

2006 STATE OF THE COUNTY
Supervisor Jim Beall, Chair
Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors
January 25, 2006

Congressman Mike Honda, thank you for your kind introduction. We are grateful for your excellent work in Washington representing the people of Santa Clara County.

Thank you for being here this evening. It is an honor to be with so many dedicated people; each one of you representing the compassion and commitment of the people we serve.

Here at work, out in the community, and in my home, I am surrounded by amazing people. One person, in particular, motivates me each and every day. Let me introduce the love of my life, and my best friend, Pat Beall.

Two other important people are here tonight - my fun and loving parents - Shirley and Jim Beall. Thank you for being here and sharing this moment in our precious lives.

The state of our county is vibrant and strong. This is clear because we are out on the front lines, doing real work, getting things done. Thanks to the public workers of Santa Clara County - the deputies, the nurses, the social workers and park rangers. We have been doing more with less. Thank you for working so hard.

Let us recognize the capable people appointed by the Board of Supervisors. County Executive Pete Kutas, County Counsel Ann Ravel, Management Auditor Roger Mialocq, Clerk of the Board Phyllis Perez, Chief of Correction Ed Flores, Public Defender Mary Greenwood, Director of Child Support Services Ralph Miller, and everyone who represents the people on our Boards and Commissions. Thank you.

My colleagues on the Board of Supervisors are impressive people. We are united together in our commitment to our community needs. We each represent over 350,000 residents in 15 cities and our county's unincorporated area. We work hard together, building a community for all.

It is an honor to serve with Supervisor Blanca Alvarado, Supervisor Don Gage, Supervisor Liz Kniss and Supervisor Pete McHugh. We have accomplished so much together.

Together we have initiated health insurance programs for children and implemented juvenile detention reform. We established an Office of Affordable Housing. We have kept our fiscal ship afloat, and clung to essential services, as the state and federal government keep withdrawing from their responsibilities.

We maintain a health and hospital system that will be providing comprehensive health care for 200,000 county residents this year. Our

hospital and clinics welcome all residents with open arms regardless of their ability to pay. We take responsibility and seek additional funds for a Public Health Department capable of protecting us all.

Our County budget reflects our values and priorities. We will craft another balanced budget for this next fiscal year wisely using innovative budget solutions to alleviate the impact of a projected \$111 million deficit on essential services.

In the past three years, we have reduced our budget by \$273 million. Like any good business operation, we are relieved to see some signs of economic recovery. We hope this turnaround trend continues for our people and our economy.

Our strength has come from our collective hearts. We all benefit when we reach out and help the most vulnerable in our community. We are the life-line for people and families. This is our mission. This is our calling. We are destined to be here, leading the way, building a community for all.

When I was young, I would hike up Mount Umunum -- one of the sacred mountains of our native people -- the Ohlone Indians. I would sit quietly, looking out over this awesome "Valley of Hearts Delight." Mount Umunum, the holy mountain of the Hummingbirds, can still teach us so much today.

Today, we look out over a new valley. A valley full of people with compassionate hearts, like the blossoms on the fruit trees before. We are on this noble mission together --caring for our people and our gorgeous land.

Let us do so with bold goals and new initiatives together, building a community for all. Our path is clear. We must provide hope and alternatives for people, and their families, in their desperate time of need. Our good work must continue to save human lives.

Today, over 130,000 county residents are subsisting in financial despair -- living below the federal poverty line. Just imagine, living in poverty, with \$19,350 or less per year for a family of four.

Over 400,000 county residents will suffer from "food insecurity" this year. This means that at some time this year they will not know how, or where, to get their next meal. We must respond.

We have many challenges. Drug and alcohol addiction is the number one health crisis of our time. Over 65 percent of the costs in our criminal justice and child welfare system are caused by substance abuse. We know that addiction is a disease. We also know that substance abuse treatment is effective. No one who suffers from the disease of addiction should ever feel alone.

We estimate that eight percent of the population survives with some mental health impairment that impacts their lives. Many have more

severe issues that need our care. The recent survey of our homeless population identifies this county as the homeless capital of Northern California. Those who thought another county had this distinction are simply wrong. The issues of mental health, substance addiction and homelessness are related.

The excellent work of our mental health department and treatment programs help people find their way. And we are working hard to prioritize their most essential and immediate need – decent housing.

Another challenge is the overcrowding in our county jails. Tonight, we have 4,500 men and women in custody. The majority of our inmates desperately need help with their substance abuse, mental health and anger management issues. For non-violent offenders in our custody, is our moral duty to introduce hope and alternatives and show them a way home.

In addition, we must uphold the highest ethical standards at every level of our government operations. We should immediately establish an Ethics Task Force of Board members and move forward with a stronger ethics and lobbying ordinance this year.

One of the greatest achievements in Santa Clara County is our Children's Health Initiative. In five short years, over 100,000 uninsured children have been signed up with some form of health insurance coverage. We have made history, by being the first in the nation, to guarantee children have access to good health care by finding them

health insurance. This is a great example of how we can come together, building a community for all.

This brings us to our first initiative. It is time we move forward with another bold new goal as we did when we introduced the Children's Health Initiative five years ago. Tonight, we call on all community and business leaders, health care experts and every stakeholder to once again come together in a public-private partnership to help qualify the uninsured residents of this county with a health care plan.

We have done it for over 100,000 children. It is time we initiate the process of finding health insurance for the 200,000 uninsured adults in this county.

We must not sit quietly as the expense of treating the uninsured, often late in their diagnosis, cost human lives and drains our County's financial resources. We must not stand idly by as people suffer and our state and federal governments fail to enact universal health care legislation.

This is the issue of our time. People desperately need health insurance. We must achieve health care for all.

We are facing another terrible crisis. It concerns the foster youth of our community. These kids are traumatized when young and society traumatizes them again when they turn 18.

We have been hearing from our older foster youth. We need to listen. Instead of finding a job, looking forward to college or making future plans, many are forced to search for the next couch to sleep on or for a mattress in a homeless shelter.

The foster care system in our society is broken. Federal and state policies have been nothing less than evil to these kids. The foster care system must be dismantled and rebuilt.

In the meantime, let's discuss what we can do now. We must empower these young adults as they transition out of the foster care system. We must champion their issues, keep listening to them, and help them find jobs and educational opportunities.

A few of these young people have overcome tough obstacles. Let us take a moment and acknowledge what success looks like.

Tonight, we honor four young adults who emancipated from the foster care system and now work for the County. Will they please stand as I call their names -- Fabiola Garcia, Lonzo Johnson, Pele Mallory and Virginia Rivera.

We recognize you tonight for being strong leaders in our workforce despite the obstacles you have faced. You inspire us. We want to celebrate your success downstairs this evening. You are shining examples of how we can all succeed together.

Yesterday, the Board of Supervisors unanimously voted to convene a Work Group to address the employment needs of our emancipating foster youth. We will be working with our community partners including the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, Working Partnership USA, the Silicon Valley Children's Fund, the Volunteer Center of Silicon Valley and the Santa Clara County Foster Parent Association. Our objective is to prepare these young people for the work force and find them jobs.

Another one of our initiatives involves our long-term commitment to the environment. We must protect nature and open space. We are so blessed to share these 840 thousand acres of land together.

To protect our environment, we should adopt a comprehensive Viewshed Protection Policy by this summer. This will protect our beautiful hillsides and ridge tops from development. It will keep our scenic vistas for all to enjoy.

We also call attention to the fact that this Board of Supervisors has placed the "Parks Charter Renewal" on the ballot in June. The renewal of the Parks Charter is critical to the future of our County Parks system. It keeps a small portion of our budget dedicated to protecting our environment. Again, we have an opportunity to provide the Parks Department with resources for additional land acquisition and ongoing land maintenance.

Tonight, let us move forward with great vision. Let us never give up hope for ourselves or for any human being residing in our great county.

Let us focus our efforts and help our 200,000 uninsured residents, our emancipating foster youth, and the hundreds of thousands of people in need.

The hands of human need are close -- not far. They are the hands of people reaching out for help. We must reach back, grasp them with our hands, and embrace them with our compassion, to help them survive through hard times.

This is our calling. This brings us together. There should be no religious, business or community leader who is absent from our team. We come together because of the feelings in our hearts and the passion in our souls. We come together because it is morally and fiscally correct to address the issues of poverty and hunger and human need.

Let our hearts blossom and brighten up lives in this diverse and gorgeous "Valley of Hearts Delight." Let us proceed -- building a community for all.

Thank you so much for being here. And thank you for everything you will do to help make this an exciting and successful year for the people of Santa Clara County.