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GOVERNOR O'NEILL'S REMARKS TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Reverend Clergy, Honorable Lieutenant Governor, Mister Speaker, Honorable President Pro Tem, men and women of the General Assembly, good people of Connecticut, good afternoon.

It is once more my honor and my privilege to address you in this beautiful chamber and to present to you my budget proposals for the upcoming year.

Yet today is one of still greater honor and still more special privilege than any I have enjoyed to date. Today I deliver not only my tenth budget address, but my first budget address in this critical decade of the 1990s.

Today we stand at the dawn of a new decade. It is a dawn whose first light illuminates new challenges. But it is only dawn, and that first light will grow stronger. We must rise to meet those challenges like the sun in the morning sky. The work we begin today must eliminate the shadows of doubt and despair which enshroud us in the half-light.

A daunting task stands before us, men and women of the General Assembly. But we have completed greater tasks and overcome larger obstacles in the past.

Fired by the faith of our people, the courage of our convictions and the spirit of innovation, compassion and accomplishment that is Connecticut, we have done it before and -- as God is my witness -- we will do it again!

The evidence of our spirit is nowhere more clear than in this beautiful chamber. Regardless of how often we gather here, I continue to experience the same sense of awe I felt when I first entered these halls as the thirty-six year old representative of Connecticut's 52nd Assembly District, from the lovely little town of East Hampton.

On that cold January morning in 1967, I looked around this proud room and felt the pride of Connecticut. I gazed at this massive rostrum and saw the strength of Connecticut. In the craftsmanship of these walls and the soaring majesty of this space, I sensed the traditions of my beloved state and first fully grasped my duty as an elected representative of its people:

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-- to try my best to be kind and just,
-- to be firm, but fair,
-- to lead, and not blindly follow
-- to build consensus through reasoned compromise, while
never compromising principles or ideals,
-- to build on Connecticut's bright past, while reaching
for our still brighter future.

Yet I also remember this room just ten years ago, when I
delivered to you my first budget message. The gilded splendor
of today was missing then, just as the strength and splendor
had been drained from our State by a national recession.

This was a different chamber in 1981, as those who served
then will remember. Its dreary walls mirrored our careworn
souls. We gathered after a decade of anguish, and steeled
ourselves for what some predicted would be an era of gloom. I
described for you the effects of deficits past, which promised
to sap not only our budget, but our hopes for the future.

But I also described to you our strengths. Like this room,
we were tarnished then, but fundamentally strong. And, just as
the artisans and planners would soon gather to restore this
chamber to its full beauty and glory, we gathered and rallied
to do the same for our beloved State. Together -- this
Governor and this General Assembly -- we rebuilt, restored and
renewed; we polished and improved; we groomed and made grander.

Together, we met the challenges of a new decade. We
delivered the dreams of our people. We fulfilled, and then
exceeded, the bright promise and brave vision that is
Connecticut!

And that is the very same process -- with the very same
result -- that I am absolutely committed to beginning today.

Today I present for your consideration the basic document
from which we, working together, not only will fashion the plan
for next year's budget, but build the foundation for the next
decade's progress and the next generation's dreams.

It is a document which I believe broadly expresses the
compact with the people we are sworn to serve, at a time when
our commitment will be sorely tested by the twin pressures of
economic slowdown and the increasing need for government's
services.

In these difficult times, our budget must meet complex and
sometimes conflicting demands. It must respect financial
limits, but its spirit must know no bounds. It must be frugal
when measured by the dollars it spends, but generous in the
needs it meets.

Since our budget must reflect our basic humanity, we must include in it relief for the elderly and the afflicted. Since our budget must link our strong past to our future goals, we must provide the resources to educate our young and to ensure the purity and cleanliness of the environment in which they will grow to maturity.

We must provide our people with decent shelter, while we provide the lawless among us with swift and certain justice. We must fight drugs on the streets and the fear of crime in our homes. Our budget must continue the work of restoring our roads and bridges and must itself be a strong and sure bridge to the future. Our budget must bear the great weight of a state's future, yet provide a gentle surface for each tiny infant's first halting steps toward it.

Our budget must be realistic. My proposal calls for growth in the appropriations act of 4.5 percent above last year's expenditures -- the slowest rate of growth in any budget in the past fifteen years, and lower than the rate of inflation for all of 1989.

Where we must go outside the appropriations act to meet special needs, in all cases we will do so with appropriate funds. We will meet the needs of our cities. . . and we will meet them with municipal funds. We will meet the need for housing. . . and we will meet it with housing funds.

For that is the message of today, as it has been the message of the past nine years. When we have the resources, we will meet the needs of our people.

And -- as in five of the past six years -- I will not be asking for one penny in new taxes!

Realistic as it must be, our budget must not pander to the pessimism of the uninformed or the professional skeptic. I, for one, am sick and tired of those who criticize this great State and the accomplishments of its proud people!

If there exist opportunities that we are missing, let us see and evaluate the proposals to take advantage of them.

If there are better ideas on how to govern, let us inject them into the public debate.

But now -- when the need is greatest for a serious and responsible look at government -- now is not the time for hollow platitudes, for shrill invective and cheap rhetoric.
Now is the time to stand up for Connecticut! Now is the time to set the record straight, and to steer a true course for the future with direct and positive action.

Our economy is fundamentally strong. Despite the gloom and doom predictions of many, nearly 22,000 jobs were created in Connecticut last year and 275,000 have been added since 1981.

Unemployment remains stable and low, outperforming both the national and regional averages. Our personal income continues to climb, and we remain the State with the highest per capita income among all the United States.

Stand up for Connecticut! Because of the efforts that began here in 1985 with the Educational Enhancement Act, teaching has become one of the most sought-after professions in Connecticut, and our public schools are hiring only the best and most able teachers to lead our children into the next century.

Basic student skills are improving. Our children are reading, writing and performing arithmetic better today than they were five years ago, and more of them are graduating from high school than at any time during the past ten years.

Stand up for Connecticut! Under our nationally recognized road and bridge program, we have repaved the equivalent of a two-lane highway from Hartford to Phoenix. We have opened new and safer roads across the State, and we have rebuilt more than 1,600 bridges.

The newly expanded and renovated Bradley International Airport is poised for a new role as a gateway to Europe in the near future. And we have improved public bus and rail transportation for commuters everywhere.

Stand up for Connecticut! We are pledged not only to commercial vitality but to natural beauty. In the past several years we have acquired thousands of acres of open space -- rolling hills, lakes and greenery that our children and our children's children will be able to enjoy for years to come. We have committed $1.8 billion to purifying our water, and our tight auto emissions control standards are removing 200,000 tons of pollutants from the air every year.

This is the record of our people! This is why I am proud to stand up for Connecticut! This is why I am committed to seeing Connecticut move forward and this is why I am confident that we can.

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And while we’re setting the record straight, let me acknowledge here those fine people without whose efforts none of our accomplishments would have been possible. Please join me in publicly thanking the thousands of men and women employed by the State of Connecticut whose diligent work has brought us to today.

We can and will move forward, ladies and gentlemen, but we will do so more leanly than we have in the past. The budget you are receiving today reflects cuts of more that $600 million from the budget requests that I received last fall.

As a result, nearly half of the departments and agencies of state government will see absolutely no growth in their budgets next year, as compared to this year. The leaders of these departments and agencies -- our Commissioners and their Deputies and Executive Assistants -- will go without a raise for the second year in a row, and at least 2,000 fewer employees will be on the State payroll by year’s end.

The State's fleet of cars will shrink by 500 vehicles. Equipment and data processing expenses will be sharply curtailed. Cuts will be felt from the Department of Motor Vehicles and the State Library right on through the Executive Branch to the Office of the Governor. And we will continue to work with the Thomas Commission to find further economies in State spending.

I will not minimize the effect of these cuts. State phones may ring longer before answered. Motor vehicle lines may move more slowly.

But Connecticut -- unlike its neighboring states in New England and in sharp contrast to the debt-ridden federal bureaucracy -- will continue to pay its bills on time!

And we will match each budget-mandated loss of convenience with a budget-mandated commitment to continuing the vital programs that our people expect and deserve, and that have made Connecticut the great State that it is today.

This budget continues to expand our prisons and the entire criminal justice system.

This budget provides more services to poor and abused children.

This budget increases the number and capacity of our drug treatment centers.

This budget protects programs for the elderly and the frail.

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This budget continues our investment in open space and is unwavering in its commitment to clean rivers, streams, lakes and our beautiful Long Island Sound!

This budget speaks to the needs of our people. It says that we will never turn our backs on the poor and the elderly . . . That we will fight and win the war on drugs . . . That we will have a clean environment and excellence in education!

Most of all, this budget says that we will continue to make Connecticut the finest place to live, work and raise a family anywhere in America!

This budget says that government will get leaner, but it also says we will get more efficient. As resources dwindle, innovations spread. Threatened with stagnation, we respond with change.

And this budget says that we will always continue to do more to meet each critical problem we face and to overcome each obstacle in our path.

We will do more to cherish and defend those most vulnerable and most valuable members of our society, our children. In the next year we will increase the capacity of the Department of Children and Youth Services to cope with the drug-driven increases in child neglect and child abuse.

I am proposing more than $5 million in new spending for services to children, including the addition of 126 staff members to D.C.Y.S. offices across the State.

We will do more to provide young families with a fair opportunity to purchase and own affordable housing. This week I proposed the creation of the Connecticut Housing Finance and Development Authority -- a new quasi-public agency dedicated to comprehensive housing services across the State.

We have a proud record of housing development in Connecticut, but the housing climate has changed and we must change as well. Federal tax reform, a more complex financing climate and Washington's withdrawal of housing support have made housing development for the next decade even more challenging than before.

The new agency will consolidate the operations of the Department of Housing, the Connecticut Housing Authority and the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority. It will administer a broad mix of programs and bring a new flexibility, creativity and accountability to our housing efforts.

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We will move aggressively to ensure our continuing economic competitiveness, especially in the all-important manufacturing sector.

I will be introducing legislation that completely revamps the Department of Economic Development's manufacturing assistance programs, giving the State much greater regulatory and financial flexibility to meet the changing economy of the 1990s.

This proposal will also provide an investment tax credit to manufacturers, giving them even greater incentive to keep their Connecticut operations state-of-the-art.

And finally, we will redouble our efforts to fight drug abuse and the devastation it threatens for our society.

In the past nine years, we have built more prison space than existed in Connecticut when I became Governor. But we will build still more.

The Capital Budget calls for an additional 725 beds to open during the next fiscal year, maintaining our progress toward ten thousand new beds by the end of 1993.

We maintain this expensive commitment because no one will fight the war on drugs for us -- we must fight it for ourselves. In the past, I have asked the federal government to use abandoned military bases to house drug offenders, and today I renew that call to Washington.

And in the past nine years we have done more to treat those seeking relief from the ravages of addiction than was ever done before. But this year, we will do still more.

I am calling for a $5.6 million increase in the budget of the Connecticut Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, so that treatment services continue to expand around the state.

A number of us gathered in this chamber today have gathered here many times before. Together, we have seen great changes in our great State... great changes for the better.

We've changed from the anemic economy of 1980 to the full-employment economy of 1990.

We've changed from deferring maintenance of our roads and bridges to investing billions in their renewal.

We've changed the exodus of teachers from the classroom to an infusion of bright new minds and dedicated educators.
We've changed the quality of our air and water by building some of the strongest environmental programs in the nation.

We've changed the fearful retreat from the plague of drugs into a wholesale assault, and we're retaking our neighborhoods from the criminals and crack dealers who have controlled them for too long.

This is an extraordinary record of achievement of which we can all be proud.

Republican and Democrat, farmer and city dweller, young and old, black and white, Yankee and Hispanic, male and female -- we have worked together to build these programs, to reach for excellence, to embrace and build upon our proud past while planning a bright future.

Last year, when it came time to pay the bill for excellence, our historic partnership was strained. But let us knit together again today, as we have in days past, to carry our tradition of excellence into 1990 and beyond.

And let me start this journey with a personal pledge to each of you, and to each and every citizen of our great State.

We will be sorely tested this year. We may at times be torn between our public mission and our personal political goals. But let me assure you today: I have fought for too long. . . Worked too hard. . . Cared too much. . . And believed too deeply in the principles for which I stand to sacrifice a lifetime's achievement for the petty political success of the moment.

I would rather return to my beloved hills of East Hampton -- to my little house on the lake -- with my self-respect and sense of accomplishment intact than to live in a mansion on a hill in Hartford, a prisoner of the polls and the pundits, the occupant of an office debased by the goals abandoned and dreams destroyed to retain it.

Make no mistake about my intentions. I firmly intend and unreservedly vow to continue to serve. But I serve not an office. I serve a State. I answer not to a title, but to the chorus of voices that is Connecticut.

As elected servants of the people, we are the beneficiaries of a great tradition of kindness and generosity. . . of strength and truth, . . of dignity and dedication. Let us resolve today that those virtues will not only be our heritage, but our legacy. Thank you.