



**Healthy Economy, Healthy Bodies, Healthy Environment
State of the County 2010
By Board President Ken Yeager**

Thank you for being here today and joining me in kicking off a new year of hope and potential.

Foremost on the minds of our residents is the economy. Unemployment in Santa Clara County is a staggering 11.7%, meaning approximately 100,000 people are unemployed. I personally know many people who are currently looking for work, and I'm sure all of you can say the same. Fortunately, Santa Clara County government is playing a major role in our economic recovery, as well as providing aid to people hit hardest by the downturn.

The county's budget is about \$4 billion—which is more than four U.S. states. As the county's second largest employer, we employ over 15,000 full time people, and have contracts with hundreds of community-based organizations. In addition, our human services expenditures generate a dollar and thirty-two cents of economic activity for every dollar spent because beneficiaries put that money immediately back into the economy.

But there are things we can do to foster a better local economy. One issue that I've championed is strengthening our local preference policies. Given these economic times, it makes sense to ensure that the vast purchasing power of the County helps our local economy as much as possible. One of my top priorities as Board President will be to ensure that more of our tax dollars return to keep good local jobs intact. **We can do this by passing a stronger local preference policy.**

Furthermore, we can do our part to improve the region's economic vitality by facilitating investment in infrastructure needs. The County is currently playing a significant role in creating high quality construction jobs with its support of local highway projects. Supervisor Cortese and I serve on the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, where we were recently successful in securing \$32 million to rebuild the 880/280/Stevens Creek interchange and additional millions to improve the 101/Capitol/Tully corridor.

These projects will not only help get commuters to work, but they will also generate family-supporting jobs in the construction industry. Considering the multiplier effect of transportation investments, the MTC funding for 880/280 alone will translate into a \$63 million-dollar boost to the Santa Clara County economy.

Other large scale transportation infrastructure projects remain on target to stimulate the economy and provide good jobs for local residents. BART to Silicon Valley recently received crucial federal approval needed to bring the project one step closer to construction. By 2018, we will

finally be able to ride BART to and from the South Bay. I will continue to lobby for funding from MTC and from the federal government. Supervisors Kniss, Gage and Shirakawa, as the Board's representatives to VTA, will continue their advocacy as well.

Other county construction projects are continuing. From the seismic retrofit work occurring on the Valley Medical Center campus, to the future downtown San Jose clinic, our County is finding ways to pump money into the economy while addressing crucial public needs.

We could also benefit from partnerships with the City of San Jose in regards to the former City Hall property. I would like the County to investigate the acquisition of the Old City Hall. Ultimately, the County will save money by having more employees located on one campus. We will be relying on Supervisor Shirakawa to help direct these projects since they are in his district, along with providing guidance to planning the fairgrounds property.

During the continuing foreclosure crisis, the County, in conjunction with the City of San Jose, was able to utilize American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, or ARRA, funds to help keep residents in their homes. Combined, our two agencies funneled nearly \$5 million to local nonprofits to provide rental assistance, housing counseling, legal services, and credit repair services.

Supervisor Gage led the effort on some of these initiatives when he was chair of the Housing Trust. He stepped down from the position a year ago, at which time I was voted chair. I hope to continue his legacy of bold leadership to assist people to be housed, to purchase their homes, and to remain in them. Recently, with the help of Congressman Honda, the Housing Trust in conjunction with the City of San Jose, was awarded \$25 million to ease our foreclosure problems.

Equally important, the County is providing many services to the unemployed in this difficult period, such as CalWORKs, Food Stamps, and Medi-Cal eligibility. Valley Medical Center and our County and community clinics provide a medical safety net for our residents.

The In-Home Supportive Services program makes it possible for the elderly and disabled to remain in their homes rather than move to an institution, which allows family members to go to work while creating jobs for caretakers.

However, the County cannot do all of this alone. We need the assistance of the Obama Administration. ARRA funding has helped the County to maintain the level of its workforce and put more people to work. Last year, the County received more than \$41 million. We are on track to receive \$86 million this year and \$32 million next year.

Simultaneously, the County must do more outreach to the industries driving Silicon Valley, so that we can understand more fully and address more proactively what they need to stay here, grow here and employ residents here.

Let me now turn to health issues. I would like to thank Supervisor Kniss for all the work she has done in this area, particularly with passing our local menu-labeling ordinance.

This year, let's renew our personal commitment to health by embracing the challenge set forth by my friend, Dr. Wally Bortz. He wrote a great book that I read several years ago which served as a wake up call to me. It's titled, "Dare to be 100." What's so wonderful about the book is that it provides an offer that no one can refuse. Who doesn't want to live a long, vital life, to be able to see grandchildren grow up, to enjoy retirement, to remain productive and give back to society?

As a way to inspire people, we are providing 50 free copies of "Dare to be 100" to people after the speech. They will be available from Dr. Bortz in the lobby along with other information to stay healthy and live longer.

As a county, we must focus more attention on health, wellness and well-being. To accomplish this, the County must lead by example with its own employees.

To decrease rates of chronic illnesses, we need to craft innovative strategies that reduce medical costs without compromising benefit levels. Projections show that our County will spend more than \$188 million in medical benefits for Fiscal Year 2010 alone. Therefore, I will present a referral to my colleagues that will request staff to work with our represented unions to examine ways to implement best practices in the field of employee wellness.

In order to improve prevention throughout Santa Clara County, we must pursue multiple strategies that address both the root causes of chronic disease and create incentives for families to live healthier lives. Therefore, I will present a referral to create a Council on Health that will focus on prevention and healthier living.

This Council will be comprised of civic, business, education, labor, health, and non-profit leaders appointed by the Board of Supervisors. It will be charged with developing proposals that will transform Santa Clara County into a place where all residents have the opportunity to lead a healthier lifestyle that will reduce chronic diseases, increase vitality, and prolong life--making us one of the healthiest counties in the nation.

We all know that one of the best ways to improve our health is to stop smoking. Cigarette smoking is the leading preventable cause of death in our nation. As a former smoker, I have a personal commitment to help people who smoke to quit, and an even stronger drive to prevent people—particularly teenagers—from starting to smoke to begin with.

One strategy that will create additional revenues to curtail smoking is to require annual licensing of retail tobacco sales outlets in unincorporated areas. This would increase funding for the Sheriff's Office to enforce compliance laws, including the prohibition of sales to youth.

Furthermore, I would like the County to consider an ordinance to ban smoking in apartment buildings and in county parks, and to prohibit pharmacies from selling cigarettes. I will be submitting a referral to strengthen our anti-smoking policies.

One issue we must address is the rate of obesity within our community and the related rise in the incidence of chronic disease. Almost 1 in 3 children in Santa Clara County are overweight or obese by age 5. More than half of adults are either overweight or obese.

Growing rates of obesity put more of our residents at risk for chronic diseases and for increased mortality. According to a recent study, the number of Americans with diabetes will double in the next twenty-five years.

As a start, I will be submitting a referral that outlines new standards for food served at our County-sponsored meetings and events. I will also work to have the County Building become a drop-off spot for vegetable and fruit boxes supplied by local agriculture.

The County can also examine new approaches to improving our community's built environment so that all neighborhoods have equal access to nutritious foods and opportunities for exercise. We need better data that is specific to cities and neighborhoods to better understand the health of our communities so we can better focus our resources.

We must develop proposals that tackle the current health inequities that exist and create a plan that will expand access to healthy food options in areas that have high rates of poverty and poor nutrition. I will support the County's participation in a regional food system planning process that will develop recommendations aimed at increasing access to locally grown produce.

In addition to tackling prevention issues related to the built environment, we must also continue to increase access to preventive health services.

The continued rise in sexually transmitted infections concerns me a great deal. Specifically, we must do more to stop women from being infected with HPV. This can be done by vaccinating young women before they become sexually active, thereby preventing serious and life-threatening diseases later in life.

The same with HIV/AIDS. We have long known how to prevent and detect HIV infections early. Yet, in our County, prevention dollars have eroded. Therefore, we should restore funding for HIV/AIDS services, particularly in the areas of prevention, screening, and early detection.

Over the last five years, the Public Health Department has been cut by nearly \$21 million, with the loss of nearly 180 employees. The Department of Alcohol and Drug Services has been cut by nearly \$4 million with the loss of more than 30 employees. As one of my policy initiatives, I will strengthen the County's role in public health advocacy and drug and alcohol prevention and treatment.

We can begin to rebuild these programs with the savings generated in administrative services from the shift of the Public Health and Drug and Alcohol Departments to the County Executive's Office. I will bring a referral to my colleagues that will direct the County Executive to add \$5 million back to programs in Public Health and \$3 million to the Department of Alcohol and Drug Services.

Of course, we shouldn't focus entirely on physical health and ignore environmental health. The two go hand-in-hand, which is why, as Board President, I will focus on environmental issues as well.

I am proud to serve along with Supervisor Kniss on the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, and was honored to be appointed by Governor Schwarzenegger to the California Air Resources Board. Serving on both agencies, I have been able to bring our County's perspective to important environmental issues.

The Board of Supervisors adopted the Environmental Stewardship goals that Supervisor Cortese and I put forth. These goals, along with many other comprehensive environmental initiatives, serve to make the County a leader in sustainability efforts.

We are working to move toward zero waste both in our operations and for our unincorporated residents. As part of that, I will bring forward a referral to ensure that County-sponsored events are zero-waste events.

I am excited that the Board will have the opportunity to consider a ban on plastic bags once our year-long education period is over. When that timeframe is complete, I will bring an ordinance forward to ban single-use plastic bags in the County's unincorporated areas.

Composting is critical to diverting waste from our landfills. I am pleased that our County facilities will begin composting on a larger scale.

We have also improved our green building policies for new residential construction and County facilities. This spring we will consider new green building policies for multi-family and commercial buildings.

What we have been doing with the Habitat Conservation Plan and the Williamson Act is very important in protecting open space. Special thanks to Supervisor Gage for his work to keep agriculture viable in Santa Clara County.

Currently, staff is looking at the possibility of installing solar panels at various facilities throughout the County, and implementing a regional power purchase agreement that will be the largest power purchase by local government in the United States when it is completed.

In addition, the County is starting its own energy efficiency retrofit program. This will help homeowners make energy efficient and renewable energy improvements to their homes while reducing their utility bills.

In order to ensure that the County is a leader in this field, my next initiative is to work with the County Executive and my Board colleagues to create an Office of Sustainability. Although it is difficult to do this with our current budget, I believe it will help us to save money in the long run. It will also ensure we meet our many local, regional and federal mandates.

Here is my vision for Santa Clara County and the green economy: First, zero-emission vehicles are manufactured in Silicon Valley, which will provide thousands of jobs. Second, these cars are purchased by county employees and the county itself. Third, at the County Government Center, we have solar panels in our parking lots and on top of our buildings—panels manufactured locally and installed by workers trained in solar installation at San Jose City College. Fourth,

connected to these solar panels are recharging stations, so batteries are charged by renewable energy, not from the grid which may include non-renewable sources. This technology would come from a Silicon Valley start-up.

As a first step, I will propose that the Government Center and our surrounding facilities use 100% renewable energy.

To successfully administer all of the elements of County government, transparent decision-making by elected officials is important to maintain the public's trust. It may surprise people that the Board meetings are not televised or webcast. I feel it is important that our meetings are at least webcast so they are as open and accessible as possible. That led me to introduce a policy last year to fund the necessary technology. So, beginning today, the proceedings of this chamber are being broadcast live on the internet and archived for viewing.

Accessible government also is hampered by the lack of parking. Who hasn't been frustrated by parking here at 70 West Hedding? Yes, the County has a parking structure several blocks away, but that is often inconvenient for people with limited mobility or who just need to park and enter the building for a brief period of time.

To me, nothing says "public not wanted" like having no public parking available. Because we need to offer some short-term on-site parking for the public, I will be coming forth with a proposal to work with various departments to make more public parking available.

Santa Clara County comes up short in many of the allocations and decisions being made by our regional government bodies. Other communities have fared much better when it comes to funding. Part of this is due to unequal representation on these bodies. Santa Clara County is home to one quarter of the Bay Area's population, yet we do not have a quarter of the representation on these decision-making bodies. This is a grave injustice, economically and ethically. Working closely with Supervisor Cortese, we will bring forth legislation that will guarantee that residents of Santa Clara County have equitable representation on the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, which is the leading agency in allocating transportation dollars.

Finally, if I had to make just one overall comment about the state of the County, it is that despite all the economic troubles we face, I believe we are fundamentally strong and that we are in a better position to weather the fiscal storm than almost any other place in America. There is an implicit understanding that all of us working together can achieve more than we can by working alone, and that we can be an example to others of how people of differing backgrounds, cultures, genders, religions, and sexual orientation can get along in harmony. We have made much progress in this regard, of which all of us should be justifiably proud.

That brings me to an historic event of personal importance to me. It concerns three former supervisors who are here today—Supervisor Susie Wilson, Supervisor, then Senator, Dan McCorquodale, and Supervisor Rod Diridon. It was August 6, 1979—31 years ago—when I was a 26-year-old staffer for Supervisor Wilson. That morning the Board was hearing an ordinance to make it illegal to discriminate against gays and lesbians in housing and employment.

Although there were a number of people speaking in favor of the ordinance, I remember the bus loads of people brought by the opposition. I listened in my office as speaker after speaker made derogatory statements about gays and lesbians and how they deserved no protections under the law.

It is never easy to stand your ground in front of a crowd of angry people who hold positions that are different from your own, but these courageous supervisors did just that as they voted for the ordinance. Sitting in my cubicle ten floors up, I—a gay man who wasn't out to my friends or family—felt tremendous pride toward my government representatives. It showed me that Santa Clara County was a place where I could live and be accepted for who I am. And if I was denied a job or housing because I was gay, then I would have legal recourse.

Although the ordinance was passed by the Board, unfortunately opponents gathered enough signatures to place it on the 1980 ballot, just as they did with a similar ordinance for the City of San Jose. Both went down in defeat—by almost a four to one margin.

But much has changed in thirty years, especially when it comes to attitudes towards the LGBT community. While Proposition 8—the initiative to deny gays and lesbians the right to marry—was passed by California voters, in Santa Clara County it failed by 53% of the vote. Our Board of Supervisors, of which I was a member, voted to oppose the measure.

And it is here, in these same chambers, that I stand before you as the first openly gay person elected to the Board of Supervisors and who, elected by his colleagues to serve as Board President, is able to give this State of the County address.

Thank you for joining me today and best wishes for the New Year.

Summary of 2010 Initiatives

- Pass a stronger local preference policy.
- Implement best practices in the field of employee wellness.
- Create a Council on Health.
- Strengthen anti-smoking laws.
- Convene a summit to improve anti-smoking campaigns.
- Establish food standards for County-sponsored meetings and events.
- Add funds back to Public Health and Drug and Alcohol Prevention Programs.
- Ensure County-sponsored events are zero-waste events.
- Ban single-use plastic bags in the unincorporated areas.
- Create an Office of Sustainability.
- Mandate that Government Center use 100% renewable energy.
- Make more public parking available.
- Support equitable representation on MTC.