

**Timothy M. Herbst
Eighth State of the Town Address
Tashua Knolls Golf Course
Trumbull, CT**

March 28, 2017

Thank you very much:

It is indeed my honor and my privilege to appear before you this afternoon to deliver my eighth State of the Town Address as First Selectman of the Town of Trumbull. Leading this community for the last eight years has been the honor of a lifetime and I am both honored and humbled to lead the best Town in America.

For more than 30 years, the Greater Bridgeport Regional Business Council has been a partner with the Town of Trumbull in promoting business expansion opportunity and economic development. As this organization seeks to rebrand itself and better promote economic development in our region, I could not be more pleased with the recent selection of Mickey Herbert to serve as President and CEO of the BRBC. Mickey, on behalf of the Town of Trumbull I offer you my sincere congratulations and I look forward to working with you.

I also want to thank the staff here at Tashua Knolls Golf Course as well as the Trumbull Golf Commission for the incredible work they do every day to keep this facility in top shape. This is truly one of Trumbull's treasures. If you have not heard yet, we are in for June Madness here in Trumbull. For the first time in the 115 year history of Connecticut Amateur Championship, the event will be held at a public golf course and the Connecticut State Golf Association chose Tashua Knolls. Our economy will benefit from the hundreds of people who will visit Trumbull the week of June 19-23rd.

In preparing this address for this afternoon, I had the occasion to review my first State of the Town Address in March of 2010. At that time, I was 29 years old and barely completed my first 100 days in office. The country was beginning to emerge from the Great Recession. Taxes increased 54% in the eight years preceding my term. Borrowing

more than doubled during that same time. Seniors were finding it harder and harder to stay in Trumbull. Our Grand List was going down instead of up. Trumbull didn't have full day kindergarten and our elementary and middle schools were in dire need of critical capital investment. My administration faced an anticipated \$3 million dollar revenue shortfall with a \$1.7 million dollar shortfall for the current fiscal year budget. The town's pension system was only funded at 27%, with years of can kicking and lack of proper funding. Two of the largest public sector capital projects in the Town's history, totaling over \$100 million dollars were in progress and wrought with mismanagement.

Eight years ago, as we met these challenges, I said this: "While we get less help from the state and federal government we must also deal with the costs of unfunded mandates, contractual obligations, inflation, bonded indebtedness and general operation and maintenance of our town. Through all of the inadequacies and poor decisions that have been levied upon us at the local level to solve, I have learned an important lesson. We can depend on no one but ourselves and we must empower ourselves to take action." Never has this been more true than right now, as we brace for the challenges of a state budget mired in perpetual fiscal crisis.

As I reflect on the past eight years and as we go forward, I am reminded of the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who said, "Our very survival depends on our ability to stay awake, to adjust to new ideas, to remain vigilant and to face the challenge of change." Indeed, these last eight years we have faced challenged with change - - fundamental change that has made Trumbull a better place to live, work and raise a family. Action we took and change we brought.

I often tell people that the R next to my name doesn't relate to a political party. The R stands for Reform. Reform is defined as making changes in order to make something better. I want to take this opportunity to thank the dedicated town employees who work with me every single day. My senior staff: Maria Pires, John Marsilio, Jim Haselkamp, Rina Bakalar, Lynn Arnow and Michael Lombardo are the A-TEAM. Our department heads are among the best and the brightest. Our employees in every division are among

the most committed and hard working. These are the people that have been the change agents and foot soldiers of reform.

I believe in all of my heart that the key to a well-managed community is one that is relevant for the future. Eight years ago I spoke about the three pillars - - Strong Finances, Strong Schools and a Strong Quality of Life. Our commitment to a sustainable community was rooted in the vision of those three pillars. I believed that if those three pillars served as our guiding light, there was no limitation to what we could accomplish and no limitation to how Trumbull could become a model community in Connecticut. A well-managed community is one where we keep our taxes low, invest in our schools, grow our economy and protect our citizens.

Action we took and change we brought. Today, I am pleased to report that the State of Trumbull is strong and growing stronger every single day. Our three pillars are the bedrock of who we are as a people.

I am proud that we have delivered two tax reductions in the last eight years and we did this while investing more money in public education, public safety and our infrastructure. By making tough choices we have balanced every budget.

Today, Trumbull's budgets are more stable now than they were eight years ago, with an average annual tax increase of only 1.65% over the last 7 years. Our tax rate is now among the most stable and predictable in all of Fairfield County. While we have kept the tax rate stable, we took note of our most cherished and vulnerable and were able to double senior citizen tax relief.

While keeping the tax rate stable, we have still invested 46 million additional dollars into our pension fund. Today, Town and Police pensions are funded at 56% and climbing. We have brought operational and legislative reform that now guarantees that we fund the annual required contribution for our pensions. Traditional pension plans have been closed for all new employees. We have diversified our investment strategy.

We have maintained a healthy rainy day fund. The town employee headcount is less than when I took office eight years ago. Steady and solid financial management has resulted in Trumbull's credit rating being upgraded - - one step away from the coveted Triple AAA. The Trumbull High School renovation was completed on time and under budget. Two large sewer projects we inherited were completed with professional management oversight that avoided the mistakes of the past. Through Charter Revision, we have implemented debt and spending reform. Capital projects that now require borrowing of more than \$15 million dollars go directly to the people for approval.

The tax rate has remained stable because in spite of the Great Recession and a state economy that lags behind the rest of the nation, our economy and our Grand List has grown each of the last eight years. In every corner of our community, we can see this transformation with our own eyes. When I took office, our commercial Grand List stood at a mere 14% of our total Grand List. Today it stands at 23% and is growing every year. Our economic development renaissance has flourished for the benefit of all of our people.

We have seen a great deal of positive activity in our corporate community this year with more to come. **Cooper Surgical** has completed its 250,000 square foot expansion on Corporate Drive. We are thrilled to have **Henkel Corporation**, which recently acquired Sun Products, expanding their corporate presence on Trefoil Drive. They will invest approximately \$20,000,000 to renovate 4 Trefoil Drive bringing 30-40 new high wage jobs to our Town. Our Trumbull Corporate Park is seeing marked increases in occupancy. 35 Nutmeg Drive is full; we want to welcome **CompHealth** to Trumbull from Norwalk. They will bring 59 new jobs with them. **Kone Elevator** is moving into 60 Commerce Drive in the Corporate Park and we would like to welcome them to Town as well. We appreciate all of our businesses and we are here to support them every day.

Our Village Districts are evolving. The new developments at Long Hill Green and Madison Village are fully occupied. I am thrilled that many of the new businesses are owned by Trumbull residents. We hope everyone will continue to support and enjoy the restaurants, shops and amenities that have flourished in our town these last few years.

As we watch the circus that is unfolding in Hartford and as we respond to cuts to municipal aid and our schools, it becomes even more important to grow our tax base and develop revenue to fund critical town services. We are placing enhanced focus on our underperforming properties in Town in order to support their productive reuse and grand list growth while maintaining the character of our Town. We want to ease the burden on our residential properties to the greatest degree possible.

We are investing in additional planning work in order to be prepared for the demands of a 21st century community. We will be facilitating additional planning for the Long Hill Green Area, the area will undergo additional redevelopment soon and we want to engage business owners and residents in the enhancement of the area. Planning and Zoning will be overhauling regulations this year and they kicked off work on a housing incentive zone in order to get ahead of housing development and diversification. We also intend to identify resources for a complete pedestrian and bicycle master plan for our Town.

We have many other exciting developments coming including the long awaited expansion of the Trumbull Mall. Trumbull is the place of choice right now and we have to keep this positive momentum moving in the right direction. The stability we have created, the excellent schools and services we offer make Trumbull a community of choice for residents and businesses as verified by the significant investments and interest we are seeing in our Town.

Toward that end, our school system is a tremendous point of pride for our community and I want to thank Dr. Cialfi and all of our administrators and teachers for their outstanding work. Recognizing the importance of early childhood intervention, in 2012 we implemented full day kindergarten and the results have built a strong foundation that is making our school system stand out above the rest.

Over the past 3 years, the CT State Department of Education (CSDE) has cited every one of Trumbull's elementary schools, middle schools and high school as a "Connecticut School of Distinction." Realtor.com has ranked Trumbull Public Schools in

the top ten of the “most in demand” school districts in the nation. Trumbull is the only school district in Fairfield County to be ranked in the top 10 nationally. The 2017 CSDE Accountability Report, the “report card” for Connecticut’s 200 public school districts, ranks Trumbull as the Number 2 K-12 school district in the entire state, just behind only Darien.

The Class of 2016 was admitted to 42 colleges and universities ranked by *Barron’s Profile of American Colleges* as “Most Competitive”, including 9 Ivy League Colleges. One only look at our real estate market here in Trumbull as proof of how people want to live here and make the long term investment in Trumbull. Currently while there are 408 homes on the market in Fairfield, there are only 104 homes on the market in Trumbull. Families are not only coming to Trumbull, but making the long term investment to stay here. In Trumbull, we have one of the highest achieving school districts in the state at a more affordable cost. There is no doubt in my mind that the state of our school system is stronger now than at any other time in our Town’s history. I want to thank our hardworking teachers and administrators for their commitment to excellence day in and day out.

A quality school system is augmented by a superior public safety in our schools and in our community. Under the leadership of Chief Lombardo, in 2016, we placed our first School Resource Officer in Trumbull High School in over 12 years. A second officer is planned to begin at Madison Middle School on April 1, 2017 and the third at Hillcrest Middle School in September.

Community involvement and community presence has increased among our patrol division. We have recruited and hired qualified minority and female candidates. Of the seven officers hired this past year, one was Hispanic and two were females. We continue to move closer towards becoming a state accredited police department. During calendar year 2016, we successfully regionalized our traffic enforcement efforts with the cities and towns of Bridgeport, Easton, Fairfield, Monroe and Stratford.

When the people of Trumbull put their head on the pillow at night, they should rest easy knowing that Chief Michael Lombardo and the hard working men and women of the

Trumbull Police Department work every day to keep our community safe. They should know that we have fire departments and emergency medical services second to none.

Financial reform, pension reform, debt and spending reform, educational reform, economic development reform and public safety reform have been the hallmarks of this administration. As I have reflected upon the last eight years, I should note that others have taken notice of the high quality community Trumbull has become.

- In 2011, *Family Circle Magazine* ranked Trumbull the 7th best town in the nation to raise a family
- In 2012, we were ranked the 2nd best town in the state for young families
- In 2014, we were ranked the fourth safest community in Connecticut
- In 2015, Trumbull's public school teachers ranked in the top twenty school districts in the state
- In 2016, the Government Finance Office Association credited Trumbull's Finance Department with excellence in financial reporting;
- And at the end of 2016, Realtor.com ranked Trumbull 10th nationally as the most in demand school district

I am proud of our accomplishments, but we have more work to do. A 21st century community requires modern amenities; Residents want to see hubs of social, cultural, business and recreational experiences. We can accomplish this type of transformation while maintaining those things that have always made Trumbull such a special place, but it will require change and strategic investment.

This afternoon, I wish to communicate to the people of this community my highest priority for 2017 and that is to commence construction of a new multigenerational community center. We in government must be clarifiers and truth tellers. When the

elephant fights, the grass gets trampled. We have an obligation to invest in our community in a bipartisan way rather than engaging in myopic parochial exercises of partisanship. Real leaders are those that are focused on the next generation rather than the next election. What we do today is important, but what we leave behind is even more important.

Every generation since our incorporation in 1797 has contributed to developing Trumbull's infrastructure and amenities with an eye toward the future. First Selectman Heimann saw this vision when we built our schools, our corporate parks and this golf course. First Selectman Butler saw this when we built our emergency medical services center. First Selectman Timpanelli saw this when we built our Police Department. First Selectman Vance saw this when we acquired the Pequonnock River Valley. First Selectman Wilson saw this vision when we made capital investments in our park systems. First Selectman Halaby saw this when we proceeded with the construction of Frenchtown Elementary School. First Selectman Baldwin saw this when we built the Early Childhood Learning Center and renovated Trumbull High School. And I see this today with the construction of a state of the art community center.

Over the last seventeen years, residents have consistently expressed support for a community center in our Town. Regularly, various civic groups reach out to the town seeking space to host meetings, events and programs that benefit our residents. With limited community space available, it has been difficult to accommodate these groups. We also know that young people benefit and thrive when they are connected to positive activities in their community. Residents are reaching out and demonstrating an increased demand for an indoor community pool.

The 2014 Plan of Conservation and Development indicated that the construction of a new community center was the highest priority for Trumbull over the next ten years. Trumbull's high credit rating allows us to borrow at near record low interest rates. In a town that is 98% developed, it will not get easier or less expensive to build a Trumbull Community Center in the future. We have an opportunity to do something very special for our community, and if we work together we can do it without significant cost to Trumbull residents.

We are exploring the sale of outdated, underutilized properties. Properties that are not on the tax rolls, that are costly to maintain and do not offer the kind of facility the Town will require in the future. There has been some rumbling to the effect that sales are imminent or neighborhoods will be besieged with inappropriate redevelopment—NOT TRUE. We are early in the process, the Town will secure brokers to assist with any potential property sales and the Town will seek to control the redevelopment in such a way as to be a win-win for taxpayers and neighborhoods.

It is important to note here today, with regard to leveraging efficiencies and revenue, the Town has the opportunity to net between 8.5-9.5 million from the sale of the properties and realize tax revenues in excess of \$600,000 per year. These numbers are conservative and do not account for other operational efficiencies and savings in building carrying costs from six underutilized properties. I encourage everyone to join me in thinking and acting for our future. We have the opportunity to construct a sustainable community asset that marks a special place in our Town for all to share. An asset that will continue to distinguish our community, much like Tashua Knolls does, much like our excellent schools do, as a community of choice for the future.

As I reflect upon the last eight years, I look at all of this positive transformation. Working together, I can say with full faith and confidence that Trumbull is better and stronger now than it was eight years ago. While the Town of Trumbull is at the top of virtually every list, it pains me to see the state I was born and raised in at the bottom of every list. It pains me to see millennials like me leaving our state in record numbers. Connecticut has earned an appalling reputation. We are “still” in many categories.

- We still have not recovered from the Recession
- We still are not growing our population. For the third straight year our population has shown steady decline
- We still are hostile to businesses and job creators
- We still are not growing businesses
- We still are not properly funding our pensions
- Again and again, we still increase unfunded mandates

- Again and again, we are still making drastic cuts to municipal aid that impact our children and their futures
- We are still reducing vital services at the same time our taxes and cost of living continue to go up

Connecticut has been still for far too long. In fact, our state is in perpetual fiscal crisis. The budget currently under consideration is a full frontal assault on well managed municipalities with high achieving school districts. The good people of Connecticut deserve better.

Eight years ago, I sought this office to ensure that the reality of Trumbull lived up to the promise of Trumbull. My ultimate mission was to leave Trumbull better than I found it. I am confident that we have accomplished that mission.

I want us to do for Connecticut what we have done here in Trumbull. As the son of a football coach, I have learned throughout my life that in order to move the chains down the field and achieve progress, it doesn't happen by sitting idly by on the sidelines. You need to put on your helmet and shoulder pads, take action and get in the game. I intend to take that action. I feel a moral obligation to step up and get in the game. In the coming weeks and months, I look forward to telling the people of this great state of how the reality of Connecticut can live up to the promise of Connecticut. Connecticut is ready for high standards and new leaders that are willing to make the tough decisions and bring the reform to get us back on track.

Wherever I go and whatever I do, the highest honor I have ever held is being called citizen of the Town of Trumbull. And Trumbull is made great by our people. At this time, it is my honor to award this year's recipients of the 2017 Clarence Heimann Leadership Award. Named after our former First Selectman, this award is given each year to a Trumbull resident or Trumbull employee who demonstrates leadership and self-sacrifice.

The first recipient was named the first Director of Labor Relations for the Town of Trumbull three years ago and he has been a positive force in helping the Town of Trumbull. As a result of his efforts, last year the Town of Trumbull converted its health

care coverage, saving over \$3 million dollars and providing even greater health care for our Town and Board of Education employees. Please join me in congratulating Jim Haselkamp.

The next two recipients work with me everyday and have worked so hard to assist the Town in the construction of a new community center. From identifying a site on Church Hill Road to working with the building committee and architects, this project would not be where it is but for their efforts. They work hard for our Town and I am proud of both of them. Are next two recipients are my Chief of Staff, Lynn Arnow and our Economic and Community Development, Rina Bakalar.

I used to think I had the toughest job in Trumbull. That was before I asked Joe Pifko and Dan Marconi to serve as the Co-Chairs of the Community Center Building Committee. These dedicated volunteers have worked hard for all of you to give our town the 21st century facility we truly deserve. The next recipient of the Clarence Heimann Leadership award is the entire membership of the Community Center Building Committee. Accepting on their behalf is my friend, Joe Pifko.

Our next recipient is an 8th grade student at Hillcrest Middle School and the youngest recipient to date. This student was being bullied every day through social media and at school. To overcome the bullying, she realized that students need to speak out about bullying from other students. This student decided to take action and started the Words Can Soar Initiative. A student of the arts she realized that she can spread her message through the arts. She wrote the song, The Choices You Make Today Will Pave the Way, which won at the L.A. Critics' Awards. She started to speak about these issues in the classrooms and organized anti-bullying events. She has raised more than \$5,000 for her anti-bullying efforts. Based on her efforts to combat bullying Hillcrest Middle School, in May she will represent Trumbull and the State of Connecticut as a State Honoree at the 102 Prudential Spirit of Community Awards. It is with great pleasure that I present the Clarence F. Heimann Leadership Award to Rachel Weintraub.

Our final recipient has given her entire adult life to public education and public service. At the age of 21 she was elected to the Trumbull Town Council and also served on the Board of Finance and Trumbull Police Commission. She was an educator in the Bridgeport Public School System for 30 years. In 2005, she was elected the first woman to lead the Connecticut Democratic Party, where she served for over a decade. Even though our politics are different, we should all be proud that one of our own made history in Connecticut and we can say they are from Trumbull. I know her parents Peter and Josephine would be very proud of her. Please join me in congratulating our final recipient, Nancy DiNardo.

Thank you all. Lets go forward together.