

**City of New Britain
Office of Mayor Timothy Stewart**

MEDIA RELEASE

June 17, 2010
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**STEWART EXERCISES LINE-ITEM VETO OF COUNCIL BUDGET; BLASTS
DEMOCRAT LEADERS FOR GRANDSTANDING AT TAXPAYERS' EXPENSE**

Utilizing his “line-item” veto authority, New Britain Mayor Timothy Stewart today rejected parts of the Common Council’s 2011 fiscal year budget calling the Council’s measure “grandstanding”.

In a veto message sent to Town and City Clerk Peter Denuzze, Stewart said he was executing the veto “to mitigate the impact to city taxpayers with the hope that the Council majority can put aside its partisanship to work together to face the tough economic realities facing the City of New Britain.”

“It had been my hope that given the dire fiscal situation facing our community Democrats on the Council would join with me in a bipartisan effort to make the tough decisions needed to lessen the tax burden on our citizens.

“Instead of coming together and finding common ground during this time of budgetary crisis, some members of the Board of Education and Common Council have chosen to play the old game of ‘us vs. them’. Facts and figures are twisted and spun in an attempt to pit City vs. Board of Education, Republican vs. Democrat, parents of school children vs. elderly taxpayers, and management vs. union.

“These tactics are a reprehensible zero sum game where there can be no winners, only losers as the community contends not only with a lack of resources, but with the negative impacts of lack of cooperation among participants in city government.”

Continuing Stewart said, “In order to make their fantasy budget work, Democrats used inflated projections of potential property sales, arbitrarily increasing the property tax collection rate, and the workforce reduction savings.

“These inflated projections are even more disappointing when they come after meetings I had with Democratic and Republican Council leaders at which realistic amounts for these figures were discussed.

“For these reasons, and with all due respect to the Council, I am exercising my line-item veto authority to reject several items in their budget, primarily \$1.5 million in school district expenses, and the transfer to other funds of \$526,761.

“These changes will result in a mill rate of 36.63, an increase of 1.65 mills or 4.7% over last fiscal year’s rate.

“This veto is done to mitigate the impact to city taxpayers with the hope that the Council majority can put aside its partisanship to work together to face the tough economic realities facing the City of New Britain,” Stewart concluded.

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NOTE: A copy of Mayor Stewart’s veto message is attached to this release

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The Honorable Peter Denuzze
Town and City Clerk
27 West Main Street
New Britain, CT 06051

Dear Mr. Denuzze:

The City of New Britain, like cities and towns across Connecticut and across America, continues to face some of the most challenging economic times since the great Depression. The question before us is whether the city's leaders will make the difficult decisions necessary to maintain a sound financial structure at the expense of political popularity, or whether we continue to pursue partisan gamesmanship at the expense of what's best for our community.

When I proposed a 2.55 mill rate increase in my budget submission, it was with a heavy heart. My proposal came at the end of a long process, going through every fund and line item, leaving no stone unturned looking for any additional revenue or ways to reduce spending to minimize any property tax increase to our residents and businesses who are already suffering in these dire economic times. It pained me to add to the burden of many who have tightened their own household budgets in light of losses of homes and jobs, but I had no other choice given estimates of revenue and the cost of maintaining essential city services.

Since that budget submission on April 15th, I have worked with both Republican and Democratic council members in an attempt to reduce the mill rate even further. I was heartened and hopeful by our discussions as it seemed that given our dire situation, people were willing to put aside political differences for the greater good. Sadly, recent events along with the budget proposed by the Council Democratic majority have dashed those hopes of bi-partisan cooperation.

Instead of coming together and finding common ground during this time of budgetary crisis, some members of the Board of Education and Common Council and even Democratic state legislators have chosen instead to play the old game of "us vs. them". Facts and figures are twisted and spun in an attempt to pit City vs. Board of Education, Republican vs. Democrat, parents of school children vs. elderly taxpayers, and management vs. union. These tactics are a reprehensible zero sum game where there can be no winners, only losers as the community contends not only with a lack of resources, but with the negative lingering impacts of lack of cooperation among participants in city government.

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I am deeply disappointed in those who have chosen this plan of attack, particularly Board Chairman Sharon Beloin-Saavadra and Superintendent Dr. Doris Kurtz who have escalated the usual budget rhetoric to historic heights in an attempt to politically blackmail me and the Council into increasing the Board of Education budget. This blackmail has consisted of a series of meetings and statements designed as a scare tactic to frighten parents of school children with the annual "sky is falling" rhetoric.

In addition to their choreographed public displays (even going so low to use children as props in their propaganda campaign) that scapegoat the City for the lack of progress in our schools, the Board of Education has used a loophole in the state statutes to hijack close to \$1.5 million in additional funds for their budget and then still ask for more on top of that. If this back stabbing and grandstanding is how our educational leaders define "collaboration" and "cooperation" between the School District and the City, it's no wonder that students have difficulty with reading comprehension.

I took the oath of office as Mayor to govern this entire community. My decisions are made on the basis of what is right for all in this community, not just those who write letters to the editor or grab headlines with gross exaggerations of classroom sizes. My decisions are also based on facts, particularly the hard financial realities of a community that can't afford high property tax increases, not on politically expedient pandering to one group in the community over the other. Therefore, I will be exercising my line item veto authority to remove the additional \$1.5 million for the Board of Education budget. Unfortunately, due to constraints of state statutes I am forced to leave in the backdoor \$1.478 million 2% set aside funds.

While I am not pleased with the actions of certain Board members, I do want New Britain parents to know that I am not taking this action lightly or as political retribution. As a former member of the Board of Education, and as a parent of two New Britain public school educated children, I fully appreciate and share their concerns for the future of education in our City. However, throwing more money at the problem does not guarantee success. In these times of fiscal hardships, raising the mill rate to increase education is like a successful operation that kills the patient. What good is an education to prepare our students for the future, if the community has no future itself with a tax rate that discourages job creation and home ownership opportunities?

In addition to the propaganda surrounding education funding, I have also had to face threats and bullying by members of the Democratic leadership. Alderman Trueworthy sought a pledge from me not to veto the budget or the Democrat majority would let my budget pass knowing that if the Council did not pass a strictly clerical adjustment to the budget reflecting the State's passing to cities of the ARRA stimulus money, the City would have a budget shortfall of \$10.5 million. The night of the budget vote, Alderman Trueworthy with his cohort State Rep. Tim O'Brien on the phone browbeat Corporation Counsel Gennaro Bizzarro challenging his legal opinion on a veto saying that the Mayor could not lower the mill rate.

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So much for Democratic Council members' pledge of bipartisan cooperation. What I gather from this budget process is that bipartisanship only functions here in New Britain when I agree 100% with Council Democrats. As I have throughout my years as mayor, I refuse to let these bullying tactics and political backroom deals interfere with City business. I am appalled that others such as the triumvirate of Sherwood, Trueworthy and O'Brien would use the children and seniors of this community as a smokescreen for their blatant political agendas. This agenda even includes having taxpayers pay more in taxes rather than have the mayor get credit for a lower mill rate.

Another questionable decision by the Council in this budget was to continue to appropriate money for a senior citizen tax relief program that does not exist. In a year when every nickel and penny counts, the Democratic majority, led by Alderman Trueworthy, have chosen instead to once again make a symbolic gesture with over half a million dollars by putting it toward this nonexistent program. I feel it is the height of hypocrisy: On one hand the Council rails about the horrific state of the Board of Education budget, and on the other hand, they put a half million dollar appropriation in the budget when they are fully aware it will sit doing no one – not seniors, not students, and especially not taxpayers – any good. Therefore, I will be vetoing that portion of the Council adopted budget as well.

Last year, I warned that the budget games played by the Council, including arbitrarily raising the tax collection rate and increasing other revenue without adequate documentation and cause for the increase would result in a budget deficit for the 2010 fiscal year. I take no comfort in knowing that prediction is bearing out with an estimated deficit at June 30th.

But unfortunately, the Council is taking that same route again by arbitrarily increasing the property tax collection rate, the workforce reduction savings and the amount of property sales revenue without any documentation to back up these changes. This is another hypocritical act by Council Democrats as for the past six budget cycles, Alderman Trueworthy has railed against my estimates of property sales revenue as unrealistic.

These inflated projections are even more disappointing when they come even after meetings I had with Democratic and Republican Council leaders at which realistic amounts for both workforce reduction and property sales revenue were discussed. At a meeting last week, I indicated that an additional \$250,000 for workforce reduction above the \$1 million in my budget would be reasonable, as would an additional \$1 million in property sale revenue. Instead, the budget passed by the Council has an additional \$750,000 in workforce reduction savings and \$1,950,000 almost \$1.5 million greater than what I indicated could be sustained.

Basically this would stick the mayor with having to make a budget with inflated estimates work, and leaving the door open to criticize me when next year rolls around with a deficit. This is certainly not the spirit of bi-partisanship that had been hoped for during this budget process; it is just more political games. Unfortunately, I do not have the luxury in a line item veto of reducing these amounts, only cancelling them in total, so I have no chance but to leave these inflated estimates in the final budget.

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For the above reasons, and with all due respect to the Council, I hereby veto in part as follows,
Resolution # 30965-5 of the June 14, 2010 special meeting of the New Britain Common Council:

Line #001-1960-0527-491	School district expenses	\$1,500,000
Line #001-1961-9015-493	Crossing guards	\$ 12,000
Line #001-0500-0505-943	Transfer to other funds	\$ 526,761
Line#001-1154-1540-111	City Clerk overtime	\$ 2,000
Line#001-1338-3240-389	Disposal tip fees	\$ 150,000
Line#001-1551-5510-380	Public Library grants & contributions	\$ 25,500

These changes will result in a mill rate of 36.63, an increase of 1.65 mills or 4.7% over last fiscal year's rate. This veto is done to mitigate the impact to city taxpayers with the hope that the Council majority can put aside its partisanship to work together to face the tough economic realities facing the City of New Britain.

I also veto Resolution #30971-5, the Capital Improvement Program Budget. I feel that political games were played with this budget as well, particularly with the Washington Park field improvements that hint of political favoritism and pork barrel spending to favor one particular district alderman. The Capital Improvement Budget will revert back to the Mayor's budget, which I feel best serves all areas of the City.

All six of the prior budget preparations during my administration were difficult, but this year was the most frustrating of all. Part of my frustration is the slow pace of economic recovery that is hitting cities like New Britain hard. But that is outside of our control and we need to deal with it as best we can.

What is most frustrating to me is that which is within our control that is painfully absent: Our collective will to put political agenda asides for the greater community good. The citizens who elected us deserve nothing less and in the difficult budget year ahead; New Britain's very survival depends on it.

Sincerely,

Timothy T. Stewart
Mayor, City of New Britain

cc: Common Council
Board of Education
Robert Curry, Finance Director