

CONNECTICUT GOVERNMENT AT THE MILLENNIUM

Gary L. Rose

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To Laurie, Garrison, and Meredith

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Preface

During a time when the nations of the world are becoming increasingly intertwined and interdependent, when the Internet links nations and people in a profound fashion, and when the power of multinational corporations seems to transcend that of sovereign nations, why would I feel compelled to write a textbook on the government and politics of a small state in southern New England? What would be the purpose of a book on the constitutional tradition, political dynamics, and governing structures of the state of Connecticut?

The answer lies in the fact that over the course of the past two decades state governments have become extremely relevant to the lives of American citizens. Despite the globalization of communication systems, the development of a world economy, and the growing role of the United Nations in world affairs, the political trend in American government has been in the direction of states' rights and smaller government. State governments have been greatly revitalized in recent decades, and states are now expected to be the engines of policy experimentation and innovation within the federal framework. As we enter the twenty-first century, the extent to which government will affect the lives of the American people will largely depend on the choices and decisions reached not by national authorities but instead by state governors, lawmakers, and judges.

Although this book should have value for all Connecticut residents, it is targeted primarily toward undergraduate students.

Today's students, often referred to as "Generation X," are among the most interesting, individualistic, and complex students I have taught during my twenty-five years of college teaching. At the same time however, members of Generation X are woefully detached from the American political process. Government and politics seem to be alien concepts for many college students, and the political process is perceived as remote and of little consequence to daily life. This disturbing lack of connection between Generation X and the American political system has been convincingly documented in the results of public opinion polling. Consider, for example, the results of a 1999 Quinnipiac Poll regarding the political attitudes of three different age cohorts in the state of Connecticut: "Generation Xers" (born after 1964), "Baby Boomers" (born between 1946-64), and "Mature Citizens" (born before 1946).¹ Sixteen percent of Generation Xers expressed the view that they were "very interested" in politics, compared to 25 percent of Baby Boomers and 40 percent of Mature voters. Thirty-five percent of Xers replied that they "regularly" follow politics, compared to 61 percent of Boomers and 75 percent of Mature voters.

With respect to voting, 34 percent of Xers replied that they "always" vote, compared to 62 percent of Boomers and 83 percent of Mature residents. Thirty-seven percent of Xers have "written or called" a public official during their lifetime, while 65 percent of Boomers and 65 percent of Mature citizens have engaged in this form of political activity.

Thirty-six percent of Xers, 67 percent of Boomers, and 68 percent of Mature voters have attended a community meeting regarding a state or local issue. Generation Xers are also less likely to volunteer for a political campaign, with only 11 percent indicating political activity of this sort, compared to 25 percent of Boomers and 32 percent of Mature voters. Forty percent of Xers voted in the 1998 Connecticut gubernatorial election, while 73 percent of Boomers and 87 percent of Mature persons cast a ballot.

The polling results must be taken seriously. A generation of young persons fundamentally detached from the political process does not bode well for the future of American democracy. For the republic to survive, it is essential that each succeeding generation

assume the responsibilities associated with democratic citizenship. The next generation must "step up to the plate" and do its part to sustain the democratic principle of government for and by the people.

In my view, a fresh textbook on Connecticut government and politics, while by no means a panacea for curing the apparent political apathy of Generation X, is one way to begin connecting Xers to the political process. It is my hope that students who read this book will not only find its contents informative and educational, but also helpful in providing motivation to become more involved in Connecticut's political process. The future of American democracy and the quality of Connecticut politics depend quite heavily on the degree of political knowledge, involvement, and leadership qualities of today's students.

Seven chapters and a conclusion follow. At the close of each chapter, one will discover a "Profile and Perspective" section. These interviews, conducted through a question and answer format, feature government officials, political activists, and experts on the subject of Connecticut government. The comments of those individuals selected for interviews provide insight into the nuances and complexities of Connecticut's governing process and political tradition.

Chapter 1 begins our inquiry into Connecticut government with a sweeping overview of the historic and recurring tension between federal and state government over the course of two hundred years. The recurring struggle between the forces of nationalism and states' rights should become evident in this chapter. More importantly, the opening chapter demonstrates why the study of Connecticut government is particularly relevant as we enter the twenty-first century. Connecticut's Speaker of the House, Moira K. Lyons, is profiled and interviewed in this chapter.

Chapter 2 takes the reader directly into the subject of Connecticut government. The focus in this chapter is on Connecticut's long and rich constitutional tradition. The development of constitutionalism in Connecticut is explored, and Connecticut's four constitutions are described in chronological order. These include the Fundamental Orders of 1639, the Royal Charter of 1662,

the Constitution of 1818, and the Constitution of 1965. Professor Christopher Collier, the official historian for the state of Connecticut, is interviewed in this chapter. Professor Collier is regarded as the foremost authority on the subject of constitutional development in the state of Connecticut.

Chapter 3 expands upon the subject of constitutionalism in Connecticut by examining how and why the state's constitution has in recent years been employed to protect and advance civil liberties and civil rights for Connecticut residents. A series of state supreme court rulings based on the Connecticut Constitution are described and discussed in the body of this chapter. Such cases range from the constitutional rights of persons accused of a crime to the recent ruling in Connecticut regarding racially segregated school districts. Chief justice of the Connecticut Supreme Court, Robert J. Callahan, is interviewed at the close of this chapter.

The political culture of Connecticut is examined in chapter 4. Political culture involves the underlying orientations and values of people toward their respective government and political process. In many ways, the political culture of a state's citizenry conditions the style, character, and policy decisions of the state's governing institutions. The interview in this chapter features Director of the Connecticut Poll, G. Donald Ferree. An expert on public opinion polling, Ferree offers insight into the current political attitudes of Connecticut residents.

A democratic political process requires mechanisms that allow for citizens to participate in politics and to convey their policy demands to government. In national, state, and local politics, the mechanism that historically has served this participatory function is the political party. Thus, the vitality of Connecticut's two-party system is the subject of chapter 5. A number of recent trends indicative of political party health are examined and discussed in this chapter. These include, among others, voter registration trends, public attitudes toward parties, and party activity in election campaigns. Interviews with Republican State Chairman Chris DePino, and Democratic State Chairman Edward Marcus, conclude the chapter on political parties. The perspectives of the two chairmen provide rich insight into the "nuts and bolts" associated with state party leadership.

Chapter 6 expands the inquiry into citizen linkage mechanisms by examining the role of special interest groups in Connecticut politics. Interest group activity has been an important feature of Connecticut politics for many years, and from all indications interest group activity has been on the rise. In this chapter, the various types of lobbyists and special interest groups operating within Connecticut politics are described. Public perceptions of lobbyists and lobbying strategies are also examined. Contract lobbyist Patty LeShane, a high profile lobbyist at the state Capitol, is interviewed in this chapter.

The legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government are the subject of chapter 7. The spheres of constitutional authority delegated to the three branches, the internal organization and workload of the three branches, as well as the interaction between the legislative and executive branches during the law-making process are explored in this chapter. The extent to which the three branches of government are prepared to meet the policy challenges of the twenty-first century is assessed throughout the inquiry. An interview with Connecticut Governor John G. Rowland concludes chapter 7. Governor Rowland offers insight into the changing role of the Connecticut governorship as well as the responsibilities associated with statewide leadership.

The conclusion summarizes and synthesizes what has been discovered regarding the extent to which Connecticut's governing system is prepared to meet the new millennium.

Those who read this work should acquire useful knowledge regarding the mechanics and intricacies of Connecticut government. Moreover, it is anticipated that such knowledge will result in political empowerment. Indeed, there is a simple and old adage that "Knowledge is power." Thus, political power as well as the ability to effectuate meaningful political change must be preceded by a firm understanding of the political system in which one lives. The undeniable relationship between political knowledge and political power is the principal reason why this book was written.

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I would also like to thank those political practitioners and experts who agreed to be profiled and interviewed for this book. In the order that their interviews appear in the book, they are: Speaker of the House, Moira K. Lyons; Connecticut's official historian, Professor Christopher Collier; chief justice of the state supreme court, Robert J. Callahan; Director of the Connecticut Poll at the University of Connecticut, G. Donald Ferree; Republican State Chairman, Chris DePino; Democratic State Chairman, Edward Marcus; contract lobbyist, Patty LeShane; and Connecticut Governor John G. Rowland. The reflections and substantive expertise of the interview participants add a very interesting and important dimension to this work.

Last, but certainly not least, I thank my family for their constant love and support.