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- Dace Blaskovitz: Welcome back to Money in Politics in Delaware. Chris Kenny, founder co-chair of *A Better Delaware*. You'll hear the phrase ABD, *A Better Delaware*. Again, off the press release is a nonpartisan public policy and political advocacy organization that supports pro-growth pro-jobs policies and greater transparency and accountability in state government. Chris Kenny, this is a very personal story for you and it really has its findings in that personal story. Please share that with the audience.
- Chris Kenny: Well, I can be very frank. A couple of sessions ago, we had worked through our *Food Industry Council* and we're pretty clear through the *State Chamber of Commerce* that a bill, the minimum wage bill that was being proposed was not something that was going to be conducive to our efforts to continue to help reduce recidivism in the state by hiring out of the criminal justice system or help those with long term unemployed or disabled return them to work with the social service organizations that come with their wraparound services.
- Chris Kenny: We are very big into that space. And economically to be effective in that space having a very expensive floor rate is going to activate an accelerated capital investment, unfortunately. And that's proven. You look at the CBO studies and other studies and I know there's studies all over the place, but you can look at the boots on the ground, the facts that workforces is not going to remain employed. I mean it's just a fact unfortunately.
- Chris Kenny: And we would like to keep them and maintain our associate base. And so we were told by leadership for months and months and months in Dover that this bill was not before committee, and it was not going to get a vote because it wasn't before a committee and we were going to address this bill. It would be with the proper hearing and there would be discussion.
- Chris Kenny: Well, low and behold, at 2:30 in the morning, the last day of session, it was horse traded for a casino tax relief bill so that the casino could then sell. And the rules of democracy were suspended and that was it. It passed. So it wasn't about the money and it's not about the money at this point. This is about what really is a good governance. And that's why a big chunk of big piece of what we're trying to accomplish with *A Better Delaware* is focused on transparency and accountability.

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Chris Kenny: Suspending the rules of democracy at 2:30 in the morning, the last day of session is just a travesty. We can do better, our government can do better, our politicians can do better, and our constituents, voters and taxpayers expect and demand that we do better than operate in such a manner. And then to follow it up with the most recent session, again, the bill, a new bill was brought up, a more aggressive, even more anti-employment bill was brought up around the minimum wage and it gets into the Senate labor committee and 29 of 33 speakers against. And none of the Democratic senators except the gavel holder to keep the committee open, listened and voted it out anyway.

Chris Kenny: And that's not how I believe that we should be conducting business. And as a government, if we're going to listen and have committee hearings, we show up. If we're not going to suspend rules and we're going to listen to the constituents and the tax payers and the businesses we show up. So that's dug into me and I'm very, very concerned. Look what happened with the real estate transfer tax. Again, the last minute horse trade. We now have the highest real estate transfer tax in the nation. Buried the realtors, mortgage brokers and the rest of that industry in order to make a budget deal.

Chris Kenny: Is that where we need to be? Is that how we do things? I don't think so. And so it's just not me. It's happening. Look at the hotel industry, we're now going to have some of the highest tax rates amongst the highest cities in the nation. Same issue.

Dace Blaskovitz: To play fair, so you formed this advocacy group and it has teeth and you have a purpose and what are you going to do?

Chris Kenny: Well, as things happen, real time we're going to go to constituents. And if it's clear that things are going to be waited intentionally, waited until the last day of session when everybody's asleep, then we will hopefully become aware of that intent somehow ahead of time through individuals that are not happy with that style of government in our state and we will deploy effective communications and megaphone that into the district of those that are trying to operate in that manner.

Chris Kenny: And so we hope that come January 1 that our message has been delivered loud and clear to the folks down in Dover that we expect you to do better. We expect more. We expect you to operate in a way that's fair and transparent and not utilize the levers of power and control due to vote counts to operate in the dark, and pick and choose winners & losers. And we all wake up on July 1st and try to figure out, well, are we going to be in business or not?

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Dace Blaskovitz: Chris, let me go a different way with you. The Delaware demographics, the African American community, that votes that votes 93% Democrat is 25% ish, not the 13% national. 10% Hispanic, of the 35% in Delaware. Two thirds uses public assistance. 13% government workers and 17% seniors reworded 3/5ths of Delaware vote themselves a paycheck. What's going to motivate any or all of those 3/5ths for change?

Chris Kenny: Well Dace, we've been in business in New Castle County for like I said, for 25 years. We have 125,000 customers a week, 1,250 associates. All of the demographics and specific information that you referenced, we have been working with those state agencies, with the social service organizations, the nonprofit organizations, with the community groups, the churches. We've been working with our associates and our customers. We are in that space. We have deep understanding, me and my family know exactly what you're saying.

Chris Kenny: And we understand our customers associates and we understand exactly those issues. And I can assure you, that if we were to educate them very specifically about issues that are occurring in Dover around what our concerns are and we're clear with them about what is happening and how it's affecting them, that they would come to the conclusion that there needs to be a course correction.

Dace Blaskovitz: How does somebody participate, reach out?

Chris Kenny: ABetterDelaware.org. We have a Facebook, Website, and Twitter. We would appreciate if people would go on and watch the three minute video that we have at the top of the page. Subscribe to our newsletter and follow us on Facebook and Twitter, and you will see the communication in real time.