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ROCKEFELLER CALLS RIVAL SHAMELESS

Says O'Connor Is Exploiting the Mentally Ill in State

By HOMER BIGART

Governor Rockefeller accused Frank D. O'Connor yesterday of "shamelessly exploiting" the misery of mental patients for political gain.

Resuming his personal attacks on the Democratic candidate for Governor, Mr. Rockefeller charged Mr. O'Connor with showing mental patients on Democratic television commercials to dramatize "a thoroughly reprehensible distortion of our record in this field."

Ignoring Mr. O'Connor's charge that he was descending to "gutter politics," Mr. Rockefeller said he would continue in the remaining days of the campaign to stress Mr. O'Connor's "lack of size" for the job of Governor.

Standing on the curb outside the headquarters of the New York Board of Rabbis at 10 East 73d Street, where he had met in closed session with Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Jewish leaders, the Governor said Mr. O'Connor was using the mentally ill and retarded as "political pawns in the campaign."

Rabbi Defend Governor

A rabbi on the fringe of the crowd spoke up to say that Mr. Rockefeller had done more than any other Governor to improve conditions at Willowbrook State Hospital for the mentally retarded, on Staten Island. He identified himself as Rabbi Philip Goldberg, Jewish chaplain at Willowbrook.

Mr. O'Connor paid a surprise visit to Brooklyn State Hospital on Oct. 14. He described that mental institution as "horrible" and charged that of more than 80,000 patients in state mental hospitals, 16,000 received "no treatment at all."

Mr. Rockefeller struck back in a speech prepared for delivery at Columbia University. He said that the O'Connor commercials portraying mental patients were examples of his opponent's "demogogy" and that the Democrats were "hiding a poverty of ideas in a smokescreen of half-truths and untruths!"

The Governor discarded his text, but told newsmen he stood by it. Answering a student's question he said the two biggest disadvantages in his race for re-election were upstate opposition to the sales tax and to the Medicaid program.

Mr. Rockefeller and Mr. O'Connor met face-to-face last night at the Sheepshead Bay High School in Brooklyn. They spoke at the dedication of the Greater Flatbush-Sheepshead Mental Health Clinic.

Mr. O'Connor, who spoke first, did not repeat the charge he made earlier in the day that the Rockefeller administration was "horse and buggy" in its planning on mental institutions. He had departed when the Governor spoke.

The Governor, in an obvious reference to Mr. O'Connor said: "Those who choose to can easily make political hay out of the human misery of mental illness through unsupported charges, easy generalizations and distorted accusations."

An audience of about 500 gave warm applause to both candidates, but more people stood to acclaim the Governor. Everyone had watched intently as Mr. Rockefeller and Mr. O'Connor, separated on the platform only by Borough President Abe Stark, managed a faintly grinning handshake, but otherwise ignored each other in their enforced togetherness.