

**Remarks of Jay Timmons
President and CEO, National Association of Manufacturers
Association TRENDS Salute to Association Excellence
Washington, D.C.
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**Raise the Voices of Association Leaders:
Shine a Light on the Darkness**

Good afternoon. Thank you so much to AssociationTRENDS.

This is a tremendous honor. When I saw the list of previous honorees, that certainly became quite evident. To be mentioned along with the men and women who I consider giants of our profession, mentors and heroes, colleagues and friends, is unbelievably humbling.

It's so special to be able to share this occasion with my family. Rick and I just celebrated 25 years together, and ours has been a relationship built on support and respect for each other's careers. He is the foundation for all that is good and right in my world, and I can never adequately express my profound appreciation for his many years of advice, support and love.

Together, we are raising three awesome children – three brilliant light forces in our lives. C.J., Ellie and Jacob remind us every single day what is really important. And I'm glad they could be here to sit through another one of Dad's "boring" speeches as C.J. so politely informed me earlier this week.

I'm really glad my mother and father are here today too. I'll tell you this: It doesn't matter how old you get, it's incredibly gratifying when you can make your parents proud.

Of course, it's their accomplishments that have always made me proud and influenced me significantly on my life journey – like when Dad took a bold risk when he was about my age and started his own business – Timmons Appliances at the corner of Bridge and Main in Chillicothe, Ohio.

And mom set such a powerful example when she rose through the ranks and shattered the glass ceiling in the 1970s to become the president, CEO and publisher of the Chillicothe Gazette. That was a time when such opportunities for women were few and far between. In just the previous decade, she had to hide the very fact that she was pregnant with me just to keep her job.

So, thank you, Mom and Dad, for your inspirational example and steady guidance.

I appreciate being joined by two people who took a chance on me a quarter of a century ago, and who gave me a tremendous opportunity to help them change Virginia for the better: George and Susan Allen. And I am glad to have Matt Kayhoe and Lisa LaFontaine here. Lisa heads the Washington Humane Society and Washington Animal Rescue League, and I have had the honor of working with her to save the lives of literally hundreds of thousands of companion animals.

I'm also grateful to be here with so many folks with whom I work on a daily basis. Leadership is all about unleashing the potential, the creativity and the ingenuity of the team that you have the privilege of being surrounded by. As soon as we did that at the NAM, and let our people do what they do best, the organization surged forward. I'm proud of Erik Rosedahl who was recognized by Association Trends as a Top Lobbyist of the Year today. I'm proud of Erin Streeter who was recognized as one of the Top Women in PR by PR News. I'm proud of Aric Newhouse who was last week named Top Lobbyist of the Year by CEO Update. And I'm proud of the other 135 members of the NAM Team who have made us an award-winning association. I am continually in awe of your talent, skill, and commitment...and I am energized to stand with you to fight for the success of our members and our country.

Today, I want to talk about something more than just the issues for which we are expected to fight. More than the traditional role of the association executive. More than what might be considered the "comfort zone" for all of us.

As association leaders, we have a unique platform – one we can use to shine a light on the darkness that is pervading our political system, and the division it has created in our country.

At some point, our journey as an association executive will come to a conclusion. Retirement will come – hopefully many years down the road. Probably about the time when Tom Donahue is just reaching the midpoint of his career. But when it does, will we say to ourselves, "I made it through, I survived by keeping my head down, by playing it safe?"

Or will we be able to look back with a sense of accomplishment, knowing that we helped to move the needle of public opinion....to lift people up who thought they were left behind....to help those who live in the shadows become productive contributors to our economy.... to remove the stain of discrimination on our society....to speak up for those to whom justice has been denied?

It's what our members do every single day. And they expect us to be a force multiplier for their enlightened examples.

Our platform....our podium....our voices....they are loud....and strong....and they're needed more than ever before, to ensure that our nation remains exceptional, and a beacon for the entire world.

Associations represent the best of American values: collaboration, consensus, and coalition-building. We bring people together to lift others up – to move our country forward, to strengthen our industries, to expand opportunity, and to give voice to our First Amendment rights.

Associations have a long history that deserves celebration. Together, we've weathered challenging times in our nation's history. Many of the people in this room have been around Washington a long time, and there are numerous battle scars to show for it. But for the most part, we understood the rules of the game, and we worked within a well-defined system with mutual respect and dignity.

Today, though, conventional wisdom in politics is no more. What we thought were tried and true basic rules of decency have been thrown out the window.

At this event last year, John Engler, who was the 2015 honoree and also my predecessor at the NAM, issued a call to action for us to bridge the partisan divide and tone down the rhetoric.

In Washington, partisanship for the sake of partisanship has stalled far too much progress. But it's more than that. The divisions in our country are not just political or partisan. This vitriol in this presidential election has taken us far beyond Republican versus Democrat. And if you love this country and everything she represents, it's nothing less than horrifying.

Too many candidates are tapping in to the most savage instincts of the voters. They offer no concrete plans to improve our economy, no logical agenda to keep us safe, no vision to build our future.

When the news is filled with grim and frightful reports, from racial tensions and injustices, to the uncertainty of the job market for working Americans, to the fear of parents for the safety of their children – even when they are at school....it's not surprising that voters would reject the status quo. They have good reason for thinking that Washington is broken, moves too slowly, and has forgotten them.

Too many candidates work overtime to seize upon this anger, but instead of building Americans up, they appeal to the least common denominator. Instead of celebrating our diversity, they exploit our differences. Instead of recognizing the enormous potential of the jobs and opportunity that businesses provide, they denigrate corporations and their leaders. Instead of standing tall for democracy, they deride America's civic institutions and leave our people wondering if some other system might somehow be better than the one that has enabled the expansion of liberty more than any other in the world.

To fix what ails us, we need ideas to build our economy, and inspiration to mend our collective soul...we do not need radical socialism...or pitchfork populism...or dividing us up based on class or race or religion or orientation.

So, what's it going to take?

For one, as association leaders, we have to affirm our commitment to the values – those Four Pillars – that make, and keep, America exceptional in the first place.

The first of these Pillars is free enterprise: powerful market forces that drive innovation and growth better than any system ever conceived in the history of mankind.

The second is competitiveness: our ability to expand markets and succeed in the global economy.

The third is individual liberty: the creativity and entrepreneurship unleashed by protecting, defending and advancing the basic freedoms enshrined in our Constitution and Bill of Rights.

And the fourth, equal opportunity: our shared belief that every one of us, if given the chance, has the potential to contribute to the success of our companies, our communities and our country.

Unfortunately for us, many in our country think that associations are part of the problem, even though we are the voice for millions of Americans. And I submit to you that we will be very much part of the problem if we do not accept responsibility for using our might, our muscle, our influence to bring our nation back together.

It all starts with reaching out not only to others we represent, but also to those who want a better future for themselves, their children, and their communities. Explaining why we do what we do, and who we do it for. If we don't, the bullies and the demagogues will win...and America will suffer.

Now it may surprise you, but I wasn't exactly the star quarterback on my high school football team. And yes, I most definitely was the last kid to get picked for dodge ball, and I found myself doing most of the dodging. As an added bonus, I somehow thought that as a high school freshman it would be really cool if I carried a briefcase to school. So I can assure you that I've had plenty of experience with bullies and those who denigrate others.

I learned long ago, they tear down others because they have nothing positive to offer.

Well guess what? We do! And so do those we represent.

It's about telling the stories of our members. And it's about telling our stories as well. Me? I'm a son of the Heartland, born in the mill town of Chillicothe, Ohio. My views were formed on our farm in Circleville, where I raised cattle and experienced the pulse of rural and small town America...where neighbors look out for, and care about, each other.

What's your story? Where did you come from? Why do you care about the future of our country? How did your life experience influence your desire to advocate on behalf of others?

Instead of speaking only to Washington, we have to speak to the people of this country – outside the Beltway – and offer bold plans and a vision for the future. Let's talk about how our values and our common sense policy solutions are going to empower them. Let's talk in a courageous way about lifting people up, rather than tearing others down. Speak out for what is right. And good. And for those who think their voices don't matter anymore.

Today's political toxins could very well infect races down the ballot, and our elections for years to come. We can't afford that – or accept that. Because it's not just about who wins one race; it's also about whom he or she places in other positions of power.

Our member companies see this when regulations are handed down. We see it when officials listen to our concerns – or when those concerns fall on deaf ears. We see it when judges misinterpret the law. Our employees and families—their paychecks, their healthcare, their cost of living, their way of life...all of that is affected.

Even in my own family, we've seen how liberty and opportunity aren't to be taken for granted. Some of you know the story of our son, Jacob, who we welcomed into our lives last summer.

After the court acknowledged our parental rights, a new judge reopened the issue on his own and we've been spending our son's entire lifetime fighting in court to keep him as part of our family.

We still don't know what comes next. We know we'll make it through, due in no small part to the positive energy and prayers of so many of our friends. But what about other families...who face all sorts of challenges...who wonder if the system is stacked against them and the American Dream is out of their reach....who wonder if they will be denied justice....who wonder if their fellow Americans think they are lesser simply because they are different?

Divisiveness in this country has real consequences. We can't turn a blind eye and let it fester.

My friends, associations of the future must set the tone. We must take our advocacy to new levels, broaden our focus, and speak directly, and in new ways, to a country that's hungry for bold solutions. To forcefully advocate for that "more perfect union" that leaves no one behind...that advances those Four Pillars of Free Enterprise, Competitiveness, Individual Liberty and Equal Opportunity. Empowered by collaboration and the knowledge that our country needs us now, more than ever.

True leaders bring out the best in all of us.

Thank you so much for honoring me with your time today...and most of all for your unparalleled and inspirational leadership. And thank you again to AssociationTRENDS for this recognition.

