

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *Mechanisms for Political Participation*

For a democratic political system to function effectively, it is essential for citizens to have opportunities to participate in the political process. Thus, a government “for and by the people” requires political mechanisms that facilitate citizen involvement. The most effective way in which citizens can engage in and thus exert influence on the political process is by participating in elections, political parties, and interest groups. In this chapter, I explore each of these mechanisms.

#### *Elections*

Voting in elections is the most basic and least demanding means of participating in the political process. The opportunity to vote is one of the many freedoms enjoyed by the American people. Voting is a civil right that should never be taken for granted. Indeed, the existence of this right is what separates free countries from those under the yoke of totalitarian rule.

Like other states across the land, Connecticut politics is characterized by routine and frequent elections. During odd-numbered years, eligible voters can participate in local elections. Elections for a wide variety of local governmental posts occur in every one of Connecticut’s 169 municipalities. Due to the home rule provision in the state constitution, towns and cities in Connecticut are allowed to create their own unique form of local

government. Local government charters adopted by communities reflect the form of government that best serves the inhabitants of individual towns and cities. On occasion, a local community will adopt a new model of government in response to the town's changing economic, social, and political conditions. For example, the residents of Stratford in 2005 voted to change their local charter from a Council-Manager to a Council-Mayor form of government. Stratford now features a strong mayoral office with the mayor elected to a four year term.

In addition to electing mayors, councilors, or selectmen, local communities typically elect a variety of board members and commissioners. For example, local Boards of Education are elected in most Connecticut communities, along with Planning and Zoning Commissioners. Although town managers are appointed by town councils in several of Connecticut's communities, there is still no escaping the fact that local elected officials are the primary persons who structure and determine the quality of life in Connecticut's towns and cities. Elected local officials determine many policies, including mill rates, property taxes, school budgets, support for sports teams, additions to public schools, local school curricula, and community development. Local elections are critical events that directly affect a community's way of life.

During even-numbered years, the citizens of Connecticut have the opportunity to elect state and federal public officials. At the state level, candidates for the state house of representatives and state senate are directly elected by the people every two years. One hundred and fifty-one seats in the state house of representatives and thirty-six seats in the state senate are elected. As noted in the previous chapter, many of these seats, unfortunately, are either uncontested or non-competitive; this has become a troubling trend in Connecticut politics.

Every four years, the residents of Connecticut also elect the state governor and lieutenant governor, both of whom run on the same ticket. At the same time, several statewide public officials who occupy offices established in the state constitution are also elected. The "constitutional offices," as they are known, include the offices

of attorney general, secretary of state, state treasurer, and state comptroller.

In addition to elections for state offices, federal elections for the U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senate, and the American Presidency will also take place during even-numbered years. Such elections are conducted coterminously with the state elections.

To vote in a general election in Connecticut, one must be a registered voter and a minimum of eighteen years of age. Registering to vote in Connecticut is a fairly simple process. Voter registration cards, readily available in government offices and public libraries, can be completed and mailed to the attention of the Registrar of Voters in one's hometown. Individuals can also register in person at their local town clerk's office, or download and complete a registration form from the Internet. Moreover, persons can register by completing the appropriate information on the form supplied by the Department of Motor Vehicles when applying for or renewing their driver's license. The latter registration process is the result of the National Voter Registration Act signed into law by President Clinton in 1993. The law, intended to stimulate voter turnout in the United States, was commonly referred to as the "Motor Voter Act." When registering as a voter, individuals can declare a party affiliation or select the unaffiliated category. Connecticut law requires that mailed registration forms be postmarked or received at an appropriate registration office at least fourteen days prior to an election. In-person registration must be completed at least seven days before election day.<sup>1</sup> Connecticut does not have "same day" or on-site voter registration.

Voter participation is more restricted in primary elections than in the general election. Despite calls to conduct "open primaries," in which unaffiliated voters would be allowed to vote, Connecticut's political parties continue to conduct "closed primaries." The decision to conduct open or closed primary elections was once determined by the state legislature. However, due to a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that emanated from Connecticut, the determination now belongs exclusively to the parties themselves.<sup>2</sup> In Connecticut, to be eligible to participate in a party's primary election a voter must

be registered with the party. An individual who is registering as a voter for the first time, or who is registered as an unaffiliated voter and would like to register with a party for the purpose of voting in the party's primary, can register in person on the last business day before the party conducts its primary election. Thus, if the party's primary is on a Tuesday, which is likely, then a new voter or unaffiliated voter can register with the party as late as 12:00 noon on Monday, the day before the primary. If, however, a person wishes to switch party affiliation from Democrat to Republican, or Republican to Democrat, then he or she must register with the party at least three months prior to the party's primary election.<sup>3</sup>

Registration procedures in Connecticut, along with party nominating rules, have been criticized by political reformers for having a restrictive impact on voter participation. Reformers argue that little reason exists to require a specified time frame for voter registration prior to the day of the general election. Reformers have also urged state lawmakers to repeal the current registration law and legislate "same day" voter registration in Connecticut. Reformers also criticize the parties for conducting closed primaries, and recommend instead a system of open primaries in which all eligible voters irrespective of party allegiance are allowed to participate. As reported by the Office of Secretary of State on October 25, 2005, there were 699,502 registered Democrats (33%), 453,715 registered Republicans (22%), and 929,005 registered unaffiliated voters (44%) in the state of Connecticut. A total of 4,387 individuals (1%) were registered with minor political parties. Thus, over forty percent of Connecticut's electorate was disenfranchised during the 2006 nominating process, unless they chose, as 14,000 unaffiliated voters did, to register with a party prior to the primary. Thus, state laws and party rules will undoubtedly remain under much scrutiny at the state Capitol and in party circles in years to come.

It should be noted, however, that while political reformers advocate a more open and robust system of electoral politics in Connecticut, voter turnout in Connecticut is still somewhat

respectable when compared to the national average. According to results published by the United States Elections Project, voter turnout in Connecticut among the eligible voting population in the 2004 presidential election was 65.2 percent, while the national average was recorded as 60.9 percent. Compared to other states, Connecticut ranks in the top 50 percent of states in terms of voter turnout, with only fifteen states recording higher levels of turnout in the 2004 election.<sup>4</sup>

Turnout in primary election contests in Connecticut varies depending on the nature of the nominating contest. Turnout in presidential primaries has not been impressive, with a mere 5.7 percent of Democrats voting in the March 2, 2004, presidential primary and 15 percent in the March 7, 2000, Democratic and Republican primaries.<sup>5</sup> The abysmal turnout in presidential primaries is more attributable to the competitive status of the presidential nominating contest in March than party rules or state election laws. For all intents and purposes the presidential nominating contest in recent elections had been decided by the time Connecticut conducted its presidential primary. Voters thus saw little reason to vote in a contest that was essentially over.

However, Connecticut voters will vote in very large numbers in primary contests when the campaign is contentious and the outcome uncertain. As noted in the previous chapter, on August 8, 2006, the Secretary of State's Office reported that 43 percent of registered Democrats voted in the Democratic primary that pitted challenger Ned Lamont against incumbent Senator Joe Lieberman for the Democratic Party's nomination for U.S. Senate.

It should also be noted that voting machines in Connecticut will soon be relegated to a historical footnote. In the Old Judiciary Room of the state Capitol on August 4, 2006, Secretary of State Susan Bysiewicz announced that beginning in 2006 and extending into 2007, voting machines in Connecticut will be replaced by an electronic optical scan voting system. The new system will feature scantron sheets similar to those used by students on standardized exams. After an extensive review of new voting systems and presentations by several companies, the Secretary of State's office

selected LHS Associates from Massachusetts to receive the state contract. Additionally, beginning in 2007, more than 200,000 Connecticut residents with disabilities will be allowed to vote at the polling place with the assistance of a specially installed phone system. IVS, a company based in Louisville, Kentucky, received a one-year contract to provide this innovative service.

In order to evaluate the efficiency and accuracy of the new electronic system, the Secretary of State's office has entered into a partnership with the Department of Computer Science and Engineering at the University of Connecticut. The department's faculty served as consultants during the search for a new voting mechanism and concluded that security standards had been met to guard against hacking and manipulation of voting results. In a press release issued on August 4, 2006 by the Secretary of State's office, Secretary Bysiewicz was quoted as follows:

Of all the concerns raised by citizens, academics, and advocates, security was No. 1. UConn has played an integral role in our decision-making up to this point. They have reviewed vendor proposals, tested equipment, and made recommendations for maintaining the highest level of security in our election process. We look forward to drawing upon their tremendous expertise as we move forward.

Connecticut's decision to adopt new technology for voting and to enfranchise the disabled complies with the "Help America Vote Act," a federal law imposed on states in the aftermath of the controversial 2000 presidential election. Although the new technology has been successfully field-tested in the towns of Windsor and Vernon, time will tell if the optical scan system and phone system for the disabled are in fact superior to conventional voting machines. An editorial in the *Hartford Courant* on August 14, 2006, regarding the new voting system was entitled "Dawn of a New Age in Voting." By 2007, the residents of Connecticut will know whether democracy has been enhanced by the implementation of new voting technology.

*Political Parties*

In addition to elections, political parties are also important and vital participatory mechanisms. Political parties are not mentioned in the United States Constitution and President George Washington warned the American people of the divisive impact of parties in his historic farewell address. Nevertheless, it was not long after the American republic was formed that the two-party system emerged. Although the names of parties and voter identification with parties have changed throughout the years, two-party competition has characterized American politics for over two hundred years. At the same time, it is more than evident that political parties, rather than corrode our country's politics, as President Washington suggested, have served to enhance and cultivate the quality of American democracy. In the oft-quoted words of E.E. Schattschneider:

The rise of political parties is indubitably one of the principal distinguishing marks of modern government. The parties, in fact have played a major role as makers of government; more especially they have been makers of democratic government. Political parties created democracy and modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties.<sup>6</sup>

Although political party organizations and their respective leaders are nowhere near as powerful as they once were, the parties nevertheless still perform critical tasks essential to the functioning of a democratic system.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, for citizens who wish to participate in the political process, the political parties continue to provide a direct and convenient avenue for meaningful and immediate political participation. Thus, it is important to grasp the continued significance of parties, despite their diminished power.

Within the context of local, state, and national politics, political scientists have identified several critical electoral functions that are performed by political party organizations: political parties

nominate candidates for public office; wage campaigns; and structure choice for the voting public at election time.<sup>8</sup>

### *The Nominating Process*

Every election year, political parties are expected to nominate a slate of candidates. Whether it is a federal, state, or local election year, the parties present a team of Democratic and Republican candidates who are prepared to serve the public should they be elected in the general election.

Parties in Connecticut have a somewhat unique way of nominating candidates for public office. The nominating system, which has been in place since 1955, is a hybrid process that involves a nominating convention followed by the possibility of a primary election. In Connecticut, the primary is referred to as a “challenge primary.” Connecticut was the last state in the country to adopt a primary election law and the primary system that was finally adopted was designed to dissuade candidates who did not have the support of the party organization from waging a primary contest.

The mechanics of Connecticut’s hybrid nominating system are relatively simple. Delegates are selected to attend the party’s nominating convention. If the candidates to be nominated are running for statewide office, such as the office of governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general, or the U.S. Senate, then the party will hold a statewide convention, normally in Hartford. The convention is run by the party’s central committee and is presided over by the party’s state chairperson. Democratic or Republican delegates from Connecticut’s 169 local communities are chosen to attend the convention. If the candidates are running for a district-level office, such as U.S. Congress, state senate or state house of representatives, then smaller district based conventions will take place with delegates chosen to attend from towns within the district. In short, the process thus begins with a party convention. In most communities, delegates selected to attend the conventions are local town committee members along with local party activists. The delegates are often handpicked by local party chairs to attend the

convention. If an individual who has not been selected by the town chair wishes to attend the convention as a delegate on behalf of a candidate, that individual has the right to wage a “delegate primary” within his or her party for the purpose of becoming a convention delegate.

At the nominating convention, a roll call will take place among the delegates. The candidate who wins the most votes at the convention is regarded as the “convention endorsed candidate.” Candidates who do not receive the most votes at the convention, yet who receive a minimum of fifteen percent of the convention vote can, if they so desire, challenge the convention endorsed candidate in a primary election, hence the term “challenge primary.”

It should be noted, however, that a recent reform significantly modified the challenge primary system in Connecticut. More specifically, a candidate who does not win 15 percent or more of the convention vote still has the option of challenging the convention endorsed candidate in a primary by petitioning his or her way onto the primary ballot. Thus, primaries can now occur in Connecticut due to the outcome of the convention vote, or through the petition process. The number of signatures required on petitions varies depending on the office that is being contested. State election law (Connecticut Public Act No. 03-241) requires a minimum of 2 percent of signatures among registered party members for statewide and congressional offices. A candidate for a statewide office, such as governor or U.S. senator, can collect signatures throughout the state, while a congressional candidate must collect signatures within the contested district. For the offices of state senator, state representative, and Judge of Probate, the threshold is 5 percent of registered party members, providing the districts are multi-town in scope.

Primary elections have been on the rise in Connecticut. Gone are the days when a powerful party leader could intervene in a nominating contest and dissuade a candidate from forcing a primary. Moreover, the 15 percent rule is hardly a difficult threshold for a candidate to overcome and the added option of petitioning one’s way onto the ballot serves to encourage, rather than discourage, challenges to convention-endorsed candidates.

In 2006, primaries occurred for multiple offices in Connecticut, suggesting that the internal cohesion of the two major parties had become rather fractious. As discussed in the previous chapter, the most high profile primary occurred within the Democratic Party. Incumbent Senator Joseph Lieberman, seeking his fourth term of office, was challenged by Ned Lamont, a millionaire entrepreneur from Greenwich, Connecticut. The key issue in this primary was clearly the war in Iraq.

Two Democratic candidates for governor also faced one another in a primary contest. The mayor of New Haven, John DeStefano, Jr., and the mayor of Stamford, Dannel Malloy, engaged one another in a policy-centered campaign. Malloy had narrowly won a majority of delegates at the Democratic Party's nominating convention, yet lost to DeStefano in a close primary contest. Although the primary was between two successful, thoughtful, and innovative mayors, the gubernatorial nominating contest received scant attention, due to the Lieberman versus Lamont primary contest. Moreover, it was well understood that regardless of which candidate the Democrat's ultimately nominated as their gubernatorial candidate, neither could defeat the popular incumbent Republican governor, M. Jodi Rell, in the general election. Forecasts by political pundits proved to be correct, with Governor Rell winning well over 60 percent of the popular vote.

In addition to Democratic primaries for the U.S. senate and the governor's office, Democratic primaries were conducted for the position of lieutenant governor, ten state Assembly districts, two judges of probate districts, and in two towns for the registrar of voters. The Republican Party also held primaries in Congressional District One, and in two state Assembly districts. In total, twenty primary elections were conducted in election year 2006.<sup>9</sup> The increase in the number of primaries reflects the diminished role of party organization leaders in Connecticut with respect to structuring the outcome of the nominating process. The party's rank-and-file, rather than the party leadership, increasingly determines which candidates will represent the party in the general election.

*The General Election Campaign*

Following the nomination of candidates for public office, the parties in Connecticut move into campaign mode. All efforts are oriented towards winning the general election. However, with regard to the campaign function, it is evident that party organizations now supplement, rather than direct, the campaign efforts of the candidate's own organization. At one time, campaigns in Connecticut were organized, funded, and coordinated by the Democratic and Republican party organizations. Campaigns were very "party-centered." However, due to the rising cost of campaigns, as well as the increased availability of media as a voter mobilization tool, candidates at practically all levels of the state's political system began forming their own "candidate-centered" organizations and essentially waging their own campaigns.<sup>10</sup> Rather than resist such a development, the party organizations had little choice but to acquiesce in the new mode of campaigning. This is not to suggest that candidates for public office divorce themselves from their party during the election. Instead, there seems to be a mutual understanding between the party organization and their slate of candidates that the candidate, not the party, is primarily responsible for the management and coordination of the campaign. The party organization will, however, provide supplemental campaign services to candidates upon request.

According to Republican State Chairman George Gallo, the Republican State Central Committee in Connecticut provides an array of campaign services to Republican candidates, which in Gallo's words is similar to an "*a la carte*" menu.<sup>11</sup> Such services include assistance with fundraising, voter mobilization efforts, and consultation for effective messaging. In 2006, the efforts of the Republican State Central Committee were geared towards the gubernatorial and congressional elections, although Republican candidates for the General Assembly who were in closely contested races also received services from the State Central Committee.

Chairman Gallo also emphasized how modernized the Republican State Central Committee has become during the

past several years. In particular, a sophisticated voter file has been developed and is routinely used by Republican candidates for voter mobilization purposes. The file precisely identifies the party registration of individuals in every one of Connecticut's 169 towns, and pinpoints who the likely voters are on election day. The file is exceptionally helpful to candidates for the purposes of targeting campaign messages prior to election day and for knowing which voters to contact and which voters to bypass.<sup>12</sup> Gallo mentioned that computer software and hardware at state headquarters have also been upgraded. Full-time staffing has increased as well. During the 2006 election year, the Republican State Central Committee was staffed by eight full-time employees. Following the election, the full-time staff was trimmed to five, including the chair, executive director, finance director, political director, and office manager.<sup>13</sup> Although Gallo fully acknowledged that party organizations no longer control the course of election campaigns in Connecticut, he did stress that the services provided to candidates still contribute to an important party presence within the context of Connecticut's electoral politics.

The Democratic Party in Connecticut has also modernized its state central headquarters, and appears to be providing similar "*a la carte*" services to Democratic candidates during election years. According to Nancy DiNardo, chairwoman of the Democratic State Central Committee in Connecticut, the voter file is clearly one of the most important services offered to candidates by the central committee.<sup>14</sup> She described the file as "state of the art" and frequently used by candidates at all levels of elections to identify their base of support as well as swing voters. Like the Republicans, the Democratic State Central Committee has a paid full-time staff consisting of six individuals who provide various services to candidates with fundraising strategies as well as the development of campaign websites. For some campaigns, the party will also provide money to candidates in need of additional assistance.

Like the Republican Chairman, Chairwoman DiNardo recognized that politics in Connecticut has become candidate-

centered with the party organization primarily performing supplemental campaign services. Although the Democratic State Central Committee no longer controls the course of individual campaigns in Connecticut, in DiNardo's view the party organization still remains a valuable resource for Democratic candidates.

### *Choice at Election Time*

In theory, political party organizations should also provide voters with a set of distinct choices at election time. The party label affixed to candidates should represent a particular philosophy of government. Theoretically, when voters enter the voting booth the party label should denote whether or not candidates are conservative or liberal on an array of policy matters. Moreover, once elected, parties should enact a coherent set of public policies. This is how political parties should govern according to the "doctrine of responsible parties."<sup>15</sup> Party platforms at one time served to structure the choices voters made between Democratic and Republican candidates. While state and national platforms are still issued by the parties, most people are quite unfamiliar with the contents of such platforms.

In Connecticut, platforms are occasionally issued by parties, but such documents tend to remain obscure. If platforms are issued, very few individuals ever lay eyes on them. Candidates, as noted above, are largely on their own with regard to campaign strategy and candidate platforms clearly supersede the party platform at election time. If voters feel there is significant ideological choice at election time, this is due to the positions articulated by the individual candidates in their own campaign literature, which is tantamount to a platform, rather than broad philosophical statements crafted by the party organization. Quite frankly, due to the moderate to liberal leaning of the Connecticut electorate, one is hard pressed to find any real evidence of an ideological chasm between the two major parties. The differences that do exist seem to concern taxing and

spending priorities. However, on social and moral issues, the two major parties in Connecticut are largely in agreement. Compared to party politics at the national level, Connecticut's two-party system is less ideologically and politically polarized.

### *Interest Groups*

Involvement with interest groups is yet another means through which citizens in Connecticut can participate in politics. For those individuals who wish to promote a specific cause, or set of causes, joining an interest group should prove to be a satisfying experience. Interest groups have become particularly important as political parties have receded in influence. As Burdett A. Loomis and Allan J. Cigler put it, "The weakness of political parties has helped to create a vacuum in electoral politics since 1960, and in recent years interest groups have aggressively moved to fill it."<sup>16</sup> Although this quotation appeared in a volume published in 1983, the notion of a "vacuum" resulting from party decline is perhaps even more relevant in 2006.

Interest groups in Connecticut, as well as in other states, can be categorized as either "special interest groups" or "public interest groups."<sup>17</sup> Special interest groups exist to promote the interests of a specific group or class of people, or perhaps a specific cause. The Connecticut chapter of the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organizations) is a prime example of a special interest group that has been operating for many years in Connecticut politics. This is the umbrella organization that represents the interests of specific labor unions. Several large labor organizations are members of the AFL-CIO, including the American Federation of State and County Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the Firefighters Union, the American Federation of Teachers, the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, the International Association of Machinists, and several building trade unions, such as the Carpenters' Union. In total, the AFL-CIO represents approximately 210,000 union workers within the state of Connecticut.<sup>18</sup> The AFL-CIO has a clearly defined legislative

agenda aimed at protecting the economic rights and living standards of the working class. In 2006, the organization's agenda at the Connecticut state Capitol included the preservation of statutes that protect binding arbitration, preventing corporate attempts to shift the cost of health care insurance onto workers, opposing job outsourcing, and protecting retiree benefits.<sup>19</sup> The Connecticut chapter of the AFL-CIO, like the national organization, is closely allied with the Democratic Party. In 2006, delegates to the AFL-CIO's state convention endorsed Democratic candidate John DeStefano for governor, and offered a lukewarm endorsement for incumbent Senator Joseph Lieberman.

Business interests are also well represented at the Connecticut state Capitol. Like the AFL-CIO, business interest groups have a clearly defined set of legislative priorities. Several organizations representing a broad array of business interests are a discernible presence at the Connecticut state Capitol.

One example of a business organization with a defined legislative agenda is the Chamber of Commerce. There is no state umbrella organization for the Chamber of Commerce in Connecticut. Instead, towns and cities have their own local chambers and, if needed, their own director of government affairs.

The New Haven Chamber of Commerce, for example, represents over nineteen hundred businesses throughout New Haven County. The businesses range from very large enterprises, such as Yale New Haven Hospital and AT&T, to small business operations, such as Allied Health Rehabilitation and Hula Hanks Restaurant in New Haven. Most of the activity of the New Haven Chamber of Commerce in 2006 was aimed at defeating legislation that was unfriendly towards business, rather than proposing new laws that favored business activity. For example, the Chamber opposed legislation that would restrict employers from conducting staff meetings with their employees to discuss matters of politics and religion. Such meetings are known as "captive audience meetings." The Chamber also opposed "pay or play" legislation that would impose a tax on businesses with a certain number of employees if the businesses were not providing their employees

with health care coverage. The Chamber also opposed “neutrality agreements,” which would ban employers of businesses that receive state financial assistance from discussing the effects of unionization on their companies with employees. Legislative restrictions on eminent domain for the purpose of commercial development were also opposed by the Chamber of Commerce.<sup>20</sup> The Chamber of Commerce generally supports Republican candidates at election time.

Apart from special interest groups that represent economic interests, such as the AFL-CIO and the Chamber of Commerce, there are a plethora of interest groups currently in Connecticut that exist for the purpose of protecting very specific causes. Special interest groups with very narrow agendas are commonly known as “single issue interest groups.” Examples in Connecticut include the Connecticut Motorcycle Riders Association, the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Planned Parenthood of Connecticut, Friends of Animals, and the Marijuana Policy Project.

In addition to special interest groups, one also finds an array of “public interest groups” attempting to influence the state policy process. Public interest groups are organized to serve the public’s interest, rather than a particular segment of society. Organizations concerned with environmental or consumer protection, as well as those organizations that seek to improve the quality of democracy in America, can be classified as public interest groups. Examples of public interest groups that are active at the Connecticut state Capitol include Common Cause, The League of Women Voters, Environmental Defense, and End Hunger. Data generated from the State Ethics Commission reveal that well over 700 organizations were present at the Connecticut state Capitol in 2003-04 for the purpose of influencing the lawmaking process.

### *Lobbyists*

In order to exert influence over the state lawmaking process, most interest groups hire lobbyists and, if possible, contribute money to election campaigns. The term “lobbying,” according to

most accounts, originated under the presidency of Ulysses S. Grant. President Grant, at his wife's insistence, would smoke his cigars in the Willard Hotel lobby, rather than in the White House. While at the hotel, Grant would meet with individuals who would often seek to influence his position on issues and obtain favors from the President. Individuals who met with President Grant at the hotel thus became known as "lobbyists."<sup>21</sup>

Lobbyists can be classified under two categories: "client lobbyist" and "contract lobbyist." The client lobbyist is an individual who is an employee of one organization and is designated as the organization's lobbyist. The individual therefore lobbies exclusively on behalf of his or her client organization and is paid a salary by the organization. The individual is essentially an "in-house" lobbyist.

The contract lobbyist is an individual who operates a lobbying consulting firm and who lobbies on behalf of several organizations for a set fee.<sup>22</sup> The contract lobbyist is not an employee of the organization, but instead provides lobbying services on a contractual basis. Based on reports, it appears that most contract lobbyists charge their clients an annual, monthly, or retainer fee. In Connecticut, the consulting firms of Betty Gallo and Co., DePino Associates LLC., and Sullivan and LeShane are leading examples of active, well-connected, and very prosperous lobbying consulting firms. State Ethics Commission data report that Betty Gallo and Co. represented twenty organizations, DePino Associates, LLC. eighteen organizations, and Sullivan and LeShane thirty-eight organizations during the two year period of 2003-04. A review of registered lobbyists, or "communicators," as they are technically known, suggests that contract lobbying firms are proliferating at the Connecticut state Capitol. Moreover, lobbying in Connecticut and in other states has become an exceptionally lucrative business. According to a 2004 report issued by the Center for Public Integrity, of the forty-two states that reported lobbying expenditures, Connecticut ranks eighth in the nation with regard to fees and salaries paid to lobbyists. The Center reported a figure of

\$27,161,810 paid to Connecticut lobbyists. California ranks first in the nation with lobbying fees and salaries reported at \$212,695,872.<sup>23</sup>

Lobbying a lawmaker is a fine art that requires excellent personal and communication skills. The successful lobbyist is one who knows how to present facts in a succinct and well-organized fashion, without being overbearing, deceitful, or in any way threatening. Careful preparation is essential to effective lobbying. What lawmakers value most from a lobbyist is reliable information that will assist them in casting an intelligent vote on proposed legislation. Generating reliable and of course persuasive information is one of the key ingredients for a successful lobbying effort. Moreover, the successful lobbyist must know how to forge political coalitions on a particular issue, and he or she must understand the art of compromise.<sup>24</sup> In the words of Louise DiCocco-Beauton, a lobbyist for the Greater New Haven Chamber of Commerce, effective lobbying at the Connecticut state Capitol requires “identifying, analyzing, and in some cases, researching the impact pending legislation will have on various business organizations, and successfully communicating your position to legislators to secure passage or defeat of legislation.”<sup>25</sup>

At the Connecticut state Capitol, lobbyists can be found discussing pending legislation with lawmakers outside the house and senate chambers, in the offices of lawmakers, in the atrium or cafeteria of the Legislative Office Building, and in the committee rooms where they frequently provide testimony on bills. It is not at all difficult to identify who the lobbyists are at the state Capitol, as the state ethics law requires all registered lobbyists to wear a badge that clearly identifies them as such. Outside of the state Capitol, lobbyists working on behalf of interest groups might also organize a public relations campaign on behalf of a public policy issue. State residents might be encouraged through direct mail or other forms of advertising to phone or e-mail lawmakers in order to influence the outcome of a bill before the legislature. Political scientists refer to this strategy as “grassroots lobbying.”

While many associate the term “lobbyist” with behind-the-scenes legislative deals, secretive negotiations, and perhaps political corruption, the fact of the matter is that lobbyists perform a vital role within the context of the lawmaking process. State Senator Bill Finch offers this perspective:

I can't imagine how the legislative process would work without professional advocates for the various points of view. The legislature deliberates, in a general way, like a court, in that information is provided by opposing interests to help reach a decision. The legislative process is much more informal and rough and tumble than a court, but nonetheless we have to process a lot of information, separating fact from fiction, and we need help. Special interests from oil companies and insurance companies to birdwatchers and child advocates all have lobbyists at the Capitol. It is important to remember who is paying the advocate and be up front with them about their interest in the outcome.<sup>26</sup>

### *Campaign Contributions*

Campaign contributions are another method by which interest groups attempt to influence the Connecticut lawmaking process. Interest group money, individual contributions, the candidate's own money, and party money, all help to finance Connecticut election campaigns.

Contrary to popular belief, campaign contributions from interest groups do not determine a lawmaker's views on legislation.<sup>27</sup> Instead, campaign contributions appear to facilitate a group's access to elected officials. If an elected official, either in the legislative or executive branch, receives a campaign contribution from an interest group, it is well understood that the group is at least entitled to an audience with the official at some point in the future. Access, rather than manipulation, appears to be the end result of a campaign contribution from a special or public interest group.<sup>28</sup>

Similar to federal politics, interest group money in Connecticut election campaigns has become quite substantial. A significant portion of interest group money has been funneled to legislative, gubernatorial, and constitutional office candidates by both lobbyists and Political Action Committees.

Political Action Committees are either connected to organizations and serve as their political fundraising arms, or operate as freestanding committees not connected to any specific organization. An example of a “connected” PAC would be the one operated by the American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) Company. Freestanding or “nonconnected” PACs tend to be those with single issue or ideological agendas.<sup>29</sup> Nonconnected PACs are essentially a group of like-minded people who feel very strongly about an issue or cause and have formed a PAC for the purpose of promoting a clearly defined goal. Connecticut’s N.O.W. (National Organization for Women) PAC would be one such example.

Also present in Connecticut are PACs that are under the control of political parties within the state legislature, known as “caucus PACS.” There are also Legislative Leadership PACs (LLPs) that are directed by the party’s legislative leaders. Such PACs are not to be confused with interest group PACs operating outside of the General Assembly. In total, there were more than 700 PACs registered with the Secretary of State’s Office in 2006.<sup>30</sup>

Similar to the federal level, and other states across the land, PAC contributions in Connecticut tend to be directed towards incumbents, rather than challengers. As Alan Rosenthal notes, “Given their high reelection rates, incumbents are most likely to win, so they are the best bets for access-motivated giving.”<sup>31</sup> Legislative leaders and committee chairs are often the main recipients of PAC contributions.

There are exceptions to the rule in every state legislative election. Take for example the 2006 state legislative campaign waged by Republican challenger Christopher DeSanctis. DeSanctis, challenged one term Democratic incumbent Tom Drew for the 132nd General Assembly district located in the town of Fairfield. DeSanctis raised \$19,000 by the beginning of August and was

among the top fundraisers for state legislative candidates. DeSanctis received contributions from a variety of supporters, including personal donations and legislative PACs. The fact that the 132nd district was regarded as a “swing” district, and Representative Drew was perceived as a vulnerable incumbent, encouraged donors to direct campaign dollars to the DeSanctis campaign. Commenting on his extraordinary fundraising success, DeSanctis put it this way:

Fundraising is just a matter of asking. We all have friends and relatives that need to be solicited. The bottom line is no one wakes up in the morning saying to themselves, ‘I have to donate to this or that campaign.’ They need to be continually reminded until they give or say no.”<sup>32</sup>

However, despite DeSanctis’s extraordinary success at fundraising, as well as his energetic grassroots campaign, the power of incumbency proved too much for the challenger. Drew received 61 percent of the vote while DeSanctis won 39 percent.<sup>33</sup>

It is difficult to determine precisely the percentage of special interest money present in Connecticut politics *vis-à-vis* other forms of political money, and it is well beyond the scope of this work to describe the details of Connecticut’s campaign finance code. Nevertheless, it is clear that interest group money has become an important element in Connecticut election campaigns and contributions to office holders have, at the very least, facilitated access to the corridors of power at the Connecticut state Capitol. Precisely what will become of special interest money is difficult to gauge and fully assess at this point in time.

The corruption and scandals that enveloped Connecticut politics, particularly the administration of Governor John G. Rowland, which resulted in Rowland’s resignation and imprisonment, served as the catalyst for lobbying reform.<sup>34</sup> Investigations into Rowland’s association with the Tomasso Construction Company revealed how ingrained special interests and contractors had become at the state Capitol. In 2005, a sweeping campaign finance reform law was passed by the

Connecticut General Assembly and signed into law by Governor Rell. The new law provides for public funding of statewide and legislative campaigns and severely restricts the role of lobbyists and contractors with respect to campaign contributions. The new law went into effect in 2007. As with most campaign finance codes, loopholes will inevitably be found and exploited that will lead to additional calls for reform.

#### Notes

1. League of Women Voters of Connecticut Education Fund, "A Guide to Voter Registration and Election Procedures in Connecticut," online at [www.lw.vct.org](http://www.lw.vct.org).

2. This is the result of the landmark U.S. Supreme Court ruling, *Tashjian v. Republican Party of Connecticut* 479 U.S. 208 (1986).

3. League of Women Voters of Connecticut Education Fund, "A Guide to Voter Registration and Election Procedures in Connecticut," online at [www.lw.vct.org](http://www.lw.vct.org).

4. United States Elections Project, "2004 Voting-Age and Voting-Eligible Population Estimates and Voter Turnout," online at [elections.gmu.edu/Voter\\_Turnout\\_2004\\_Primarys.htm](http://elections.gmu.edu/Voter_Turnout_2004_Primarys.htm). The figures presented are based on the voting eligible population (VEP) rather than the voting age population (VAP). Unlike the VAP, the VEP only includes persons eighteen years of age or older who are legally eligible to vote. It does not include persons eighteen years of age or older who are ineligible to vote due to criminal records or citizenship issues.

5. United States Elections Project, "2004 Presidential Primary Turnout Rates," online at [elections.gmu.edu?Voter\\_Turnout\\_2004\\_Primarys.htm](http://elections.gmu.edu?Voter_Turnout_2004_Primarys.htm)

6. E.E. Schattschnieder, *Party Government* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1942), p. 1.

7. See Joseph I. Lieberman, *The Power Broker* (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin, 1966) and *The Legacy* (Hartford: Spoonwood Press, 1981), p. 213. Both of Lieberman's works focus on John Bailey, the legendary Democratic Party boss in the state of Connecticut. Both works provide rich insight into the influence and power wielded by party organization leaders in a previous political era.

8. Several works explore the broad functions of political party organizations. See, for example, William J. Crotty, ed., *Approaches to Party Organization* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1968); and William E. Wright, ed., *A Comparative Study of Party Organization* (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1971).

9. Data obtained from the Office of the Secretary of State website, [www.sots.ct.gov](http://www.sots.ct.gov).

10. The role of media in fostering candidate-centered campaigns is discussed in many works on political parties. For a succinct treatment, see Barbara G. Salmore and Stephen A. Salmore, *Candidates, Parties, and Campaigns: Electoral Politics in America* (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1989), chapter 3.

11. Phone interview with George Gallo, chairman of the Connecticut Republican State Central Committee, July 27, 2006.

12. Gallo interview, July 27, 2006

13. Gallo interview, July 27, 2006.

14. Phone interview with Nancy DiNardo, chairwoman of the Connecticut Democratic State Central Committee, August 15, 2006.

15. This is the perspective advocated by the Committee on Political Parties, *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System* (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1950).

16. Burdett A. Loomis and Allan J. Ciglar, "Introduction: The Changing Nature of Interest Group Politics," in Allan J. Ciglar and Burdett A. Loomis, eds., *Interest Group Politics* (Washington: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1983), p. 20.

17. For a review of interest group activity and group categories, see Norman Ornstein and Shirley Elder, *Interest Groups, Lobbying and Policymaking* (Washington: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1978), pp. 35-53. A discussion of public interest groups can be found in Andrew S. McFarland, *Public Interest Lobbies: Decision Making on Energy* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1976), pp. 1-43.

18. Data on membership obtained from phone call to central headquarters in Rocky Hill, Connecticut, July 31, 2006.

19. Connecticut AFL-CIO 2006 Legislative Agenda, online at [www.ctaflcio.org](http://www.ctaflcio.org).

20. My thanks to Louise DiCocco-Beauton, for supplying this information. DiCocco-Beauton is the Director of Governmental Affairs and lobbyist for the Greater New Haven Chamber of Commerce.

21. The origin of the term “lobbying” is often attributed to Grant’s experience with individuals at the hotel who attempted to exert influence over his perspective on issues. See Jennifer Barrios, “Early Lobbyists Found ‘in’ Crowd at Willard Hotel,” American Society of Newspaper Editors, April 22, 2004; online at [www.asne.org/index.cfm?id=5217](http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?id=5217).

22. An informative overview of client and contract lobbying can be found in my lengthy personal interview with contract lobbyist Paddi LeShane. See Gary L. Rose, *Connecticut Government at the Millennium* (Fairfield, CT: Sacred Heart University Press, 2001), pp. 167-72.

23. Neil Gordon, “State Lobbyists Near the \$1 Billion Mark,” The Center for Public Integrity, August 10, 2005; online at [www.publicintegrity.org/hiredguns/report.aspx?aid+728](http://www.publicintegrity.org/hiredguns/report.aspx?aid+728).

24. An excellent overview of what constitutes appropriate lobbying conduct and skillful strategizing can be found in Bruce C. Wolpe and Bertram J. Levine, *Lobbying Congress: How the System Works*, 2nd ed. (Washington: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1996), pp. 13-47.

25. Interview with Louise DiCocco-Beauton, August 2, 2006.

26. Interview with State Senator Bill Finch, September 1, 2006.

27. John R. Wright, “Tobacco Industry PACs and the Nation’s Health: A Second Opinion,” in Paul S. Herrnson, Ronald G. Shaiko, and Clyde Wilcox, eds., *The Interest Group Connection: Electioneering, Lobbying and Policymaking in Washington* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publisher, 1998), pp. 174-95.

28. David Lowery and Holly Brasher, *Organized Interests and American Government* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2004), p. 133; Alan Rosenthal, *The Third House: Lobbyists and Lobbying in the States*, 2nd ed. (Washington: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2001), p. 120.

29. Gary C. Jacobson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, 6th ed. (New York: Pearson Education, Inc. 2004), p. 73.

30. Online at [www.sots.ct.gov/ElectionsServices/CampaignFinance/PACList1.Doc](http://www.sots.ct.gov/ElectionsServices/CampaignFinance/PACList1.Doc)

31. Rosenthal, *The Third House*, p. 133.

32. Interview with Christopher DeSanctis, August 15, 2006.

33. Voting statistics available online at [www.sots.ct.gov/RegisterManual/SectionVIII/S0V06Assembly.htm](http://www.sots.ct.gov/RegisterManual/SectionVIII/S0V06Assembly.htm).

34. For a more thorough treatment of recent political scandals involving Connecticut public officials, see Gary L. Rose, ed., *Public Policy in Connecticut: Challenges and Perspectives* (Fairfield, CT: Sacred Heart University Press, 2005), especially Gary L. Rose, “Introduction,” pp. 15-23, and Brian Stiltner, “The Challenge of Ethical Political Leadership,” pp. 101-18.