

2017 State of the City Address
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Before the Valparaiso Chamber of Commerce
January 24, 2017

In an article that appeared last week in the New York Times, Richard Edelman, a Harvard-educated communications CEO declared that there has been a global implosion of public trust in government. His research revealed that two-thirds of the world's countries are "distrusters." A distrusting country is one in which less than half of the people trust in the mainstream institutions of business, government, media and non-governmental organizations. Edelman argues that this growing story of distrust is powerful, unpredictable and has damaged the ability of governments to be an effective force in leading change.

Trust is a very precious—but all too often rare—commodity. With an abundance of trust come prosperity, progress, and peace. In the absence of trust, we are all forced to play defense, and, in the end, nobody really wins. Trust is both powerful *and* fragile. Like bridges, trust is much easier to dismantle than to construct. If not constantly forged and nurtured, trust can evaporate like streams in the desert.

This year our country endured a most unusual and divisive presidential election. For many it feels like the moorings of a just Democracy have come loose. Others feel a sense of cautious optimism in the prospect of change itself. But overall, a more pervasive skepticism toward government and our public institutions is felt by a growing number of citizens. Public trust is in short supply, and its scarcity is hurting all of us.

I believe that this rising distrust of government can and must be redeemed at the local level. Local government is closest to the people and touches their lives every day. Local government can be most responsive to the needs and aspirations of its citizens. It is where innovation is most welcome and where problems are best solved. Good local government is practical—not ideological. It seeks unity and collaboration among neighbors. The voice of the average citizen is best heard at the local level, and it is the natural locus for citizens to engage and collaborate with their elected officials. I *believe* in local government and its ability to bring progress, healing, innovation, prosperity, justice and peace to our nation. Just recently, I offered some unsolicited advice to our new governor Eric Holcomb. I told him that the state's cities and towns are its stallions, and for the state to flourish, we need to let the stallions run. Yes, I'm convinced local government will lead the way forward for our nation.

I have offered these musings on local government and trust in order to say this: that I, your city council, and an immensely talented city leadership team have, for the last thirteen years, sought *first* to earn your trust and *then*, to build a stronger and more

vibrant city *upon the foundation of that trust*. Trust flows from consistent practices. For local government, these include fostering extensive citizen engagement, promoting unity and marginalizing politics, creating clear and consistent strategic planning, and maintaining fiscal transparency and accountability. These are the building blocks of trust. Fourteen years ago your city leadership team chose five core values to guide our day-to-day decisions. These are: honestly accountable, surprisingly responsive, creatively frugal, respectfully compassionate and boldly proactive. We know that the better we model these values, the stronger the bond of trust we will have with our citizens. We look to you, those we serve, to hold us accountable to these aspirations.

Yes, we have made incredible progress since this journey began in 2003, but those improvements were made possible by the support, engagement and goodwill of the citizens of Valparaiso. Notably, this public faith and engagement extends to *all* sectors of our community: education, business, non-profits and the faith community. It is what defines the greater Valparaiso community and what drives us to climb higher year after year. Above all, we must continue to diligently protect this fabric of trust with our collective words, actions and attitudes.

Every state of the city address must offer both a glance back and a look forward to the future. I cannot begin to detail *all* that is happening in our city government. I am an average guy surrounded by a bunch of overachievers, and I have trouble keeping up with all they've got in process. Our work culture is healthy and dynamic. No one cares who gets the credit as long as we get things done. And by the way, it is our job to get things done, not simply talk or argue about what to do. If your elected officials are all talk and no action, then its time to use the ballot box to bring change.

2016 was another banner year for Valparaiso with improvements occurring in all sectors of our city. We completed the \$2.2 M intersection reconstruction at Burlington Beach and Calumet Avenue, including pathways. We added the stunning mile-long Vale Park pathway, which connects all of our westerly subdivisions to our extensive pathway system. It's been dubbed the new 20-minute vacation. Be sure to walk it soon, and take your dog along because we even added a dog (and person) watering station along the way. Speaking of dogs, in 2016 the city acquired from the Clifford family a 14-acre campus across from the high school on Campbell Street. This year we will add a dog park in partnership with Lakeshore Paws, and a new horticultural facility at that key location. Last year we added a pathway along the Calumet Avenue business district and this year we will connect that pathway further north to the new pathway on Burlington Beach. We keep our 19 miles of pathways free of snow in the winter; so fair weather walkers, you are without excuse now.

Tower Park will get a complete makeover this year with help from generous local athletes in a program we call "Leaders Giving Back." New outdoor basketball courts and a state of the art artificial turf baseball/softball field are being made possible with gifts from names you know: Drew, Hummel, Samardzija, Purdue, Cavanaugh and Bishop. When the weather warms up, you may feel like going on a bike ride, but your bike is at home or in the shop. No problem, this April we will unveil the new Zagster bike share program

around town and on the VU campus. Another first for Valpo; and another option for living out our Fit City goals.

Public safety is a vital objective for every community. Our exceptional fire and police departments are constantly improving and innovating. Just last month we added four new police officers to serve a growing city, along with two additional K9 units. Our detectives have recently completed advance training in voice stress analysis and cellular phone forensics, and we are the first department in Indiana to employ drone capability. Our fire department is saving more lives with cutting-edge equipment and training. With a grant from Firehouse Subs last year we added Lucas compression devices on all our ambulances. These devices greatly increase the chance of surviving a heart attack. In fact, our rate of regaining heart circulation in full cardiac arrest rose last year from 27% to 44%. While it sounds odd, Fire Chief Dutz and his department set a goal in 2016 to be the best place in Indiana to have a heart attack. I am immensely proud of our safety departments as they set the bar for innovation, professionalism and character.

Have you noticed the sprawling new industrial building just east of Rt. 49 in the Lakes of Valparaiso campus? This represents another first in our commitment to helping businesses grow to create more quality jobs. In partnership with the private sector, this new building meets the growing demand for immediately available space for a new or relocating company. Our active business parks are generating new employment opportunities for our citizens and a stronger tax base for our future.

Valparaiso continues to gain statewide and national recognition for our achievements and rich quality of life. Even we were a bit surprised last year when the American Planning Association recognized the city for its planning excellence, naming Central Park Plaza as one of America's Great Public Places for 2016. When you consider the other four were in cities like Tulsa, Philadelphia, Fairbanks and Cincinnati, we are playing in the big leagues. Chicago's Millennium Park and New York's Central Park were also previous winners of this award. Valpo is turning heads all over the state and Midwest region. In fact, we have so many requests from other cities to visit and discuss our progress that it's becoming a challenge for us to manage.

Our downtown continues to expand in vitality and investment. We completely renovated the north block of Washington Street this year. This key area has added many boutiques, restaurants, and businesses to our repertoire. Our creative arts and museum district continues to take shape. We plan on launching the new Chicago Dash bus expansion and transit oriented development late this year, with a generous grant of \$6.7M from the Regional Development Authority. Skating continues to be the cool winter downtown destination gig. This year, we expect to exceed our first year record of 51,000 skaters at Urschel Pavilion. We are adding new events in our downtown every year, and last year we welcomed over 110,000 visitors who went home with happy hearts and lighter wallets. Central Park Plaza is our public square—the people's place—and we want to give you more and more reasons to head downtown this year and enjoy food, entertainment, fresh air and your neighbors.

While infrastructure investment is vital, a city is much more than roads, concrete and buildings. The strength and beauty of a city is found in its people. As Valpo has grown, and as the American culture has become more diverse, we have welcomed new neighbors from all ethnicities, cultures and walks of life into our city. Our minority populations have more than doubled in the past fifteen years, indicating that Valpo is indeed a welcoming and open city. Last April, our city council enacted a Human Rights Ordinance that protects against discrimination while emphasizing unity over litigation. During the debate over the ordinance, the city hosted a number of public forums where those for and against had the opportunity to be heard. But just as important as the opportunity to be heard, is the responsibility to hear and to understand. Our world would be better off if we would all just listen more and talk less. The great jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes said it best “It is the province of knowledge to speak and it is the privilege of wisdom to listen.” Healthy communities are able to have frank conversations when necessary, but do so in a spirit of respect and understanding. Our city did, and that made me proud.

If we had more time, I would go into detail about how well our business community is performing as evidenced by our low unemployment rate. Indeed, our economic outlook looks very bright. Our dark fiber project will be complete this year to ensure that our businesses and schools have all the bandwidth they need to excel. I wish I had time to talk about our strong financial position and the new OpenGov portal that Clerk Treasurer Swihart is compiling. This new portal will provide detailed city financial information to our citizens in a simplified format. And if time permitted I would talk about more paving, more sidewalk repair, more utility and storm water improvements and all the other things that you trust us to do, and do well. But I want to take the last few minutes of our time together to talk about the power of vision.

Last month I was going through some old campaign material and came across a flyer from my first mayor campaign in 1999. As you may recall, I came up a few votes short in that election. Seventeen years ago I penned a vision for our city and included it in this campaign piece. Although written almost two decades ago, these words feel fresh and relevant today. As I read it, ask yourself if our city has moved closer to this vision over the last thirteen years. As you listen to it, consider the power of vision to transform communities.

My vision for Valparaiso is that someday soon it will be nationally recognized as one of the best mid-sized cities in the United States. I envision a Valparaiso that has laid a bedrock foundation for the future through extensive and innovative long-term planning. Valparaiso will consist of various strong and cohesive neighborhoods that collectively form a vibrant and diverse community.

Valparaiso will be clean, safe, and alive with activity. We will appreciate our heritage yet welcome the future. Business, labor, education and government will work together in a spirit of cooperation and mutual trust to create quality employment opportunities. Our city will be known for its excellence in education and commitment to life long learning. We will value the importance of strong families and see children as our greatest

resource. We will show respect for the environment and be good stewards of our natural resources. We will forge new partnerships and build lasting bridges so that the fabric of our community will be like a tightly woven garment: strong, beautiful and durable.

Compassion, respect and a strong sense of justice will permeate our community and strengthen our commitment to each other. Volunteerism will be a way of life for us, not just a good idea. Our quality of life will be a product of many lives quality-lived. I dream of a city that grows not just in size, but in character, compassion and reputation. Our city government will work diligently to empower its citizens for personal and collective success. Through teamwork we will always find a way to get the job done.

*One thing is certain: my vision for Valparaiso must be **our** vision for Valparaiso. The more I listen to city residents and community leaders, the clearer that vision becomes. The 21st century will bring great challenges and unparalleled opportunities to our city. Your next mayor must be prepared for these changes and effectively implement the vision for success. Join me in turning a vision into action and, together, we will work diligently to leave a vibrant and caring community to our children.*

When a city embraces its vision and trusts its leaders to pursue that vision, magic happens. Vision and Trust. One relies upon the other to exist. As we collectively embrace this vision *and* the values that build trust, we have every reason to be optimistic about the future of our city. Valparaiso is a light on a hill. A compass for other communities. A city that will thrive amidst the challenges of turbulent times. A city that works for the betterment of all its citizens, and which embraces timeless values like hard work, collaboration, compassion, family and integrity. A city where all citizens contribute and where all benefit.

Thank you all for believing in this vision, and for trusting me and my team to help forge it over the last thirteen years. With three years left on my final term, you have my word that the progress you have come to expect out of the Costas Administration will continue unabated. In fact, I will approach the next three years *not* like a leisurely summer drive, but like the final three laps of the Indianapolis 500: fast, focused and driven. We'll have time for a victory lap, but only after the race is won. Until then, I remain deeply grateful for your trust and your character. Together we will succeed. Together we will prosper. Together we will fashion a beautiful city our children are proud to call home.