GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

For Further Information:

Jon Sandberg  566-4840
537-5862

GOVERNOR O'NEILL'S BUDGET ADDRESS BEFORE THE 1987 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, Reverend Clergy, Men and Women of the House and Senate, People of Connecticut:

Today marks a critical moment in our young legislative session. The excitement of campaigning is behind us. The thrill of election night is past. And the fanfare of our opening session has joined the excitement of past opening sessions -- a faint echo in this vast and glorious hall.

Today, our ceremonies are at an end, but our commitment is just beginning. Today, I submit for your review and consideration my budget proposals for the State of Connecticut for the 1987-88 fiscal year.

Today, we begin that process by which all of us as elected officials may be most accurately measured and most fairly judged.

In the budget we will fashion in the ensuing weeks and months, the people who brought us into office will see the breadth and depth of our commitment to them. They will be able to measure campaign rhetoric against programmatic reality. They will be able to weigh the promises made against promises kept. In the budget document which you will pass and I will sign, they will be able to judge finally the extent of our wisdom and prudence -- our compassion and concern -- our vision and our courage.

Our budget is a vital document. It expresses numerically our sense of democracy. It exemplifies with exacting clarity the social goals for which we strive and the values which we hold dear.

Let there be no misunderstanding about that which we undertake. Our budget is no mere fiscal detail. It must embody the principles upon which we all campaigned. It must clearly and unmistakably express the faith of those fine and generous citizens of Connecticut who brought us to office and whom, by our oath and our honor, we are dedicated to serve.

The budget that I am sharing with you today -- and that all of Connecticut will share come July 1 -- is an expression of our common values, our shared ideals, our mutual hopes -- and our native Yankee prudence. It is a human budget with a humane outlook. But it is tempered with the pragmatic realization that we must not mortgage our future out of our desire to treat each ill of today.

(more)
You have before you a budget that truly meets human needs. It builds upon the successful programs we have crafted in recent years. And, it opens new avenues to the healthy, prosperous and competitive Connecticut of the future that is the common goal of every person in this hall today!

We must assess our budgetary needs with care. But we must also look beyond our budget's numbers to see the faces of every citizen of this great state. We must see those budget numbers in:

** The careworn face of the 75-year-old woman trying to make ends meet by foregoing the medication she needs;

** The hopeful face of the high school senior who sees the opportunity for further education fading in the cruel light of financial reality;

** The despairing face of the 25-year-old single parent who fears that the hope of job training will be lost for lack of a secure child care arrangement;

** The concerned faces of each and every property owner in this state anxiously awaiting a rumored mill increase, if not this year, then the next.

We must be prudent, but we must look into those faces for our "bottom line." The budget I submit today calls for an 11.4 percent increase in general fund spending, of which three percent represents new commitments. But a "good" budget is measured in dreams fulfilled, not in dollars spent.

Men and women of the General Assembly -- the budget I submit today is a good budget!! In the end, the "bottom line" depends upon your starting point.

Today we start from here: We cannot afford to be spendthrifts with the people's resources. But, in equal measure, we cannot afford to cut the hope out of the people's future.

By June the third, the "bottom line" will be a budget that meets our people's needs, provides for their future, and embodies our traditional values in bold and imaginative ways.

Yes, our budget will be larger -- but larger in responsiveness and hope.

Yes, our budget will increase -- but the increase will be in the spirit of Connecticut and Connecticut's people.

Our budget must preserve the economic gains that have brought meaningful employment to nearly 97 percent of our workforce. We must continue our successful economic development programs, encourage tourists to spend more time in our classic environment, increase our small business incentives and expand our commitment to high technology, particularly research and development in our institutions of higher education.
Our budget must provide us with a competitive edge for an increasingly competitive world.

Yet mere preservation of our current economic strategy is not enough. In the midst of prosperity, our budget must reach out to those of our fellow citizens outside of, or displaced from, the economic mainstream -- as well as those in danger of becoming so.

To those outside, we must renew and creatively expand our job training network. Our budget can do this by:

** Maintaining crucial services in a Department of Labor hampered by the loss of federal funding.

** Expanding and strengthening our innovative -- and successful -- Jobs Connection Program to help people lift themselves through meaningful employment out of the vicious cycle of poverty.

** And by establishing a new position of Deputy Commissioner for Job Training within the Department of Labor to ensure that our efforts and resources are coordinated -- and on target.

In addition, we must expand the availability of quality child care to ensure that working mothers and fathers can continue to work.

Our budget must face the chronic problem of unacceptably high unemployment rates among our youth, particularly in urban areas, through the Youth Employability Development Program in our Department of Education.

Working together, we must preserve and expand the fundamental right that every Connecticut citizen has to safe, affordable and decent housing. We must -- this year -- craft a major expansion of our multi-faceted capital housing program.

The time has come to expand our pilot program of rental assistance for low-income people, and to incorporate a companion program of limited assistance for working families as well.

Our budget must expand the opportunities for those among us whom illness, tragedy, violence, or a cruel turn of fate have left homeless.

Through our budget, let us renew and preserve the commitment to educational excellence and equity that made 1986 such a memorable year.

We must continue and expand our efforts to demand and reward quality teaching of our children, for only absolute excellence is good enough.

(more)
Our budget must expand the opportunity to reach our youngest minds by encouraging our local school districts to extend their kindergartens, and additional funds must be provided to our school breakfast program to promote the healthy bodies that are the head start to healthy minds.

Education is a lifetime endeavor -- and nowhere is it more crucial that at the juncture between adolescence and young adulthood.

Our budget must expand the opportunities of every Connecticut citizen to explore the privilege of higher education at Connecticut's public and private institutions. We must increase student financial assistance.

Our budget must honor our fundamental obligation to preserve and protect life itself from the evils of our society -- and there is no evil more sinister or threatening than drugs. We must fund our three-pronged approach to:

** Educate our people about drug abuse;

** Expand our capacity to provide treatment to those who seek help before their dreams are destroyed; and,

** Crack down hard on merchants of death who deal destruction to the vulnerable among us.

Let us provide the resources to train and graduate the new sworn personnel necessary to bring our State Police to its largest complement ever! Let those who would drive drunkenly or unsafely take notice: Our crackdown on your behavior is a permanent program.

Let us also be mindful that justice delayed is justice denied -- for victims of crime and for those who stand accused as well.

We must hasten the availability of justice by creating an additional nine judges, by providing additional victims' advocates, and by building a new community correction facility with the capacity to hold 400 criminals.

Our budget must also recognize that preservation and restoration of our natural resources is truly a public trust -- and you and I have been chosen by the people of Connecticut as the guardians and custodians of that trust.

Let us move forward into the second year of our landmark Clean Water Fund Program in the hope that a reasonable reauthorization of the federal clean water act will finally pass into law. Let us give our Department of Environmental Protection additional resources to clean up identified hazardous waste sites, to continue to prevent groundwater contamination, and to strengthen the capacity of our Air Compliance Unit.

(more)
Let us earmark additional resources for open space acquisition and management. Let us push forward with our new Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program.

Let us instill added vigor into our efforts to preserve Connecticut's precious farmlands.

Because Connecticut is truly a community, our budget must preserve and expand the opportunity for independent living within the community to the most fragile, frail and vulnerable among us.

Let us provide additional resources for home-based services to prevent unnecessary -- and costly -- institutionalization of the frail elderly.

Let us expand the community-based mental health services that have made Connecticut a national leader in the field. And let our budget reflect our support for the efforts of persons with disabilities to obtain meaningful employment.

Also, in our budget, we can and must provide meaningful tax relief for hard-pressed local property taxpayers.

Finally, our budget must -- and will -- preserve the fiscal soundness and stability that we have worked so hard to earn in recent years. It will be balanced in every sense of the word: We can meet our present needs without sacrificing our future well-being!

We must continue to be mindful, however, of the tremendous impact that decisions in Washington can have on this -- and every other -- state. We must resist the impulse to indulge in wholesale revisions to our tax structure simply because the federal government has done so.

Let us not be so foolish as to preserve our rainy day fund while at the same time we sow our clouds with the rain-making seeds of ill considered revenue restrictions.

Let us begin to act on our budget today. Let us re-study our needs... for sound highways...safe streets...clean air...and decent homes. Let us firmly establish our priorities. Let us redouble our efforts to achieve a bright Connecticut today and still brighter Connecticut in the future.

Let us build our budget from the bricks of our dedication and the mortar of our love. Let us build it strong enough to shelter our weakest from the strong winds of adversity -- whatever their source.

Let this budget be a monument to our commitment. Let its many chambers safely house the hopes and dreams of our people.

Thank you....