

The key priorities are stopping crime, building partnerships, and health care and welfare solutions

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The county as community

Editor's note: This is a condensed version of the State of the County speech delivered by Jim Beall Tuesday evening, when he took over as chair of the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors.

By JIM BEALL

TONIGHT represents a new beginning for Santa Clara County. And as we begin, we have much to be proud of.

Whether in technology or innovative public policy, Santa Clara County is pushing the envelope. We are literally redefining the cutting edge.

In 1997, our challenge will be to be even more innovative and creative. We have to ensure prosperity and work opportunities are available to every family in Santa Clara County.

I see two linked years emerging

The first is partnership: With the community, with local, state and federal government leaders, and with businesses.

The second theme is prevention. Prevention activities not only improve the quality of life, but are the morally and fiscally sound way to govern.

What I'd like to do here is touch on five priorities for the county this year:

The first is transportation, the key to our continued economic success. Our transportation systems must run as efficiently and quickly as the microprocessors that we design for the world.

Twelve years ago, voters entrusted us with more than \$1.2 billion for transportation projects. I am proud that we brought those projects in on time and on budget.

With the passage of Measure B, the county has additional financial resources in our general fund. We have authorized bonds to be improvements along Highway 87, fix potholes and plan for a connection to BART service.

Another key priority is crime prevention. People deserve to feel safe. The continued rise of violence, especially among young people, is very disturbing.

Stopping crime and violence requires a collaborative approach by law enforce-

ment to develop a community action plan for violence prevention. This means including Santa Clara County residents in every aspect of the plan.

This plan must include school and community-based efforts to reduce and prevent violence, efforts to combat gun violence, and preventing workplace violence.

A third priority are public/private partnerships for a healthy Santa Clara Valley.

Today 200,000 hard-working, honest county residents are without health insurance. We usually see them when they become seriously ill and come to the county hospital, a cost of \$69 million to the county last year.

Before we have to take the county budget to the fiscal ER, we need to meet the challenge of providing health care to all of our community. Every employer needs to offer basic health insurance to its workers.

I will convene, not a "round" but "operating" table of businesses, hospitals, nonprofits and local government leaders to develop some options.

Another key priority will be welfare. This is perhaps our biggest challenge. How do we cope with cuts in funding for poor families, the elderly and disabled in a practical and compassionate way?

As usual, Santa Clara is a step ahead of other counties in developing solutions. Starting a year ago, a cross section of our community came together to develop the Employment Support Initiative.

We will also launch a new, expanded Housing Trust to help meet the need for affordable housing.

As I listened to Gov. Pete Wilson's State

The first "T" is transportation funding. The state budget lacks adequate funding to ensure that people can get to their jobs.

The second "T" is training. The governor's budget doesn't begin to fund job training needs. Today we have a waiting list of 10,000 people on welfare who want job training and want to go back to work. Yet the governor's budget only provides funding to train 1,500 additional people. This makes no sense.

The third "T" is toddler and child care. Under the governor's budget, we're at least \$10 million short of what's needed.

I am pleased that the governor doesn't want to eliminate benefits to legal immigrants. However, the budget will cut home support services to 1,500 elderly and disabled people in our county — services that let them remain in their own homes instead of warehousing them in expensive nursing homes.

What does it say about our values if we cut lifeline services to them? Well, we're not that kind of community.

The state has to fund us to do a good job with transportation, training and toddler and child care. I ask each of you to work with me to lobby the Legislature on these issues.

This year we'll work hard to bring the county to the people. I will recommend that we hold some board meetings at night and others in the neighborhoods. I am also pleased that board agendas and materials will soon be available free on the Internet.

Now, providing good services is only part of the equation. We must maintain our good credit and our fiscal solvency.

This means meeting our obligations to pay for Retiree Health and Workers Compensation, rather than going into debt as we have in the past. When I was first elected two years ago, this was one of the first projects Blanca Alvarado and I took on, and I am pleased that we have reduced overhead despite shrinking budgets. By keeping our financial house in order, we can increase our bond ratings and retain the trust of taxpayers.

At the beginning of my presentation, I mentioned that Santa Clara County was on the cutting edge of the world. I want to leave us with a thought on why we are so phenomenally successful. Our secret is because we work hard. Really hard.

I challenge the fine men and women who work with us in the county to work harder than the people we serve, to work longer than those in Sacramento and

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of the State speech last week and reviewed the state budget, I became increasingly concerned about how we will ensure that the elderly, children and the disabled are protected. I am concerned about how we will help adults prepare to return to the workforce.

I give the governor credit for committing to give counties the flexibility to design welfare to work programs that will fit



Jim Beall