

**Governor Rell's Address
Myles Martel Lecture in Leadership & Public Opinion
University of Connecticut
October 14, 2004**



Good morning and thank you so much for inviting me to be here.

It is a pleasure to be at the University of Connecticut on this autumn day. Connecticut's investment in higher education is a wise one and it is paying big dividends for our state.

Thank you also for asking me to be a part of this splendid lecture series. Thanks to the generosity of Myles Martel, this lecture series focuses on leadership.

It is a subject Dr. Martel knows well himself, having served as a debate advisor to President Reagan and an advisor to his Communications Office, as well as a consultant to numerous other leaders.

We are proud to have this series at the University of Connecticut, associated as it is with UConn's Center for Survey Research and Analysis.

Dr. Martel's generosity is a tribute to the caliber of our university and its research center, and I thank him for his kindness as I thank you again for your invitation to be here today.

Let's begin with a story. It's an old one, perhaps a familiar one. Those of you who know a little about government might even say it's an appropriate one.

There are two little boys. One, Timmy, is an eternal optimist. For him the glass is always half-full, even when it's three-quarters empty.

For the other, Tommy, nothing is ever quite good enough. He is a cynic, a pessimist, forever seeing the darker side of life.

Timmy and Tommy's parents would like their sons – both of their sons – to deal with life on a more even keel.

So they take the boys to a psychologist. After several sessions, the doctor is ready for an aggressive treatment.

“Bring them to me next week,” he says, “and I will teach them a lesson they will never forget.”

Next week rolls around and the doctor sends Tommy to a room filled with candy and toys – all the latest playthings and video games and mountains of stuff to rot the teeth.

Timmy, on the other hand, is locked in a dark room filled chest-high with what government refers to as Anatomically Reprocessed Horse Feed, Type II, Solid – what the private sector calls manure.

An hour later the doctor checks on Tommy. He looks at the doctor and asks, “Is this all?”

Disappointed, the doctor checks on Timmy. He finds the door to Timmy's room propped open and the young man energetically employing a shovel.

The doctor asks, “What on earth are you doing?”

Timmy replies, “With this much manure, there's got to be a pony in here somewhere.”

Which segues surprisingly easily to the subject of ethics reform in the State of Connecticut.

No, not the manure part – rather because there is a pony in here somewhere.

Restoring public confidence in Connecticut state government is possible – more than that, it's essential.

It requires strong leadership.

It requires a plan.

It requires follow-through and attention to detail.

It's happening now.

I tell you it is possible because I know it in my heart. I feel it every day.

On July first, when I stood on the steps of the Capitol to take the oath of office under what could charitably be called adverse circumstances, I knew there was a pony in there somewhere.

I said that Connecticut is resilient.

“Ours is a strength that is centuries old,” I said, “but ever new. It’s the optimism of Connecticut families – always ready to look forward to tomorrow.”

And every day since that day I feel that optimism anew.

I feel it at the open houses I’ve held around the state – including my first, held at the Capitol, when nearly a thousand people came to visit over the course of three hours.

I feel it walking down the street. People roll down the windows of their cars to shout encouragement.

I felt it on Connecticut Day at the “Big E.” I felt it at the send-offs for our valiant National Guard troops.

People believe.

They believe in the desire of state government to help.

They believe that the overwhelming majority of state government employees and elected officials are honest.

They believe that a troubled time in the history of our state does not necessarily mean the future is forever clouded.

They believe that we can learn from our mistakes.

That we can make wise decisions.

That bright people with sturdy will and good intentions can – will – do more, do better, do right.

They are right.

And here is the first thing I would tell you about leadership: You must never – never – do anything to cause them to believe anything else.

It is the solemn obligation of a leader always to be a leader. Even when – perhaps especially when – you don’t feel like being a leader.

I was personally devastated, disappointed, disillusioned by Governor Rowland. I was awed by the task that lay before me.

My job was to go out and do it.

For it may well be at times like that when people need leaders the most.

I am blessed, in this time, to be leading when so many people do believe so strongly in the fundamental principles of state government, despite the trials of recent months.

It would be possible to lead were that not the case. The task would be infinitely harder, however.

So I am grateful every day for the faith of the people of Connecticut.

Yet faith alone is not enough. There must be a plan. This is the second important leadership lesson I want to tell you about today.

All the faith and good will in the world is wasted without direction.

Do not confuse a vision and a plan. I have – no doubt you do, too – a vision for Connecticut that includes open and honest government.

A vision, however, is inspiration. A plan is hard work.

Please understand: I am not denigrating the value of vision. It is extremely valuable – ask President Bush’s father, who was roundly criticized for lacking what he called “the vision thing.” But it will not substitute for a plan.

The plan is your road map. You can draw it yourself, but better yet you can ask the advice of the best and brightest people around you.

In the end, yes – the responsibility for the road map is yours. But as a leader you have the ability to draw on the resources around you. Doing so is not a sign of weakness. It is a sign of strong and thoughtful leadership.

So to translate my vision for open and honest government in Connecticut into reality, we needed to have a plan.

And there is. It begins with Executive Order Number One, which I issued on the day I took office.

Executive Order Number One created the position of Special Counsel for Ethics Compliance – I call her my Ethics Czar.

At UConn you know her as Rachel Rubin, Director of Ethics Compliance for the Storrs and regional campuses.

In my office she is responsible for ensuring that everyone adheres to the highest possible ethical standards.

Rachel has already performed an ethics compliance audit of state agencies, identifying numerous areas for improvement in the way ethics are taught and enforced.

From that audit we have developed an Ethics Compliance Plan, also required under Executive Order Number One, which we are putting in place across state government.

The Ethics Code will be a part of state employees' lives from before the beginning – from before the moment they are hired. They will get a copy of the Code during the interview process, and appropriate training once they are on the job.

We will follow that up over the course of their career, and when they move on they will be reminded about the “revolving door” provisions that apply after they leave state service.

Managers will be evaluated on how well they create an environment where enforcement of the ethics code is a given and reporting possible ethical violations is encouraged.

Each agency will have an ethics compliance officer to work closely with the State Ethics Commission.

And ethics statements will be reviewed and updated every year. They will become vibrant, vigorous policies – not dusty documents written for the sake of public relations and then filed in some anonymous drawer.

Rachel's work hardly stops there, of course. She works with me every day to find new ways to restore public confidence in government.

I also put together a Contracting Reform Task Force, which reported back to me with 133 – yes, 133 – suggestions for preventing fraud, abuse and waste. We are now working to turn these recommendations into legislation for the upcoming session of the General Assembly.

We are also taking immediate steps that do not require legislative approval, such as working with the Department of Administrative Services to form a single portal for state contracts – a one-stop shop for every state contractor.

Everyone gets the same deal, every time.

I have asked contractors to go above and beyond the requirements of the ethics code and to stop giving gifts of any kind to state employees – no matter how well-intentioned.

Our ethics laws do allow state employees to receive certain small gifts, such as up to \$50 worth of food and beverages in a calendar year. No one's going to be bought and sold for the price of a quick meal at McDonald's.

But offering a gift to a state worker puts them in the uncomfortable position of having to assess its value, potentially having to decline it, and certainly having to report it.

No gift, no problem. It's as simple as that.

This guidance is contained in a memo that goes to every vendor doing business with the state. In it I ask them to make all of their employees aware of the policy.

I am also working hard to make our state Ethics Commission a dynamic and effective body.

This week I asked the majority and minority leaders of the House and Senate to send members to a working group. I want that group to reconfigure the Ethics Commission to get rid of the infighting, get rid of the politics and to make the Commission work.

Together we will draft a bill that should be one of the first pieces of legislation introduced when the Legislature convenes in January.

I am proposing changes in the way members of the commission are appointed, to make certain this body remains a strong and nonpartisan panel of "citizens."

I have also proposed changes in the internal structure and operations of the commission, to help guarantee in it can meet its obligations effectively.

My goal here is not to make changes for the sake of change, or throw out everything that is working simply because some things obviously are not.

We have an opportunity to make the Commission work better. It would be worse than wrong to miss that chance.

These are some of the things we are doing on the ethics front. Restoring public confidence requires action in other arenas as well, however, to show that we are thoughtful and careful stewards of public trust and public dollars.

I have to tell you, I was staggered when I received a report from the state Auditors about the amount of state property that was missing every month. The Auditors issue this report routinely, but the first one I received as Governor captured my attention.

Whether through theft, vandalism or simple carelessness, we were losing an absolutely outrageous amount of equipment and supplies.

How can the public have confidence that we are being good stewards of their tax dollars when a leaf blower, vacuum cleaners and even an X-ray machine and a washing machine can disappear from the state inventory without explanation?

They can't. And I can't blame them.

I asked the Office of Policy and Management to examine state agencies and report back to me how well they were keeping track of state property.

The answers in most instances were good. In 12 out of 68 cases, however, I sent memos to agency chiefs ordering them to come up with plans to do better. They have until the end of this month to get back to me.

I consider any waste or loss of state property appalling. Especially in a time of limited resources, we have to take care of what we have.

The same goes for state credit cards. Earlier this month, after consulting with my legal team, I ordered a new policy for state credit cards, gas cards, phone cards and other cards.

The policy makes it crystal clear that state cards are for state business only, and anyone who violates that policy can face disciplinary, ethical and criminal sanctions.

So these are some of the elements of my plan for restoring public confidence in Connecticut government. These are some of the specific steps we have taken, or are undertaking now.

Of course, there are new challenges every day. And we rise to meet those challenges. Some of them we can anticipate; many, many more we cannot.

We do our best to be guided by our principles. To be open and honest, to deal fairly with the people of this state, to seek the best for them. To work with dignity, honor and civility.

And here is the third and final major point I would make today about leadership. It is not about doing. It is about seeing to it that things are done.

This is full of contradictions and pitfalls. It does not mean that leaders do not do things. They do – they must – for leadership is an active role, “lead” is a verb.

But the leader who tries to do it all is headed for burnout, and in a powerful hurry.

True leadership lies in guiding others to success. In ensuring that everyone is performing at their best, doing the work they are pledged to do and doing it well.

A leader holds others accountable. This is the “doing” of leadership. It is not about doing for someone after they have failed – or worse still, stepping in before they’ve had a chance to try on their own.

Doing it all, or trying to do it all, is a disease called micromanaging. It can be literally fatal – certainly to whatever effort you have undertaken, sometimes to yourself.

Many a heart attack chalked up to “overwork” has at its root a leader who would not – perhaps could not – delegate or hold others accountable.

It may seem counter-intuitive, but trying to do it all sometimes appears easier than delegating, which is really another word for trusting someone else to do the job.

And it *often* may appear easier than confronting someone who is letting down the team by not meeting their responsibilities.

These are called “difficult conversations” for a reason. There are people who specialize in teaching others how to have them. They never stop being difficult.

Leadership *is* difficult. It is difficult and demanding and there are days when it takes you away from your family when there is nowhere else you’d rather be.

It is also astonishingly rewarding. It is exciting and consuming and offers an opportunity to truly make a difference in people’s lives.

This last is an important piece to remember. Leadership offers an opportunity to make a difference in someone’s life, no matter what the project.

Because as a leader you are not only working toward a goal, you are working with a team. You are affecting your teammates as you bring them along in their work, whether your goal is a public project or a variation on a widget.

A leader works with the team – and with the other team, too. As we head into the next legislative session and the budget negotiations, I know full well that my ability to work with the members of the Legislature will have a direct effect on my success.

Fortunately, I served many years in the House of Representatives and presided over the Senate as Lieutenant Governor.

I know many of the members of the legislature and I think they know me. I am confident we will be able to work together well.

I am confident, in fact, that we can do *great* things for the state of Connecticut.

I believe that fairness and openness are still the bedrock ways of doing government business in Connecticut.

I believe that our state employees and our state contractors want to avoid even the appearance of impropriety.

I believe that we will emerge from this legislative session with a stronger, more vigorous Ethics Commission – one where its flaws have been minimized and its strengths retained or enhanced.

And so we have come full circle. Because the confidence that I see every day in the people of this marvelous state fills me with confidence in the role I have undertaken.

I know it is possible. I feel the power of the possibilities.

I know there is a plan. I have worked with some of the brightest minds in the state of Connecticut to draft it.

And those same people, along with many others, are working with me every day to carry out that plan.

If these are some of the elements of leadership, then here is one of the fruits of leadership: Action.

Actions, not words, are the ultimate results of leadership.

What has happened?

What has changed?

What is better?

Here is where you must judge all leaders in the end, including yourself if you would be a leader.

Our actions have just begun. Our first hundred days ended less than a week ago. We have a long way yet to go.

My promise to you, as a leader, is that I will see it through.

I will work with my team, and with the Legislature, and with the people of this state, every day.

I will work to reinforce the basic faith that people have in the good intentions of their state government.

I will work to ensure that the taxes they pay are spent wisely, and the property maintained with diligence and care.

I will be mindful of the things that work as I seek to improve the things that do not.

And I will check in with you from time to time, to see what you think. To hear your concerns, to listen to your advice.

To give you a chance to hold me accountable, as I must hold accountable those who work for me.

Thank you.