

From the Office of Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz

January 9, 2004

For Immediate Release

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PROPOSAL CLARIFYS GIFT BAN FOR OFFICIALS
Ethics laws strengthened, extended under plan

Secretary of the State **Susan Bysiewicz**, along with House Majority Leader **Jim Amann**, Senate President Pro Tem **Kevin B. Sullivan** and Government Administration & Elections Committee Co-chairs **Jim O'Rourke** and **Don DeFronzo** announced a plan to clarify and strengthen a variety of state ethics and gift laws relating to public officials.

"The public trust is priceless. It is insulting to the public to hear technical legal arguments that ignore the intent of our ethics laws," said Bysiewicz, who introduced a number of ethics proposals as House Chair of the Legislature's Government Administration Committee. "Connecticut's ethics laws are some of the strictest in the country and clearly state that a public official is prohibited from using their office for personal financial gain."

Under the plan, gifts valued at over \$100 from subordinates, or anyone doing business with or seeking to do business with any state department or agency, would be prohibited. State agencies would be required to post the names of all contractors with contracts over \$100,000 on their websites.

"Ethics 101 is a prerequisite for public life, but when you learn of those who cheated on the exam or didn't even take the course it impacts all of us in the eyes of the public," Representative Amann (D-Milford) said. "Common sense, and the law, tells us that accepting expensive gifts and free services is wrong. When neither the law or common sense serve as a deterrent, it is time to go back to the drawing board."

Senator Sullivan (D-West Hartford), who has already called for tougher revolving door laws, conflict of interest regulation and ethics enforcement, joined in support of Secretary Bysiewicz' proposals. Said Sullivan, "even as Connecticut sorts out what to do about Governor Rowland's misconduct, it is essential that we act to clean up the law on official gifts, contracts and ethics. I am pleased to

have Secretary Bysiewicz' support for several of my proposals and glad to join in supporting her initiatives."

In addition, criminal and civil penalties for ethics violations would increase to a maximum of \$10,000 from \$2,000. And, the statute of limitations for such violations would be extended from three to five years or the duration of public service.

"Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz's legislative initiatives add to a growing list of ethics proposals that the GAE Committee will review in the 2004 session," said Senator DeFronzo (D-New Britain). "Her proposals will set higher standards and strengthen enforcement capabilities."

Bysiewicz also announced her support for a more independent state Ethics Commission, a concept proposed last month by House Democrats including Amann and O'Rourke. Currently, the Commission's budget and membership is subject to legislative and gubernatorial approval.

"I thank Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz for her contribution and support of our effort to pass sweeping ethics reform legislation this year," said Rep. O'Rourke (D-Cromwell). "Among the many troubling revelations of the Governor's acceptance of expensive gifts, appear to be a form of tribute to be paid to him by his vassals. It is imperative that we remove any perceived or real loopholes in the gift ban law."