out the door. That stuff has to stop. Where's The News Journal story about that?

Greg Lavelle: Also, to the reporter, go down and ask all 62, I guess she already said she's underpaid, go down and ask the other 61 members: Do you get paid enough for this job? Nicole Poore got elected, and now heads Jobs for Delaware Graduates; it is a 98% federal and state tax payer-funded organization, probably making about a \$100,000 a year, after she got elected.

Greg Lavelle: In addition to.

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- Dace Blaskovitz: In addition to, that's right. She's probably making 60/65 in her position. But going back to the story, there's reforms that can be done. But it was just too sad, quite frankly, or funny, the woe is me. I served for 18 years, my wife and my family. I wasn't running to The News Journal saying, "Hey, can you do a story about how hard I work and make me really look sympathetic?" It's nonsense. It's nonsense. To the policy, because I know you guys like to talk about policy. The general assembly, in my opinion, is headed in the wrong direction. We need business people; people like Quinn Johnson, he runs a daycare, hundreds of children, employees. He gets it. He is in that field. That's what we need in Dover. We do need diversity. I'm not opposed to teachers or state employees being there, but the trend is going the wrong way. Absolutely.
- Dace Blaskovitz: His name is Greg Lavelle. I'm not sure if you saw it, but the State of Delaware is ranked 50th in a business/corporate income taxes, ranked 50th. So if you think a business is coming to Delaware...
- Greg Lavelle: Oh, quickly, on state legislative pay. We're probably the 15th highest paid state legislature in the country; small state, small constituency, 15th or so highest pay. I wasn't able to grab that exact statistic, but we are up there in the top 20, or if not top 10.
- Dace Blaskovitz: Woo. Greg Lavelle is his name. We'll see you back here next week for more Money and Politics in Delaware.