

I stand here tonight, with a very different speech than the one I gave you in 2008. Then, we were in the fourth year of the old five-year plan, and things were running smoothly. I want to thank the people who developed the plan for their forethought and care and for the stability that we have had for the last six years.

Now is a different time. The recession has left us wary and frightened, and mostly concerned about the future and our pocketbooks. The State of our Town is strong, but the state of local finances – here and everywhere -- is very troubled. We can't look to the federal government to help us – Congress has cut Community Development Block Grant funding by 33% this year. That federal funding has been a safety net for Arlington for decades, funding services for the elderly, for troubled youth and for many programs and scholarships that have made a difference in the lives of the young the old, and people with meager means. And state government can't help us either because it has its own looming deficit.

Actually, the only major thing that the State can do, and I urge it to do, is to give the Town the ability to put our town employees into the GIC or a health plan that brings comparable savings to the Town while maintaining high-quality benefits. I want to emphasize – this is not about asking our employees to accept inferior health insurance; it's about providing good health coverage without overpaying for it, which is what we're doing under the present system. This move seems drastic to many town employees who have benefited from generous benefits for years. Now, that said, I must also say that our employees are underpaid compared to surrounding communities and to the outstanding job that they do for us. I understand the fear of change. I understand the concern over loss of bargaining rights on this issue. But we have no choice. We can't keep doing business the same old way. If the cost of providing health insurance goes unchecked, we will lay off even more teachers, more firefighters and more police, and

more DPW workers. We will lose the sense of Arlington that we enjoy today. We have already cut too much.

We need to think and spend in new ways. We want both sides to compromise, as is happening behind the scenes right now on a health care package for the coming year. We need a partnership with our employees. We need to help them by paying them fair wages, and we need to insure that the HRA warrant article #32 is passed this Town Meeting and we must lobby our state legislature to allow us to provide our valued employees the good health coverage they deserve at a cost that we --- and they --- can afford.

As you know, there will be an override vote on Tuesday, June 7<sup>th</sup>. Like many town leaders, I urge Town Meeting and citizens to get involved in the discussion about the future of our town. We really benefitted from the stability of our last multi-year plan, which allowed us to keep the promises made to the voters in the last override. And I believe will again benefit from the new plan. It is a shorter time period of three years in a time of great uncertainty. This is a vote about whether we continue to be a great, welcoming community or one that continues to lay off teachers, reduce minimum manning of firefighters and police, and decimate the DPW. Please come to the Override Kickoff next Sunday afternoon from 1-3 at the Masonic Lodge on Academy Street. We started organizing about three weeks ago and I was pleased that so many young families, and an equal number of white haired veterans, have become involved in this effort. The first organizational meeting drew 52 people, and the Saturday morning meetings at 8 have drawn a wonderful cross section of the Town. Will all the officials and Town meeting members who are already working on the Override stand up. Talk to them, ask them questions. We need you and your vote on June 7<sup>th</sup>.

There are some really important warrant articles before Town Meeting this year, and we need your thoughtful consideration of

possible changes to how we do business. The management of our Town does a darned good job, and I am really proud of the people who sit behind me tonight. They are an energetic, engaged, group of managers who enjoy each other and take pride in their work. I give a lot of credit to our Town Manager, Brian Sullivan, for finding these stellar employees, and thank him. They and all the workers in the town deserve our respect and appreciation. As an example: How in the world did Jimmy Dodge's crew of 19, yes 19, people manage to plow 5 square miles of roadway so efficiently all winter long?

This Town Meeting will make at a lot of big decisions this spring. Should we sell or lease the Town assets of the Crosby and Parmenter Schools in order to help rebuild the Thompson School? We will be thinking about continuing our trend towards consolidating functions by voting on the combined town/school human resources department. And under Article #51, we will be discussing whether to rework the way that our town and schools handle their financial affairs. We will be discussing whether it is time for Arlington to take a big step forward by adopting Pay as you throw. All these decisions have the potential to change the way that we do business.

In closing, I urge you to think of the words of my former neighbor, the wise Charlie Foskett, who in a recent memo talked about what he believes is Arlington's core mission. We don't always agree, but Charlie's got this exactly right. He said our core mission is to:

1. Insure Public Safety, Public Health, and Public Order. This includes police, fire, health department, building codes, zoning, traffic rules, etc. Without these citizens could not go about their daily activities.

2. Maintaining public works and infrastructure. The highways, by-ways, buildings and equipment necessary to assure the first mission. If fire trucks can't get to a residence or commercial buildings, if there is no center for administration, etc, none of the core objectives can be achieved.
3. Education of Children: Since the earliest days of our Colonies, our Commonwealth, our Nation and our town, this has been a primary obligation of our common society. ...
4. Other Common and Societal objectives. These include social back-up nets for senior citizens or the less fortunate, parks and recreation, arts and culture, beautification programs, etc.

I have always had great confidence in this Town Meeting. You balance out the political agendas with your thoughtfulness and diligence. We need your thoughtfulness this spring, and I look forward to lively debates. Thank you for your time, your involvement, and your commitment to our community.