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President Higdon's 93rd Commencement Address

Leo I. Higdon Jr.
Connecticut College

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CONNECTICUT COLLEGE

Connecticut College President Leo I. Higdon, Jr.
93rd Commencement Address
May 22, 2011

Good morning. To all of our graduates, parents and families, trustees, faculty, staff and honored guests: Welcome to this very special Centennial Commencement. Today, our graduates will receive their well-earned degrees. In addition, our program includes remarks by the senior class speaker and awards for two extraordinary graduates. We also will have a presentation of the College Medal, and we will confer an honorary degree on our distinguished keynote speaker Cynthia Enloe, an alumna from the Class of 1960.

And now, in what has become a tradition for me, I'd like to ask all of the graduates to stand and recognize those whose support made it possible for you to be here today – parents and grandparents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends. So graduates, let's stand, and show our appreciation. Thank you, please be seated.

I'd like to add my own thanks to the parents and supporters here today. These graduating seniors are a very special group. I want to thank you for entrusting them to us. Connecticut College provides a liberal arts education that is distinctive, personal and far-reaching. Your students are leaving here today with an education they can be very, very proud of.

And you, my seniors... It seems like yesterday when I welcomed you to this campus as freshmen. The College's Centennial seemed very far off that August day in 2007. And yet, here we are. Our Centennial Class is graduating at the mid- point in this historic year. In addition to the "official" Centennial events the College has hosted, we – your class and I – have had a number of opportunities to get together this year. Going forward, we will share many common memories. It will always make your class special in my mind. And your class will always be a special part of Connecticut College history.

When you first arrived on campus, I advised you to take full advantage of all the opportunities inherent in a Connecticut College education. And you have. One hundred and thirty two of you have completed the requirements for more than one major. Another 62 of you have earned a certificate from one of our interdisciplinary academic centers. You have excelled on the stage, in the studio and on the athletic fields. You have become fluent in world languages. You have earned recognition through fellowships from Goldwater, Fulbright and the National Science Foundation, among others.

You have shared your talents with the world through study abroad, internships and special research projects. I am impressed and deeply gratified by the work you have done – it is a strong

indication of the impact you will continue to have throughout your lives. You have become experienced activists and advocates. Working to support, nurture and protect refugees in Rwanda, white lions in Africa, impoverished youth in Brazil... And in the US, studying energy alternatives, mental health issues and acting as advocates for underprivileged youth – in your home communities and right here in New London.

Connecticut College offers an education that teaches students to cross boundaries between different areas of study and solve complex problems by using the tools and perspectives of multiple disciplines. Just as importantly, this education takes place within this beautiful residential setting where students experience firsthand how their personal choices and contributions affect the entire community.

As individuals and as a class, you have impressed me with your intelligence, your talent and your passion. You are privileged to have completed a Connecticut College education. I hope that you now will use this education to help others – wherever you go and in whatever you do next. I know that as alumni, your support for the College will be very strong. As you transition to being graduates of Connecticut College, I want to thank you in advance for the time, talent and support I know you will give this institution throughout your lives.

You have the unique experience of graduating when the College is celebrating its 100th anniversary. Every Commencement is an opportunity to look back and look ahead. Your Commencement is special because the whole College is looking with you. This year, we have looked back at our founding and celebrated the community that welcomed us here, as well as the people who worked so diligently to make it happen. In fact, Cynthia Enloe will speak in more detail about the historical importance of our founding.

Today, as we celebrate your graduation, we also look to the future. Your future. I know that your liberal arts degrees mean you are prepared to take on life's challenges – in whatever form they present themselves. You will be the ones to solve the most pressing problems of our time – because you can and do think critically, communicate well and have the skills, knowledge and experience to analyze problems and develop solutions. I am so proud of you.

At Connecticut College, you have been a vital part of a dynamic and increasingly diverse community. I encourage you to continue to be active citizens in whatever communities you call home. And continue to value equity and inclusiveness as important components of your life-long learning.

Above all, I encourage you to stay connected to the College. Your adult life has taken shape here. You have carved out important relationships that will sustain you. And you will continue to develop relationships with alumni across the globe. You all, we all, share a very important common bond in Connecticut College. This college is yours. Forever.

Thank you.