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Introduction, Public Policy in Connecticut: Challenges and Perspectives

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Introduction

GARY L. ROSE

One of the principal functions of a state government is to ensure the health, welfare, and safety of state residents. State governments are expected to design and enact a broad array of domestic public policies that contribute, to the extent that resources allow, to a respectable quality of life for those persons who reside within the state's geographic borders. Indeed, for the past twenty-five years, as a result of the "Reagan Revolution" that commenced in 1981 and the subsequent Republican congressional election victory in 1994, a substantial share of domestic public policy has been transferred from the federal government to the governments of the fifty states. The transfer of power, applauded by conservatives and criticized by liberals, is commonly referred to as "devolution." As a result of devolution, state governments are now expected to assume a much more pronounced role in the delivery of public services to the American people.

Although debate continues among politicians and academics regarding which level of government is most capable of delivering services to the American people, the fact of the matter is that the fifty states, not the federal government, are currently the units of government that determine the substance of numerous domestic policies. Moreover, the American people apparently look to state governments, more than the federal government, for domestic leadership, policy innovation, and trustworthy decision making. In 1981, the Gallup Poll asked a sample of Americans this

question: "Which do you think is more likely to make decisions free of political corruption: the federal government in Washington or the government of this state?" Forty-two percent of respondents identified their state government as the level of government least affected by corruption, while only 26% identified the federal government.¹ The American peoples' growing confidence in state authority can be observed across time as well. In 1936, the Gallup Poll asked a sample of Americans: "Which do you favor: concentration of power in the federal government or in the state government?" Fifty-six percent of respondents in 1936 favored concentrated power in the federal government, while 44% preferred power in state government. In 1995, the Hart and Teeter Research Companies for the Council for Excellence in Government asked the same question with vastly different results. Sixty-four percent of respondents in 1995 favored concentrated power in state governments, while only 26% favored concentrated federal power.²

Precisely how well state governments have delivered services to the American people in the age of devolution is a debatable question, and one that is well beyond the scope of this particular work. Moreover, with fifty individual state governments in the United States, there is a substantial variation in public service performance; thus blanket generalizations are virtually impossible. Financial resources, political leadership, and the capacity of state governing institutions are directly related to the ability of a state to effectively deliver public services to state residents. In some states, public operating budgets are healthy and robust, the state revenue base is broad and deep, political leaders are creative, and governing institutions, such as state legislatures, are equipped with appropriate technologies and staff. In such states, the response to public needs is normally more efficient and effective compared to those states with modest operating budgets, unstable streams of public revenue, ineffective political leadership, and governing institutions unprepared and ill-equipped for the range of new public responsibilities associated with devolution. However, regardless of how well prepared a state is to exercise and manage public policy in the twenty-first century, the fact of the matter is that state governments, prepared or not, are fully expected to meet the public needs of the American people.

Devolution Comes To Connecticut

For more than two decades, state lawmakers, governors, and judges in the state of Connecticut have immersed themselves in a host of domestic policy issues that at one time seemed far beyond the scope of the Connecticut polity. Even the policy challenges that historically have been regarded as the province of Connecticut government now require approaches and solutions far more sophisticated and innovative than those employed by decision makers prior to the age of devolution. As House Speaker Moira Lyons noted in an interview with this author, lawmakers who served in the Connecticut General Assembly twenty or more years ago would be “blown away” if they knew what sort of policy issues currently face those who serve in the state legislature.³ Indeed, all branches of Connecticut government are feeling the effects of devolution: the legislative workload of the Connecticut General Assembly involves issues that require lawmakers with technical, financial, and scientific expertise; Connecticut’s governors grapple with an array of new and highly complex issues that demand creative problem solving; and Connecticut’s judges are forced to confront a growing docket of civil and criminal cases that require not only an excellent grasp of the law, but also an understanding of the social, economic, and political underpinnings of the law itself.

The devolution of power to state governments has also meant that states are in many ways more responsible for financing public policies that prior to devolution were regarded as federal responsibilities. Accordingly, state operating budgets have expanded and policy makers out of necessity have adopted new methods of raising public revenue. In Connecticut, for example, a 4.5% state income tax was adopted in 1991. Indeed, a review of Connecticut’s operating budget should underscore the financial ramifications of policy devolution.

For Fiscal Year (FY) 2003, the state of Connecticut’s operating budget was \$13.2 billion. For Fiscal Years 2004 and 2005, the governor recommended budgets of \$13.6 and \$14.2 billion respectively. Connecticut is a relatively small state with slightly more than three million residents, yet in FY 2005 it will have an

annual operating budget of more than \$14 billion. As indicated in table 1, over 90% of the state's operating budget is directed towards programs associated with the General Fund. This includes areas such as human services, aid to towns and cities, hospitals, and corrections. Over 6% of the budget is allocated to the Special Transportation Fund, while close to 2% is designated for the Mashantucket Pequot and Mohegan Funds. The additional monies are appropriated for a variety of established operating funds, including the Soldiers', Sailors', and Marines' Fund, the Regional Market Operating Fund, the Banking Fund, the Insurance Fund, the Public Utility Control Fund, the Workers Compensation Fund, and the Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund.⁴

Table 1
Appropriated Funds Of the State (in millions)

	Estimated	Recommended	
	FY 03	FY 04	FY 05
General Fund	\$12,139.8	\$12,476.5	\$13,026.4
Special Transportation Fund	892.4	898.8	921.9
Mashantucket Pequot & Mohegan Fund	106.0	85.0	85.0
Soldiers', Sailors' & Marines' Fund	3.6	3.5	3.5
Regional Market Operating Fund	0.9	0.9	1.0
Banking Fund	15.6	15.2	15.5
Insurance Fund	20.8	19.8	19.8
Public Utility Control Fund	20.5	19.8	19.8
Workers Compensation Fund	23.4	21.8	22.1
Criminal Injuries Comp. Fund	1.4	1.4	1.4
Grand Total	\$13,224.4	\$13,542.7	\$14,116.4

Source: Governor Rowland's Budget Proposal, FY 2003-2005 Biennium

With respect to sources of revenue, the state of Connecticut depends on a variety of taxes to support the operating budget. The state income tax generates roughly 35% of the budget, while the state sales and use tax yield more than 23%.⁵ Additional sources of

revenue are derived from federal grants, gaming, corporate taxes, public service taxes, the cigarette tax, the real estate conveyance tax, and the motor fuels tax.⁶

Governing in an age of devolution is certainly a most challenging task for Connecticut's political leadership. Indeed, in addition to expertise in budgetary matters, an effective state lawmaker in Connecticut must understand the many demographic and economic trends currently underway within the state and how such trends will inevitably impact the budgetary and policy process. State lawmakers in Connecticut must have a good grasp of finance and economics, as well as sociology and politics, in order to respond to the many multifaceted policy challenges that are rapidly emerging in the first decade of the twenty-first century. As we embark upon the new century, there appear to be ten major and distinct policy challenges that await Connecticut's lawmakers.

The Challenge of Economic Growth

Public policies designed to promote economic growth are one of the major challenges that continuously face state lawmakers across the land. In Connecticut, economic growth and job creation will definitely be a high priority item for the state's policy makers in the years ahead. Although many aspects of economic growth and economic cycles are conditioned by national and even international forces well beyond the scope of state government influence, it is still reasonable to expect policy makers at the state level to adopt economic policies that contribute to employment and business productivity. Indeed, the success of public policies such as those related to urban development and health care for the aged depend directly on the vitality of the state's economy. Public revenue is needed for government to provide public services to state residents, and a healthy economy that generates streams of revenue is essential for this purpose.

Projecting trends in economic growth is a difficult task, even for the most skilled economist. Long range forecasts contain many elements of uncertainty due to the multitude of hidden variables that affect economic growth. Consider the analogy presented by W. Michael Regan, the deputy director of the Connecticut

Department of Economics and Community Development, and Mark Prisloe, the department's chief economist:

An economy is fluid. It ebbs and flows in a constant struggle for equilibrium. Imagine a marble dropped in a bowl. It will continue to roll around the inside of the bowl until it comes to rest. At this point it has reached its "stationary state" (or "steady state" if all relevant variables grow at an identical rate). It will remain stable until it encounters another stimulus. The magnitude of the stimulus will determine the path the marble takes and the amount of time it will spend rolling around in search of its "stationary" or "steady" state.⁷

Although "ebbs and flows" as well as "stimuli" are difficult to predict, most observers of the Connecticut economic scene seem to agree that Connecticut's economy in the foreseeable future will be marked by low growth and modest productivity. Indeed, several indicators reveal a less than robust economy now and in the immediate years ahead.

Economic projections from 2000 to 2010, suggest that economic growth in the state of Connecticut, like economic growth patterns in states throughout the Northeast, will lag behind the national average, a pattern that has persisted for more than thirty years.⁸ In Connecticut specifically, it is projected that approximately 150,000 new jobs will be created from 2000 to 2010, which is only 15,000 new jobs per year. In addition to creating new jobs with respectable salaries and wages, the challenge of economic growth and productivity will be further compounded by the declining number of young persons entering the work force. Demographic trends reveal that compared to 1990, 200,000 fewer persons between the ages of 18-34 will enter the Connecticut workforce during the first decade of the twenty-first century. This is a 22% decline in the number of available workers in this very critical age category. Among the fifty states, Connecticut ranks third with respect to the population decline of 18-34 year-olds.⁹

In addition to modest job growth and a declining pool of eligible workers, another problem inherent in Connecticut's

economy concerns the types of jobs that will be created in the years ahead. More specifically, the trend is quite clearly towards jobs that require very sophisticated technological skills and high levels of education. For example, jobs related to the fields of computer programming and information technology are expected to grow at a phenomenal rate. Indeed, the Connecticut Economic Resource Center projects that with the exception of computer programming, information technology occupations will grow at five times the rate of other jobs in the state. The important question, however, is whether or not the emerging workforce in Connecticut possesses the necessary levels of education and technological skills required to assume such positions.¹⁰

Traditional manufacturing jobs in Connecticut, which served as the backbone of Connecticut's economy for a good part of the twentieth century, are clearly on the wane. Moreover, it is unlikely that the state will ever experience a reversal of this trend. Manufacturing plant relocation to southern states, Latin America and Asia are among the several reasons manufacturing jobs are rapidly disappearing in Connecticut. From 2000 to 2005, employment in manufacturing jobs in Connecticut declined from 262,360 to 254,900. By 2010, the Connecticut Department of Labor projects 251,600 employees in the field of manufacturing. Thus, over the ten-year period, it is projected that 10,760 manufacturing jobs in Connecticut will be lost, a total decrease of 4.1%.¹¹ Examples of manufacturing jobs projected by the Department of Labor to be very hard hit by 2010 include, but are not limited to, lathe and turning machine tool setters, machine feeders and offbearers, cutting, punching, and press machine setters, prepress technicians, along with drilling and boring machine tool setters. On average, such occupations will experience somewhere between a 17-18% loss in jobs.¹²

Although Connecticut's economy is not by any means in a state of crisis, the economic forecast and projections clearly suggest that strategic and creative economic planning on the part of Connecticut's political leaders, working in conjunction with economists and executives from private industry, will definitely be needed in years to come. Those involved in economic planning must develop long-term strategies and policies designed to

stimulate economic growth, accommodate the growing labor shortage among persons 18-34 years of age and prepare young adults entering the workforce with the necessary skills required for technological occupations. At the same time, economic planners must find ways to retrain individuals who appear destined to lose their jobs, most notably those involved in manufacturing occupations. Economic policy making is a very complex, multidimensional and far reaching policy area. It is currently one of the most serious policy challenges facing the state of Connecticut.

The Challenge of Transportation

Anyone who drives on Connecticut's major highways, such as I-95, I-91, Route 84, or Route 15 (also known as the Wilbur Cross Parkway in the north and the Merritt Parkway in the south) will most likely be frustrated by the sheer volume of traffic and the inevitable traffic jams that occur on a daily basis. The vast majority of the Connecticut work force travels to and from work in cars. Buses and railroads are used by only a tiny percentage of individuals. The people in Connecticut, like Americans across the land, love their automobiles.

Table 2
Land Area and Persons Per Square Mile:
U.S. and Six New England States

	Land Area	Persons Per Square Mile
United States	3,537,438	79.6
Connecticut	4,845	702.9
Rhode Island	1,045	1,003.2
Massachusetts	7,840	809.8
Vermont	9,250	65.8
New Hampshire	8,968	137.8
Maine	30,862	41.3

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

Connecticut's traffic problem lies in the density of the state's population, as well as the relatively undeveloped mass transit system. The density of Connecticut's population per square mile manifests itself in a large volume of traffic. Also, with population slowly but steadily rising, the traffic situation on Connecticut's roads and highways will become much worse. Table 2 shows how geographically small Connecticut is in relation to other New England states, yet how dense the population is per square mile. Connecticut with 702.0 persons per square mile is not as densely populated as the states of Rhode Island and Massachusetts, but is certainly more dense than the northern New England states of Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. Connecticut, as the data indicate, is far more dense than the national average as well. With the large number of inhabitants per square mile in Connecticut, along with the heavy reliance of Connecticut residents on automobiles for transportation, it is no mystery why Connecticut's roads are often in a state of gridlock. Moreover, projections published by the Connecticut Department of Transportation clearly indicate that the state's traffic problem will increase quite severely. Table 3 presents the Department of Transportation's long-term projections regarding the volume of traffic. What is particularly alarming is how the volume of traffic is projected to increase dramatically throughout the sixteen transportation planning regions, with no region immune from traffic growth.

As the traffic data suggest, Connecticut's highways and roads across the state will experience a marked growth in traffic volume during the next two decades. In most regions of the state, the volume of traffic will increase by more than 20% while in some regions the increase will be more than 30%. For those who commute long distances in Connecticut, such figures are quite disconcerting. Imagine oneself on one of Connecticut's highways in the year 2025. The volume of traffic will be extreme and in some parts of the state intolerable. The flow of traffic in Connecticut thus poses a major challenge to the state's policy makers and it is the responsibility of the Connecticut state legislature working in conjunction with the Department of Transportation to develop creative and effective solutions to what is rapidly becoming a crisis situation.

Table 3
 Department of Transportation Traffic Projections: 2000-2025
 Vehicle Miles Traveled Growth (%)

	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025
Planning Region 1	.00	4.27	8.74	12.97	16.77	20.53
Planning Region 2	.00	5.55	12.27	18.26	23.53	29.30
Planning Region 3	.00	4.18	8.49	12.41	16.85	21.54
Planning Region 4	.00	6.20	12.84	19.59	25.99	31.69
Planning Region 5	.00	5.62	10.69	16.06	20.30	24.43
Planning Region 6	.00	4.80	10.05	12.37	16.72	19.91
Planning Region 7	.00	4.18	8.91	12.76	16.23	19.63
Planning Region 8	.00	5.37	10.64	15.53	19.85	24.09
Planning Region 9	.00	6.07	11.74	16.95	21.18	25.38
Planning Region 10	.00	5.56	12.25	18.08	23.69	29.11
Planning Region 11	.00	5.72	10.94	16.56	23.07	29.76
Planning Region 12	.00	5.72	12.81	18.92	23.30	28.52
Planning Region 13	.00	9.47	19.14	27.08	31.98	37.07
Planning Region 14	.00	6.24	13.69	21.01	28.02	34.79
Planning Region 15	.00	7.18	14.23	21.15	26.37	31.03
Planning Region 16	.00	4.34	8.90	13.65	18.01	23.37
Total	.00	5.73	11.87	17.38	22.19	26.96

Source: Connecticut Department of Transportation, Series 27 Travel Model Data, February 2002. Vehicle Miles Traveled growth is calculated from the number of vehicles in a designated region times the distance they travel.

The Challenge of Environmental Protection

The challenge of environmental protection is present in many states throughout the United States, and Connecticut is certainly no exception. Hazards to animal and plant life as well as to the health of human beings exist in many different forms. Although Connecticut seems to have a well-respected and somewhat aggressive Department of Environmental Protection, a review of threats to the state's environment suggest quite clearly that environmental protection is, and will continue to be, a most challenging task in the years ahead. A number of problem areas

have been cited, not only by Connecticut-based environmental protection interest groups, but also by the Council on Environmental Quality, a state agency which functions independently of the Department of Environmental Protection. The Council consists of nine members appointed by the governor and leaders within the General Assembly. A reading of the Council's 2001 Annual Report suggests a plethora of environmental hazards within the state of Connecticut, many of which are invisible yet detrimental to the state's quality of life.

According to the Council's Report, there is a serious problem involving high levels of mercury in Connecticut's air. Power plants that burn coal and incinerators that burn garbage and sewage are generating mercury, which in turn drifts into ponds, lakes, and streams across the state. Pregnant woman and children who eat fish contaminated by toxic methyl mercury appear to be the individuals especially at risk.¹³

In addition to dangerous levels of mercury, the Council identifies sewage overflows into Connecticut's rivers, as well as the Long Island Sound, as posing a serious environmental challenge. Although the Council notes that substantial progress has been made with respect to the construction of storm and sanitary sewers, the evidence still suggests that such sewers carry more water than can be handled by local treatment facilities.¹⁴

Consumption of electricity due to increased use of electrical appliances will also take its toll on Connecticut's environment, with a 10% increase in electrical usage predicted by 2015.¹⁵ The demand for increased electricity will, as the Council notes, result in more electrical power plants, resulting in increased air pollution and increased consumption of water.¹⁶

Beyond the problems of mercury, sewage overflow, and electrical consumption, the Council also identifies infestation by "invasive species" as a potentially grave threat to Connecticut's environment. Invasive species, according to the Council, include "colonies of tiny zebra mussel" as well as chestnut plants that infest and eventually choke the flow of streams and rivers. The Council notes that certain invasive species, if not arrested, will undoubtedly inflict serious damage on Connecticut's ecosystem.¹⁷

In addition to the Council's Annual Report, it is instructive for those concerned with environmental challenges to review the chief concerns expressed by leading environmental protection interest groups currently operating in Connecticut. The policy agendas of such organizations further suggest that environmental protection is one of the important challenges for Connecticut lawmakers in the years ahead. Consider, for example, the concerns expressed by two of Connecticut's foremost environmental protection groups, Save the Sound, and the Connecticut Public Interest Research Group (ConnPIRG).

Save the Sound, as the organization's name indicates, is concerned with the preservation and protection of the Long Island Sound. An estuary 110 miles long and 21 miles wide, the Long Island Sound offers many forms of recreation to Connecticut residents, including fishing, swimming, and boating.¹⁸ Although to the naked eye the Sound may appear to be in no immediate danger of environmental destruction, the fact of the matter is that multiple environmental hazards are gradually and systematically destroying the Sound's water and aquatic life. As reported by Save the Sound, human negligence, as well as residential and commercial development, have "greatly intensified the rate at which pollutants reach the Sound."¹⁹ Sewage, pesticides, household chemicals, and car exhausts are each in their own way contaminating various aspects of the Long Island Sound, a slow but steady form of environmental destruction.²⁰

ConnPIRG is another public interest group in Connecticut that monitors environmental hazards. According to this particular organization, air pollution generated by incinerators in power plants presents a serious health risk to all Connecticut residents. The quality of Connecticut's air is declining and thousands of children suffer from asthma as a result.²¹ According to ConnPIRG, Connecticut is especially negligent with respect to recycling efforts, with approximately two-thirds of the state's trash burned in incinerators rather than recycled. The end result is the release of dangerous toxins that inflict damage on all forms of life in Connecticut.²²

The environmental concerns identified by the Council on Environmental Quality, Save the Sound, and ConnPIRG clearly underscore why environmental protection is one of the great challenges for Connecticut lawmakers in the years ahead. The issues

are serious and very complex, but if the residents of Connecticut are to enjoy an environment free from dangerous toxins and pollutants, then it is incumbent among those in positions of political power to establish and enforce sound, sensible, and cost effective environmental policies. Indeed, the state's quality of life is at stake.

The Challenge of Ethnic Diversity

Another major challenge that will inevitably face state lawmakers concerns the changing ethnic character of Connecticut's population. Clearly, the demographic composition of the Connecticut population has undergone a rather dramatic transformation during the past two decades, resulting in a far more diverse and ethnically heterogeneous state citizenry. As ethnic heterogeneity increases, so too do the policy demands of the state's population. Such demands require lawmakers, irrespective of skin color, religion, and ethnic origin, to be acutely sensitive and responsive to the policy needs of population groups that at one time were without political voice. Federal census data presented in table 4 clearly reveal a state population in the midst of ethnic transition.

Table 4
Population Projections for Connecticut: 1995-2025

	1995	2000	2005	2015	2025
Total Population (thousands)	3,275	3,284	3,317	3,506	3,739
Population Subgroups (%)					
Whites	88.6	87.4	86.2	84.0	81.9
Blacks	9.1	9.8	10.5	11.9	13.1
American Indian, Eskimo, Aleutian	.2	.2	.2	.2	.2
Asian and Pacific Islander	2.0	2.4	2.8	3.8	4.5
Hispanic	7.5	8.7	10.0	12.7	15.3

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. Beginning in 2000 respondents were allowed to identify themselves as belonging to one or more racial/ethnic group.

Generally speaking, racial minorities will account for an increasingly larger share of the state's population. In 1995, racial minority groups constituted 18.8% of the total state population, while in 2025 this figure is projected to be 33.1%: one-third of the population. The most dramatic change appears to be among the Hispanic population. From 1995 to 2025, the Hispanic population in Connecticut, which consists of persons of Mexican, Central and South American, Puerto Rican, and Cuban descent, is expected to double in size from 7.5% to 15.3%. Asians and Pacific Islanders are also projected to double from 2.0% to 4.5% of the state's population, while Connecticut's Black population is projected to increase from 9.1% to 13.1%. The percentage of American Indians, Eskimos, and persons of Aleutian descent will remain static, with no change projected. The white population in Connecticut, which includes a wide range of ethnic groups, is projected to decline from 88.6% to 81.9%, a 6.7% decrease.

The federal census data, assuming the projections are accurate, have serious implications for those who occupy future positions of political authority in the state of Connecticut. The source of political demands and the substance of political agendas are bound to become more complex as the state's population increases by close to half a million new residents, and as the state assumes a more racially heterogeneous and multicultural character. The census trends also suggest that a multiplicity of policy issues most closely associated with Connecticut's urban areas will undoubtedly require the close attention of Connecticut's legislators, governors, and judges. Policy issues closely associated with Connecticut's cities, in which most Hispanics and Blacks reside, will most surely be the subject of debate and policy resolution at the state capitol for the foreseeable future.

The residents of Connecticut's inner cities, more than ever, will need the support of the state legislature to help elevate and enhance their quality of life. Despite former governor Rowland's ambitious urban agenda, Connecticut's cities are still in need of, and will continue to need, affordable housing, quality schools, job opportunities, safe roads and bridges, police protection, and adequate health care. Political demands from racial minority groups in Connecticut's cities will expand in proportion to their

steady increase within the population, thus requiring the state legislature and administrative agencies to be sensitive and responsive to the needs of inner-city inhabitants. This is not to suggest that Connecticut's state government should be expected to "fix" all of the ills that plague cities such as Hartford, Bridgeport, New Haven, and Waterbury; indeed it is quite unrealistic to expect government at any level to somehow solve the problems that have beset America's urban areas. For Connecticut's cities to embark upon a successful path of redevelopment, government assistance must necessarily be supplemented by private sector initiatives, as well as effective civic participation. Successful urban policy making requires coordinated financial and political partnerships, rather than unilateral or disjointed problem solving efforts. Nevertheless, urban-based policy issues will most certainly affect the state legislative agenda in future years—census projections support this conclusion—and state lawmakers to the extent that is possible will be expected to offer creative solutions.

The Challenge of Ethical Political Leadership

Financial resources, strategic planning, and perceptive lawmakers are essential to the success of policy innovation and policy problem solving. Adequate levels of funding, carefully designed plans of action, and astute political leaders with vision will most certainly be needed in years ahead in order to deliver public services effectively to the residents of Connecticut. At the same time, it is essential that those individuals who are elected or appointed to public office be persons of sound moral character and who understand and appreciate the relationship between ethics and good government. High levels of funding for public programs and well-designed policy plans, albeit important elements of policy success, will for all intents and purposes mean very little if those in positions of public leadership betray the public's trust.

The challenge of ethics in government is an appropriate, although unfortunate, subject within the context of current Connecticut politics. For many years, Connecticut was known throughout the land for its clean and almost puritanical style of politics. Indeed, the state of Connecticut is known as both the

“land of steady habits” and “the Constitution State,” due to its predictable and stable system of politics, as well as its long tradition of noble self-government. Connecticut’s Fundamental Orders of 1639 was the first written constitution known to man, and it was in Connecticut that the tradition of constitutionalism began.

More recently, however, Connecticut government has been marred by activity that is fundamentally at odds with the state’s long tradition of steady and ethical self-government. Corruption in government appears to be proliferating and political scandals now surface with alarming frequency. Such a condition is particularly distressing to those who teach political science and who attempt in their lectures to impress upon students the virtues of public service. Newspaper photos and clips on the evening news regarding political scandals, and which sometimes show political leaders being led away in handcuffs, contribute very little in the way of motivating young persons to engage in the political process.

The year 2003 was particularly troublesome with respect to ethics and public leadership in the state of Connecticut. The mayor of Bridgeport, Joseph P. Ganim, was convicted in federal court of engaging in a wide variety of corruption related activity. Twenty-one federal charges, including bribery, kickbacks, extortion, mail fraud, tax evasion, and racketeering, were brought against the once popular mayor, who up to that point was regarded as a rising star in Connecticut politics. Ganim had been elected to five terms as mayor of Bridgeport and was credited with revitalizing an impoverished and debt-ridden city. In 1998, Mayor Ganim was tabbed by the Democratic Party’s candidate for governor, William Curry, to run on the Democratic ticket as lieutenant governor. Although the Curry/Ganim ticket was defeated, it was clear to most political observers that Ganim would be the frontrunner for the Democratic Party’s gubernatorial nomination in 2002. The federal trial, which captured statewide and national media attention, resulted in sixteen separate guilty verdicts against Ganim. The mayor was subsequently sentenced to nine years in federal prison. Ganim’s co-conspirators, who cooperated with federal prosecutors, received substantially lighter sentences.

The Ganim trial revealed the inner-workings of a political cabal determined to obtain wealth by awarding preferential contracts to developers in exchange for lucrative kickbacks and other amenities. As the prosecution often noted, the city of Bridgeport under Mayor Ganim was "for sale." Political corruption of this sort has surfaced from time to time in American cities across the land, resulting in trials and convictions of urban political leaders. Thus, in some respects, the Ganim case was not unusual. Political scandal, however, does come in many forms, which was painfully evident from the lurid federal case against Waterbury Mayor Philip Giordano.

As the federal corruption case against Ganim was unfolding, so too was the federal case against Mayor Giordano, yet another mayor of a large Connecticut city in financial crisis. Giordano had been elected mayor of Waterbury in 1995, and in 2000 he was nominated as the Republican Party's candidate for U.S. Senate. In the senate contest Giordano faced the popular incumbent Senator Joseph I. Lieberman and not unexpectedly was soundly defeated in an enormous election landslide. Lieberman received 64% of the vote (813,265) to Giordano's 35% (440,306).

The F.B.I. initially began investigating the activity of Mayor Giordano as part of a federal corruption probe. There were rumors that Giordano had connections to underworld figures associated with the New York based Genovese crime family. Like the Ganim case, construction contracts, bribes, and kickbacks appeared to be the focus of the investigation. Also like the Ganim case, federal investigators employed wiretap devices in order to obtain incriminating evidence against Giordano. However, it was during such wiretaps that federal agents learned that the mayor of Waterbury was involved in matters far more serious and harmful than economic corruption. Wiretapped conversations between Giordano and a Waterbury prostitute, Guitana Jones, revealed that the mayor of Waterbury was engaged in sexual relations with minors, more specifically the child and niece of the prostitute with whom he was speaking. Giordano's use of a cell phone to arrange the sexual encounters with the children constituted a federal offense, resulting in the immediate apprehension and incarceration of the mayor. The issue of federal corruption and the mayor's

possible ties to organized crime paled in comparison to what federal investigators discovered about Giordano's sex life and how he had harnessed the prestige of the mayoral office to harm the lives of two children. The federal case against Giordano was airtight, and a jury convicted the former mayor on seventeen felony counts. Mayor Philip Giordano was subsequently sentenced to thirty-seven years in federal prison.

Political scandal has become a common feature not only in Connecticut's cities, but also at the highest levels of Connecticut state government. State political figures have also been the focus of extensive federal investigations. The federal case against former Republican state treasurer Paul Silvester is one such example. Silvester was charged by federal prosecutors with accepting bribes and kickbacks in exchange for investing \$200 million of state pension money in the Boston-based investment firm, the Triumph Capital Group. Prosecutors claimed that Triumph Capital was given an unusual amount of discretion by Silvester regarding how best to invest the pension funds as well. The high-profile corruption case against Silvester was the subject of extensive media coverage and provided the Democratic Party with an opportunity to level ethical charges against the Republican Party and the Rowland administration during the 2002 gubernatorial campaign.

After a lengthy federal investigation, Silvester pleaded guilty to corruption charges and was prepared to serve as a government witness against Frederick W. McCarthy, chairman of the Triumph Capital Group, and Lisa A. Thiesfield, Silvester's former girlfriend. McCarthy and Thiesfield were charged with racketeering, bribery, conspiracy, and mail fraud.²³ Shortly before the trial, however, McCarthy and Thiesfield negotiated a plea bargain arrangement with federal prosecutors, thus negating the need for a federal trial. Silvester was subsequently sentenced to fifty-one months in prison, and three years supervised probation.²⁴

The years 2002 and 2003 were troubling with regard to corruption in government and the apparent lack of ethics and moral character on the part of those elected to serve the state's citizenry. Unfortunately, 2004 was equally distressing. Governor Rowland, a Republican who had been elected to a third term of office, unprecedented in Connecticut, came under both intense

federal investigation and investigation by a bi-partisan Select Impeachment Committee formed within the Connecticut House of Representatives. The major concern of investigators was whether or not the governor awarded no-bid state contracts to construction companies, particularly the Tomasso Group, one of the state's largest construction contractors, in exchange for personal amenities, gifts, and work done on his summer cottage located on Bantam Lake in Litchfield, Connecticut. Additionally, investigators were concerned with the special relationship between the governor and a businessman named Robert V. Matthews. Of particular concern was a condominium in Washington, D.C., owned by Governor Rowland and which had been leased to Matthews' niece. The rental payment to the governor had been funneled from Matthews through the niece and was well beyond the going rate of rentals in the same condominium complex. Rowland received rental payment of \$1750 a month, while the going rate for identical rentals was approximately \$450 a month. In addition to the suspicious rental payments, Matthews bought the condominium through an associate, or what investigators identified as a "straw buyer," for what appeared to be a very inflated purchase price.²⁵ What was particularly disconcerting to investigators was that the rental payments and purchase of the condominium seemed closely related to multi-million dollar state loans awarded to Matthews for his personal business enterprises.

The House Select Impeachment Committee employed the services of the New York law firm Mannatt, Phelps, and Phillips to conduct the impeachment investigation. Attorney Steven Reich, who had served as legal counselor to the Democratic members of the House Judiciary Committee during the 1998 impeachment proceeding against President Bill Clinton, meticulously coordinated and presented the corruption case against Governor Rowland. Witnesses were called to testify before the committee and several subpoenas were issued. One witness subpoenaed by the Select Committee was Governor Rowland. As many predicted, the governor refused to testify and challenged the legality of the subpoena on the grounds that the separation of powers doctrine within the Connecticut Constitution protected a sitting governor from testifying before an investigatory committee formed by the

state legislature. The case went to court, and much to the governor's chagrin, the legal argument was not accepted. In a landmark 5-2 decision, the Connecticut Supreme Court ruled that the separation of powers doctrine did not immunize the governor from a subpoena issued by the state legislature. In the view of the state supreme court, a subpoena issued by an investigative committee established by the state legislature was inherent in the impeachment power of the state legislature.

With the high court's historic ruling, issued on Friday, June 18, 2004, it became apparent that the governor was left with essentially three options: appear before the Select Committee and testify as requested; appear before the Committee and plead the fifth amendment; or ignore the subpoena and let the impeachment inquiry proceed without his participation. Precisely how the governor would respond to the court's landmark ruling was unclear, and political pundits along with legal analysts predicted one or another response. On Monday, June 21, three days after the Supreme Court's decision, the governor publicly announced his decision. In a televised address issued from the patio of the governor's mansion in West Hartford, the governor, with his wife Patty by his side, announced that effective July 1, 2004, he would officially resign from the office of governor. Although many political leaders, including those within the governor's party, had been encouraging the governor to resign, his decision still sent shockwaves throughout the state and polity.

To describe the governor's announcement as surreal is perhaps an understatement. For more than two decades, John G. Rowland had been regarded as one of Connecticut's most extraordinary and gifted politicians. He began his political career as a Republican state representative from his home town of Waterbury, where the Rowland family name is synonymous with public service and good government. Indeed, Rowland's grandfather, Sherwood Rowland, was credited with exposing a corrupt political ring operating in Waterbury during the 1930s, which resulted in prison sentences for the mayor of Waterbury and several top city officials. Following two terms in the state legislature, Rowland, at the age of twenty-seven, was elected to the United States Congress, representing Connecticut's fifth congressional district which

included Waterbury and several surrounding towns. Rowland was the youngest member of the U.S. Congress, and according to some reports the youngest member ever elected to the national legislature.

After one unsuccessful gubernatorial campaign in 1990, Rowland was elected to the office of governor in 1994. He was then reelected in 1998, and again in 2002. What made Rowland's election victories even more remarkable was that a Republican governor could be elected to three consecutive terms in a state where the Democratic Party enjoyed a numerical advantage in party registration.²⁶ Moreover, with the exception of a few legislative sessions, both chambers of the Connecticut state legislature for close to forty years have been under the control of the Democratic Party. The political dynamics of the Connecticut polity would suggest that a Republican governor would have limited success, although this was hardly the case. As a savvy and astute politician, Governor Rowland moderated his position on many wedge issues, and governed the state from a centrist position. The governor's budgets, despite the political posturing and opposition of his opponents, were normally accepted by the state legislature. Moreover, under Governor Rowland, the University of Connecticut was transformed into a world-class public university known not only for academic excellence, but also for its NCAA Division I men's and women's national champion basketball teams. The University of Connecticut's football program was also elevated to Division I along with the construction of a sparkling football stadium built to accommodate 40,000 spectators. Most important, Governor Rowland took a special interest in urban redevelopment and personally spearheaded programs and projects designed to revitalize Connecticut's troubled cities. In particular, the infrastructure of Connecticut's urban areas was vastly improved under his leadership. Most symbolic of the governor's commitment to urban redevelopment is the project known as Adrian's Landing, a \$771 million convention and entertainment center scheduled for development in the city of Hartford.

Throughout most of his tenure, Governor Rowland enjoyed exceptionally high public approval ratings. However, once the

political scandal broke and stories involving unethical behavior on the part of the governor routinely captured the headlines of nightly newscasts and local newspapers, most notably the *Hartford Courant*, his public approval ratings and public perceptions of his integrity declined dramatically.²⁷ Governor Rowland, in no uncertain terms, lost the trust of the Connecticut citizenry and resignation seemed to be the one and only appropriate course of action. The political career of John G. Rowland, once filled with promise and potential, including the possibility of a Cabinet post in the administration of President George W. Bush, ended in disgrace. As noted in the preface, Rowland was eventually sentenced to federal prison.

On July 1, 2004, Lieutenant Governor M. Jodi Rell, a respected, moderate Republican from Brookfield, Connecticut, and known for her ability to forge consensus on divisive policy issues, was inaugurated as the state's eighty-seventh governor on the north steps of the state capitol. Governor Rell's inaugural speech, broadcast live and delivered before more than two thousand persons who had assembled to observe the ceremony, emphasized themes of healing, trust, and ethics in public service. As the newly inaugurated governor boldly proclaimed: "We must and we will recommit ourselves to ending the culture of corruption that has plagued our state for far too long." Governor Rell also announced in her inaugural address that her very first official act as governor of the state of Connecticut would be to issue Executive Order No. 1, "which imposes strict ethics restraints on those who serve in government." The Executive Order also provides for a public integrity officer to be part of the governor's cabinet.

The Ganim, Giordano, Silvester, and Rowland scandals are among the most high profile political scandals that have emerged in Connecticut in recent years. Beneath the offices of governor, state treasurer, and big city mayors, one also finds a rash of additional scandals, or alleged scandals involving state legislators, a state judge, and in some instances mayors in Connecticut's smaller communities. Barely a day goes by in Connecticut when there is not some mention in local newspapers, radio, or television of a brewing political scandal. Precisely why political scandal has proliferated at such an alarming rate in Connecticut is difficult to

explain and beyond the scope of this particular work. Nevertheless, it is painfully evident to even the most casual observer that something has indeed gone awry in Connecticut politics. A state once known for its pristine and fair system of politics, and characterized by ethical public servants, is now referred to by political commentators as "Corrupticut," or "Connectigate." Residents of Connecticut cannot be proud of this development, nor should they dismiss or ignore such a disturbing trend. Ethical leadership is a prerequisite for good government, and recapturing the place of ethics in public service is clearly one of the most serious challenges which currently confronts the "land of steady habits."

The Challenge of Health Care

In most democracies, health care is regarded as a basic and fundamental human right. The national government in countries such as Canada, Sweden, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Italy provide a full complement of health services to citizens from the moment of birth to the time of death, in essence a "cradle to grave" public policy. In the United States, however, the policy of health care is, for the most part, a private affair rather than under the jurisdiction and administration of the government. Although over the years there have been several components of health care policy that have come under the control of both the national and state governments, such as Medicare, Medicaid, and, in Connecticut, the HUSKY Program and ConnPACE, the health care system in the United States for all intents and purposes is still very much in private, rather than governmental, hands.²⁸

While the quality of health care in the United States is often described as exceptionally advanced, there are nevertheless inherent flaws and deficiencies in the health care system, particularly with respect to health insurance coverage. Indeed, data gathered by the U.S. Census Bureau reveal that the number and percentage of Americans without health insurance have been steadily increasing over the course of the past fifteen years. In 1987, slightly more than thirty-one million Americans (12.9%) were without health insurance, while in 2003, the figures had risen to approximately fifty million citizens, or 15.6% of the population.²⁹

Although the percentage of Connecticut residents without health insurance is considerably below the national figure, the recent census data are still disconcerting. Among the state's 3.4 million inhabitants, 357,000 individuals were discovered in the 2003 census survey to be without any form of health insurance. This constituted 10.4% of the state's total population. Like the national trend, the percentage of Connecticut residents without health insurance has also been steadily rising. In 1987, the percentage of persons in Connecticut without health insurance was recorded at 6.4%. Thus, there has been a 4% rise in uninsured state residents over the fifteen year period.³⁰

The 2003 census figures also revealed that 8.3% of persons under the age of eighteen in Connecticut were without health insurance. In 1987, this figure stood at 4.5%. While the census figures for all persons in Connecticut without health insurance were not dissimilar to the percentages in other New England states, the percentage of uninsured under the age of 18, with the exception of Massachusetts, was considerably higher. In Maine, 6.0% of children in 2003 did not have health insurance, 7.9% of children were uninsured in Massachusetts, 5.5% in New Hampshire, 5.2% in Rhode Island, and only 3.9% of children were uninsured in Vermont.³¹

Although rising insurance premiums, increasing deductibles, shrinking insurance networks as well as a severe shortage of health care professionals are also problematic dimensions of the current health care system in Connecticut, it is the lack of health care insurance or the fear of losing one's health insurance that is foremost in the minds of many state residents, regardless of income, occupation, and insurance status. Consider, for example, the findings generated from a four town focus group study organized and conducted by members of the Connecticut Health Policy Project just prior to the 2002 elections.³² The Connecticut towns selected for the study included Canton, Groton, Cheshire, and Putnam. In every group, the participants rated the issue of health insurance as equal to or higher than the policy areas of education, the environment, energy, transportation, and the economy.

Most participants, quite surprisingly, regarded the issue of health insurance as more important than the war on terrorism.

Moreover, the participants seemed skeptical, and in some instances disillusioned, with the manner in which the gubernatorial and legislative candidates in 2002 were addressing the issue of health insurance, and practically all respondents viewed powerful special interests, such as insurance and pharmaceutical companies, as responsible for preventing meaningful health care reform.

When asked if given a chance what they would say to candidates for public office about the status of health insurance, the focus group participants clearly echoed the sentiments of one another: "help," "stop promising and do something," "make health care a priority," "the uninsured are real people, not just numbers," and "the crack is widening."³³

Whether lawmakers in Connecticut hear the desperate pleas of the uninsured and finally address the plight of this population group will depend, of course, on an array of political forces that ultimately condition legislative decision making. The force of public opinion, the resolve of law makers, election mandates, media reporting, gubernatorial leadership, special interests and lobbyists, as well as the economy and existing revenue are among the many variables that ultimately affect the policy of health care. Objectively, the prospect for reform in the immediate future looks rather bleak in light of the state's political dynamics. Regardless, the number of persons without health insurance is climbing in Connecticut, and state legislators, irrespective of party, need to be cognizant of the physical, economic and emotional pain that envelops those who are without health insurance. As the Connecticut Health Policy Project succinctly puts it:

One in ten Connecticut residents lack any health coverage, and that number is likely to grow. Lacking health insurance puts people at risk for severe long-lasting harm to their physical and economic health.³⁴

Indeed, as the evidence strongly suggests, the challenge of health care has descended on the state of Connecticut and it is the moral responsibility of state lawmakers to develop creative and meaningful solutions for those in need of assistance.

The Challenge of an Aging Population

Connecticut's population is growing older (see table 2, p. 143), and as a result there is increasing demand for the state to accommodate the social service needs of the elderly. Data regarding age trends do not suggest that the elderly and retirees will dominate the state's population by year 2025, but it is very clear that persons sixty-five and over will constitute a growing share of the Connecticut population. In fact, persons sixty-five and over are the only age category projected to significantly increase during the next two decades. Like those trends regarding racial heterogeneity, trends regarding age have public policy ramifications as well, perhaps most notably in the policy area of long-term health care.

As Connecticut's population ages, there will be much greater demand for long-term care services for the aged. More nursing homes with trained professional staff as well as in-home services will be required to take care of the elderly. As many elderly exhaust their life savings and are often forced to sell their homes to pay for long-term health care costs, the state will be forced to assume responsibility for paying the bill. Currently, Medicaid is the primary means by which a state supports the health care costs for elderly who have become destitute. For all intents and purposes, the Medicaid program, which is jointly funded through state and federal taxes, can be viewed as a form of welfare. Although nursing homes in Connecticut are privately owned and managed, their very existence depends heavily on Medicaid payments. Trends in aging suggest quite clearly that more nursing homes and community-based long-term care services, along with more Medicaid payments, will be required to meet the health needs of Connecticut's elderly. According to Governor Rowland's Budget Proposal for Fiscal Years 2003-05, the cost of Medicaid is growing at a rate of close to 9% per year.³⁵

Is there an alternative means of providing health care to the elderly? Can Connecticut's lawmakers devise a system of long-term health care that is less costly to taxpayers, and less economically devastating to the state's aging population? There are no easy answers to questions associated with long-term health care

for the elderly and infirm, and providing cost effective and quality health care to Connecticut's elderly population will be one of the most daunting challenges to state lawmakers in the years ahead.

The Challenge of Prison Overcrowding and Recidivism

Connecticut's prisons are filled to capacity with individuals who are either serving their sentence or who are awaiting trial. Moreover, the rate of recidivism has reached alarming proportions, which further compounds the problem of overcrowded prisons. Indeed, the problem of prison overcrowding in Connecticut has become so acute that Connecticut is now exporting 500 prisoners to Greensville Correctional Center in Virginia to serve out their prison terms. Prison overcrowding is so severe in Connecticut that former Governor Rowland appointed a special commission to review the problem of prison overcrowding and to issue recommendations for resolving the overcrowding crisis. In the policy area of criminal justice, the problem of prison overcrowding is clearly regarded as the issue in need of the most immediate attention. Thus, it seems appropriate to add the issue of prison overcrowding to our list of pressing policy challenges.

Table 6
Annual Incarcerated Population: 1990-2002

1990	9,589
1991	10,814
1992	11,022
1993	11,769
1994	14,125
1995	14,889
1996	14,967
1997	15,588
1998	15,909
1999	16,776
2000	17,749

Source: Connecticut Department of Corrections, Annual Report, 2003.
www.doc.state.ct.us/report/annualreport

Prisons have become a growth industry in the state of Connecticut, a sad, even tragic state of affairs. In 1982, there were thirteen state correctional institutions in Connecticut. In 2003, there were eighteen correctional institutions under the jurisdiction of the Connecticut Department of Corrections, seventeen prisons for males and one prison for females. For Fiscal Year 1989-90, the annual budget for corrections was \$186,941,974. For Fiscal Year 2002-03, the corrections budget had ballooned to \$576,803.09.³⁶ On July 1, 1990, the total number of incarcerated individuals in Connecticut was recorded at 9,589. As of July 1, 2003, this figure was 19,121.³⁷ This is a doubling of the state's prison population over the course of only twelve years. Table 6 presents longitudinal data which can only be described as alarming and very disturbing.

With the construction of several new prisons during the last twenty years, one might surmise that the Department of Corrections has effectively managed the problem of prison overcrowding. This, however, has not been the case. As noted in the 2003 Prison and Jail Overcrowding Commission's Report, to alleviate the problem of prison overcrowding, the state has been forced to reopen closed facilities, renovate existing buildings to create space, double-bunk cells, and, as previously stated, export 500 prisoners to Virginia.³⁸ The Commission's Report also cites a figure of 850 inmates who are housed in "non-traditional living spaces," such as half-way houses and other transitional accommodations.

Prison overcrowding in itself is a serious problem for the state of Connecticut. However, the challenge of overcrowding becomes even more problematic when viewed within the context of the prison population's demographics. As of July 1, 2002, 8,490 prisoners in Connecticut were Black, 5,003 were Hispanic, 5,257 were white, and 123 were classified as Other.³⁹ In short, 71% of the state's prison population is Black and Hispanic, yet only about 18% of the state's population is classified as such. These figures clearly underscore the plight of Blacks and Hispanics within the inner-cities of Connecticut. Chronic unemployment, deteriorating and underperforming schools, racial prejudice within the judicial system, as well as the disintegration of two-parent families are among the variables related to the disturbing number of Blacks

and Hispanics currently behind bars. Although it might seem unreasonable to expect state lawmakers and governors to resolve this most disturbing dilemma, the fact of the matter is that creative leadership and strategic public policies at the state level are desperately needed to improve the lives of young Blacks and Hispanics who reside in Connecticut's cities. Job creation, improved housing conditions, and quality public education are policies clearly within the purview of state government.

The Challenge of Inner-City Education

Inner-city schools in the state of Connecticut have been the subject of much debate and controversy within the chambers of the Connecticut state legislature and before the benches of Connecticut's courts. It is no secret that the public schools of Connecticut's inner-cities are in need of desperate help. The school buildings are in need of structural repair, educational resources are lacking, and the quality of the educational experience is far behind that of schools in the more prosperous Connecticut suburbs.

The educational experience and performance levels of suburban school children compared to urban school children in Connecticut is so vastly different that the Connecticut Department of Education has specifically identified the "achievement gap" as one of the Department's most important and immediate policy concerns. Indeed, regardless of what standardized academic measure is used, urban school children do not perform as well as suburban school children. For example, scores on the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) reveal a marked difference in performance between white and Asian students, who normally attend suburban schools, compared to Black, Hispanic, and Native-American students, who for the most part attend urban public schools. The Connecticut Department of Education describes the results of the CAPT in these terms: "The performance of white and Asian students is substantially higher than that of Black, Hispanic, and American Indian students in all subjects."⁴⁰

Another measure of academic achievement frequently employed is the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). Although the

SAT is by no means a perfect measure of a student's academic ability or learning potential, the test nevertheless does provide college admissions officers with some indication of a student's preparedness for college level work. One again, like the CAPT, the SAT underscores the very different educational environments of Connecticut's suburban and urban schools. In 2000, for example, the average mathematics score on the SAT among all Connecticut students who were tested was 503. The average verbal score on the SAT was 501.⁴¹ The two scores combined reveal an average SAT score of 1004. The scores in urban communities, however, were substantially lower than the state average. In Bridgeport, the math and verbal averages combined show an average SAT score of 783. In Hartford the average score was 782. In New Haven the average score was 815, in New London 816, while in Waterbury the average SAT was recorded at 857.⁴²

In addition to the CAPT and SAT, dropout data compiled by the Connecticut Department of Education further reveal the plight of students in the state's inner-cities. Table 7 presents the findings.

Table 7
Annual School Dropout Data in Connecticut

Academic Year	91-92	92-93	93-94	94-95	95-96	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00
Statewide	4.7	4.6	4.6	4.8	4.6	3.9	3.5	3.3	3.1
Bridgeport	11.4	11.4	10.4	8.8	7.1	7.4	8.9	8.4	10.3
Hartford	17.1	18.0	15.7	22.0	23.4	13.4	10.9	12.1	10.9
New Haven	12.5	8.8	8.0	9.2	10.3	10.0	6.8	7.7	6.1
New London	12.6	7.6	15.9	11.0	9.3	10.8	12.6	9.8	11.6
Waterbury	10.4	13.0	12.8	8.7	15.9	15.7	10.2	4.5	2.8

Source: Connecticut State Department of Education Website. www.csde.state.ct.us/public/der/datacentral/common2.asp?table=Dropout00

As the data in table 7 indicate, the dropout rate in Connecticut's inner-city schools is substantially higher than the state average. Although the data over a ten-year period suggest a gradual decline in the percentage of students who are dropping out

of urban schools, particularly in the city of Waterbury, which reports a rather dramatic reversal of the dropout trend, the larger picture that unfolds is that a significant portion of students who attend inner-city schools in Connecticut are far less likely to complete their high school education than students elsewhere in the state.

Although two very different educational environments have persisted in Connecticut for many years, it would be remiss not to identify recent efforts on the part of Connecticut's courts to correct the apparent disparity. Indeed, there have been some very bold and racially sensitive rulings issued by the Connecticut Supreme Court, based on provisions within the Connecticut Constitution, which in one way or another have attempted to rectify the dichotomous character of Connecticut public education. Such rulings, although by no means a panacea for equalizing the two educational environments, demonstrate a concern on the part of Connecticut's high court with correcting what has become a tragic and immoral educational situation. Two Connecticut Supreme Court rulings, issued approximately twenty years apart, reveal how serious this issue has become in the eyes of the court. Both decisions are regarded as landmark rulings within the context of state constitutional law.

In *Horton v. Meskill*, 172 Conn. 615 (1977), and a companion case, *Grace v. Meskill*, 172 Conn. 615 (1977), the Connecticut Supreme Court addressed the issue of state support for local school districts. Citing the equality provisions contained within the Connecticut State Constitution, the court concluded that the state was required by law to assume a more direct and decisive role with respect to funding Connecticut's public schools. More specifically, as a result of the Horton ruling, poor urban school districts, characterized by persons with low personal incomes and low property values, could now look to the state for funding assistance. It was the position of the state supreme court that students, regardless of their residence, were constitutionally entitled to a respectable level of financial support and that a system of public education that depended exclusively on the wealth of a local community and concomitant property values for funding was inherently unconstitutional. Thus, the state now

became more involved in funding elementary and secondary schools, and per pupil public expenditures were equalized to a much greater degree in urban and suburban schools. According to the Connecticut State Department of Education, Division of Evaluation and Research, in academic year 2000-01, 53.6% of public school funding was derived from local revenue, while 41.0% of the revenue was derived from the state. Five percent of public school funding was in the form of federal dollars, while 0.4% was identified as tuition and "other" sources of revenue.⁴³

Building on the Horton legal precedent, the Connecticut Supreme Court nineteen years later issued a dramatic and controversial decision regarding public education in the state of Connecticut. In *Sheff v. O'Neill*, 238 Conn. 1 (1996), the state's high court ruled that the equality provisions of the Connecticut Constitution required the state to not only provide equal funding to urban and suburban school districts, which was the decision in Horton, but also to develop plans for racially integrating urban and suburban school districts. The Sheff case, which originated in the city of Hartford, was applauded by educational reformers as a bold and legally sound decision on the part of the Court grounded in the constitutional principle of equality. Critics of the ruling suggested a twisting of the state constitution to achieve a liberal social agenda.

Although little integration actually occurred following the historic Sheff ruling, the decision nevertheless suggests that the state supreme court did view the existence of two very different and separate educational environments in Connecticut as unconstitutional and inherently unfair to the state's inner-city racial minority students. In January 2003, a legal settlement was finally reached in which both parties in the case, the state and Sheff, agreed to moderate and voluntary forms of racial integration. The most important aspects of the settlement appear to be an agreement on the part of the state to build eight new magnet schools in the Hartford area, to provide \$45 million over the course of four years to help with integration efforts, and to expand "Program Choice," which allows parents of urban school children to send their children to public schools in surrounding suburbs. Most observers and analysts conclude, however, that

despite the legal settlement, the vast majority of urban school children will still be confined to substandard, poor, and racially segregated public schools.⁴⁴

The Challenge of Higher Education

In 2003, the state of Connecticut was faced with a serious budget deficit. In his effort to close the budget gap, Governor John G. Rowland recommended to the state legislature a series of cuts in government spending, as well as a modest increase in various taxes. Although spending cuts appeared to affect a broad range of state-supported services and programs, the governor's proposed cuts in educational spending were among the most profound. Public institutions of higher learning in Connecticut, which include the state's four year public universities and two year community colleges, were definitely targeted within the context of the governor's deficit reduction plan. In 2004, to the surprise of many, the deficit no longer existed and a \$100 million budget surplus was announced. Nevertheless, despite a \$100 million surplus, higher education in Connecticut remained a rather low priority within the context of policy priorities.

In a report issued by the Board of Governors for Higher Education, state support for higher education has been steadily declining. As a percentage of total state appropriations, spending for higher education, as noted by the report, is at its lowest point since 1997. Table 8 presents what must be disturbing trends for those concerned with the quality and vibrancy of public higher education in Connecticut. The data in this table must be viewed as disconcerting for those who view the quality of public higher education as integral to the future of Connecticut's economy and more generally the state's quality of life. The one and only interpretation of this data is that government support for Connecticut's public universities and community colleges is declining. Although one can argue that the recent modernization and expansion of the University of Connecticut, along with the Connecticut State University system and community colleges tends to suggest otherwise, the fact of the matter is that percentage trends in operating budgets are the most telling figures regarding policy priorities.

Table 8
 Spending for Higher Education as a
 Percentage of Total State Appropriations

Fiscal Year	Percent
1989	6.6
1990	5.9
1991	5.8
1992	4.9
1993	4.8
1994	4.7
1995	4.3
1996	4.0
1997	3.9
1998	4.1
1999	4.3
2000	4.6
2001	4.5
2002	4.4
2003	4.4
2004	4.3
2005	4.0

Source: "Connecticut Public Higher Education Trends: 2004 System Trends," published by the Board of Governors for Higher Education, Department of Education, State of Connecticut. Adapted from a graph presented on page 10 at www.ctdhe.org.

The issue of state support for higher education becomes even more troubling when placed in a comparative context. The amount of state dollars spent on higher education per capita in Connecticut compared to other states further suggests that education is not a priority item at the state capitol. Consider the following facts. In 2003, Connecticut ranked twenty-seventh among the fifty states in terms of per capita spending on education. Connecticut is thus in the lower half of states in terms of educational spending for individual state residents.⁴⁵ Moreover, the state of Connecticut, quite astonishingly, is currently ranked forty-fifth among the fifty states with regard to support for higher

education compared to its wealth as a state. This figure is based on state funding levels for education compared to the state's ability to pay, which is reflected in the personal income of state residents.⁴⁶

The problem of support for public higher education in Connecticut becomes more pronounced when trends in student enrollment are reviewed. Although student enrollment in public universities and community colleges has not dramatically increased over the last several years, it has nevertheless increased at a rather steady rate.⁴⁷ Indeed, it appears that an inverse relationship currently exists between enrollment and spending within the state of Connecticut: as enrollment has increased, support for public higher education has decreased. Consider the following enrollment figures. In 1990, enrollment in the state's public universities and two year colleges was recorded at 66,246. This figure declined by more than 6,000 students in the mid 1990s but rose again beginning in 1998. In 2002, full-time student enrollment was recorded at 70,044, which was the fifth year of consecutive growth for full-time students.⁴⁸ While an increase of 3,798 students over a twelve year period may not at first glance seem terribly dramatic, such an increase when considered in light of current spending cuts must inevitably be affecting the quality of education within Connecticut's public institutions. Spending cuts directly affect the extent to which institutions can hire additional faculty, along with the extent to which new forms of technology can be purchased and incorporated into the classroom. As such, faculty to student ratios are adversely affected by spending cuts, and constrained departmental budgets are unable to keep pace with the demands of the information era. These are not the trends one associates with educational excellence. How to maintain a system of quality public education in light of modest budgetary support is clearly one of the most difficult challenges facing policy makers in the state of Connecticut.

A Political Prescription

Thus, there appear to be ten complex policy challenges that await state lawmakers at the Connecticut state capitol in the years ahead. Although such policy challenges will be addressed in separate chapters, it is important to understand that no policy area

exists in a vacuum. Public policies in multiple ways are deeply interconnected, and effective policy management requires long-term and comprehensive plans of action. Public policy-making is in many ways a fine art, and policy leadership requires political leaders who are capable of understanding and grasping the economic and social interrelationship among seemingly disparate public policies.

Developing a comprehensive approach to public policy-making is by no means an easy task, and academics who study public policy, as well as the politicians who practice it, are seldom in agreement regarding which model of policy-making yields the most effective results. To complicate matters even further, the steady proliferation of special interest groups at the Connecticut state capitol has done little to foster an integrated approach to the policy-making process.⁴⁹ Indeed, the rising power of special interests and lobbyists within the Connecticut General Assembly has in some respects contributed to a fragmented and "balkanized" system of governance hardly conducive to macro policy planning. Quite frankly, the Connecticut citizenry can elect honest and ethical candidates to public office, as well as candidates with impressive vision, but until the deleterious and fragmenting influence of special interest groups is brought under control, the efforts of our most skilled and well-intentioned political leaders will be seriously compromised.

Thus, for the policy process in the state of Connecticut to be effective one needs to consider, at the risk of appearing idealistic, political reforms that contribute to an integrated and more cohesive system of policy-making. More specifically, there needs to be a concerted effort aimed at restoring and revitalizing those governing mechanisms that for so many years contributed to a sound system of policy-making. Such mechanisms, which served as the heartbeat of Connecticut politics and the state legislative process are the political parties.⁵⁰

Although laced with imperfections, the political party more than any other political mechanism, is the most useful tool for effectuating direct, cohesive, and meaningful change in the policy process. Political parties foster teamwork among state lawmakers, and it is through the parties that a comprehensive, rather than a fragmented, governing agenda is advanced. In a political system characterized by party government, candidates for the General

Assembly are elected as members of a legislative team, as opposed to representatives of insurance companies, labor unions, or gun manufacturers. Indeed, it is through the party, not the special interest group, that legislative teamwork is advanced and a closer association forged between the legislative and executive branches of government.

When political parties structure the course of the governing process, there is likely to be a more cohesive, integrated, and directional legislative agenda. This is not to suggest that Connecticut's two major parties should be "left-wing" or "right-wing," or polarized to the point of hostility, but rather that political parties and party labels should represent a set of values that lawmakers embrace within the context of their legislative behavior. It is this model of government that political scientists refer to as "responsible party government" and that seems to offer the most hope with regard to a unified and directional system of public policy-making.

Equally important is that a political process characterized by responsible political parties lends itself to a fairly defined system of political choice at election time and contributes to the accountability of lawmakers elected under a party label. When political parties represent a particular philosophy of government, the labels of political parties actually have meaning. Voters at election time, who might have difficulty understanding the key policy differences between two legislative candidates, will at the very least be guided by a candidate's party label. Thus, a legislative candidate who may not be well known within a multi-town district will nevertheless be associated with a set of economic and social principles in a system characterized by responsible political parties. Voting choices are more simplified under this system of politics, legislative behavior becomes more predictable, special interest groups and political action committees have less chance of influencing and fragmenting the policy process, and lawmakers are ultimately held more accountable. A state senator or state representative who campaigns under a Democratic or Republican party label will be expected to act as a Democrat or Republican once elected to the state legislature.

Engaging in theoretical discourse regarding the virtues of political parties as governing instruments is, however, much easier than actually resurrecting the governing roles of parties. Moreover,

any discussion of party revitalization is immediately met with resistance by critics of political parties who depict party organizations as the province of “patronage politics,” “party machines,” and “party bosses.” There are those who view a strong system of political parties as inherently antithetical to the values of objective government, free-thinking lawmakers, and the values of participatory democracy. Opponents of party government seem to prefer the maverick lawmaker who acts independent of party and the pressures of a party-based legislative team. While such a model of government might on its face seem noble, the fact of the matter is that lawmakers with weak allegiances to political parties, what Alan Ehrenhalt refers to as “solo practitioners,”⁵¹ are in many ways the most vulnerable and susceptible to the influence of lobbyists and the corrosive influence of special interest campaign contributions. A state legislature comprised of individuals beholden to special interests is less likely to advance broad-based public policies that serve the needs of the people. Political parties are the institutions that advance broad and comprehensive legislative agendas, not special interest groups.

Thus, as we begin our examination of the complex public policy challenges in Connecticut, it is wise to reflect on the perspective long advanced by many in the political science profession. Strong political parties and coherent public policy-making are related to one another, and to effectively meet the policy challenges of the twenty-first century, we must first restore political parties to their rightful place within the governance process. Indeed, restoring the governing role of political parties is perhaps the greatest challenge of all.

Notes

1. Gallup Poll, 1981, cited in Mavis Mann Reeves, “Public Opinion and Federalism, 1986,” *Publius* 17, no. 3 (summer 1987), p. 52.

2. Polling data presented and referenced in James MacGregor Burns, et al., *State and Local Politics: Government by the People* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2002), p. 39.

3. Gary L. Rose, *Connecticut Government at the Millennium*, (Fairfield: Sacred Heart University Press, 2001), p. 20.

4. Governor Rowland's Budget Proposal, Fiscal Year 2003-2005 Biennium, p. 24.

5. "An Overview of the State's Revenues and Expenditures," Office of Fiscal Analysis Presentation to the Legislative Internship Program, January 21, 2003.

6. "An Overview of the State's Revenues and Expenditures."

7. W. Michael Regan and Mark Prisloe, "Estimating the Impact of Public Policy and Investment Decisions," in *Connecticut Economic Digest* 8, no. 5 (May, 2003), p. 1.

8. Connecticut Economic Resource Center Report, "Jobs 2010: A Look at Connecticut's Workforce Over the Coming Decade," April 29, 2003, pp. 1-2. Key findings summarized at www.cerc.com/detpages/news733.html.

9. Connecticut Economic Resource Center Report.

10. Connecticut Economic Resource Center Report.

11. Connecticut Department of Labor, Office of Research; last updated February 5, 2003. www.ctdol.state.ct.us/1mi/misc/indproj.htm.

12. Connecticut Department of Labor, Office of Research; last updated March 6, 2003. www.ctdol.state.ct.us/1mi/misc/indproj.htm.

13. *2001 Annual Report of the Council on Environmental Quality*, www.ct.gov/ceq/LIBceq20/7/ar2001.pdf, p. 2.

14. *2001 Annual Report of the Council on Environmental Quality*, p. 20.

15. *2001 Annual Report of the Council on Environmental Quality*, p. 37.

16. *2001 Annual Report of the Council on Environmental Quality*.

17. *2001 Annual Report of the Council on Environmental Quality*, p. 5.

18. Brendon T. Turnbull, "About Long Island Sound," www.savethesound.org/mbzaboutlisound.htm, p.1.

19. Turnbull, "About Long Island Sound," p. 3.

20. Turnbull, "About Long Island Sound," pp. 3-5.

21. "ConnPIRG Legislative Agenda," www.connpirg.org/ct.asp?idz=9533&id3=CT, p.1

22. "ConnPIRG Legislative Agenda."

23. *Hartford Courant*, December 21, 2003, p. A1.

24. Reggie Hales, "Former State Treasurer Paul Silvester Sentenced to 51 Months Imprisonment," November 20, 2003, www.inqnews.com/Article.php?id=564.

25. *Hartford Courant*, June 20, 2004, p. A11.

26. As of February 2004, there were 626,959 registered Democrats in Connecticut (34%), 422,204 registered Republicans (23%), 777,431 registered unaffiliated voters (42%), and 4,973 registered members of minor political parties (2%). Source: Elections Division, Office of Secretary of State.

27. A poll conducted by the Center for Survey Research and Analysis located at the University of Connecticut in April 2004 discovered that Governor John G. Rowland's public approval rating had declined to 20%. This was the lowest public approval rating recorded for any Connecticut governor since 1978, the year in which the poll was first conducted and public approval ratings first measured. In September 1998, the governor's public approval rating was recorded at 78%, indicating extraordinary support among the residents of Connecticut. It should also be noted that immediately following Rowland's resignation speech on June 21, the governor's public approval ratings were recorded at 33%. Source: www.nynewsday.com/news/local/wire/ny-bc-ct-rowland-poll, June 22, 2004. The public's growing disapproval and deep displeasure with Governor Rowland was also reflected in public perceptions towards the governor's personal integrity. A Quinnipiac University Poll released in February, 2004, discovered that 84% of persons surveyed expressed the view that Governor Rowland was dishonest and untrustworthy, while a mere 10% perceived the governor as honest and trustworthy. This was a dramatic change from previous years. In June of 1999, 30% of respondents perceived the governor as dishonest and untrustworthy, while 56% viewed him as an honest and trustworthy individual. Source: Poll cited and discussed in *Hartford Courant*, February 20, 2004, p. B3.

28. Medicare is a federally supported health insurance program signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965. Medical services are provided to persons sixty-five years of age and older, regardless of income, and the plan requires a small premium for health services. Medicaid, also signed into law in 1965, provides health services to the poor, including seniors unable to pay Medicare premiums, and is jointly funded by both the federal and state governments. HUSKY is a health insurance plan for poor children in Connecticut, while ConnPace provides prescription drugs for senior citizens who fall below a certain income level.

29. U.S. Census Bureau, www.census.gov/hhes/hlthins/historic/hihist4.html.

30. U.S. Census Bureau.

31. U.S. Census Bureau.

32. As noted in its publication: "The Connecticut Health Policy Project is a non-profit, non-partisan research and educational organization dedicated to improving access to affordable, quality health care for all Connecticut residents. The Connecticut Health Policy Project believes that empowered, informed consumers are the best engine to improve Connecticut's health care system for all." www.cthealthpolicy.org/aboutus.htm.

33. Connecticut Health Policy Project, "Connecticut Likely Voters and the Uninsured: A Focus Group Study," September 29, 2002. www.cthealthpolicy.org/focus/2002study.htm.

34. Connecticut Health Policy Project, September 2003. www.cthealthpolicy.org/briefs/issue-8.htm.

35. Governor Rowland's Budget Proposal, Fiscal Year 2003-05 Biennium, p. 11.

36. Department of Corrections Annual Report, 2002-03, www.doc.state.ct.us/report/annualreport, p. 2.

37. Department of Corrections Annual Report, 2003, p. 1

38. Report of the Prison and Jail Overcrowding Commission, January 15, 2003, p. 9.

39. Department of Corrections, Annual Report, 2001-02, p. 2.

40. Connecticut State Department of Education, Division of Evaluation and Research, "The Condition of Education in Connecticut," www.csde.state.ct.us/public/der/ssp, p. 41.

41. Connecticut State Department of Education. Division of Evaluation and Research, "State Education Facts," www.csde.state.ct.us/public/der/edfacts/tables/perf-sat.htm p. 1.

42. Connecticut State Department of Education, Division of Evaluation and Research, "Students and Testing," www.csde.state.ct.us/public/der/datacentral/common2.asp?table=SATB, pp. 1-5.

43. Connecticut State Department of Education, Division of Evaluation and Research, www.csde.state.ct.us/public/der/edfacts/tables/cm/cm-st-facts.htm, p. 2.

44. For a full treatment of the Sheff case, the subsequent settlement, and comments by observers, see *The Hartford Courant*, January 23, 2003, Section A.

45. Report issued by Board of Governors for Higher Education, Department of Higher Education, State of Connecticut, "Connecticut Public Higher Education: 2003 System Trends," www.ctdhe.org, p. 19.

46. "Connecticut Public Higher Education: 2003 System Trends," p. 20.

47. "Connecticut Public Higher Education: 2003 System Trends," p. 23.

48. "Connecticut Public Higher Education: 2003 System Trends," p. 23.

49. Between 1999-2000, 927 separate interest groups were registered with the State Ethics Commission. See Gary L. Rose, *Connecticut Government at the Millennium* (Fairfield: Sacred Heart University Press, 2001), pp. 154-60.

50. My discussion of party government and the relevance of strong political parties is rooted in a large body of political science literature. The foundation work for this perspective was authored by the

Committee on Political Parties, *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System* (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1950). Although the Committee's report addressed the centrality of responsible parties in national politics, the argument still has great relevance for the governance process at the state level as well. A forty-year retrospective on the work of the Committee, along with an excellent review of the literature and discussion of the current relevance of responsible parties can be found in John Kenneth White, "Responsible Party Government in America," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Northeastern Political Science Association, Providence Rhode Island, November 16, 1990.

51. Alan Ehrenhalt, *The United States of Ambition: Politicians, Power and the Pursuit of Office* (New York: Times Books, 1992), p. 18.