CANDIDATE SPEECH

FOR

ANDY ROSS

Hello everyone! I want to thank each one of you for taking a moment from your busy schedules to meet here today. It’s wonderful to see all of you here in this room, and honestly, I don’t know which view is more inspiring-the one behind me-18 square miles of our fantastic city of New Haven, or the view I have right now-of seeing all of you vital, civic minded and interested citizens who made it a point to give us a part of your Saturday afternoon. I knew from the beginning that I wanted to have this event right here, in this very spot for a particular reason. We are on the 19th floor, and that altitude provides a panorama like no other. Laid out before us is New Haven-a truly unique city, and from this perspective we can marvel at its diverse beauty. The streets that seem smaller from here are filled with history-from world-class universities to elm trees that hold the secrets of hundreds of years of heritage, and every avenue tells a story as they come alive every day with the pulse of a modern city. Our neighbors are professors and doctors, educators and first responders, parents and students. This is a model city, and I am truly grateful to be a part of this outstanding community. It is with that in mind that I say to you today that it would be an honor and a great privilege to become the next Mayor of New Haven, and in order to do so, I will seek the Republican nomination in July.

Today is a vitally important time for all New Haven residents regardless of party affiliation. Look outside. See how the view shows us **one** great city. See how the perspective unifies everything we see. Today we begin the conversation about what it will take to make **OUR** New Haven stronger and more vital than it has ever been. Today we’ll begin that conversation about our schools, public safety, budget and public health, and there will be several voices in that discussion. The other candidates will join in as well, but I wanted to take a few moments and share a little bit about who I am, my background, and why I believe that as Mayor, I will work to realize a stronger and more sustainable city for each one of us.

I have been a New Haven resident for the past 10 years in the Wooster Square neighborhood. I believe in service and I have been blessed with being able to participate in various organizations and boards not only in my neighborhood but in other areas of this great city as well, from Wooster Square to Newhallville and from Downtown to Fair Haven. As many of you may know, I have been a businessman and entrepreneur since my teens, and when I was very young, I began learning what it takes to build a living, breathing entity from the ground up. Stephen Covey once said, “Management is efficiency in climbing the ladder of success; leadership determines whether the ladder is leaning on the right wall.” I have managed, I have been part of a team, and I have been a leader. I firmly believe that as Mayor, being a leader with proven business sense as well as diplomatic acumen is key in creating an effective and supportive environment capable of managing this city and all of its myriad details.

Today we begin the conversation about the future of our city, and the process of choosing a leader has now been initiated. That choice will be made both inside and outside of party lines. This is a very important time for New Haven residents regardless of party affiliation. The conversation must be centered around what is best for our residents, and whether the discourse is about our schools, public safety, budgets, or issues concerning public health, the conversation will go on between all candidates, not just one, regardless of party affiliation, race or religion, and all will be for the ultimate benefit of New Haven and its residents. This Mayoral race will be run to reveal who is best suited to lead New Haven to New Levels.

We have good schools; our numbers are getting stronger and stronger every year. But we can and will do better. My intention is that we have GREAT schools, engaged and interested students, and teachers who are passionate about their educational mandate. Our crime numbers are going down, yet there is still more that can and should be done in order that we truly feel safe in our neighborhoods. The tax mill rate has dropped for the first time in years, yet it is apparent how short lived that would be with the new proposed budget.

 I believe that we cannot just approve a budget because it balances; rather we must approve a budget that is balanced and gives our residents the biggest “bang for its buck.” I don’t know of anyone that isn’t working harder and longer hours than they have in the past, while seeing less and less of his or her hard earned dollars at the end of the work week. In other words we need to make sure the money that is allocated to our city departments go toward the right things. We must make sure that our citizens find value in the government they choose. We must ask ourselves, “Are we doing enough to make sure that we are fiscally responsible and effective, or are we complacent and too lazy to dig deep into the numbers and decide what is best for our city and what is most equitable for our residents?”

Let’s face it. We have become too dependent on state funding over the years, and for even longer we have been getting by with budgets, created by “smoke and mirrors.” We have been burdened by almost three quarters of a billion dollars in debt and fortunately, interest rates have been at historic lows. What is going to happen when we have to service that debt at higher interest rates? We know they won’t stay this low forever. On top of all of that, we have close to three quarters of a billion dollars in unfunded pensions (**is this also $ ¾ billion?**). The day of reconciliation on that will approach sooner than we know it. We know there have been cutbacks by the state in the area of subsidies and grants, promising to be impactful in a negative way, but the budget problems we face today have been brewing for over twenty years under Democratic control.

Let’s face something else. We keep taking on more debt to satisfy old obligations and that simply is robbing Peter to pay Paul. For example, let’s take a look at our Protective Self Insurance plan (PSIP). The auditors found us to be lagging in funding it to the tune of 6 million dollars. The “resolution” at the time was to borrow the 6 million dollar short fall at the rate of 2 million dollars a year to bring the account current-that is more borrowing for not being fiscally honest with ourselves year after year. I have a question…how many of YOU would consider taking a personal loan at a rate of over 30%? Wouldn’t you try to find a more equitable solution?

Believe me, I am not delusional. I know that when am elected as Mayor, I will have to contend with a majority of democrats controlling the Aldermanic board, but I believe that we truly have a common goal and I can work closely with them to come up with solutions to fix problems this city faces. I want to acknowledge that this city has come a long way and I grant that to Mayor De Stefano and I recognize that we are seeing improvements in our school system, but there is so much more that we can do. We must make sure the school board dollars that account for 32% of our total budget are getting to the right places. Remember, we have to work together to find the solutions to make this happen. Another area that needs to be more efficiently managed is public safety. This is and always will be a major concern in a city like New Haven and although we see improvements, we can do more by making sure our community policing efforts are dedicated to the mandate to produce quantifiable results. We spend 71 million dollars a year for public safety. That should buy a lot of peace of mind. Do all of you feel that peace of mind and that sense of safety that we should be feeling?

As far as revenue streams, the Parking Authority controls 9,880 spaces in this city, and I believe they can do a better job in delivering more money to our general budget. As Mayor, I would take a serious look at our new parking meter requirements and try to find common ground with the merchants who depend on being able to provide customers resources in which to park care free while shopping.

We also must realize that we have issues of self-sufficiency. Only 57% of our current revenues come from local sources while 43% come from the State and other grants. We pay 17 million dollars a year in debt service. We have to find the solutions to lessening this debt and being more financially independent as a community. Also keep in mind that our rating with Fitch is only A, not AAA or AA. We are one letter away from being a B and that one little letter will cost this city millions of dollars in increased interest costs. Each one of us is personally invested in securing and maintaining the best credit rating we can have for ourselves. Don’t you want the same for the city you call home? With regard to finances, I will propose a flat line budget in 2014, which means I will take the 2013 budget and hold the line on any new spending. If there is any surplus due to revenue increases I will split up the surplus 3 ways. The first will be to pay down our almost three quarters of a billion dollars in debt, the second one will be to pay down our under funded pensions of over 600 million dollars and a third of the money will go to tax payer relief in reducing our mill rate to under 39.

It’s not all bad news! I have to say, I like the way our Board of Education works now with an appointed board, however I would leave all the appointments up to the Aldermen. As Mayor, I would also create a parents oversight committee consisting of six people appointed by the Mayor. This committee will work with the Board of Education members in making decisions as well as handling their other duties, and I would also like to see two Aldermen on the board.

So there you have a little bit of who I am and the foundation, not platform, on which I stand. Business, management, finances and civic service have been in my blood for as long as I can remember. At the age of 16, I was the youngest person in Connecticut to be granted a real estate license. While attending college, I became the sole owner/operator of a business that in six years grew into a six million dollar company. As I got older and garnered more experience, I founded Manufacturer’s Credit Corporation. That began with one employee, me, and within six years it grew to employ more than 200 people. I support many community initiatives such as the Historic Wooster Square Association, the Christian Community Commission, Newhallville Promise Project, and Solar Youth to name a few. I am a Small Business Association SCORE Mentor, and I have been the Chairman of the Downtown/Wooster Square Management Team. I tell you all of this not to boast, but to let you know that my intellectual resources, my vision, and my heart are invested in the city of New Haven and its citizens. I am dedicated to the betterment of this city and look forward to joining the legions of leaders who have worked for hundreds of years to make New Haven the historic and diverse Mecca it is today. I thank each one of you for your time and consideration and I look forward to continuing a fruitful dialog with each of you and the community of New Haven, as your next Mayor. Thank you all!