

Remarks of William W. Ginsberg
President of The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven

at a Convening on

Preserving our Values and Commitments:
A Look at the Challenges of 2017 and How Our Community is Responding

New Haven, Connecticut
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Good evening, all, and welcome to this convening on “Preserving Our Values and Commitments.” Thank you all so much for joining us here this evening for this important conversation.

This evening, we will explore together how our community has responded in the face of the extraordinary challenges of this past year; our goal is to squarely face the question of whether we are meeting the test of our time, and to think about how we can work together even more effectively in 2018 and beyond. Remarkably, it is a reflection of these extraordinary times that we even feel the need to come together to talk of how we can best preserve the values and commitments that have built and sustained this community. And yet, to see you all here, and to think about all those with whom The Foundation has been engaged this past year - so many who are committed to stand up for the people of our community and its timeless values and commitments - is itself a most powerful statement that this community is unbowed and is determined to move forward. I thank you all for that, and for being here with us tonight.

I extend particular thanks to our three panelists - Alice Forrester, Michael Taylor and Kica Matos. Three of our community’s truly extraordinary leaders. Three leaders on the front lines of the battles and the struggles of 2017; three leaders who we look to blaze the trail forward. We are all privileged to have the opportunity to hear from them this evening, and I will introduce them in a few moments.

Before we get to conversation with our panelists, I would like to set some context from the perspective of The Community Foundation.

Exactly one year ago, at the College Street Music Hall on a cold rainy night, at a Foundation gathering not unlike this one, we came together as a community to look ahead in the aftermath of the 2016 election and the bitterly divisive campaign that had preceded it. We said that night that the challenge before us would be to do the work of community in the face of a new reality, the reality that a profound sense of division was casting a dark shadow over our country. We resolved that night to recommit to one another and to our shared future; we resolved to remember that our diversity has always been among our greatest strengths as a community and remains today a touchstone for how we move forward; and we resolved to stand up for those on the front lines of resistance to the forces that would drive us apart.

Looking back over the last twelve months, we gather tonight neither to congratulate ourselves nor to wallow in our struggles, but rather to take stock of how the core values and commitments that define our community are weathering the storms. And we gather tonight to look forward and to declare again our support for one another as we face the tests yet to come.

What are the values of which I speak? Inclusion. Generosity of spirit. Unity. A community built on these values is what we all inherited from those who came before us in this place, and is what we must pass on to those who will follow us here.

And our commitment? To come together, to stand together and to work together each day, both to address our needs and to understand and pursue our future opportunities. To come together, to stand together and to work together....the very definition of a successful community.

Let us be clear: the challenges we face both in Connecticut and in our country have been long in coming; they did not spring fully-developed like Athena from the head of Zeus from the choices voters made in 2016. Really since 1980 - for more than a generation - our values as a national community have been anchored in the idea that the common good in our country is simply the sum total of our material welfare as individuals. The very idea of the common good in America has withered. And so, as we have grown more prosperous over these decades, we have grown apart as well, into a society defined more by inequality than by community. Not only wealth, but also hope and the promise of opportunity for the next generation have more and more become the privilege of the few.

As in our country, so too in our state. For Connecticut, 2017 has been a time of reckoning: reckoning with the effects of an economy that has been growing too slowly for a generation, leaving us with a State budget that no longer supports the level of public investment that is needed to create the kind of society that we want to live in and that we aspire to leave to the next generation.

So we have been headed for many years in directions that have felt unsettling or worse. Yet the events of 2017 are a true departure point, as the forebodings that we spoke of on College Street last fall have become reality. This year, the divisions in our national life have been deliberately deepened and widened. Our leaders exalt exclusion over inclusion. People are singled out and demonized for political purposes by virtue of their religion or their ethnicity. Blatant demonstrations of hatred are uncondemned, as if we do not know from history where these darkest of all of humanity's demons can lead us once they are let loose. Democratic institutions that serve to check the excesses of the majority - the courts and the free press - face daily attacks. And our common efforts to ameliorate our destabilizing inequities - from the Affordable Care Act to DACA protections for young immigrants to criminal justice reform - are undermined and rolled back.

I realize how partisan this may sound, but tonight I am not talking about politics or policy; I am talking about community. For it is the very idea of community that has been under assault in our country in 2017, those very values of inclusion, generosity of spirit and unity. It is the idea of community as we have long practiced it here, the very idea that sustainable change and progress is that which benefits the many and not just the few, that we have needed to defend in 2017.

In that defense, our community needs advocacy, not neutrality. Neutrality is not an asset when our community is under attack. And make no mistake: our values are under attack, as are the local nonprofit institutions that embody those values and the vulnerable and needy among us who utilize the services of those nonprofits.

And of course we need to do more than defend. We need a path forward, a path defined by more than different public policies and different leaders, a path grounded in the core values of community. For if we are in a battle, it is a battle for hearts and minds. Will we accept that progress is only possible through a winner-take-all mentality, or do we believe that social progress can be widely shared?

And so I submit to you that our task - all of us, those who do the work of community at the local level, in Greater New Haven and so many other communities around the country - our task is to reassert the values of caring, of generosity, of inclusion and of unity. Therein lies our path forward.

Throughout this past year, The Foundation's shorthand way of trying to capture all of this has been *Community, Now More Than Ever*. It is our message, our watchword. It has been the touchstone for much of our work - with our donors, with nonprofits, with our Board and as a staff. No matter the context, *Community Now More Than Ever* is our way of saying that for all of us who are committed to the future of this place and its people, acting on our commitments has never been more important.

Community Now More Than Ever is not only about values. As always, inescapably, it is also about money. For so many nonprofits in Greater New Haven, the State budget has been challenge #1 in 2017. Set against the backdrop of a nonprofit sector that has grown too dependent on State support, the four-month delay in enacting a budget this year created a level of uncertainty and chaos not seen before. For any number of smaller nonprofits, the State budget catastrophe was nothing less than an existential threat, and several have closed their doors. Many local institutions small and large alike have pared back services and shut down programs. For nonprofits providing services in areas such as healthcare and immigration where Federal policy is also in flux, the uncertainty of 2017 meant both brutally difficult decisions about services in the immediate term as well as the need to reassess or abandon longer-term institutional plans that had been put together in a totally different time.

As the Connecticut budget fight went on and on over the summer, the Connecticut Nonprofit Alliance surveyed nonprofits in the state. Fully 80% of respondents anticipated staff lay-offs, and half were planning to eliminate programs, reduce staff hours and cut staff salaries. Put straightforwardly, Connecticut nonprofits have just not faced this kind of budget crisis in the past.

Sometimes very bad news can feel like a relief when one is anticipating something even worse. I have heard this sense of relief from several local nonprofit executives since the State budget was finally enacted last month. Yet our friends at Connecticut Voices for Children warn us against exhaling so readily. Voices tells us that the percentage of the State budget going to the broad swath of programs affecting children and families - including health care, early childhood, K-12 education, social services and higher education - is at an all-time low in 2017, and has declined by almost one-third since the early 1990s. And Voices points out too that given provisions in the budget capping

future State spending, there is little likelihood of turning this trend line around in the foreseeable future.

The Foundation's 2017 grantmaking has reflected these realities. We worked with our friends at United Way to understand the depth and breadth of the impact of State budget cuts on local nonprofits, and The Foundation's October grant decisions were geared toward general operating support for organizations feeling those impacts. To keep ourselves on top of a rapidly changing environment, throughout the year The Foundation has probed more deeply into areas that have been particularly vulnerable to the changed winds of 2017, including nonprofit media, immigration, health care access and its impact on racial and ethnic health disparities, women's issues, and the rise in hate-inspired incidents. Much of this work took the form of briefings for our donors, and I am pleased that our donors responded in turn with additional support for local nonprofits working in these areas.

In Greater New Haven and nationally as well, donor response to the challenges of 2017 has been highly uneven. Organizations on the front lines of high-profile battleground issues have seen spikes in fund-raising, including as I understand it local organizations such as Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, IRIS in its work with refugees, and the Connecticut Chapter of the ACLU. Local social service organizations on the other hand - many of which are being deeply hurt by the State budget - have generally not seen significant increases in giving, and The Foundation regularly hears the concern that donor attention is shifting from social services and the arts to issues that have a higher profile this year.

Beyond all of these specifics, I do want to say that doing our work with nonprofits and donors this year has felt very different. There has been a palpable yearning in this community to come together, to find comfort in a shared cause. Time and again this year I have heard that yearning in the question: "what can **we** do?"

Tonight I can say that we have done much. Indeed, I believe that there is much for our community to be proud of in the ways we have re-asserted our commitment to our core values and commitments this year.

Certainly, that is true with regard to immigration. For our community, built by immigrants and continually being renewed by successive waves of immigration, a community where the contributions of our immigrants both documented and undocumented are well-established, including by a Foundation report issued in 2015, the dramatic changes in U.S. immigration policy this year have required a total about-face. This community was quick to prepare for the possibility of large-scale deportations, and I am very proud of the grant The Foundation made in March to support this preparedness planning. And when the deportation orders began to be issued, the community showed its true mettle. Clergy, neighborhood leaders, activists and elected officials came together and came forward to open our arms and our doors to people facing deportation. And in July when Nury Chavarria walked out of Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal Church on East Pearl Street into the arms of her children, or last week when Marco Reyes Alvarez walked out of First and Summerfeld Church on Elm Street into the embrace of his family, this community had much to be proud of. We saw these people not as Guatemalans or Ecuadorians, not as residents of Norwalk or Meriden, not by reference to their immigration status, but as part of who we are as a community. If

one wonders what inclusion and generosity of spirit look like in real life, one need look no further than the photos of Ms. Chavarria and Mr. Alvarez when they emerged from their sanctuaries.

We have seen this same resolve among women leaders in our community too. The women of the Delta Sigma Theta sorority were among the first, bringing together the NAACP, Junta for Progressive Action and Planned Parenthood within a week of the 2016 election for a conversation that grew into a series of community fora under the title of “Conversations that Matter.” And propelled by the historic Women’s March last January, women in our community have been organizing in new ways too. *Emerge Connecticut* was founded in 2017, an affiliate of *Emerge America* with the goal of increasing the number of women holding public office. And *Ella’s List* was launched as well to “build the bench” of women leaders in our State.

Our unity was on vivid display at the annual meeting of our Community Fund for Women & Girls in June, which featured Linda Sarsour, a Palestinian-American leader from New York. Ms. Sarsour’s appearances have had a highly divisive effect in other communities, but here she was welcomed without incident or objection, and her message was all about strengthening community across lines of race, religion and ethnicity. “When you build communities,” she told us, “you are...learning how not to let the past repeat itself.”

So there is much to be proud of, but let us also recognize that we can and must do better. The times demand it.

When New Haven stepped up as a “sanctuary city” last winter, for example, there was widespread support. But other voices were heard too, questioning why our city would put Federal funds at risk by supporting the undocumented when those funds are so important to American citizens living in our community. It may have seemed at the time like just a small crack in our unity, but these are the kinds of superficial scratches that can grow into deep wounds if not diagnosed and treated.

Now more than ever, we cannot afford deep wounds. We have seen these wounds at the level of individual nonprofits, where the conflicting pressures to both advocate at the policy level and provide services at the client level have created strains not previously seen. And we have seen these wounds at a broader level too, such as in the search for a new Superintendent for New Haven Public Schools, a process that the *New Haven Independent* has called an “explosion of incivility and division,” a process that will now make the work of our new Superintendent much more difficult. Nothing is more important to our community than K-12 education, so now it falls to all of us to come together to support the new leader of our schools in her efforts to provide the best possible education for New Haven’s young people.

I could continue to talk about what has happened this past year positive and not-so-positive, but I want to say a bit about how The Foundation is thinking about these issues as we look forward.

In 2018, The Foundation will continue our work to engage our donors in the issues of the day, offering a continuing series of donor briefings and other community gatherings. Donor engagement is always at the heart of what we do, and that is and will be true *now more than ever*.

2018 is shaping up to be the year in which mission-related investments become a much larger part of The Foundation's work. I look forward to having more to say about that in the months to come.

As we finalize our plans and budgets for next year, The Foundation is also considering several new programmatic strategies:

- First, we expect to expand our already robust capacity building work by investing more deeply in nonprofits that are exploring major changes to their business models to adjust to new public sector funding realities. Are there new collaborations that can help local institutions manage through these times? Are there new revenue models that should be pursued? Our goal is to be helpful to organizations as they explore these kinds of issues.
- Secondly, nonpartisan voter registration. Engagement in the democratic process - always essential - has never been more important. Too often, we see low voter turnout among the very people that are served by the nonprofit organizations that The Foundation supports, and we know that these nonprofits are a good avenue for reaching these people. Much is at stake in 2018, with elections at the Gubernatorial and Congressional levels, and an investment in mobilizing voter registration next year can also be a prelude to continuing this work as we move toward the 2020 census and the Presidential election.
- Thirdly, in this time when both the credibility and the business model of traditional media are under unprecedented strain, The Foundation recognizes that our journalism work has never been more important. We plan to deepen our engagement in this area and are also working with other community foundations in the State on this as well.

For all of this, there is every reason to believe that our community will experience 2018 as a continuing time of division, of vulnerability, and of limited horizons. So if as I said before, the larger struggle we are in is one for hearts and minds, what our community needs even more than new programs and new resources is a sense of hope; hope grounded in the belief that we in Greater New Haven remain committed to the values of inclusion, generosity and unity; hope grounded in the belief that we in Greater New Haven remain together – that whatever may lie before us we will continue to come together, to stand together and to work together to create opportunity and to support the people and institutions among us that are particularly vulnerable in this time.

This is the work of all of us who are committed to the future of Greater New Haven. As I said at the outset, to see all of you here and to know that many more who are not here are equally committed is what gives me confidence that we will in the end be equal to the challenges of this time.

The privilege and the burden of undertaking this work of community does fall on all of us, but it falls disproportionately on our leaders. Tonight, we are joined on this panel by three of this community's most extraordinary leaders, so let's get to our panel.

First, introductions:

- Alice Forrester is executive director of Clifford Beers Clinic, a 103-year-old New Haven institution that provides a wide array of services to address the mental, physical and social issues affecting its clients, all with the goal of improving the health, resiliency and quality of life for children, families and communities. Clifford Beers works with some of the most

vulnerable in our community and in some of the most difficult circumstances imaginable, as we all saw through its work in Sandy Hook in recent years. Clifford Beers is all about hope – the word is right there in its logo and its annual “builders of hope” event is one of the annual highlights on our community’s calendar. Alice herself, as much as anyone in our community, personifies hope.

- Kica Matos is Director of Immigrant Rights and Racial Justice at the Center for Community Change in Washington, DC, yet of course those of us here in Greater New Haven know her also as a great local leader. She served as a Deputy Mayor in New Haven and ran Junta for Progressive Action. She is a woman of deeply-held principles and of many causes, and what runs through all of them is her passion for social justice and her fierce and skill advocacy. She is a nationally recognized leader in the fight for immigrant rights and comprehensive immigration reform, and has been the spearhead – oftentimes out front but sometimes behind the scenes as well – in so much of what we have done as a community in support of our immigrant population.

Kica is also Chair of the board of The Community Foundation. For another month that is, for she will give up the Chair and roll off our Board at the end of this year. So this is the first of what I trust will be several opportunities to express my deep gratitude and enormous admiration for what you, Kica, have contributed in your seven years of devoted service to The Foundation. Thank you so much.

And while I am doing so, I also want to recognize too Kica’s predecessor as Foundation Chair, Will Colwell, whose board term ends next month as well. Like Kica, Will Colwell has been a great leader on our board in many capacities who has done so much to shape The Foundation since 2011. He is a lifelong resident of this community whose deep and abiding commitment to it and love for it has been so evident in his tireless devotion to our work. Thank you, Will. I am deeply grateful to you as well, as I trust you know.

- And our third panelist, Michael Taylor, the Chief Executive Officer of the Cornell Scott Hill Health Center. Since its founding in 1968 on Congress Avenue as the first community health care center in Connecticut, the Cornell Scott Hill Health Center has for almost half a century been one of this community’s truly indispensable institutions. Today, Hill Health provides care to more than 36,000 patients in Greater New Haven and the Lower Naugatuck Valley, including services provided at reduced fees for uninsured patients who meet Federal income guidelines. And just today, Hill Health issued a joint announcement along with Fair Haven Community Health Care and Yale-New Haven Hospital of the establishment of a new innovative collaboration to improve primary health care delivery in our community – exactly the kind of innovative coming together that these times demand. Bravo to all three institutions.

Mike Taylor is a deeply experienced health care executive who has been at Hill Health since 2010. Under his leadership, the Center has greatly expanded its services and its impact and has reclaimed its historic role at the center of how primary care is delivered to the people of this community. Yet when one talks to Mike about the Center and the challenges of this time, he responds in terms of his patients – the people of this community and the challenges they face. Indeed, in the CEO statement that he has posted on The Foundation’s

giveGreater.org® web site, Mike focuses on the “Community of Caring” that Hill Health has created to provide person-centered integrated care that improves the lives of so many patients and families across our community. That is what he is all about.