GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

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GOVERNOR BILL O'NEILL'S BUDGET ADDRESS TO JOINT SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY...HALL OF THE HOUSE, STATE CAPITOL

Mister Speaker, Mister President, Ladies and Gentlemen of the House and Senate:

I appear before you today to present for your thoughtful consideration the budget that I propose for the State of Connecticut for the 1985-1986 fiscal year. But, unlike on similar occasions in past years, I am not going to use this opportunity to fill this great hall with a litany of numbers.

All too often, the real meaning of the government budget process -- in this state and elsewhere -- becomes more obscure rather than more clear because of the ease with which we slip into the numbers game. Therefore, I intend today to let the budget's numbers for the most part speak for themselves. Instead, I want to use my time before you to state what I believe this budget is really about.

Let me begin by using a word which is more significant than any mere number ever could be in describing the budget. Ladies and Gentlemen, the budget I submit to you today is balanced! And it is balanced not just in dollars and cents -- as required by law -- but balanced because it provides for our people's needs and it does so without unnecessarily taxing their purses. A budget which is mathematically balanced cannot be our sole objective, although that promises to be an increasingly difficult one to attain in light of recently announced federal budget proposals. But a government's budget -- whether it be that of a state, a municipality, or the nation as a whole -- is more than a collection of numbers evenly distributed between revenues and expenditures.

A budget -- because it allocates the scarce resources of government -- represents our basic plan of government. Behind the budget's cold statistics lies our historic obligation -- as Governor and Legislature in a free and democratic society -- to provide for the needs and well being of all of our citizens.

We must set its numbers against our people's needs, its programs against our people's hopes, and its formulas against the future's promise. It is only after we have taken these measures that we will know if our budget is fair and if we in government have been faithful to our offices.

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The people of this state have from the beginnings of our democracy had the right to demand from us nothing less. Before there were Republican and Democratic parties as we know them today, Thomas Jefferson asserted the self-evident truth that governments are instituted to secure the inalienable rights of the citizenry to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

In the views of those who gathered in Philadelphia in 1787 to promulgate what became the Constitution of the United States of America, government must, among other things, "establish justice, promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity."

And, we should not forget as we celebrate our 350th year, that here in Connecticut -- the Constitution state --our forefathers anticipated even those great minds when, by the Fundamental Orders of 1639, they sought to establish "an orderly and decent government...to order and dispose of the affairs of the people in all seasons as occasion shall require."

Nothing less than the history of our democracy has defined our task in government. The budget is the principle governmental tool we have to accomplish it. As we work to forge our budget into an effective instrument, let us not lose sight of our historic responsibilities.

Let us also be aware as we begin the budget-making process that this year our basic instrument of government must be stronger than ever. The 1985-86 budget must do more than provide for the traditional needs of this state as they arise during a single fiscal year.

In 1985-86, we have old debts to pay, new crises to meet, and enormous new burdens to bear because of a federal government which has become increasingly indifferent to its people. In addition, we will have to establish a foundation for Connecticut's future growth and plan wisely to accommodate contingencies which are now unforeseen.

These are imposing demands to place upon a single document. But they are at the same time demands clearly imposed upon us by our offices. We must accept them. We must understand them. And, above all, we must discharge them.

It is with these duties in mind that I offer my budget for 1985-1986. Let me draw your attention to some of its features.

My budget seeks to discharge an old and large debt -- a tragic debt, because the interest on it is sometimes paid in human lives. I propose that we dedicate more than three-quarters of a billion dollars to rebuilding Connecticut's roads and bridges.
Consumed by the necessary task of creating Connecticut's highway system, our predecessors did not always attend to its maintenance. As a result, while we were building miles of new roads and bridges, many more miles of older roads and bridges gradually decayed. Now, we who are presently charged with the safety and welfare of the citizens of Connecticut cannot allow that process to continue. This Legislature must finally assume commitments which have too long been avoided in the past. We cannot leave these problems to be dealt with by our successors.

Therefore, the budget which I submit to you today provides not only for the continuation of our ten-year program of restoring Connecticut's roads and bridges by fully funding its second year. It also proposes the creation of a Local Road and Bridge Trust Fund to contain in excess of $100 million.

It calls for an accelerated schedule of removing tolls from our highways. And it funds the prompt installation of concrete median barriers at the most dangerous points on Interstate 95.

We must spare future Legislatures the political stress of meeting these ever inflating needs. But, most importantly, we must provide our people with good roads to foster the growth of their economy and sound roads to preserve the safety of their persons.

Our road and bridge debt has been accruing for a long time. We must wipe it from the books as quickly as possible. Because it is a function of government to restore and protect, we will restore the highway system and thereby protect the economic and personal welfare of those who drive on it.

But, even as we move on with the business of paying our own old debts, we find ourselves faced with the responsibility of paying the debts of others.

Monday the word issued from Washington that the current administration intends to abandon our nation's elderly by denying them medicare increases and housing. It intends to deprive the bodies and minds of our young by cutting back on school lunch programs and by withholding the loan resources so many of them need to meet the financial demands of higher education. This federal administration would desert the poor -- striving to better themselves--by eliminating federal jobs programs and would weaken the country's economic superstructure by abandoning mass transit funding.

The list of federal abdications of responsibility grows longer. As a consequence, the likelihood of Connecticut's ability to care for those forgotten by Washington diminishes. Yet, we cannot and will not abandon them. Because it is a necessary and proper function of government to provide for those in genuine need, we in Connecticut will provide!

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Accordingly, I am proposing to you today that we not merely maintain the sustenance benefits we make available to our poor, but that we increase them by five per cent. And, as we enhance our capacity to care for the poor, the elderly, the disabled and the homeless, I also propose that we enhance our capacity to identify those who seek benefits not because of need, but because of greed.

You will see in your budget documents 26 new positions within state government which will enable us to identify those who abuse welfare programs and to eliminate them from the benefits list. We, in government, are obliged not only to provide for the needy, but to prosecute those who prey upon them. We must pursue both obligations with equal vigor.

Especially in light of the federal government's abandonment of the needy, our state government can ill afford to waste its response to human suffering. Therefore, you will also see funds in your budget documents earmarked to establish a new cabinet position -- a Secretary for Human Services which I mentioned in my last address to this body -- to better coordinate our human services programs and to assure the prompt and efficient delivery of state assistance.

And, whether Washington cares to or not, we must continue our efforts not only to sustain our disadvantaged citizens but to assist them to make themselves fully productive members of society. In Connecticut, we must continue to provide jobs and job training so that the poor -- not the rich--can help themselves. Because it is a function of government to try to make the poor productive, we in Connecticut must try to make the poor productive.

And we must not only do all within our power to permit our disadvantaged citizens to enter the productive mainstream, we must never forget those whom age has forced out of it. Our elderly citizens who served us so faithfully and well in their youth should not be denied services when it is their turn to need.

Accordingly, I propose to you today that we expand state funded home care for the elderly; that we fund adult day care centers for victims of Alzheimer's disease; and that we increase state resources to provide safe and wholesome housing for our elderly population -- even as Washington refuses to do so. Because it is a function of government to care, we in Connecticut care.

Even as federal dereliction forces new responsibilities upon us, we cannot forget our state's traditional and proper responsibility of providing for the safety and security of its citizens.

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Therefore, my budget proposes that we expand our state police force by creating a class of 70 new troopers to begin in the next fiscal year. Additionally, I propose to expand our judiciary by creating six new judgeships in 1985-1986 as the first phase of a three-year program which will add a total of 18 new judges by 1988. And, finally—so that we, the law-abiding citizens of Connecticut, may sleep more soundly in our own beds — you will find in my budget funding to provide 500 new beds in 1985-86 and to plan for 400 beds thereafter — a total of 900 beds — so that those convicted of crimes may be properly confined in our state's prisons. Because it is the sometimes unpleasant function of government to punish, we in Connecticut—after just conviction -- will punish.

Just as we will not abandon our elderly, we will not abandon those at the beginning of life's journey. The vicious crime of child abuse threatens the first halting steps of that journey. It injects terror where there should be love. It creates nightmares where there should be innocent dreams. As Governor, I will not permit child abusers to raise a generation of fear within the borders of this state!

You will find in my budget provisions for a child-find hotline and the staff to maintain to permit the rapid exchange within our state and with other government bodies of information concerning lost or runaway children. Moreover, I will be submitting legislation during this session which will permit the introduction of videotape testimony of child abuse victims into the trials of those accused of victimizing them. Because it is a function of government to defend the defenseless, we in Connecticut will defend the defenseless.

These are some of our traditional responsibilities and we must accommodate them. But, we also must provide in our financial planning the flexibility necessary to respond to new threats — such as the threat to our drinking water supplies.

Nothing could be more fundamental to life than the water we drink, bathe in and cook with. When that fundamental need is threatened, government must respond.

Several months ago, I commissioned a team of state officials to focus on the problem of contaminated ground water supplies. They have reported to me and I, in turn, am recommending to you:

*** That we intensify our effort to monitor the quality of the water being consumed by our citizens;

*** That, when monitoring indicates contamination, we provide a safe and secure supply of water; and

*** That, while providing quality water, we continue to work to eliminate contamination. Because it is the function of government to purify, we in Connecticut must purify.

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Our budget must meet current needs and it must sow the seeds of future growth. Therefore, since nothing is more essential to future growth than an educated citizenry, education expenditures represent the largest single share of my proposed budget.

In 1985-1986, I hope you will join me:

*** By fully funding the educational equalization grant;

*** By increasing grants to towns for school construction, school transportation, and for special and vocational education; and

*** By providing additional teacher training and improvement programs. The education funds in my budget proposal represent money that we must spend to develop today's young minds to meet tomorrow's challenges.

Along with educational opportunities, we also must provide an economic climate which itself fosters growth. In the last four years, Connecticut's economy has far outperformed the nation's. In the face of competition from other states and other regions, let us retain our preeminent position by:

*** Expanding CONNTAC, a high technology clearinghouse for business, industry and labor; and

*** Increasing industrial development and job training opportunities in Connecticut.

Because it is a function of government to encourage learning and growth, we in Connecticut will encourage learning and growth.

In broad outline, I have given you some of the major areas which I propose to fund in the upcoming fiscal year. I believe our democratic principles require us to do so. But spending is, of course, only one-half of the budget picture. The other half is revenue. We must attend to both.

I have said before and I will say again that we must be prudent in husbanding the past revenues accrued in our Rainy Day Fund. We must avoid the temptation created by our current prosperity to impair the state's future revenue stream to the detriment of the generations which will succeed us.

I have proposed to this body a sales tax cut of one-half per cent, effective on April 1, 1985, and to continue in the fiscal year 1985-1986. You are considering a variety of tax cut proposals of your own initiative. Let us work together to review all of these options and let us not be swayed by partisan or proprietary concerns in choosing which is the wisest.

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Let us instead choose that program which will return the greatest amount of money -- consistent with prudent fiscal management -- to those of our citizens who have the greatest need. In my opinion, we can afford to reduce our people's tax burden during the next 15 months by approximately $136 million. But we can afford to reduce taxes by $136 million only if we do not have to absorb the $131 million which I estimate that the President's proposed budget, if adopted, would cost the State of Connecticut.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let us not deceive ourselves. For every dollar cut from the federal budget, someone will be knocking on your doors and on my door seeking its replacement. In many cases, we will not be able, in good conscience, to refuse. Let us then work within that framework in the most equitable fashion possible. Because it is a function of government to be prudent, we in Connecticut must be prudent.

As part of our prudence, let us also recognize that every new crisis does not require the expenditure of new state dollars. As we begin the process of deciding how the state should best spend its revenues, we should consider how the state can achieve its goals within the existing expenditure levels.

Therefore, with this budget, I am submitting a package of proposals whose implementation will not require additional funding. Primary among these are the bills which -- through a combination of education and enforcement -- address the menace of drunken driving on our highways.

I am recommending an increased emphasis on drug and alcohol education programs in our schools and increased enforcement by the state police. With your help, I want to complement these programs with legislation which would seek to keep the drunken driver from our roads and, if he ventures onto them, to punish him severely.

I ask you:

*** To eliminate the cabaret liquor permit which allows bars to remain open late into the night;

*** To enact "per se" legislation which would mandate conviction for drunken driving of anyone found behind the wheel with a blood alcohol level over .1 per cent; and

*** To impose a 30 day license suspension upon conviction for a first drunken driving offense. And, as I have asked my fellow Governors in our neighboring states, I ask you to raise Connecticut's legal drinking age to 21.

And, above all, I ask you now to join with me to explore all the possible means by which we can eliminate the senseless tragedies caused by the drunken driver. We must never let it be said that Connecticut did not do everything within its power to prevent the sacrifices of its citizens to alcohol related crimes.

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Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you my budget proposals. Even as I present them, I am aware that they do not mark the end of the budget process, but are merely its beginning. Therefore, as we begin this process, let us keep foremost in our minds the realization that we are performing the most basic of our government functions. Because it is our most basic function, it must also be our most careful, our most responsible, our most compassionate, and our most just.

For many in this hall, today represents a first venture into the budget process. This venture will--- at all times --- be hard work and -- at some times -- it will be frustrating. But we cannot allow our frustrations to deter us from our proper mission.

We may disagree. But, even as we disagree, let us renew our pledge to resolve our differences according to the ideals of a free democracy. Let us engage in no debate which does not respect these ideals. And let us not offer to the people of this state a budget which fails to "establish justice, promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity."

Thank you.