

MAYOR BRONIN DELIVERS STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

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HARTFORD, CONN (March 13, 2017) – Today, Mayor Bronin delivered the State of the City address at Hartford's City Hall. Below are Mayor Bronin's full remarks as prepared.

Council President Clarke, members of the Court of Common Council, Treasurer Cloud, Town Clerk Bazzano, members of Hartford's delegation to the General Assembly: Good evening, and thank you for your service to our city. I'm proud to serve alongside you.

To the hardworking employees in every city department, thank you for everything you do for Hartford's residents, businesses and visitors. Over the past year, you've done more with less, you have faced uncertainty and change with grace, and you make our city proud, every day.

To our businesses, small and large, to our non-profit partners, to our faith-based leaders and to the countless volunteers who give your time— thank you for all that you contribute to the life of our community.

To my wife Sara and our three children, thank you. I love you.

And to the citizens of the City of Hartford, thank you for giving me the privilege of serving as your Mayor.

Twelve months ago, I stood in this chamber with a stark and somber message. But I also said that our city can and will be strong "if we face our challenges honestly, with clear vision and with an unflinching willingness to do the difficult things those challenges demand."

Over the past twelve months, that's exactly what we've done – for the first time in far too long in Hartford. I hold this administration to high standards. Hartford is done with business as usual.

And today, while we have much more work to do, I am more confident than ever in the future of our city.

Twelve months ago, a baseball park stood half-built, hopelessly delayed and millions over budget. We set new deadlines, and when those deadlines weren't met, we acted decisively. We fired the contractor. We demanded the insurance company take responsibility. We got the stadium built, and we protected the taxpayers of Hartford.

Thanks to the tireless work of our development services team, we're now a month away from opening day. No matter what you thought about the stadium deal, now is the time to rally together, to embrace this the stadium and team that are now ours, and to make it a success.

Twelve months ago, I reported that we faced a massive fiscal crisis, far larger than any in our city's history. We knew that there had to be deep cuts and layoffs. There were, and they were difficult. This past year, we reduced the city's workforce by one hundred positions, and reduced the cost of city government by more than \$20 million annually.

As we did that, our employees rose to the challenge. Today, Hartford has a more responsive, more efficient, and more effective city government than we have had in many years. In every department, we have rethought and redesigned the way we do business.

Twelve months ago, I asked our municipal labor unions to be part of the solution for our city. We have not yet achieved what we're seeking, or what we, as a city, need. But with the Hartford Fire Fighters Association, we reached a landmark agreement that will save our city nearly four million dollars next year alone – with changes to pension contributions and benefits, active and retiree health care, and salary schedules. Our firefighters stepped up, and they deserve our thanks.

We continue to negotiate with our other labor partners. To those partners, and those employees: our fiscal problems are not your fault, but they cannot be fixed without you. It is my hope that the agreement reached with our firefighters will serve as a model for what can and must be done, together.

As we've faced our fiscal challenges, we've brought a new rigor to budgeting. Our budget team built a robust forecasting model. We conducted a Municipal Peer Benchmarking analysis, together with New Haven and Waterbury. And for the first time in seven years, our finance team met the filing deadline for the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report.

And as we've taken a back-to-basics, rigorous approach to budgeting, we've also done it transparently. We opened our books. We asked the State's Municipal Finance Advisory Commission to examine those books. We partnered with the National Resource Network, a national consortium of municipal finance experts that is conducting an independent review of our fiscal position.

Hartford's fiscal crisis is not yet behind us. We still face deficits much larger than we can close through cuts. And until we've built a new partnership with the State of Connecticut and other stakeholders, we cannot yet take any option off the table.

But because we have been honest and direct, we've won the confidence and support of partners that are essential to our effort.

Two weeks ago, the CEOs of our three largest private employers — The Aetna, The Hartford, and Travelers — announced a powerful commitment. They collectively pledged \$10 million a year for five years to support the Hartford Public Library, recreation centers, and public safety.

Their support will fund vital but vulnerable services, while reducing the deficits we face. But even more important than that, they sent a strong message that the future of Connecticut's capital city matters to them.

Their commitment is conditioned on being part of a comprehensive solution to Hartford's fiscal crisis. They know that solution cannot be achieved at the local level alone.

Our efforts and our advocacy have begun to be heard at the State level, too. In his State of the State address, the Governor embraced the idea that Connecticut needs strong cities. And the Governor's budget proposal included substantial new revenue sources for Hartford and for other cities, coupled with the demand for accountability.

Working together with our legislative delegation, we need to fight hard for that new revenue, because there is no sustainable solution without it. And we should accept and embrace accountability, because taxpayers deserve it.

If we continue to take the direct, honest approach we've taken, I believe that we can and will emerge from this year with a sustainable solution in place.

And we cannot settle for anything less. Because I refuse to hide our problems, to hide from our problems, or to pass them on to some future administration — as past administrations did to us.

And if and when we have achieved solvency and sustainability, we won't rest — because mere solvency is not our goal. Our goal is vibrancy and growth. Our goal is to make Hartford the healthy, beating heart of this region of more than a million people. And our goal is to ensure that every resident has a share in Hartford's rise.

That is why we have not let ourselves be defined by crisis alone. We have built for the future. We have made changes that are long overdue. And this year we will continue to build, with a focus on four key areas: Public safety, economic development, quality of life, and education.

First, public safety. There is no more fundamental responsibility of government.

The root cause of crime in our city is the crushing weight of poverty, the absence of opportunity, the scourge of addiction, and the obstacle that a criminal record represents for too many of our citizens.

Law enforcement will never be the only — or the best — answer for preventing crime. But effective, community-oriented policing is an important part of the answer. We are working hard to ensure that our police have the staffing, the tools, the training, and the partnerships they need to help keep our neighborhoods safe.

For years, Hartford made a conscious decision not to fund the recruitment of police officers, even as many retirements loomed.

Since January of last year, we have brought on two recruit classes — the beginning of a multi-year recruiting effort. We pursued and won the largest federal Community Oriented Policing Services or COPS grant in the country to support our new hiring. And we've worked hard to recruit a police force that better reflects the community it serves.

In the class that started last month, more than sixty percent of recruits are black or Hispanic. Three of the recruits came through our Hartford resident cadet program. Last week, we opened a new recruitment drive, specifically for Hartford residents aspiring to a career in the HPD.

We're not compromising and will not compromise the standards we demand. We don't need to, because the goals of diversity and excellence are not at odds. A police force that better reflects our community better serves our community. We are working hard to build one.

We have also made investments in technology. We've expanded Shotspotter to cover all residential and commercial areas of Hartford. We secured grant

funding to expand the network of public safety cameras throughout the city. And we used other grant funds to launch a state-of-the-art Real Time Crime Center, a regional asset that allows police to analyze many sources of information and focus their enforcement efforts more precisely and more effectively.

We've also built new partnerships. A few months ago we launched a new partnership with federal law enforcement agencies, the Focused Violence Reduction Team. At our request, the U.S. Attorney's Office, along with the FBI, DEA, and ATF, dedicated additional resources to help us take illegal guns — and shooters — off our streets.

We've also expanded the police department's partnership with the people of Hartford. We opened the department's weekly COMPSTAT meetings to the public — inviting residents to attend, share their insights, their concerns, and their questions.

We won a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice — the Byrne Criminal Justice Grant — to fund a community-led public safety strategy. In the coming weeks, we will select a local organization to lead that planning effort focused on neighborhoods in the North Hartford Promise Zone.

At a time when communities across America have seen tensions grow with law enforcement, I'm proud that Chief Rovella and the leadership of our Police Department welcomes both public scrutiny and self-examination.

This summer, when an officer used excessive force against an individual in his custody, our department informed the public, contacted the independent State's Attorney, initiated an internal investigation, shared the video tapes, and saw transparency as essential to preserving public trust.

Over the past year, the Hartford Police Department trained all sworn officers in nationally-recognized bias-based training on Fair and Impartial Policing.

And because accountability must come from both inside and outside a department, I nominated a full slate of appointments to the Civilian Police Review Board, which will allow that weakened board to fulfill its mission for the first time in years.

Along with the active and essential partnership of our community — with the help of residents who take back their neighborhoods with block watches, with strength in numbers, and with faith — this focus on building the staff, the tools, the training and the partnerships for our police department will make our city safer.

Of course, public safety is not the province of police and law enforcement alone. Over the past year, the skilled and brave professionals of the Hartford Fire Department responded to 137 structure fires and 19,502 medical calls, assisted in the relocation of nearly five hundred residents displaced by fire, and delivered five babies.

Last year was the busiest year in recent memory for our Fire Department, with more calls for service than any other department in the state.

Under the leadership of Chief Freeman, the department's rules and regulations have been updated for the first time in forty years. And for the first time in over five years, the Hartford Fire Department is one hundred percent compliant in delivering live fire training for all members of the suppression division.

And just as we've worked to hire police officers, we are also recruiting the first new class of firefighters since 2012, and received nearly seven hundred applications. We will soon bring on a large number of new firefighters, the future of our outstanding Department.

After too many years in which our proud department appeared to be in decline, the Hartford Fire Department is once again upholding the standards of excellence that first made it a Class 1 Department twenty-five years ago.

Please join me in thanking all of our public safety employees for the selfless, dangerous work that they do, every day.

As we work to make our city safer, we are also working to make it stronger economically.

Economic development in a small city like ours requires a vibrant center. With UConn opening later this year, thousands of new units leasing up, commuter rail service to New Haven and Springfield scheduled for next year, the Goodwin Hotel reopening, the ballpark on track for an April 13th opening day, local coffee shops open nights and weekends, a Barnes & Noble coming soon, and the potential for new State investment in the XL Center, Hartford's downtown is ready for a resurgence.

In a sign that employers see that promise, United Bank announced that they were moving hundreds of employees into Hartford — citing the concentration of businesses and the city's significant strides in revitalization when they announced their move.

We look forward to welcoming United Bank to Hartford, and working with them in the years ahead to accelerate that revitalization even more.

But as we work to keep building momentum in our downtown, we've also worked hard to promote development in our neighborhoods — and to push forward long-sought, and long-stalled neighborhood projects.

For years, our City has had access to tens of millions of dollars in federal funding for a streetscape improvement project on Albany Avenue. But it wasn't prioritized, the designs were never completed, and the work was never done. This summer, that work will finally begin.

For years, the Hartford-based developers of Brackett Knoll have waited to do phase two of their successful homeownership development in the Northeast neighborhood. Today, through the Capital Region Development Authority, the funding is in place to build new homeownership opportunities for residents.

After years of delay and uncertainty, the Weaver High School project is moving forward, a vital asset for Blue Hills and for North Hartford as a whole.

And for twenty years, the Frog Hollow neighborhood has fought for a library branch to replace the small, leaky and heavily-used rented space on Park Street. Today, after years of broken promises, that project is fully funded through external grant funding.

We're working hard to ensure that similar progress is made on many other projects that matter to all of our neighborhoods.

Our team is pushing forward, in partnership with the Hartford Housing Authority and the CRDA, to ensure that the long-overdue redevelopments of Bowles Park and Westbrook Village get done, strengthening Blue Hills and Upper Albany.

In December, we signed the long-negotiated agreement with the National Park Service to create the new Coltsville National Historical Park — a key step in the already impressive rebirth of Coltsville and the Sheldon-Charter Oak neighborhood.

And in June, we secured State Transit Oriented Development funding to support improvements in the Bartholomew Avenue area, where a new brewery and other new businesses are bringing new life to an increasingly vibrant Parkville.

Promoting growth isn't just about securing funding for specific projects or building new buildings. It's also about making the rules smarter and more predictable. It's about making it easier for businesses to do business. And it's about creating a community of innovation, investment, and entrepreneurship.

That's why the award-winning, comprehensive rewrite of our zoning code is so significant — the first comprehensive rewrite in fifty years, and a model of progressive zoning policy.

That's why we rebuilt the depleted office of planning and economic development with an outstanding, professional team.

That's why we've made comprehensive process improvements in Licenses and Inspections — to improve service to residents and businesses.

And that's also why we've been working — in partnership with the UCONN Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, and with anchor institutions from Hartford Healthcare to Trinity College to our insurance companies — to prepare a strong application to the Connecticut Innovation Places grant program.

Our city revolutionized both manufacturing and insurance. And we have the corporate, non-profit, academic and entrepreneurial partners that can help us, be a center of innovation in this twenty-first century.

From the new co-working space and business accelerator at 20 Church Street, Innovate Hartford, to the new MakerspaceCT at Coltsville, to the social enterprise incubator, ReSET in Parkville, we are already seeing many private partners who share our goal and are already working to achieve it.

As we work to promote broadly-shared economic development, we've also focused on the basics of responsive government, committed to customer service — focused on the quality of life issues that make a city attractive to residents and businesses alike.

We're all sick of wasting time at unsynchronized traffic lights. So we sought — and got — a \$5.7 million grant to improve the traffic signal system and replace twenty-eight key traffic signals. Led by DPW, that work is happening now.

Since last year, I've heard from organizations that struggled with a confusing system for reserving city facilities and playing fields. So two weeks ago, we launched a new, more user-friendly online reservation system.

We had all heard complaints that there was no welcome center in City Hall, that the 311 system didn't work, that snow parking bans were too confusing, that it's

too difficult to get speed bumps installed on neighborhood streets, and that our streets weren't friendly to pedestrians or bicycle riders.

So today, we have a fully-manned Resident Service Center on the ground floor of City Hall.

We cleared a backlog of thousands of 311 complaints and, while we still have work to do, we set new expectations for follow-through. As a result, public usage of 311 has nearly quadrupled since 2015.

We launched the Blue Light Snow Parking Ban system to give advance notice of parking bans and to make one thousand new parking spaces available during parking bans.

We launched a new partnership with our NRZs to prioritize the installation of traffic calming measures, with neighborhoods in the driver's seat.

We adopted a Complete Streets ordinance, to make our roads more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly.

We all know the contagious, demoralizing effect of blighted properties in our neighborhoods and along our commercial corridors.

So we used grant funding to hire a Blight Director, focused every minute of every day on fighting blight.

Tonight, the Council will be considering a fully revised blight ordinance. And we are establishing a Land Bank, funded with \$5 million in grant funding secured to help put blighted properties back into productive caring hands through public-private partnership.

Our tremendous Department of Public Works, working with the smallest team in many, many years, rose to the challenge of change. They redesigned their sanitation and snow operations. They are delivering a higher level of service than ever – while at the same time organizing toy drives, partnering with Milner School, and consistently giving back to the community to which they give so much already.

On quality of life issues, that's just some of our work over the last year. We have much work still to do. And we will continue to do it, knowing that the small stuff matters in big ways for everyone who calls our city home.

While I am proud of the progress we have made on many fronts, there is one arena where too little change and progress has been made, and where there is a moral imperative to do far more: education.

Yesterday and today, Vanessa de la Torre and Matthew Kauffman of the Hartford Courant published a wrenching examination of the gap between neighborhood schools and magnet schools. It is a gap that every parent, every teacher, every student in Hartford knows too well.

In the coming weeks, the Hartford Board of Education will choose the next leader for the Hartford Public Schools. Fixing that gap and strengthening our neighborhood schools must be the single most important priority for our new Superintendent, and I pledge to be a full partner.

We have two candidates with deep roots in our community, and a strong commitment to the schools, children and families of Hartford. I look forward to hearing from them as they publicly share their vision. And I look forward to working with our next Superintendent to make the vision real.

Among the challenges facing the next Superintendent is the fact that many of our schools are severely under-enrolled, but in desperate need of renovation.

We cannot build schools without a plan for filling those schools. And no one can justify spending millions of dollars maintaining, heating, and servicing half-full, deteriorated buildings, when those dollars could go instead to teachers, paraprofessionals, social and emotional learning, art, music or books.

Our next Superintendent must lead our community in a collaborative process that ultimately allows our district to focus on a smaller number of better neighborhood schools. But that plan can't just be about which buildings stay open and which buildings close. The Board of Education must also be able to look parents and students in the eyes and say, honestly: things may change, but they will change for the better.

Our next Superintendent must also continue the work of achieving rapid, dramatic culture change in response to the findings of the report by the State Office of the Child Advocate — a report conducted at my request, following a troubling incident last summer.

The report revealed a decade of intolerable failures in protecting our most vulnerable children, and our Superintendent and Board of Education must restore and keep the city's trust.

Education, of course, extends beyond the classroom — and our City's responsibility for engaging, protecting, preparing, and partnering with Hartford's young people doesn't end when school is out.

In last year's State of the City address, two months on the job, I spoke of our aspiration to create a privately-funded Youth Service Corps, to provide part time, year-round employment to young people aged sixteen to twenty-four.

Last July, we made good on the first phase of that promise. We raised more than \$2.2 million in private contributions, and today more than two hundred young people are members of the Corps — getting experience, pride and a paycheck for working on projects from beautifying our parks to assisting residents displaced by fire.

This evening, we are joined by members of our Youth Service Corps: Cristalee Melendez, Asia Newell, Tyanna Bell, Kaiyah Allen, Deborah Mestly, Rodney Carr, Rodney Crump. We want you to know that everyone here tonight believes in you, and are here to support you and your success. Thank you for your hard work and dedication to the program.

We also secured a federal grant to help prepare two hundred and seventy-five young people in the Promise Zone for employment after high school. We preserved the summer employment program, giving hundreds of young people work experience and training. We convened the first ever Early Child Development Conference, to focus on the impact of toxic stress and early brain development on learning and school success.

Through the Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative, we have pulled together the many providers who work with young people in our city, and we have rallied them around a common commitment: to break down the silos and take a shared responsibility, so that we have a better chance of getting support to the young people who need it most.

So this is where our focus will remain: on moving beyond our fiscal crisis, through partnership; on public safety, economic development, quality of life, and on education and youth engagement.

And we will continue to do it with integrity, transparency, and a commitment to running a government that's worthy of the people's trust.

But as we continue our work, we need to acknowledge that while we are working to fix these problems that have existed for decades here in Hartford, the world around us has changed since we began this work one year ago.

Today, children around the country — including U.S. citizens — are going to school in the morning, afraid that their parents will be detained during the day. Immigrants, even those who are documented, are wondering today whether they are welcome in America.

In the face of that change, we must reaffirm our commitment to being a city that is welcoming to all: One Hartford. A United Hartford. A Proud Hartford.

Proud that we have been a city where generation after generation of migrants and immigrants has come to build a life for their families — from Puerto Rico, from Albania and Bosnia, from Italy and Ireland and India, from Burma and Latin America, from the West Indies, from down south, from every corner of the world. Who together built this City.

Proud that all children are welcome in our schools or at the Hartford Public Library. Proud that our law enforcement officers are here to protect, not to tear apart families who are working hard and trying to get ahead.

Proud that at this time when some are fanning the flames of division in our country, we know that our differences make us stronger because we share a common love for this country and for our city.

Proud that as our federal government seems poised to roll back criminal justice reforms and deny the importance of a second chance, our City remains committed to fighting for a criminal justice system that actually works to keep communities safe — and that doesn't put redemption out of reach.

Proud that as our federal government turns its back on climate science, we are working to make Hartford a model of environmental responsibility at the local level, through the work of our Climate Stewardship Council.

Proud also that, at this time when the State of Connecticut is struggling with sluggish growth, when so many of Connecticut's cities are struggling with a property tax system that just doesn't work, we in Hartford are working to reshape the debate about our future, about the region's future, and about Connecticut's future.

What we are doing here to rebuild our Capital City — aiming not only at solvency, but beyond that to vibrancy and growth — is an essential part of making the State of Connecticut competitive again.

And I know that if we continue to do what we've done during this difficult last year – if we continue to hold ourselves to the highest standards, to be honest and direct, to be bold in our vision and unafraid of doing what it takes – our efforts will pay off.

Like so many of our residents, the City of Hartford is resilient. The City of Hartford is strong.

One Hartford. A United Hartford. A Proud Hartford. A Strong Hartford.

Post Nubila Phoebus — after the clouds, the sun. Our city's motto, written a long time ago, but written for such a time as this.

God bless you, and may God bless the City of Hartford.

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