

Mayor Scott D. Jackson
2011 Inauguration Remarks
Hamden High School Auditorium
Sunday, November 27, 2011

Good afternoon friends.

First, I would like to thank all of you who have taken their time to join us here today. Senator Richard Blumenthal, Senator Martin Looney, Senator Joe Crisco, Representative Peter Villano, Representative Brendan Sharkey, your presence here means a great deal to us.

I would like to offer a special thank you to Governor Dannel Malloy for doing me the high honor of swearing me in on this special day. As a former Mayor, you are all too familiar with the challenges we face on an everyday basis and the seriousness of the tasks we undertake. I appreciate your friendship, and I appreciate the confidence you have shown in me by asking me to serve first on your transition team, and now as a member of your Two-Storm Review Panel. Sir, your dedication to the great State of Connecticut defies comparison and your leadership stands as a model for public servants everywhere.

I think it is fair to say that, two years ago, no one was quite sure how effective Hamden's government would be. We had an untested Mayor and a new Legislative Council, together staring down the worst economy since the Great Depression. And friends, we all know that times have not been easy for anyone over the last two years, but sandwiched between three federally-declared natural disasters, stubbornly high unemployment rates, and a volatile Dow Jones Industrial average, the Town of Hamden was named a Top 100 Place to Live by CNN in 2010 and a Top 100 Place for Young People by General Colin Powell's *America's Promise Alliance* in 2011. This place, this space, this unique geography, continues to vibrate at a slightly different pitch than the world around us.

Here in Hamden, we know that our diversity is our strength. In 1992, my senior year in college we were assigned Andrew Hacker's controversial text, *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal*. And while I understood Professor Hacker's point, I also knew that he didn't get it exactly right because, frankly, I'm from Hamden. We do better here. We do not crow about our diversity or build monuments to it, we simply live the way people are supposed to live and pass that simple lesson on from generation to generation.

Here in Hamden, we know that we have Democrats and Republicans and Greens and unaffiliated voters. But first--long before we are members of organized or disorganized parties-- we are friends, neighbors, and partners in a single community enterprise. We are not defined by political ideology, but rather the shared goals of our common interests.

Here in Hamden, we know that what my friend Bill Strickland, says is true: “our children deserve the very best that our community and our culture have to offer.” And living up to that credo every day--not just parading it around on special occasions--is what helped earn us the *America’s Promise Alliance* selection this year.

I speak of Bill Strickland frequently; he founded an inspirational program for young people in Pittsburgh in 1968 called the Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild and has been transforming lives ever since. He wrote a great book a few years ago called *Make the Impossible Possible: One Man’s Crusade to Dream Bigger and Achieve the Extraordinary* which, even if you never read the book, it is still a great title because it brings every one of us into the struggle. No one gets to sit on the sideline. If, over my career of public service, I can make a fraction of the impact Bill has made in his community, I will deem myself a success.

“Our children deserve the very best that our community and our culture have to offer.” Bill used a curious word here: “deserve”. To deserve creates a requisite of obligation, it creates a definitive entitlement, and today, to be “entitled” carries negative connotations. The very word establishes a tension with the bootstrapping Yankee ethic that is as endemic to this geographic space as changing leaves. Yet we are uncomfortable with the word.

But, simply by choosing to be members of this community, we are entitled to certain things. We are deserving.

Here in Hamden, we deserve to be safe in our homes. You saw earlier in the program the honor guards of the Hamden Police Department and Hamden Fire Department under the able leadership of Chief Thomas Wydra and Chief David Berardesca. Every day, more than 200 firefighters, police officers, and dispatchers are there to answer the call. Yesterday at Sleeping Giant State Park I ran into three firefighters hiking back to their apparatus because they had been dispatched to the Blue Trail to assist a man who had had a seizure. These firefighters hiked well in excess of a mile and half because they got the call.

And they are supported by those holding elected office like Councilman Jack Kennelly and Councilman Harry Gagliardi, as well as recent members of the Legislative Council Gabe Lupo, Raeanne Curtis, and Michael Iezzi, Jr. These

members have created a proud legacy that supports this fundamental entitlement of Hamden's stakeholders.

But making safe neighborhoods is not the sole province of the Town of Hamden as a distinct corporate entity. No one gets to sit on the sidelines when our community safety is at risk. Hamden is home to the highest concentration of veterans in the State of Connecticut; men and women who have put their lives on the line to keep our borders safe and the light of liberty bright. Our volunteer Veterans Commission, alongside the town's VFW and American Legion Posts and service organizations like the scouts and the Elks Club promote the notion that we all have a stake in our security and there is no more honorable endeavor than to stand for a cause in which you believe.

But we also have people in our neighborhoods, people who fulfill that critical role of neighborhood watchdog that is absent in too many places around the country. Every neighborhood in Hamden has a person who is willing to applaud those who are doing the right thing, but also has the fortitude to stand up to someone who is doing the wrong thing. It is this web and interplay between government and citizen that keeps our neighborhoods safe.

Serving on Governor Malloy's Two-Storm Panel has been an eye-opening experience. It is our charge to elicit best practices and lessons learned during Tropical Storm Irene and the October Nor'easter and apply them to the State's emergency operations plan. One critical lesson is that, in a natural disaster, Public Works crews must accept the mantle of emergency response provider. Here in Hamden, we had no issues with that during the storms because people like Councilmen Mike Colaiacovo and John DeRosa have made sure that our Public Works crews have the funding for the tools and training necessary to respond when required.

This weekend I was reviewing my Storm Panel notes, and I saw that I scribbled in the margin, "what would you do if you called 911 and there was no one there?" I am proud to say that, in our town, our neighborhoods are strong enough to band together until help arrives.

Here in Hamden, we deserve strong neighborhoods. Community pride, community will, emerges from backyard conversations and neighborhood gatherings, it blossoms up through civic associations, and it impacts public policy at the Legislative Council through members like Oswald Brown and David Hennigan and Tom Rousseau. Thoughtful leadership creates an environment in which the future of Hamden is not dictated by fiat from Government Center, but rather emerges organically from the neighborhoods we serve.

Here in Hamden, we deserve a connection to our rich history. Although I was born and raised in Hamden, it is people like Councilman Al Gorman who really helped me understand how our past, both recent and ancient, directly impacts the Hamden of tomorrow. We know the names and draw inspiration from them: Ernest Borgnine and Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson; A.C. Gilbert and Eli Whitney; Thornton Wilder, Linda Greenhouse, Donald Hall, and Franz Douskey; Joe Castiglione and George Grande; Jonathan Quick and Scott Burrell. They are us and we are them because we are all Hamden. The students at Hamden Middle and Hamden High Schools suffer from no lack of role models.

But no role model is as effective as the one we can reach out and touch. We all have feet of clay, but we stand nonetheless and for the names I have already mentioned, there are literally thousands of other local heroes who, like Bill Strickland, change lives for the better every day. They are people like Lynn Campo and Chris Honnen, who found a way to juggle their family lives, their professional lives, and their roles as public servants to give something back to the people of this town. When it comes to inspiring our young people, no one gets to sit on the sideline.

And I honor them because Here in Hamden, we deserve a commitment to public service. On the stage, you see people like Berita Rowe and Judi Kozak, who of their own accord decided to return to the Legislative Council because we need them in uncertain times. And there is Vera Morrison, the steadfast Town Clerk who has provided the calm counterbalance to five Hamden Mayors. And Carol Noble and Betty Wetmore who have, for more than a decade and for little recognition, given their time and talents to the Legislative Council simply because they love this Town.

Each one has shed the party label, shed the personal or parochial interest when they have taken their seat around the horseshoe of the Council table. Public service is large, not small, and I am proud to say that I have worked with the best Council members in the Town’s long history. Council members like Jim Pascarella, who as President of the last Council, was an able partner in moving the Town forward despite the headwinds of economic malaise, natural disaster, and a small cadre who just want things done the way they were done year after year, decade after decade.

Service requires sacrifice. The cynics among us will try to create the impression that there is some personal gain, some gross payday for those who put their name on the ballot. I was born in the year 1971. Watergate and its aftermath were literally the background noise of my formative years. I do my best to

annually re-read Hunter S. Thompson's riveting collection of articles that make up his book, *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72*. For all my life, government service has been looked at with, shall I say, a great deal of skepticism. But the women and men on the stage with me today are living proof that, though our inner demons and our magnetism toward schadenfreude will try to drag us into the darkness, there is light in public service. "Politician" is not a dirty word. Public service cannot be a base enterprise because we do the most important work our society imagines: we protect the environment and we educate our children.

Here in Hamden we deserve clean air, clean water, and healthy spaces, both indoor and outdoor. Kathleen Schomaker and Adam Sendroff have been tremendous partners in getting both the Town and the Board of Education to recognize that an understanding of ecology, of conservation, and of the value of our natural resources makes both fiscal and community sense. Let me make it plain: we generate too much garbage and too many pollutants. We pay, and our children will pay, hefty costs for our blithe and cavalier attitudes about what we consume and what we discard. Forgiving the pronunciation, there is an old saying: *apres moi le deluge*. After me, the flood. Meaning the "chickens will come to roost" long after I'm gone, so I am unconcerned. Well, sea level is expected to rise by three feet between now and 2050, when I hope to still be here. And we are spending, as a community, more than \$66 a ton to dispose of the massive amount of curbside trash we all put out once a week; trash disposal accounts for about one mill of Hamden's taxes. "Le deluge" is here, "le deluge" is now. That is no longer the question, the question is what do we do about it? How do we arrest our profligacy?

There is a lot at stake here. My son Max is five years old, a kindergarten student at Ridge Hill School. He has an inhaler, a nebulizer, and takes a pill every day with his breakfast to manage breathing difficulties. And I wonder how much of that has to do with how we as a society, as a culture, treat...or ignore... those basic things we need--like clean air.

But there is fortune here. And the fortune is that, in most of life, the elders teach the younger. But right here, right now, our children teach us about how to protect our world. And, to our credit, we've given them the tools.

Here in Hamden, our children deserve the very best that our community and our culture have to offer. Michael D'agostino and Scott Harris, Austin Cesare and Bryan Johnson: you have demonstrated the will to stand up for the education issues important to our community. And with you stand not only Superintendent Fran Rabinowitz and the professional educators of Hamden, but

also the Library Board, the Recreation Commission, and the Arts Commission because, here in Hamden, we all own all of our children all day and all year, and they deserve enriching programs in school and out of school. At its core, at the end of the day, every person being inaugurated today has fought to be here because we look at the children--who are ours--and we want the best for them and we will bleed for the next two years to give them the very best of what we had.

But two years goes by very quickly, and the years are hard. To my colleagues on stage, I implore you: we can't afford to let negativity take root; we can't afford to submit to inertia; and even in tough times, we cannot turn our collective backs on those things that we and our neighbors deserve. Every day brings new challenges, and we must meet those challenges with new ideas. At the same time, we cannot employ the same old tired solutions for old problems. We have to do better. We must be smarter and we must stand tall in the face of those who are satisfied with the "same old same old." When faced with adversity, we meet it with positivity. Good things don't happen on their own, we make them happen every day with strong backs and force of will. We make them happen together, as 60,000 strong and we rage against those who would seek to have us fight ourselves..

Mom, Craig, Christina and Brian, Marian and Sidney, I do this for you because each of you has chosen to invest in this Town. Mandi, Max, and Eli, I do this for you because you have bought into my vision of Hamden as more than just a place where we lay our heads at night, but as our hometown and all that comes with that distinction. And Dad, I miss you, and on my toughest days, I would love to get your thoughts on how to handle the things that come up when the buck stops at your desk.

I know how it would go. My father would tell me to have shorter meetings and kick more people out of my office the minute they started wasting time. Because there isn't a lot of time to waste when trying to build a community where excellence is the norm. He would tell me to get mad, because Hamden is worth getting about. And my father, Chief Petty Officer Marion Jackson, USN Retired, would remind me that we can--together--generate the bluest of skies and the greenest of grasses and the brightest of hopes for his grandchildren.

Today, Hamden stands tall just as we on the stage stand, prepared and recharged, for the next two years. Tomorrow, we go back to work in earnest and redouble our efforts.

I believe in Hamden, and I know that you do too. If you haven't already, take a

moment to read Eric Lehman's outstanding book, *Hamden: Tales from the Sleeping Giant*. Our love of this community isn't new; it goes back generations. We are links in that long chain between history and community and future. We know excellence because we have seen it. Extraordinary is the custom here. We know that the impossible is, in fact, very possible because dozens, hundreds of times right here we have proven it so. We know that this land is ours, and like clay, we will mold it as we see fit.

Friends, celebrations are great, but what I really want to do is get back to work. I will see you bright and early tomorrow. The bluest of skies, the greenest of grasses, the brightest of hopes. The Hamden we deserve. The Hamden within our grasp. I will see you tomorrow.

Thank you.