STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS

by
Rod Diridon, Chairperson
Board of Supervisors, County of Santa Clara
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Good morning, welcome and thank you all for being here.

You will note that this is not a declaration of direction from the Chair of the Board. Rather it is a description of the joint hopes and prayers of each of us for our Valley's future.

Santa Clara County with its 1.4 million residents ranks fourth in the state and 11th in the nation in population. Yet the number and types of County services delivered by our $1.4 billion budget and our 14,000 employees places us second only to Los Angeles in the state. That means Santa Clara County government is a big business made more challenging because of our chronic funding problems and great diversity of programs. Unlike most other counties in the state, our services include operating a major, growing transit agency and a large highly acclaimed medical center. With 860,000 jobs in the Valley today soaring to between 1.1 and 1.3 million jobs by the year 2000, it means we have our work cut out for us if we are to maintain our basic quality of life. Let's look at where we've been and the direction this Board is heading.

1988 -- the year of the courtroom -- is over! Whether in the courtroom with the Branson litigation (the "black hole" battlefield over jail facilities), defending against a homeowners' association attempting to block the Guadalupe Corridor Project, or waging war for additional courtrooms through trial court funding, the courtroom took center stage this past year. Sitting before you is a battle fatigued Board of Supervisors, but one gratified for the most part with the accomplishments of that contentious time.

With the opening of the new main jail, our lawsuit with the inmates ended, and the public vote in June confirmed the creation of a new Department of Corrections to run the jails. The court ruled in the County's favor in the Pinehurst Homeowners' Association vs. Guadalupe Corridor lawsuit, and that project is back "on track" and "full steam ahead."

At the beginning of the year and continuing throughout the June budget hearings we remained captive to a Governor and State Legislature over the fate of our desperately needed trial court funding. Finally, thanks to the cooperation of our West Valley cities, this Board will today opt into the trial court funding program allowing us to create and staff 18 new judgeships to help relieve a bottleneck that contributes to jail overcrowding. We have cause for excitement indeed.

We are deeply indebted to Zoe for her leadership in bringing us through the endless maze of litigation, and the success of her lobbying efforts in Sacramento for trial court funding. Unique among us, she actually read and comprehended all the legal documentation which by now is measured in meters if not kilometers.

Let me interject here also a note of sincere appreciation for our outstanding County staff who have contributed so much to making these successes possible. County Executive Sally Reed, County Counsel Don Clark, Assistant Executive John Maltbie, Finance Director Bill Parsons and every one of our fine agency and department heads and staff, thank you for giving us your all. This Board takes enormous pride in the quality of services offered by our employees -- from our library system, Transportation Agency, Public Services Agency, Health and Social Services Departments, all our internal departments, to all the agencies within the criminal justice system and others. I recall Alex Haley's words describing the help he had along the way from his family, and we're all of us part of the County family, "When you see a turtle sitting on a fencepost, you know he had some help getting there." So, from all of us "turtles," Thanks For A Great Job."

Yet while we reflect on the achievements of 1988, we can't ignore our failures. Traffic congestion grows steadily, our air and water are threatened by toxic pollution and our courts and jails labor under crushing loads. Add to that the tragedy of the homeless still aimlessly roaming our streets. Drug abuse continues to threaten the fibre of our community; at risk children and youth flounder in society only to become abusive or addictive adults; the needs of our mentally ill far outweigh the services we can provide; AIDS plagues our community while alienating its victims from adequate treatment and life sustaining services; violent crime inexorably spirals upward, and the list goes on.

We as a Board collectively view these failures of the world we live in as our marching orders for tomorrow.

In the last weeks I've met with the Board members individually and have been gratified with the goals each

has set for the coming year. Let me assure you the public is being well served by my colleagues whose commitment to the citizens of Santa Clara County extends far beyond their mandate. Please refer to the attached list of assignments for Board members to appreciate the level and focus of individual commitment. Let me stress a few.

SUPERVISOR SUSANNE WILSON has relentlessly pursued efforts aimed at protection of our groundwater. As Chair of the Toxics Policy Committee she will continue those efforts to strengthen and enforce local and state laws governing the disposal of hazardous materials.

As Chair of the Valley Medical Center Joint Conference Committee, she has very effectively guided the policy direction of our County hospital. This year promises to be an exciting one for VMC with the opening of its new patient tower in the spring. As in many areas of government, though, tax dollars alone cannot sustain both capital and operational costs of a hospital the size and quality of VMC. Therefore, Susie will be working with Mike Fox who is leading the VMC Foundation drive to garner both public and private capital financing.

SUPERVISOR ZOE LOFGREN, whose leadership on the Measure A drive brought us critical highway improvement dollars, can point with pride to the current construction on Highways 101 and 237. And she's sighing in relief now that construction on Highway 85 begins to move toward the west side of the Valley, after years of discord and delay.

While she's been out building highways, Zoe, too, has been wearing another hat -- that of protector of health and health related services. She has championed the needs of the mentally ill, substance abusers, and the growing number of youngsters in our schools testing positive in tuburculin screening. A particular pursuit of hers this year will be in the area of maternal health and drugs.

A year ago, Zoe appropriately pointed out that for over 40 years the Board of Supervisors of Santa Clara County has been wrangling with the dilemma of providing basic human services with decreasing dollars. That problem persists. Every member of this Board is working in his or her own area to stretch too few dollars to cover too many real human needs. Zoe has been working closely with the County Supervisors Association of California on a stable source of funding for counties. Much as our school systems demanded in the last election a dedicated revenue stream, so too do our counties need continuity and reliability in human services program funding.

But early indications suggest that the state will transfer the $800 million required for education by Proposition 98 out of the meager coffers of local government. We each support more funding for education, but I can't believe the voters intended to provide that support at the expense of already underfunded human service programs.

As a remedy for this kind of threat, Zoe is working with CSAC to develop a ballot measure which will dedicate a portion of the state sales tax to counties. While the measure would not necessarily increase county revenues, the increased stability would dramatically improve budgeting and program efficiency. Our Board enthusiastically supports Zoe in this effort which must be a major priority during the coming year.

Through her devotion to building a new children's shelter, SUPERVISOR DIANNE McKENNA has touched upon a far greater need for the children and youth of our community; the need for centralizing and coordinating services to children. Children enter the service delivery system of the County through a great number of doors -- through the welfare door, the door to public or mental health facilities, through a family crisis which brings them to the door of the Children's Shelter, or perhaps the iron door of the criminal justice system. And where they enter the system affects forever the character of the service provided. Yet most of these youngsters have needs which span many departments.

In an effort to develop a centralized needs assessment and coordination capability, Dianne will be chairing a new Youth Services Joint Conference Committee comprised of individuals representing all facets of the services we now provide to children and youth. I know this Board will give her every support in this critical effort.

And to our new SUPERVISOR RON GONZALES -- a very warm and enthusiastic welcome. Ron's service to the citizens of Sunnyvale is a fine precursor to the kind of representation he will offer citizens of District Three and throughout the County. He brings to this Board a strong background and interest in environmental issues, protection of the baylands, transportation and land use concerns. He will continue and broaden his Role Model Program for Hispanic Youth in our County. Along with Zoe he will be working on a newly formed Jail Operations Joint Conference Committee. I suspect that being the lucky Supervisor with the most jails in his district, Ron will quickly become our resident expert on jails.

Again, Ron, welcome to the Board. We all look forward to working with you.

Now let me introduce the final primary objective for the coming year. The time has come to add a new dimension to serving our constituents. Our problems have spilled over city and county boundaries. Many solutions must be found regionally.

The term "regional government" is anathema to most, and I concur. We need to have roots in our communities, both city and county. We need that local perspective, a local sense of self, of pride and of community. Without these qualities I suspect we would become an amorphous nonentity with neither interest nor involvement in our governmental processes. And having served 17 years in public office, I know it is citizen involvement which ultimately leads us to lasting solutions.

Yet our major problems such as air pollution, transportation, housing, the vitality of our economy, and even drug related crime have transgressed city and county boundaries. The time is now to look outside ourselves. The citizens of South San Jose, Campbell and Los Gatos are helpless in controlling the life threatening air pollution which drifts down from San Francisco-bound Bayshore Freeway traffic and lodges in our mountain rimmed basin. Our Milpitas, Palo Alto, Campbell and East San Jose residents, like all others in our valley, must inch their way to work daily on overcrowded freeways and expressways. This congestion threatens the economic viability of Silicon Valley and is exacerbated by out-of-county commuters unable to find affordable housing near our jobs. And drugs imported or manufactured in the meanest districts of our region cause crime, overcrowded jails and enormous human suffering as those drugs are sold in our neighborhood schools.

Truly these current trends are life threatening to both our citizens and our economy. And, although we try, they cannot be changed by governmental or private sector action in our Valley alone.

With luck and "if the creek don't rise," I will be selected the next chair of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, and in that capacity as well as chair of this Board, I have called for a regional leadership summit to be called BAY VISION 2020. This one-year effort guided by both government and private sector leaders will first identify what we want the region to be like in the year 2020. And second, it will define the public and private steps which must be taken now to reach our longterm goals.

Supervisor Wilson who chairs the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and Rohnert Park Mayor Warren Hopkins, who presides over the Association of Bay Area Governments, have agreed to co-convene the effort.

In addition, the presidents of the region's nine county Boards of Supervisors and mayors of the area's three largest cities have been invited to be co-conveners. Most have already indicated cooperation and support. The conveners will appoint a broad based and balanced blue ribbon commission of top private sector leaders to help identify regional problems, their interrelation throughout the area and to develop a specific blueprint for solutions. Local jurisdictions, the private sector, and the regional, state and federal governments will be encouraged to to review and implement the strategies recommended.

BAY VISION 2020 will focus on regional problems and make specific mitigation recommendations. A tall order to be sure. But the recent Los Angeles 2000 effort described in the attached "National Journal" article by Neal Peirce has given us a blueprint for the process. Make no mistake . . . cooperative regional goal setting and problem solving, done very publicly, is the only way to guarantee our longterm economic and environmental viability!

No speech of mine would be complete without at least a modest reference to the issue which most stirs my heart -- transportation. The Transit District Board will be grappling with issues surrounding our buses and the Guadalupe, Fremont/South Bay and the Vasona Corridor projects along with the Caltrain extensions. But with the Board's consent and encouragement from the Santa Cruz County Board leadership I'm reactivating the long dormant "Santa Cruz/Santa Clara Counties Suntan Special Committee." This joint Committee between our two Boards will meet informally at first to consider general concept proposals designed to reduce congestion and improve safety over the hill to Santa Cruz. Now that's a regional problem in another direction and a real challenge.

Strictly on the home front, I am proud to announce the commissioning of a second history book on Santa Clara County. Windsor Publications, whose first book on the history of the County is still returning royalties to the coffers of the Historical Heritage Commission, has proposed a second book which will explore the emergence of our county as "Silicon Valley." The Commission has enthusiastically endorsed the publication and a contract will be before the Board at our next meeting.

Given the ambitious backdrop of goals of this Board, the year ahead holds great promise. It holds promise, too, as a time of transition, a time for team building and to put behind us the battles of the last few years. I am hopeful that the employees of Santa Clara County will know how highly we value them as individual components of this organization and for their commitment to the people of our County -- you are our greatest asset; and finally, I am hopeful that with the encouragement and involvement of the citizens of Santa Clara County we will look back to the year 1989 with pride and a worthy checklist of achievements.

Thank you.