

## CHAPTER THREE

### *How “Blue” is Connecticut?*

Prior to the presidential election of 2000, the electoral maps used by the major networks during their election night coverage would designate states carried by Republican presidential candidates as blue, while those states in which the Democratic candidates won were colored red. Beginning with the election of 2000, the colors were inexplicably reversed, with states voting Republican designated as red and those voting for the Democratic ticket shaded in blue. It was also during the 2000 election that states began acquiring red and blue labels not only to portray a state’s presidential voting pattern, but also to identify a state’s ideological orientation. In addition to voting Republican for president, a red state was now considered a conservative state with a citizenry that was right of center. Blue states were where Democratic candidates would fare well, and where many liberal and left of center voters resided. “Red state” and “blue state” labels remained in place during the presidential election of 2004, and continue to be used by political pundits when analyzing voting patterns and political leanings among the fifty states. Indeed, red state and blue state labels have practically become an accepted part of the American political vocabulary. Such designations often mask the complexity of state politics, but in the world of sound bites and journalistic commentary the colors serve to simplify and organize political analysis.

The state of Connecticut, not long ago regarded as a swing state in presidential politics, is now described by political observers as a

blue state. Connecticut is predicted to vote for the Democratic presidential ticket every four years and elect U.S. senators and members of Congress who are moderate to liberal in their political beliefs. Candidates for governor, as well as candidates for statewide constitutional offices, are advised to embrace moderate and liberal causes if they wish to have a political future in Connecticut, regardless of party affiliation. Although there are still some local communities in Connecticut that elect conservative Republican state lawmakers, such communities are relatively few in number. The state of Connecticut is now among those states in the Northeast, the upper Midwest, and the Pacific Rim that are designated "blue."

Two major bodies of evidence should be explored in order to document the political persuasion and ideological orientation of a particular state. Such evidence includes a range of election results, as well as public opinion among the state's voting age population. Although there is every reason to believe that Connecticut has become a more liberal state, it is still necessary to explore data that may, or may not, document this general characterization.

### *Presidential Election Results*

Prior to the collapse of the stock market and the advent of the Great Depression in 1929, Connecticut was a very Republican state. As electoral college maps reveal, Connecticut supported Republican presidential candidates in fifteen of the twenty presidential contests from 1856, the first presidential election in which the Republican Party fielded a presidential candidate, through 1932. However, with the Republican Party and Republican President Herbert Hoover blamed for the nation's economic collapse, the country's political landscape, Connecticut included, underwent a major partisan realignment.<sup>1</sup> As a result of a dramatic shift in party allegiance among millions of voters, the Democratic Party under the leadership of Franklin D. Roosevelt thus became the nation's dominant party. In many states where the Democratic Party had been overshadowed by the Republican Party, the Democrats were

able to eclipse the Republicans as the state's majority party, or at the very least compete with the Republicans on an equal basis.

In Connecticut, the new pattern that emerged during the Depression was one of vibrant two-party competition. From 1932 through 1960, Democratic and Republican presidential candidates were each able to win the state of Connecticut four times, a perfectly even split in the number of election victories.<sup>2</sup> Healthy two-party competition would continue in presidential elections over the course of the next thirty years. In the elections of 1960, 1964, and 1968, Connecticut voted for the presidential candidates of the Democratic Party. However, in the presidential elections of 1972, 1976, 1980, 1984, and 1988, Connecticut voted for the Republican presidential candidates. From 1960 through 1988, the Democrats carried the state of Connecticut in three presidential election contests, while the Republicans were victorious in five.

Several presidential contests in Connecticut between 1960 and 1988 were exceptionally competitive, while several were landslide elections. In the presidential election of 1960, Massachusetts Senator John F. Kennedy won 53.7 percent of the vote in Connecticut, while Richard M. Nixon, a former California senator and vice-president under President Dwight Eisenhower, won 46.3 percent of the vote, a 7.4 point margin of victory for the Democratic candidate. Both Kennedy and Nixon were regarded as centrist presidential candidates. The election of 1964 was a Democratic landslide. President Lyndon B. Johnson, a former Texas senator and vice-president under President Kennedy, and who succeeded to the presidency following Kennedy's assassination, secured 67.8 percent of the vote in Connecticut, compared to 32.1 percent won by conservative Arizona Republican Senator Barry Goldwater. This was an enormous 35.7 point margin of victory for the incumbent president. In 1968, Hubert Humphrey, a former Minnesota senator and vice-president under Johnson, won 49.5 percent of the vote in Connecticut, while Nixon won 44.3 percent, a somewhat narrow 5.2 point margin for the centrist Democrat. Third-party candidate George Wallace, a charismatic states' rights governor from Alabama who supported racial segregation, won 6.1

percent of the total vote in Connecticut in 1968. The election of 1972 recorded yet another landslide, with President Nixon winning 58.6 percent of the vote compared to South Dakota Senator George McGovern's 40.1 percent, an 18.5 point margin between the two candidates.<sup>3</sup> McGovern was regarded as one of the most liberal presidential candidates ever to be nominated by the Democratic Party. The election of 1976 was once again highly competitive. President Gerald Ford, a moderate Republican, won 52 percent of Connecticut's vote while Georgia Governor and moderate Democrat Jimmy Carter won 47 percent, a slim 5 point margin for the Republican candidate. The election of 1980 was nearly a landslide in Connecticut with conservative Republican Ronald Reagan, a former California governor, winning 48.2 percent of the state's popular vote compared to 38.5 percent for the besieged President Carter. This was a 9.7 percent margin of victory for Reagan. Third-party candidate John Anderson, a moderate Republican Congressman from Illinois, received 12.3 percent of Connecticut's total vote in 1980. As in 1964 and 1972, the election of 1984 was also a major landslide. President Reagan, running for reelection, received 60.7 percent of the vote in Connecticut, while liberal Democrat Walter Mondale, the former Senator from Minnesota and vice president under President Carter, polled only 38.9 percent. Reagan's 21.8 percentage point margin of victory in Connecticut exceeded that recorded for Nixon in 1972. Intense two-party competition returned with the election of 1988. George Bush, a moderately conservative Republican who had served two terms as Reagan's vice president, garnered 51.9 percent of Connecticut's vote compared to 46.9 percent for Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis, a 5 point difference.<sup>4</sup> Like Mondale, Dukakis was also considered one of the more liberal Democrats during that point in time.

Beginning in 1992, the Connecticut electorate began voting for Democratic presidential candidates on a routine and predictable basis. In 1992, Arkansas governor Bill Clinton, considered one of the most talented governors in the nation, received 42.2 percent of the state's popular vote, while President George Bush received 35.7

percent of the vote, a 6.5 percent margin of victory. The mercurial and populist H. Ross Perot, running as a third-party candidate, won 21.5 percent of the vote, an extraordinary showing for a third-party presidential candidate. The election of 1992 would prove to be the last competitive presidential contest in Connecticut for quite some time.

In 1996, Connecticut voted overwhelmingly to reelect President Bill Clinton. President Clinton won 52.9 percent of the state's popular vote, while the conservative Kansas Senator Bob Dole secured only 34.6 percent. President Clinton's 18.3 point margin was practically identical to that of President Nixon's in 1972. Perot, running once again as a third-party candidate, received only 10 percent of the state's vote, less than half of what he received in the previous election.

In election year 2000, Al Gore, a former U.S. senator from Tennessee and vice president under President Clinton, won 55.9 percent of the vote in Connecticut. Gore's running mate was the U.S. Senator from Connecticut, Joe Lieberman. Conservative Texas Governor George W. Bush, who would win the presidency following an unprecedented U.S. Supreme Court ruling concerning a disputed recount in Florida, received only 38.4 percent of Connecticut's vote. Gore's 17.5 percentage point margin over Bush in Connecticut could be attributed not only to Lieberman's popularity with Connecticut voters, but also to the liberal drift of the state's population in recent years.

In 2004, Massachusetts Senator John Kerry, known for his liberal stance on multiple policy issues, won 54.3 percent of Connecticut's popular vote. President Bush, who would win his reelection bid, received 43.9 percent of the state's vote. Kerry's 10.4 percent landslide win over Bush was revealing with respect to Connecticut's political and ideological posture.<sup>5</sup>

As we examine the results for Connecticut, it is evident that of the four most recent presidential elections, only the election of 1992 resulted in less than a ten point margin of victory for the Democratic candidate. The 1996, 2000, and 2004 elections in Connecticut were Democratic landslides, with margins of 18.3,

17.5 and, 10.4 percentage points respectively. Three landslide Democratic victories in a row, two of which were overwhelming victories, suggest a state that has become exceptionally hospitable to Democratic presidential candidates.

Democratic presidential candidates have also done very well with little variation among the state's congressional districts. In 1992, Bill Clinton won congressional districts one, two, three, and six.<sup>6</sup> Congressional districts four and five were won by President Bush.<sup>7</sup> However, in the election of 1996, President Clinton won the most votes in each of Connecticut's six congressional districts. In the 2000 presidential election, Al Gore also carried every congressional district in Connecticut. In 2004, John Kerry, like Gore and Clinton before him, won every congressional district, which now numbered five.<sup>8</sup> In essence, every congressional district in Connecticut for the past three presidential contests could have been colored "blue."

### *Connecticut's Congressional Delegation*

Heading into the 2006 congressional mid-term election, Connecticut's congressional delegation consisted of three Republicans and two Democrats. While this might seem odd in a state designated as blue, and one in which Democratic presidential candidates have been winning every congressional district, the fact of the matter is that Connecticut's congressional Republicans were a far cry from the ideologically conservative Republicans elected from the red states of the West and South. In the tradition of "Rockefeller Republicanism,"<sup>9</sup> the three congressional Republicans were for all intents and purposes moderate in their politics and policy pursuits. The moderate political center describes the political orientation of former Congresswoman Nancy L. Johnson of the fifth congressional district. Former Congressman Robert R. Simmons of the second congressional district was also described as a very moderate Republican. Congressman Christopher H. Shays of the fourth congressional district was and is more moderate than Johnson and Simmons. Shays is in fact frequently described as a

"liberal" Republican. The moderate to liberal positions embraced by the three Republican members of Congress explain their electoral success.<sup>10</sup>

Ratings published by the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), a liberal lobbying organization founded in 1947, reveal how moderate Connecticut's Republican congressional delegation was compared to their Republican counterparts in Congress. On a scale of 0-100, with 0 representing the most conservative rating and 100 the most liberal, ADA's average rating for Republicans in the U.S. Congress, which includes the House and Senate, is 12.<sup>11</sup> Clearly, the vast majority of Republicans in Congress vote in a conservative direction on legislative roll calls. A collective rating of 12 is also a reflection of the intense partisan polarization currently present in Congress. In contrast, however, Connecticut's Republican congressional delegation received an average ADA rating of 56. Congressman Simmons was rated 55, Congressman Shays 70, and Congresswoman Johnson 45. Very few Republicans in Congress received similar ratings. Indeed, Congressman Shays was rated as the most liberal of all House and Senate Republicans. The only Republicans with ratings of 45 or higher included Representative Michael Castle from Delaware (50), Representative James Leach from Iowa (55), Representative Mark Kirk from Illinois (45), the two Senators from Maine, Olympia Snowe (65) and Susan Collins (45), Representative Charles Bass from New Hampshire (45), Senator Arlen Specter from Pennsylvania (45), Rhode Island Senator Lincoln Chafee (55), and Representative Ronald Paul from Texas (50). The ADA ratings indicate that among the twelve most moderate Republicans in Congress, one-fourth are from the state of Connecticut.

With regard to the Democratic House and Senate members from Connecticut, the ADA ratings suggested that Christopher J. Dodd is one of the most liberal members of Congress with a score of 100. Senator Joseph Lieberman received an ADA rating of 75, which is certainly on the liberal side of the continuum, but considerably less liberal than the rating for the state's senior senator. Congresswoman Rosa L. DeLauro, who represents Connecticut's

third congressional district, received an ADA rating of 100, an identical score to that of her mentor and former boss Senator Dodd.<sup>12</sup> Congressman John B. Larson, who represents Connecticut's first congressional district, also received a perfect liberal rating of 100. The ratings of Connecticut's Democratic House and Senate members further support the frequent assertion that Connecticut is a very blue state.

### *State Politics*

Presidential election results and the ideological orientation of a state's congressional delegation are both useful indicators of a state's political leanings. Federal politics tend to involve a range of domestic and foreign policy issues that manifest themselves in value judgments on the part of the American people. The polarization of the American electorate in the twenty-first century and the current red state versus blue state dichotomy is a reflection of the highly contentious character of national rather than state politics. Nevertheless, in the United States politics is both a national and subnational affair, and to capture the political predisposition of a state one must also examine dimensions of political activity below the federal level. Gubernatorial and state legislative politics are useful for this purpose.

### *The Governorship*

Connecticut's governors for the past fifty years, regardless of party stripe, have been moderate in their views and stances. Democratic governors Abraham Ribicoff (1955-61), John Dempsey (1961-71), Ella T. Grasso (1975-80), and William A. O'Neill (1980-91) were essentially moderate Democrats who governed without ideological agendas. They were Democrats in the traditional sense in that they favored a somewhat expanded role of government and looked to unions, urban areas, minority groups, and the working class for political support. Republican governors John Davis Lodge (1951-55), Thomas J. Meskill (1971-75), John G.

Rowland (1995-2004), and M. Jodi Rell (2004 to the present) drew their political support from the suburbs, wealthier voters, business interests, and the white-collar class. Nevertheless, Connecticut’s Republican governors, in the tradition of Rockefeller Republicans, were also moderate in their approach to governance. Years of a state legislature under the control of the Democratic Party also encouraged Republican governors to embrace centrist and at times liberal causes. Even Governor Rowland, who had gained a reputation as a brashly conservative congressman, endorsed liberal positions on social and moral issues. His unparalleled support for urban renewal in several of Connecticut’s cities was also surprising, given his Republican credentials.

As the state’s Lieutenant Governor, M. Jodi Rell succeeded to the governorship following Governor Rowland’s resignation from office, the end result of a scandal that consumed the Rowland administration and several close associates. During her tenure in office Governor Rell has enjoyed extraordinarily high public approval ratings, which have hovered between 75 and 80 percent. Governor Rell’s support is also uniform across the eight counties of Connecticut and very high among Republicans, Democrats, and unaffiliated voters. She is also popular among both women and men.<sup>13</sup>

Although Governor Rell’s unpretentious and down-to-earth persona is relevant to her approval ratings, it is really the governor’s politics more than any other variable, including a healthy state economy during her tenure in office, that explains her broad base of popular support. Governor Rell, not surprisingly, supports positions that reflect the moderate to liberal character of the state’s population. For example, Governor Rell supported legislation that allows for civil unions in Connecticut. Moreover, the Governor endorsed campaign finance reform, along with legislation that would expedite stem cell research. Support for civil unions, campaign finance reform, and stem-cell research are positions traditionally embraced by Democratic politicians, not Republicans. Governor Rell’s support for such issues clearly coincides with the values of the Connecticut citizenry. The Governor is also pro-choice

on the abortion issue. Governor Rell's popularity among the Connecticut citizenry was more than evident in the 2006 election. The Governor received 63 percent of the vote compared to 35 percent for Democratic challenger and Mayor of New Haven, John DeStefano.<sup>14</sup>

Prior to the Rowland/Rell Administration, Connecticut experienced one of the most liberal and free-thinking governors in modern times. Lowell P. Weicker, Jr. (1991-95), elected as a third-party candidate, embraced numerous liberal causes. In addition to his liberal stance on moral issues, Governor Weicker was an adamant supporter of public school desegregation in Connecticut, even to the point of urging a radical redrawing and merging of local urban and suburban school districts. It was also Weicker who engineered Connecticut's highly controversial personal income tax, a policy that led to a massive and quasi-violent public protest on the lawn of the state Capitol. Formerly a three term Republican Senator and well known for his "maverick" political style, Weicker's conduct as a United States senator and as Connecticut's governor personified in many ways the brand of moderate to liberal politics endorsed by a sizeable contingent of the Connecticut electorate. Weicker was the quintessential Rockefeller Republican.<sup>15</sup>

### *State Legislative Elections*

State legislative elections provide additional proof of a state's political complexion. From 1967 to the present, the Democratic Party in Connecticut has enjoyed dominance over the state house of representatives. With the exception of 1973-74 and 1985-86, the Democrats have consecutively won a majority of seats in the lower house of the General Assembly. From 1987 to 2005, the Democrats on average have occupied 62 percent of the seats, a most comfortable margin of power. In the mid-term election of 2006, the Democrats increased their power in the state house by garnering 70 percent of the seats. To further complicate matters for the Republicans, shortly after the election, Republican state representative Diana Urban from North Stonington, who represents

the forty-third legislative district, announced that she had decided to switch parties and join the Democratic caucus. Urban's defection increased the Democrats' share of seats in the house to 71 percent.

Democrats have also enjoyed control over the state senate, although the ratio of Democrats to Republicans has been much closer. Like their Republican colleagues in the state house, senate Republicans occupied a majority of seats in 1973-74 and again from 1985-86. The Republicans also held a majority of senate seats from 1995-96. However, from 1997 to the present, the Democratic Party has ruled the senate, with the ratio of Democrats to Republicans expanding during this time period. From 1997 through 2000, Democrats controlled 52 percent of the seats, while the Republicans occupied 48 percent. In raw numbers, this was only a two seat margin. From 2001 to 2004, however, the average percentage of Democratic seats grew to 56 percent, while in 2005-06, the percentage Democratic seats increased to 64 percent.<sup>16</sup> In the election of 2006, the Democrats won 67 percent of the senate seats. The 2006 election therefore resulted in a veto-proof Democratic majority in the Connecticut General Assembly, yet another indication of a state that has become very "blue."

It should also be noted that while there are safe legislative seats within both political parties, the evidence shows a distinct advantage for the Democratic Party in this regard. In the 2004 state legislative elections, 82 percent of seats in the state house of representatives were either uncontested by one of the major political parties, or won by a margin of 10 or more percentage points. Of those house seats in either the uncontested or "safe" category, 68 percent were held by the Democrats. The same pattern appeared in the 2004 state senate contests. Eighty percent of senate seats were either uncontested or won by margins of 10 or more points, and within this category of non-competitive seats, two-thirds were won by Democratic candidates.<sup>17</sup> Granted, state legislative elections are very localized election contests and normally not characterized by the "wedge issues" that dominate national politics. Nevertheless, Democratic and Republican candidates for the Connecticut state legislature disagree on issues, most notably taxing and spending

priorities, and while the ideological orientation of Connecticut politics may not be fully gauged from the results of such localized contests, the data still shed light on the political leanings of the state's electorate.

### *Public Opinion in Connecticut*

One of the very best measures of a state's political orientation involves the attitudes of its citizens towards social, political, and economic issues. Collectively, such attitudes comprise a state's "public opinion." Public opinion polls are the most common means of evaluating where the residents of a state stand on a range of policy issues. Public opinion polls are scientifically conducted and by using refined and time-tested methodologies they allow one to generalize about the orientations of a state's population from a relatively small but representative sample of adults. For the purpose of this inquiry, the polling results of the Quinnipiac University Poll should prove instructive.

Released on April 7, 2005, a Quinnipiac Poll based on a sample of 1,541 registered voters discovered that a majority of Connecticut residents were very tolerant with regard to the contentious issue of civil unions. Fifty-six percent of persons surveyed favored a law that would support same sex unions in the state of Connecticut. Thirty-seven percent of persons were opposed to such legislation. Connecticut residents, however, were found to be less tolerant towards gay marriage, with 53 percent of respondents opposed to a law that would establish this right. Forty-two percent of persons polled favored a law protecting gay marriage. On both issues, however, the residents of Connecticut were more liberal than the nation as a whole.<sup>18</sup>

With respect to the highly volatile and politically divisive issue of abortion, a Quinnipiac Poll released on May 2, 2006, discovered that 31 percent of Connecticut residents believed that abortion should be legal in "all cases," while 38 percent supported legalized abortion in "most cases." The two figures combined suggest that a very large majority (69 percent) of the state's adult population favor

the right to abortion. Beyond support for abortion, 78 percent of persons polled also expressed support for a law that would require Connecticut hospitals, including those of a Catholic denomination, to provide victims of rape with emergency contraception. Support for legislation requiring emergency measures in hospitals was also evident across demographic groups. The poll discovered 69 percent of Republicans, 85 percent of Democrats, 79 percent of Independents, 75 percent of men, 81 percent of women, and 84 percent of Catholics in agreement with such a law.<sup>19</sup>

The public's attitude towards the war in Iraq and President George W. Bush's job performance are additional indicators of a state's political posture. In Connecticut, it should come as no surprise in light of the state's presidential voting pattern that a large majority of residents are both opposed to the war in Iraq and have serious doubts about the competency and judgment of President Bush. A Quinnipiac Poll released on June 8, 2006, found that 63 percent of respondents were of the opinion that the war in Iraq was the "wrong thing to do." This was an eleven point increase in the level of opposition to the war over the course of the past two years. Moreover, attitudes towards President Bush seemed closely related to attitudes towards the war. Seventy-two percent of persons polled stated that they disapproved of George W. Bush's performance as president.<sup>20</sup>

Public opinion polls leave little doubt that Connecticut's citizens are moderate to liberal in their political orientations.

### The 2006 Congressional Mid-Term Election

#### *Lieberman versus Lamont: The Historic Democratic Primary*

Perhaps no other event in recent years demonstrates more convincingly how blue Connecticut has become than the August 8, 2006, Democratic primary election between incumbent U.S. Senator Joe Lieberman and challenger Ned Lamont. Lamont, a millionaire from Greenwich, who made his fortune in cable television contracts with colleges and universities, decided to

challenge Lieberman, who was seeking his fourth term in office. The central issue in the primary campaign was clearly the war in Iraq. Lamont opposed the war and advocated an American withdrawal. Lieberman supported the war and favored continued American involvement until the Iraqi government could be stabilized, essentially the same position as that of President Bush.

In the very early stages of the campaign, it appeared that Lieberman faced little opposition from Lamont and was once again coasting to reelection. A Quinnipiac Poll released on May 2, 2006, showed Lieberman with 65 percent support among likely Democratic voters to Lamont's 19 percent.<sup>21</sup> At this point in time, Lamont had little name recognition and his campaign was in an embryonic stage.

The Lamont campaign eventually went on the offensive with very dynamic campaign ads featuring the candidate surrounded by energetic young voters enthusiastically endorsing his candidacy. Lamont depicted the war in Iraq as a misguided foreign policy venture in terms of lives lost, lives ruined, and billions of dollars squandered. Lamont's anti-war message resonated with voters. A Quinnipiac Poll among likely Democratic voters released on June 8 showed Lieberman's support at 55 percent compared to Lamont's 40 percent. The Lamont campaign was clearly gaining momentum. In an effort to reverse the tide of growing support for Lamont, Lieberman forcefully defended his eighteen years as a United States senator. He emphasized his experience, seniority, and impressive record of constituency service. Lieberman not only stressed his long record of public service as a state lawmaker, state attorney general, and his tenure in the Senate, but also his deep roots within the Democratic Party.

Sensing a possible loss to Lamont in the Democratic primary scheduled for August 8, Senator Lieberman began a petition drive that would allow him to run as a third-party candidate in the November election in the event he lost the primary. Connecticut election law required that a petition with the requisite number of signatures be presented to the Secretary of State's Office on August 9, one day after the primary election. Throughout his political

career in Connecticut, Lieberman had received strong support among moderate Democrats, Republicans, and unaffiliated voters. Thus, in Lieberman's view, he could win the general election, despite a defeat in the Democratic primary.

By the middle of the summer, the primary campaign between Lieberman and Lamont had become the focus of national attention. Media commentators, political pundits, and columnists were describing the primary contest as a "referendum" on the war in Iraq. Some analysts went so far as to describe Connecticut's primary as a referendum on the Bush presidency, due to Lieberman's close association with the president. Supporters of Lamont were quick to remind voters of how President Bush embraced and kissed Joe Lieberman on the floor of the House of Representatives following the President's 2005 State of the Union Address. "Remember the Kiss," became one of the rallying cries of the Lamont campaign.

A spirited and combative televised debate on the evening of July 6 between the two Democrats further elevated the status of challenger Lamont. Although the political novice seemed outmatched at the start of the debate in terms of poise and substance, he quickly gained confidence and composure as the debate wore on. Much to the surprise of debate watchers, Lamont demonstrated a command over an array of domestic issues in addition to foreign policy. Although opposition to the Iraq war was the centerpiece of the Lamont campaign, it was now evident that the challenger was not a single-issue candidate. The debate served to bolster Lamont's bid for the Democratic Party's nomination. A Quinnipiac Poll released on July 20, 2006, showed Lamont at 51 percent among likely Democratic voters with Lieberman at 47 percent. The challenger had eclipsed the incumbent.

Following the debate, both campaigns went into overdrive. Both candidates feverishly crisscrossed the state, delivering speeches before large crowds and airing powerful campaign ads. Several ads, as expected, castigated the opponent in derisive terms. Both candidates engaged in negative campaigning. As the August 8 primary approached, it became evident that Lamont's campaign strategy and anti-war message had effectively mobilized many

Democratic voters. A Quinnipiac Poll released on August 3, only five days prior to the primary, showed Lamont with a commanding lead among likely Democratic voters, 54 percent to 41 percent. Some pundits suggested that a landslide primary victory for Lamont was a distinct possibility.

The 13 point lead, however, proved to be somewhat fleeting. On August 7, the day before the primary, a Quinnipiac Poll showed Lamont's lead cut to 6 points, 51 percent to 45 percent. It was evident that a portion of Democratic voters who might have initially turned against Lieberman were now reevaluating their support for the inexperienced challenger. Leading political personalities also appeared in Connecticut on behalf of both candidates during the final days of the primary campaign. President Clinton visited Connecticut to endorse Lieberman, while Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, and California Congresswoman Maxine Waters campaigned on behalf of Lamont. The primary election was intensely covered by all the major networks, especially MSNBC's Chris Matthews. Throughout the summer of 2006 the tiny state of Connecticut, with slightly more than three million residents, was the epicenter of American politics.

Ned Lamont won the August 8 primary with 52 percent of the vote to Lieberman's 48 percent. The Secretary of State's office reported voter turnout in the August primary at 43 percent of registered Democrats, an unprecedented level of participation in a primary election in Connecticut. Although the election was very close, the primary contest was nevertheless a momentous event and described as a major upset. A three-term incumbent Senator, who had run for President in 2004 and who had had been tabbed as the Democratic Party's vice-presidential running mate in 2000, was defeated in a primary election by a political neophyte. In American politics, such a development is almost without precedent. Ned Lamont's powerful anti-war message, which reflected the mood of the Democratic Party in Connecticut, combined with a masterful campaign meticulously directed by Lamont's campaign manager, Tom Swann, resulted in Lamont's stunning primary victory. It was a historic primary election with potentially national implications.

In a less than magnanimous concession speech, Senator Lieberman congratulated Lamont on his primary victory, but quickly added that the election results reflected political polarization and the politics of the past. Comparing the Senate contest to a sporting event, Lieberman stated that the Lamont campaign had won the first half of the game, while the second half, which was just now beginning, would be won by him. The Senator announced that he would continue his campaign for reelection to the U.S. Senate as an "Independent Democrat." The following day, in compliance with state law, Lieberman's petition for a third-party candidacy with the required number of signatures was filed with the Secretary of State's Office. His "third party" was officially named "Connecticut for Lieberman."

With respect to voting behavior within the primary election, there appeared to be a very clear class division within the Democratic Party. Lamont received a significant portion of his support from young, well-educated, and liberal anti-war Democrats, many of whom were located in the more affluent towns of Connecticut. Liberal bloggers were also strong supporters of the Lamont campaign, although it is difficult to determine if blogs such as "My Left Nutmeg," "Firedog Lake," and the "DailyKos" merely reinforced the views of young voters or actually structured political orientations towards the two candidates. Several pundits have suggested that the "blogosphere" propelled the Lamont candidacy, although such generalizations need to be supported with additional research. The appearance of Internet bloggers was first observed during the 2004 presidential campaign of liberal Democrat and former Vermont governor Howard Dean.

Senator Lieberman was supported in the primary by moderate and older Democrats, organized labor, and urban voters. The Connecticut chapter of the AFL-CIO had endorsed Lieberman at its state convention, although the endorsement was for the primary only, not the general election. Lieberman's close association with the Bush administration explains why the unions issued a qualified endorsement. Unlike Lamont's support among the affluent Connecticut suburbs, Lieberman's principal base of support

appeared to be Connecticut's cities. Election results revealed that the only communities in Connecticut where Lieberman actually won the most votes were the five cities with populations of over 100,000. This included the cities of Hartford, Waterbury, New Haven, Bridgeport, and Norwich. The class division in the Democratic primary contest was acute.<sup>22</sup>

Following the Democratic primary, the race for the U.S. Senate was predicted to be very close. A post-primary Rasmussen Poll of 500 likely voters conducted during August 9-10 and released on August 12 showed Lieberman with a 5 point lead over Lamont, 46 percent to 41 percent. Alan Schlesinger, the Republican nominee, was supported by only 6 percent of likely voters. Schlesinger, a former state lawmaker and mayor of Derby, was never considered a viable candidate after it was learned that he had gambled at one of Connecticut's casinos under the alias Alan Gold. It was also revealed that Schlesinger was sued by a New Jersey casino over a gambling debt. Despite the Republican establishment's plea for Schlesinger to withdraw his candidacy, and despite the fact that President Bush refused to endorse his bid for office, the combative Schlesinger remained in the race.

The campaign themes of the three candidates were somewhat predictable. Senator Lieberman continued to stress his experience and emphasized his bipartisan approach to governing. The Senator presented himself as an experienced and practical consensus builder in an age of destructive party polarization. Ned Lamont continued to criticize the war in Iraq and the Bush administration's foreign policy. At the same time, Lamont attempted to expand his appeal beyond his Democratic base by discussing domestic issues, such as Social Security, education and job growth. Schlesinger, who performed remarkably well in the three debates, presented himself as the only true conservative in the race. Schlesinger tried to rally Republican voters on his behalf by depicting both Lieberman and Lamont as liberal Democrats.

On election day, Senator Lieberman prevailed in a fairly convincing fashion, thus winning a fourth consecutive term to the U.S. Senate. His strategy of forming a third party and running as an

"Independent Democrat" proved to be successful. The incumbent senator won 50 percent of the vote, while Lamont received 40 percent, thus leaving Schlesinger with a mere 10 percent.<sup>23</sup> Lieberman's emphasis on experience and his bipartisan approach resonated with voters across the political spectrum, particularly among Republicans and Independents. Exit polls indicated that 70 percent of Republican, 54 percent of Independent, and 33 percent of Democratic voters opted for Lieberman. Sixty-five percent of Democratic voters supported Lamont, along with 35 percent of Independents, and only 8 percent of Republicans. Lamont had limited success in expanding his base beyond the Democratic Party. Twenty-one percent of Republican voters supported Schlesinger, along with 10 percent of Independent and only 2 percent of Democratic voters.<sup>24</sup> Schlesinger appealed to a very small slice of conservative voters who chose to remain loyal to the Republican Party's official candidate. Although Senator Lieberman was and is a supporter of the ongoing war in Iraq, the 2006 U.S. senate election was in reality a contest between a very liberal Democrat (Lamont) and a moderately liberal Democrat (Lieberman); in essence a contest between two Democrats. The conservative Republican candidate Alan Schlesinger for all intents and purposes was a marginal presence in the campaign. Generally speaking, the Republican Party was barely noticeable.

### *The Five House Seats*

The races for the five seats for the House of Representatives continue to document a steady and growing liberal pattern of politics in Connecticut. Two of the three moderate Republicans were defeated in their bid for reelection by liberal Democrats. In the fifth congressional district, Republican Congresswoman Nancy Johnson, who at the start of the campaign seemed certain to win reelection, lost to thirty-two year old Democratic state senator Christopher Murphy. These results were shocking. Murphy won 57 percent of the vote to Johnson's 43 percent, a landslide victory for the youthful Democrat.<sup>25</sup> Connecting Johnson to President Bush

and emphasizing the Congresswoman's close association with special interest groups was at the core of Murphy's strategy. While such a strategy certainly contributed to Murphy's victory, the deciding factor, in this author's view, appeared to be Johnson's own distasteful, personal, and negative ads, which undoubtedly caused many voters to question her sense of ethics and fair play. Johnson's ads, which were orchestrated by the Republican Congressional Campaign Committee, resulted in Murphy winning the fifth congressional district. Congresswoman Johnson self-destructed in 2006.

Republican Congressman Rob Simmons in the second congressional district lost his seat to Democrat Joseph Courtney, a former state representative who had previously challenged Simmons in 2002. The election was the closest of all the House races in the United States, with Courtney winning 50.1 percent of the vote to Simmons' 49.9 percent. The legally required recount revealed several inaccurate tallies in the original results. However, after several days of carefully recounting ballots, Courtney was awarded the seat by a margin of 91 votes. The election in Connecticut's second congressional district lends further credence to the old adage that every person's vote truly matters. In 2006, Courtney's portrayal of Simmons as an ally of President Bush seemed to be the deciding factor. Like many House races across the land, the Democrats had successfully nationalized the contest for Connecticut's second congressional district.

The results in the fourth congressional district proved to be a surprise to many political pundits, for it was here that the Republican incumbent was deemed to be the most vulnerable compared to his counterparts in the fifth and second districts. Nevertheless, Republican Congressman Christopher Shays prevailed by winning 51 percent of the vote to Diane Farrell's 48 percent. Farrell, who had served as First Selectwoman of Westport, had also challenged Shays in 2004, losing that contest by only 4 percentage points. Throughout the campaign, Shays was deemed an endangered incumbent due to his unwavering support for the war in Iraq. Pundits speculated that Farrell's strategy of linking Shays to the war, and more generally the Bush administration, would result

in the incumbent's political demise. Why Congressman Shays won reelection is difficult to precisely pinpoint, although several variables seemed relevant. In this author's view, the major reason why Shays was able to win reelection was due to his late summer announcement following his fourteenth fact finding trip to Iraq that he would entertain the possibility of timetables for a phased U.S. withdrawal from the war. His support for timetables suggested to swing voters that the Congressman was flexible and adaptable regarding his position on the Iraq war. This was key to his survival in the fourth congressional district.

Additional variables were also at work in this contest. The working class city of Bridgeport, a bastion of Democratic politics, failed to deliver a large vote for Farrell. The Democratic Party machine was less than enamored of the well-to-do former selectwoman from the wealthy town of Westport. Moreover, Shays, who is originally from Stamford, is now a homeowner and resident of Bridgeport. Although not a native of the city, the Congressman managed to forge important ties with the city's political establishment. One can also point to the favorable perceptions many voters have towards Chris Shays as a person. He is well-liked by his constituents and deemed by many to be an ethical and thoughtful public servant. One is hard pressed to find a person in the fourth congressional district who dislikes Chris Shays. Many people know the Congressman and respect him. Additionally, one needs to cite the Congressman's exceptionally effective staff located in the city of Bridgeport. For many years the Congressman's personal staff has met the needs of his constituents. Finally, Shays's strong support for campaign finance reform, which was at odds with his party's congressional leadership, further contributed to his support among reform-minded voters. Voters in the Fourth Congressional District appreciated Congressman Shays's "maverick spirit." Thus, a confluence of factors seemed to contribute to Congressman Shays's reelection victory. His reelection was surprising to many, but in retrospect it was an understandable outcome.

The two races in the first and third congressional districts were foregone conclusions and for the most part received very little

media coverage. Both seats are extremely safe Democratic seats, with the results never in doubt. Congressman John Larson in the first congressional district won 75 percent of the vote compared to Republican challenger Scott MacLean's 25 percent. In the third congressional district, Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro won 76 percent of the vote, while the Republican challenger Joseph Vollano received only 22 percent. Republican congressional candidates are essentially sacrificial lambs in both districts with little possibility of staging an upset. The socio-economic and political demographics of both congressional districts and the popularity of both Larson and DeLauro among their constituents explain the overwhelming Democratic landslides.

The results of the 2006 federal and state elections should leave little doubt that Connecticut politics has become very favorable towards the Democratic Party. With some rare exceptions, such as Governor Rell and Congressman Shays, Connecticut is firmly in the Democratic column. Conservative and even moderate Republican office-holders are now a very distinct minority. Can the Republican Party stage a comeback? What will it take to revitalize the GOP? These are legitimate questions that face Republican Party strategists in the years ahead.

#### Notes

1. Two seminal works on election realignments in American politics are Walter Dean Burnham, *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1970) and James L. Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1973).

2. Sarah M. Morehouse and Malcolm E. Jewell, "Connecticut," in Andrew Apleton and Daniel S. Ward, eds. *State Party Profiles: A 50-State Guide to Development, Organization and Resources* (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1997), p. 46.

3. Richard Scammon, ed., *America Votes: A Handbook of Contemporary Election Statistics*, volume 11 (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1975), pp. 7-13.

4. *Statement of Vote, 1976-1988* (Hartford: Office of Secretary of State).

5. *Statement of Vote, 1992-2004* (Hartford: Office of Secretary of State).

6. District one is in the central part of the state and includes the city of Hartford and surrounding communities. District two covers the eastern half of the state. New London, Norwich, and Storrs are communities in this district. District three is where the city of New Haven is located and covers other communities throughout New Haven County. District six, which no longer exists, due to reapportionment, was located in the northwest part of the state, with communities in Litchfield County and beyond contained within its borders.

7. District four is largely the Fairfield County district, which includes many wealthy communities such as Westport and Greenwich, but also the impoverished city of Bridgeport. The Fifth district, which eventually was merged with the sixth, included the city of Waterbury and extended westward to Danbury and the New York border.

8. *Statement of Vote, 1992-2004* (Hartford: Office of Secretary of State).

9. The term “Rockefeller Republican” is associated with the former governor of New York. Nelson Rockefeller represented the moderate wing of the Republican Party, which for all intents and purposes had been overtaken by conservative Republicans beginning with the Republican Party’s nomination contest in 1964. Northeastern Republicans, such as those in New York and the New England states, including Connecticut, are known for their fiscal conservatism, yet liberal stance on social and moral issues. Such Republicans have become a distinct minority in a party now dominated by ideological conservatives from the South and West.

10. As of 2006, Simmons had served three terms in Congress, Shays ten terms, and Johnson twelve terms.

11. My figures in this section are drawn from Americans for Democratic Action, Ratings, 2004, online at [www.adaction.org](http://www.adaction.org)

12. Congresswoman DeLauro served as Senator Dodd’s chief administrative assistant from 1981-86.

13. From August 19, 2004 to June 8, 2006, Governor Rell’s public approval ratings have averaged 78 percent. In June of 2006, the Governor’s approval rating among Republicans was 84 percent, 68 percent among Democrats, and 77 percent among Independents. Seventy-five percent of men and 76 percent of women approved of the way the Governor was

handling her job. Within the eight Connecticut counties, the Governor's approval rating was 77 percent in Fairfield County, 74 percent in Hartford County, 83 percent in Litchfield County, 76 percent in Middlesex and New Haven Counties, and 72 percent in Tolland, Windham, and New London Counties. Source: Quinnipiac University Poll, released on June 8, 2006, online at [www.quinnipiac.edu/x11362.xml?ReleaseID=922](http://www.quinnipiac.edu/x11362.xml?ReleaseID=922).

14. Online at [www.sots.ct.gov/ElectionsServices/election\\_results/2006\\_Nov\\_Elections/ov.&%20LTGov/pdf](http://www.sots.ct.gov/ElectionsServices/election_results/2006_Nov_Elections/ov.&%20LTGov/pdf).

15. Weicker's liberal political orientation and unique style of politics are thoroughly captured in his autobiography, Lowell P. Weicker, Jr., with Barry Sussman, *Maverick* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1995).

16. Online at [www.sots.ct.gov/RegisterManual/SectionIII/Leg3.htm.Political%20Division%200%20THE%20Connecticut](http://www.sots.ct.gov/RegisterManual/SectionIII/Leg3.htm.Political%20Division%200%20THE%20Connecticut).

17. *Statement of Vote 2004* (Hartford: Office of Secretary of State).

18. Quinnipiac Poll, released April 7, 2005, online at [www.quinnipiac.edu/x11362.xml?ReleaseID=671](http://www.quinnipiac.edu/x11362.xml?ReleaseID=671). Commentary on Connecticut results in comparison to national opinion provided by Poll Director Douglas Schwartz.

19. Quinnipiac Poll, released May 2, 2006, online at [www.quinnipiac.edu/x11362.xml?ReleaseID=909](http://www.quinnipiac.edu/x11362.xml?ReleaseID=909).

20. Quinnipiac Poll, released June 8, 2006, online at [www.quinnipiac.edu/x11362.xml?ReleaseID=922](http://www.quinnipiac.edu/x11362.xml?ReleaseID=922).

21. Quinnipiac tracking polls regarding the Lieberman/Lamont primary contest can be found at [www.quinnipiac.edu/x1291.xml](http://www.quinnipiac.edu/x1291.xml).

22. For a concise treatment of the class division within the Lieberman/Lamont primary that includes evidence of voting patterns, see Howard Reiter, "Connecticut Primaries Showed Class Divide Among Democrats," in *The Hartford Courant*, August 13, 2006, p. C6.

23. Online at [www.sots.ct.gov/ElectionsServices/election\\_results/2006\\_Nov\\_Election/USSenate.pdf](http://www.sots.ct.gov/ElectionsServices/election_results/2006_Nov_Election/USSenate.pdf).

24. Online at [www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14349736](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14349736).

25. House election results are online at [www.sots.ct.gov/ElectionsServices/election\\_results/2006\\_Nov\\_Election/Congress.pdf](http://www.sots.ct.gov/ElectionsServices/election_results/2006_Nov_Election/Congress.pdf).