



TESTIMONY BY MAYOR MARCIA LECLERC, TOWN OF EAST HARTFORD

March 10, 2014

R.B. No. 5465 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE CONNECTICUT AEROSPACE  
REINVESTMENT ACT

Chairman Fonfara, Widlitz and members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee

Chairman LeBeau and Perone and members of the Commerce Committee...

Good morning. My name is Marcia Leclerc and I am the mayor of East Hartford. I am before you today, to encourage your support of Raised Bill 5465, An Act Concerning the Connecticut Aerospace Reinvestment Act.

As most of you know, East Hartford has been the proud home to Pratt & Whitney since 1929. By the 1940's over 40,000 employees worked on the production of Pratt & Whitney aircraft engines in East Hartford. During this time, the town's open space and farmland developed around the growth of the Pratt & Whitney factory located on Main Street. Pratt production ran three continuous shifts and this boom brought prosperity, neighborhoods were constructed, schools opened, and businesses flourished.

Over the past several decades, even as we have witnessed the dramatic reduction of employees Pratt remains our top employer with over 6,800 employees at the East Hartford facility. UTC has nearly 2,500 direct suppliers across Connecticut, 87 of which are located within our town. This number will grow, as this investment will increase the demand for employees, suppliers, retail, restaurants, hotels, and housing throughout the region.

East Hartford has faced many challenges in recent years since the great recession, and in truth, even prior to that time. As most of us involved in local and state government understand, the burdens of taxes, services, and non-taxable land fall disproportionately on urban and first-ring communities. In East Hartford, we face difficult decisions every budget cycle about what programs we can afford, and those that we just cannot function without. However, we cannot turn our backs on our taxpayers, students, families, those in need of meals, pre-school programs, and the list goes on. We do not have expansive green space readily available and no longer have undeveloped land on which to place new homes, commercial buildings, or factories. Our net grand list remains stagnant at 2.7 billion, while the mill-rate continues to climb past 45, despite the fiscally responsible budgets we continue to implement on behalf of our residents and businesses.

Investing in Connecticut towns and cities will make us a laboratory for cutting-edge innovations, and fuel urban progress and strengthen communities throughout the state. Let us continue that trend right here, right now, and overcome the challenges of urbanization by being a driving force for economic revitalization.

With towns and cities facing broad challenges every day, their roles as economic drivers become ever more critical to the health of the national economy. As noted by the most recent U.S. Conference of Mayors Metro Economies Report, metro areas generate 90 percent of the nation's GDP and 86 percent of employment. With this expected growth comes an opportunity to ensure that communities are sustainable and thriving in a competitive global environment.

Therefore, when we are presented with a “once-in-a-generation opportunity”, as our Governor accurately stated, by UTC proposal of investment in our community, we must act quickly and decisively. We all have the opportunity to be a part of the next chapter in this State’s history.

The new 425,000-square-foot Pratt & Whitney headquarters and the 100,000-square-foot of new and renovated research and engineering labs will bring in millions of dollars in revenue not only to East Hartford, but also to the region and state. The expansion will directly result in the creation of temporary and high paying jobs. With this reinvestment comes relief to our grand lists, and in turn, our taxpayers.

These proposed plans are consistent with East Hartford’s Plan of Conservation and Development, as well as the master plan for Rentschler Field, which includes development of the remaining 400-acres for housing, retail, office, and hotel space. I believe this announcement will jump-start development that has been long stalled after the construction of the stadium and Cabela’s. Since last week alone, we have responded to several new inquires about development along our Main Street and Silver Lane corridor.

We are grateful for the leadership and vision demonstrated by our Governor, UTC Chairman & CEO Chairman, Louis Chênevert, and Pratt & Whitney President, Paul Adams for their commitment to East Harford, our communities, and the State.

East Hartford supports our Governor as he continues to work with the leaders of UTC and Pratt to tackle the complex challenges facing our state. Now on behalf of the citizens and tax payers of East Hartford, I humbly request your support for this historic legislation that will launch a vibrant and dynamic future for Connecticut. A future that will see reinvestment in our towns and cities, like East Hartford, and create jobs that will strengthen the economy. Please support Raised Bill 5465.

Thank you for your time today.