

OAKLAND COUNTY EXECUTIVE L. BROOKS PATTERSON
STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS
FEBRUARY 18, 1999

Thank you, Mary Margaret, and good evening ladies and gentlemen.

It was Theodore Roosevelt who said, "The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it."

Applying Teddy Roosevelt's standard, I might just pass muster as a good Executive. For I have indeed picked - and Oakland County is indeed blessed - with an array of bright, talented, and creative men and women who, as a team, have guided Oakland County's fortunes these past six years.

My team of Directors, working hand in hand with the County Board and other elected officials, have reduced costs, streamlined government, introduced cutting edge technology, steadily rolled back taxes, privatized parts of government where it made sense, and have constantly fought to create an environment where business could invest and flourish. And the end result? The attainment of a goal so rare that only a score of counties in the United States can boast a similar achievement: a AAA bond rating bestowed upon Oakland County by Wall Street this past July.

The assessment of Oakland County by the independent experts on Wall Street borders on hyperbole. For example, Angela Connelly, a Vice President and Sr. Credit Officer from Moody's Investor Services, Inc. was quoted in the press as saying, "Everything about them [Oakland County] is stellar. Their economy is high and there is a lot of growth in their tax base. From my perspective, they are not just better than most counties, they are better than all."

As I report to you on the State of Oakland County tonight, folks, it doesn't get much better than that.

As many of you know, I led a delegation back to Wall Street just last month to maintain and defend the AAA rating we achieved for the first time in 1998. Literally, three days after our return from New York City, confirmation was received that a AAA rating had been once again bestowed upon Oakland County.

Why am I so excited about a AAA rating?

Very simply, from time to time the county, and its municipalities, are required to sell bonds to finance certain projects. These bonds carry an interest rate that we must pay to the bond holder in addition to the principle sum. The higher the bond rating, the lower the interest rate charged to Oakland County and its taxpayers. What's our new rating mean to us?

A couple of months ago we sold a bond issue and were charged an interest rate, not at 6 percent, not at 5 percent, not even at 4 percent, but at 3.89 percent! Further, you should be aware that the municipalities in Oakland County can borrow off of our AAA bond rating which further reduces the cost of government in Oakland County as well.

When you reduce the cost of government as we have in Oakland County, we can afford to reduce the taxes that are imposed to support that government. So last year, I am delighted to report to you, the Oakland County Board of Commissioners, acting upon my recommendation, lowered once again the county tax rate, this time to 4.19 mills...and now Oakland can boast the lowest county tax rate in the State of Michigan!

There's a Goodyear blimp flying overhead right now with a sign that reads, "Oakland County is Open for Business."

What is it about Oakland County that impressed Wall Street? Many things I suspect, but certainly they were impressed by the value of our new construction permits issued throughout the county in 1998. The total exceeded \$1.6 billion, following on the heels of \$1.8 billion in new construction permits for both 1996 and 1997.

Wall Street nodded approvingly when they saw more than 7,000 single and multi-residential family units were constructed last year with a combined value of over \$961 million. They noted our housing values are already 50 percent higher than the state average, with the average residential sale price in Oakland in 1998 soaring to \$185,000.

Wall Street specifically mentioned that they were “impressed” with the 43 percent increase in the county’s assessed valuation over the last five years. Please keep in mind that the assessed valuation is 50 percent of the market value. And last year alone, 1998, the state equalized value - basically 50 percent of the true value of all the property in Oakland County - increased from \$38.9 billion to a little over \$43 billion, a staggering \$4.1 billion increase in one year! We cannot find another county in America that experienced such phenomenal growth.

During its review, Wall Street didn’t just look at the value of our housing, or the value of our real estate, but looked at income as well. And when compared to more than 3,000 counties in America, only two counties have a higher per capita income than Oakland: New York County and Nassau County, better known as Manhattan and Long Island.

Ladies and gentlemen, amassing this kind of economic strength gives me more than just bragging rights on a night like this. It also affords me the

opportunity to reduce still further the costs of living and working in Oakland County. Within the next six months we plan to refinance 12 separate bond issues involving over \$60 million - sixty million dollars that were sold at a higher interest rate. But now, with our new AAA bond rating, combined with greatly improved market conditions, we can refinance these bonds at 3.89 percent, and the taxpayers will enjoy a \$28 million interest savings over the next twenty years.

In addition to the strength of Oakland County's economic base, there are other factors that caught the attention of Wall Street and perhaps will catch your eye tonight. Given the time constraints, I would like to cover three such areas with you in my State of the County Address: First, Oakland County's increased application and utilization of technology; secondly, our fiscal management practices which Wall Street describes as "sound and prudent." And, finally, the significant pro-business initiatives we have launched to help create a favorable business climate in Oakland County.

TECHNOLOGY

First, the issue of successfully inculcating technology into the daily affairs of Oakland County business. Oakland County's investment in technology has been relentless, focused and effective. Oakland County's investment in technology separates us from the competition. In 1993, when I was first elected County

Executive, we had a scant 200 p.c.'s in the workplace of more than 4,000 employees. Today we have 3,000 p.c.'s and a skilled workforce exposed to over 20,000 hours of skill training each year. But it's more than just p.c. deployment.

You may recall in my State of the County Address in 1997, I announced my commitment to "plant Oakland County's flag deeper in the high-tech arena." Well, we have planted that flag, and Wall Street was impressed with our efforts.

Clearly, both Moody's and Standard & Poor's were bullish about our program called "Enhanced Access," a term we developed to describe the ability of our citizens to access government records from remote locations. We have a treasure trove of data stored in various county agencies. It is our goal to convert as much of that information as possible into a retrievable electronic format so that anyone with a computer can access our information, day or night, from the convenience of their home or office. The data that can be made available to the public is almost limitless: everything from property tax records, information on civil lawsuits, land files, and so forth.

Enhanced Access has been time consuming, laborious, and expensive. We've even had legislation enacted in Lansing to make Enhanced Access a reality, and I want to thank our friends in the legislature for their swift response to this complicated issue.

And I'm delighted to inform you tonight that the first program that demonstrates the potential of Enhanced Access came on line just a few weeks ago, February 1, 1999. Oakland County became the first county in America to launch the benefits of an Enhanced Access Program that we call MAAP, the Mortgage Application Acceleration Program. This program is designed to make mortgage and home equity loan reviews and approval quicker and easier. The program is a product of a lot of hard work and cooperation between my Department of Management & Budget, the Department of Information Technology, and the Clerk/Register Office, Equalization Department, and the county's cities, townships and villages, as well as partners within the private sector, most notably Comerica Bank and Standard Federal Savings & Loan.

This unique and innovative collaborative partnership has resulted in the creation of a data base of information which banks and lending institutions can now access through the Internet to evaluate property for loan approval.

It works like this: A loan officer, using his computer, can access our property records to begin the loan application process. He can simply point and click and pull up all the relevant information he needs to make the calculation. Available now in an electronic format is such information as the number of rooms in a given house, the square footage, whether the property has a garage, and so

forth. This information, which has not been available before in a computerized format, eliminates in most cases the time consuming and painstaking process of conducting a physical on-site inspection of the property. It also allows a loan officer, from the convenience of his office, to bring up on his computer screen all the comparable homes sold recently in a particular area to assist in determining the merits of the loan application.

Listen to this: instead of the four to six weeks it normally takes to review and evaluate a loan request, it is conceivable to walk into a bank or mortgage office in the morning and walk out that same day with money in hand. The evaluation process will be less expensive as well. The ease of obtaining the necessary information will reduce the evaluation fee from the average \$300 to \$400 to just \$50, with 15 percent funneled back to the local communities where the property is located.

The Mortgage Application Acceleration Program is the first of many applications of Enhanced Access you will see, and we reminded Wall Street that we're the only county in America that has the technology.

Another area where Wall Street was impressed with our efforts to embrace technology in the business affairs of the county was our GIS Program - Geographic Information System. This program, like Enhanced Access, has been a long,

difficult, and expensive effort that I initially announced way back in my State of the County Address in 1995.

You may recall that GIS is a program to create a computerized base map detailing Oakland County's 440,000 parcels of land in a digitized format. This map will replace the 4500 paper maps that have been manually maintained lo these many decades. When the GIS is fully operational later this year, the range information and the levels of utilization that can be made available to the public and to the local units of government will be staggering.

We will be able to track such things as the path of the gypsy moth infestation, and provide accurate information to determine where spraying can be done most effectively. The Drain Office will be able to depict sewer and drain locations; boundaries can be conveniently pinpointed; rights of way delineated. Law enforcement will be able to track crime trends, thus allowing for more efficient allocation of manpower. The Health Department will benefit from GIS by being able to identify sources of illness, such as Legionnaire's and Hepatitis A outbreaks which have occurred in Oakland County in the past couple of years. GIS has quickly become an essential component of the One Stop Shop, integrating a plethora of demographic data with census tract information. In fact, GIS is credited with taking us to the next generation called the "Virtual One Stop Shop."

Y2K

As you might imagine, Wall Street was interested in how we are handling the Y2K problem. In my State of the County address on March 6, 1997, I was already beginning to alert the public about the impact of the year 2000 on our computers. I said then, "It does not affect only Oakland County government, it affects literally every business, governmental unit, school district in the United States - or for that matter in the world - who depend upon computer technology." Since then Oakland County has moved aggressively to adapt our computer systems so that they will be compliant by the year 2000.

We've already exhausted 54,000 man-hours, analyzing over 4,000,000 lines of code. Tough decisions have been made about what systems could in fact be converted and which ones had to be completely replaced. In the final analysis, it often boiled down to the cost of conversion versus the cost of replacement. Utilizing a combination of both approaches, we've been able to keep our cost down to under \$5 million since we initiated our crash program.

In this most critical area, Oakland County has demonstrated its technical acumen and leadership ability. It gives me a great deal of pride tonight to announce that Oakland County will be Y2K compliant by the end of April, 1999. I would like to introduce the leader of our tech forces, John Mahoney, the Director of

Information Technology, and Joe Maletta, his point man on Y2K, and any other members of this extraordinary department who are here tonight - please stand up and be recognized for the truly outstanding job you have done.

This is one instance when I gladly followed Teddy Roosevelt's advice: pick a good man and then have the self-restraint to stay out of his way. (Of course, Mahoney would tell you it's because I can't tell a pentium chip from a potato chip.)

A couple weeks ago, back on Wall Street, I argued that technology was also contributing to an improved quality of life in Oakland County, and I cited the integration of technology into our law enforcement programs. I pointed out that through technology our communities can be made safer.

This argument was never more evident than the report we gave Moody's and Standard & Poor's regarding the sophistication of our CLEMIS consortium. CLEMIS, of course, is the acronym for Courts Law Enforcement Management Information System. Some 45 local police departments and the Sheriff's Department are hooked up to a computerized crime data sharing network, and the technology in this system that has been refined over the years is unparalleled. Fingerprints, mug shots, criminal records can be accessed by officers in patrol cars utilizing on-board data terminals. This past Christmas the largest multi-jurisdictional federal grant ever approved in the history of the Department of Justice

was awarded to Oakland County: a \$17 million grant funded through the COPS MORE program. This grant will help defray the cost of installing a high speed metropolitan area communication network, improve photo imaging systems, lap tops in patrol cars, automatic live scan fingerprint systems, records management, computer aided dispatch, and a state-of-the-art mobile computing system throughout the county.

The generational advances in our 30 year old system and the uniqueness of what CLEMIS has to offer allows me to make a very important announcement tonight regarding a breakthrough in police work in southeast Michigan. I'm delighted to announce that police agencies outside of Oakland County have applied for and will be accepted into our CLEMIS consortium. For the first time the Macomb County Sheriff's Department, the Livingston County Sheriff's Department, the Cities of Warren, Harper Woods and Fraser, and the Township of Plymouth will join us as partners in our state-of-the-art, high-tech crime fighting system. Negotiations are presently underway to add 12 other jurisdictions outside of Oakland County.

This is the first time that data sharing has ever occurred across county boundary lines in southeast Michigan. It represents a significant breakthrough: a truly regional system. Criminals don't recognize Eight Mile or Dequindre as a boundary, crime fighting technology of the 21st century should not either.

Part and parcel to our overall plan to wage a more effective crime fighting effort through technology is the development and enhancement of our emergency 9-1-1 phone system. The county has invested \$3 million in the program to upgrade call taking equipment. With the new technology coming on line in Oakland County, a dispatcher will be able to display the location of a 9-1-1 cell phone call on a computerized screen and then transmit that information to a police officer in his patrol car via a computer, thus pinpointing the location of the cell phone user to within 125 meters - a federal standard within the next two years. There's no question the response time will be improved and lives will be saved.

OAKLAND'S FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

The second area of interest to Wall Street was how Oakland County managed its financial affairs. On this issue, their follow-up report included such phrases as "sound" and "prudent."

As an example of prudent management, we shared with Wall Street the county's preference to acquire and pay for new facilities from operating revenues rather than through the process of bonding and going in debt. While many other government units would be compelled to bond for construction, we are completing our new Medical Examiner's building at a cost of \$10.2 million, funded out of operations. We are in the process of completing the renovation of a new district

court in Troy at a cost of \$5.5 million, also funded out of operations. In 1997 we acquired \$6 million twin administrative office buildings, called Oakland Pointe, as well as constructing a 200 bed medium security facility for \$ 2.3 million, again all funded out of operations.

This show of economic strength impressed Wall Street, and at the same time allowed us to present a balance sheet with minimal debt.

I thought it was important for Wall Street to see what others thought of us. We presented Moody's and Standard & Poor's with copies of awards presented to my Department of Management & Budget Fiscal Services Division last year, including the "Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting;" the popular "Annual Financial Report Award;" and the "Distinguished Budget Presentation Award." These awards, along with numerous National Association of County awards, demonstrated to the satisfaction of Wall Street that under the guidance of our very capable Management & Budget Director Robert Daddow the fortunes of Oakland County are in good hands.

POSITIVE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

A third and final area where Wall Street took a close look at Oakland County's leadership was in our determination to promote a positive business environment in Oakland County where costs of doing business would be kept low,

investment would be encouraged, jobs would be created, and a unique quality of life could be sustained.

I brought Wall Street up to date on one of the initiatives that I announced last year: the effort I have dubbed “Automation Alley.” Facing competition from economic powerhouses such as Silicon Valley in California, Route 128 in Boston, and the Research Park Triangle in North Carolina - all pursuing a limited pool of high-tech talent - Oakland County simply could not afford the luxury of sitting back and waiting for skilled workers to find us. We must aggressively go out and find them, and that is exactly what we are doing. The vehicle for accomplishing this is Automation Alley, an ambitious national marketing strategy. (I acknowledged that Silicon Valley had a significant head start on us; but I also reminded them that it’s the second mouse that gets the cheese.)

In a period of a little under ten months we were able to take this initiative from conception to birth. Like any proud father, I have high hopes that with the nurturing support of family members - the 45 high-tech companies which joined me and became the nucleus of the Automation Alley - we will become one of America’s most recognized and respected high-tech corridors in the United States. With the launching of the Automation Alley Web site and the publication of our new First Class Magazine, phase one of the project was completed on time.

To the extent that we are successful in preparing students for the workplace of tomorrow and attracting highly skilled workers for high-tech companies that employ cutting edge technology, Oakland County will have taken a giant step toward my goal of developing a recession-proof community.

Automation Alley will kick off phase two within the next 30 days. We will increase the membership in the consortium, expand the size of the region, and invite our institutions of higher learning to join us in this exciting effort.

Another area where we are committed is the development and promotion of international trade for Oakland County businesses. For the second year in a row, we sponsored a trade mission to Canada, taking along with us representatives of small and medium sized businesses. Buoyed by the success we enjoyed on the first mission last year, we had high hopes that were in fact realized. Several of our business participants have already entered into joint ventures and strategic alliances with Canadian partners. We plan to return to Toronto next fall and build upon the success we've enjoyed so far.

This year, along with my economic development team, I intend to visit a number of European countries in the fall, this on top of a five-day trip to Israel in May.

One of the most successful pro-business ventures undertaken by my Administration is the highly respected Business Roundtable. The Roundtable is the result of a pledge I made during my campaign in 1992 and was launched in early 1993. Under the able direction of Deputy County Executive Ken Rogers, who at that time was head of Economic Development for the county, the Roundtable, with its 125 members from the private sector, developed 143 recommendations to help Oakland County position itself as a leader among governments that support a pro-business climate. Of the 143 recommendations forwarded to me by the Roundtable, 84 have been implemented to date. With that success still on the minds of the membership, a streamlined Business Roundtable, pared down from the original 12 committees to just six, spent the last couple of years developing an additional 56 recommendations designed to maintain Oakland County's competitive advantage as the millennium approaches.

Finally, in support of our business community, there have been improvements made at the Oakland County International Airport, a topic I speak of every year. Oakland County International is a corporate niche airport, housing over

a thousand private planes, the second busiest airport in Michigan, and ranks among the top 30 of the busiest airports in the world. This past year we put the finishing touches on a \$300,000 noise and land use compatibility study. It puts us in a position to receive in excess of \$20 million in federal funds over the next eight years to make the necessary improvements to become an even better neighbor.

Because of the number of foreign companies in Oakland County and the travel between corporations and their home offices, we have experienced increased international traffic at our airport. A couple years ago, with the support of our local Congressman Joe Knollenberg, we were able to at long last get full-time customs service so business travelers from around the world could clear customs at the convenience of our own local airport. But the recent DaimlerChrysler merger is creating even more international traffic at Oakland County International. DaimlerChrysler is operating four flights weekly between here and Stuttgart, Germany utilizing an air bus which can accommodate 50 to 60 passengers. A single customs officer could not handle that increased activity, so a second full-time customs officer has been added this past month, with expanded hours to better serve our international customers.

PROGRAM UPDATE

In my remarks tonight I'd like to take a look back at some of the programs I mentioned in prior State of the County Addresses, basically to give you a progress report.

After my election in 1992, my first trip to Lansing to visit Governor John Engler was in February of 1993. I had just one issue on my agenda: to open negotiations with the Governor and the state to acquire vacant land south of the Oakland County campus, commonly referred to as the Clinton Valley property. Oakland County, because of its inevitable expansion, has utilized most of the buildable sites on our present 396 acre site. We were dangerously close to running out of land.

I am delighted to report to you tonight that after six years of negotiations with the State, we have finally reached an agreement which allows Oakland County government to purchase the contiguous 84 acres of land on our southern border. Based upon our projections, this acquisition should address our land needs well into the next century. I wish to thank the Governor of this State, his staff, our friends in the legislature, along with Dave Ross, my Facilities Director, for the successful conclusion of these long, and sometimes difficult, negotiations.

You may also recall, in the past I have announced that we were working on the relocation of our South End Office from the City of Royal Oak to the City of Troy. That has been accomplished, and the new South Oakland Service Center on Crooks Road in Troy will be open and ready for business within the next couple of months. The 55,000 square foot facility which places county services closer to all south Oakland residents will house Circuit Court Probation, Personnel, Veterans Affairs, Probate Court caseworkers, and Community Corrections employees. The new Center will also provide space for CLEMIS training for police officers, as well as house an office for Oakland County Commissioners who represent the southern part of the county.

And while we're on the subject of buildings, now seems to be the appropriate time to congratulate Dr. Ljubisa Dragovic and his talented staff on the soon-to-open new Medical Examiner's building. The Medical Examiner staff will move from obsolete quarters in the lower level of the jail into a state-of-the-art facility which will position Oakland County to become a regional forensic center. We will be able to serve our residents, not only in a more timely and professional manner, but we will also have the ability to extend our service to jurisdictions within southeast Michigan.

Now, I am truly delighted to bring you up to date on a very important project which I announced in my State of the County last year: the Child Care Center for Oakland County employees. Since this effort was announced a year ago, my staff has been working with the Board of Commissioners to finalize the program. This fall we will be offering our hard working employees a county-sponsored Child Care Facility. Phase one involves renovations to the existing Health Care Annex across the parking lot from the Executive Office Building and will accommodate the first 50 children, age five years and younger. Phase two, a new addition, is planned for the Annex and will house an additional 50 children. An affordable, high quality, on-site child care center for Oakland County government employees is long overdue. Providing this kind of service goes to the heart of our ability to attract and retain qualified county personnel. Many of the nation's major corporations and, yes, even some county governments, offer child care for their employees, and Oakland County government should be equally competitive.

One final project which turned out to be hugely successful deserves mention tonight. I'm talking about the 3 ½ day food, arts and entertainment festival over Labor Day week-end that the county sponsored in the City of Pontiac. We called it Arts, Beats & Eats. Little did I know when I announced this festival last year that it would turn out to be one of the most successful festivals, not just in the state, but in

the country. Final figures show that the 3 ½ day funfest attracted more than 400,000 people - double our original projections. Arts, Beats & Eats II, set for this coming Labor Day, will expand over additional downtown blocks in Pontiac, double the number of restaurants, and increase the number of nationally recognized performers, and bring in nearly 200 local and national artists. We project a crowd, given good weather, to approach 600,000.

From all reports, everybody had a good time, with a very orderly crowd, and nearly \$90,00 was raised for local charities at the same time. Congratulations to Jon Witz and all his volunteers.

LOOKING FORWARD

As we round out this year - nay, as we round out the decade - for that matter, the millennium - let's take a quick look at some of the issues that we will tackle as we move forward. You're going to be hearing a lot about two major capital improvement projects that will be considered for funding in the near future. Competing for limited resources is a \$100 million courthouse expansion and a \$90 million jail addition. It doesn't take a financial genius to figure out that regardless how strong Oakland County is, it's not strong enough to undertake both these projects at the same time, so priorities will have to be assigned.

On the drawing board for the courthouse is a renovation, along with a 235,000 square foot expansion of the existing building, and a 5,000 square foot addition to the Commissioner's Auditorium. Changes would improve public access to the courthouse. The design improvement would keep prisoners completely isolated from the public and judges and jurors which is not the case today. There are compelling arguments for an expansion.

Also under consideration is a proposed jail expansion that would add 1,000 beds to the 1,816 already available. Supporters of the jail addition argue that with the current facility hovering near capacity, more space will be needed soon. The impetus for expansion, of course, is the ever present threat that overcrowding conditions in the jail will trigger a federal court order that basically takes the decision making power out of our local hands, leaving us only with the funding obligations. That is not our style, and we will be examining the arguments for expansion of jail capacity.

Let me be very clear tonight about these two projects. First of all, the public should know that we are not going to blindly charge ahead and fund both, for that matter either one, of the projects, until all alternatives are explored.

What alternatives you might ask? Well, let's look at the courthouse expansion first. We must ask ourselves, are there other buildings available to

expand into at a lower cost? Buildings that are either owned by the county or buildings which we could acquire? Understand that some personnel functions at the courthouse are not strictly court related and could be moved into other space on our campus with no impact on the quality of the services provided by the judicial branch in Oakland County today. If enough adequate space could be found in other buildings which we presently own or might acquire, costs could be dramatically reduced with a scaled-down expansion of the courthouse.

As for the problem of easing jail overcrowding, the alternatives to building an expensive new jail are even more abundant. Every year I give you an update on programs that fall under the jurisdiction of our Community Corrections Division. This four-year old department is directed by a very creative fellow named George Miller. It seems that every time I turn around, George and his people are coming up with a new program to save money, even produce revenues sometimes, but always relieve jail overcrowding. You might remember my report to you on WAM and the Impact Weekend, two unqualified successes from Community Corrections that I reported on last year. WAM, which is an acronym for Weekend Alternative for Misdemeanants, is a program that provides non-violent misdemeanor offenders the opportunity to perform weekend community service work at local non-profit organizations rather than serving a jail stint.

WAM has sent 1,711 non-violent offenders through the program since its inception in August of 1997. WAM participants were out in the community painting churches, cleaning parks and trails, shoveling snow, basically as George Miller says, "Giving back to the community." But most importantly, while they were out on the street under a supervised weekend program, the county saved 10,447 jail days...that's right, 10,447 days of jail that were freed up and made available for the more dangerous criminal.

Impact Weekend is a program that targets first and second time drunk driving offenders and pays for itself. Instead of the taxpayers footing the \$68 per day cost of housing drunk drivers in the county jail, those convicted of this crime pay the \$175 cost for treatment which includes up to six weeks of lectures, counseling and group therapy. In the 3 ½ years that it's been in operation, more than 2,000 people have gone through the program. What's really impressive is the fact that only 7 percent of those completing the program are ever re-arrested again for drunk driving compared to a state-wide re-offending rate of 33%.

One of George Miller's newest programs is called "Step Forward" which is a state-of-the-art interactive incarceration alternative conducted in partnership with the Health Division Substance Abuse Office and Community Mental Health. This innovative approach is geared toward non-violent offenders who have a

substance abuse and/or mental health problem. Instead of throwing these people in jail (again taking up valuable space and contributing to jail overcrowding), Step Forward refers them to a reporting center for treatment. There they receive substance abuse and mental health counseling, literacy training, employment and training assistance, and parent education classes. The program was designed to accommodate 60-80 individuals but has already grown to 120 and may be expanded beyond that.

Mr. Miller is exploring additional alternatives to incarceration for non-violent offenders which can achieve the benefit he seeks: protection of the law-abiding public, savings to the taxpayers, and the reduction of the inmate population at a potentially overcrowded jail.

If Oakland County does not build a new, expensive jail, you've got George Miller to thank. Seriously, as you can see, ladies and gentlemen, there are alternatives to simply committing to build two very expensive projects. Before that decision is made, alternatives will be explored and, where feasible, implemented.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

Now let's talk very quickly about the future challenges facing Oakland County. As I look into Oakland County's crystal ball I see a few bumps down the road . . . I mean that literally as well as figuratively.

Perhaps nothing threatens Oakland County's future economic viability more than the issue of its roads. It hangs over us like a economic sword of Damocles, waiting to sever our ability to retain old business and attract new business. Our congested and often pothole riddled roads have already claimed one victim, Control Power Reliance of Troy. Frustrated by its inability to get trucks in and out of their site after 3:00 p.m. due to gridlock in the 14 Mile Road/I-75 area, Control Power has decided to move its operation from Oakland County over to Macomb County.

That one example makes the point: good roads are an economic development issue. If we don't take quick and decisive action to relieve congestion and fix our roads, we could see an exodus of business from Oakland County over time. That's something we just cannot afford to let happen. Without business you don't have jobs. Oakland County has over 40,000 businesses with an annual combined payroll approaching \$26 billion, making our economy larger

than that of 19 states. From all those jobs and from those payrolls comes taxes which fund our schools, pays for our health care initiatives, put nurses in the schools, sanitarians in our restaurants. These jobs put judges on the bench, prosecutors in court, they keep deputies on the highway. They buy parkland, preserve nature trails. That's why we fight to keep business in Oakland County: business contributes directly to the wealth of Oakland County; business underwrites the quality of life that we enjoy in Oakland County.

On the subject of roads, we're attacking this problem with a two-pronged approach. First, we are holding discussions with MDOT in an effort to secure additional road funding. At the same time we are meeting regularly with SEMCOG (Southeast Michigan Council of Governments) to establish road needs in Oakland County as a top priority. For its part, the Road Commission for Oakland County is doing the best it can with the money available. But when Michigan still ranks 42nd out of 50 states in terms of per capita state and local spending for roads, you can begin to understand what an uphill fight the Road Commission is facing.

I cannot mention the subject of taxes and state spending priorities without registering my annual complaint about Oakland County's role as the cash cow for Michigan. In a recent report by SEMCOG, we were once again recorded as the

number one taxpaying county in this state. We send \$2.5 billion to Lansing and, unfortunately, are ranked 75th in the state in receipt of those taxes coming back at \$1.9 billion. I concede that Oakland County will always be a donor county, but as the number one taxpayer, Lansing should be especially responsive to Oakland's needs.

Once again I call attention to this problem. And to our friends in the State Legislature, I offer this word of caution: you cannot expect us to be the number one taxpaying county in this state without giving us number one roads in this state. To expect one without the other is to strangle the golden goose.

As I stand here tonight and recite the list of accomplishments that we have notched over the past year - for that matter over the last six years - you know and I know that these successes were not due solely to the leadership of yours truly.

(Okay, maybe they were.)

You all know me better than that. You know that I truly believe in the Teddy Roosevelt admonition that I quoted in the opening of my speech: hire the best people and then get the hell out of their way. I would be remiss tonight if I didn't talk about some of these "best people" who do so much for my Administration, do so much for our county, who do so much for all of us as taxpayers here in Oakland.

I've been a part of Oakland County's officialdom for nearly 25 years, first as prosecutor and now as county exec. When I enjoyed success as a prosecutor it was because of the teamwork of the assistant prosecutor, a trained police officer, a bright and concerned jury, and a tough judge. These last six years as county exec, the successes that I have been privileged to chronicle in the course of my State of the County Addresses are due in every instance to the talented and dedicated county employees who work long and hard every day to serve the needs of our citizens. These employees produce a high quality product which is cost-effective, efficient, and all too often they do it without any praise or recognition. As I travel across this county, I can't tell you how many times - numerous times - I have heard how politely the citizens are received at the various counters of Oakland County government. Not only are our employees polite to deal with, but I want you to know how professional they are as well.

In just the past year, the nationally recognized Government Finance Officers Association, singled out the professional work of our Fiscal Services Division with several awards, including the "Distinguished Budget Presentation Award," which incidently is the highest form of recognition in government budgeting. Down the hall, our Health Division won a National Association of Counties Achievement Award for its "Womens, Infants and Childrens Interactive Electronic Learning Room Program" which offers nutrition education services to WIC

clients. And across the street, Children's Village scored a NACo Award for its "Secured Treatment Program for Chronic Juvenile Offenders."

Downstairs, the Planning and Economic Services Division took home a NACo Award as well for its "Reichhold Site Program" which sets forth a redevelopment plan for the former site of an abandoned paint factory in Ferndale. This innovative project also garnered an outstanding planning award from the Michigan Society of Planning Officials and the Michigan Chapter of the American Planning Association.

Our Community Development Division was selected by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to receive the "Blue Ribbon Practices Award" in housing and community development for its Home Improvement Program. Whereas the national average for HUD rehab homes is 67; Oakland County's number is 247 homes rehabbed in a single year.

There were also individual honors handed out in 1998. Cynthia Gomulka, a youth specialist at Children's Village, was chosen "State of Michigan Child Care Worker of the Year" in the non-secure program category. Larry Falardeau, Chief Planner in the Planning and Economic Services Division, received the first ever "Pioneer in Public Service Award" for his efforts to promote a trailway and greenway network throughout Oakland County, and just a couple of weeks ago

Larry received yet a second award, this one the “Johanna Roskopp Award” for his work in restoring and protecting the Clinton River Watershed. Jean Chamberlain, my South Oakland Government Liaison, was selected by the Michigan Womens Commission to receive the organization’s “Thirty Years - Thirty Women Award” for her many and significant contributions to the State of Michigan.

Now that I breathe the rarified air enjoyed by those who have reached the sexagesimal plateau, in my leisure time I read biographies on government and business leaders whom I admire. A comment by Ray Kroc, founder of the McDonald’s Corporation, caught my attention. The man who revolutionized the restaurant industry said, “You’re only as good as the people you hire.”

I could not agree more, and Oakland County is good because we have good men and women in our ranks.

ALLEN AND NICHOLS

Speaking of good people, I would like to close tonight by recognizing the service of two of my former colleagues in county government. We hear a lot today about politics, the sleaze the corruption, the bad role models. And with our recent national nightmare, I suppose I can’t blame the public for holding politicians in low esteem.

But certainly bucking that trend, are two gentlemen who served all of you extremely well here in Oakland County. They brought credit to their office and to themselves, and left us recently, one by retirement and one by death.

First, County Clerk Lynn D. Allen, who retired last year after 30 years of service. Lynn was an innovator who brought technology into an office laden with hundreds of thousands of paper transactions. He did it quietly, effectively, and always with a smile. He was approachable, responsive, and clearly in an era when it means so much, his character and integrity were above reproach. He now is enjoying a well-deserved retirement in Oscoda with his wife Mary Ann, and we wish him well. My other colleague who left us last year was the irrepressible John Nichols, Sheriff of Oakland County, who passed away on December 18, 1998 after 14 years of service to Oakland County and 57 years of service to law enforcement here in southeast Michigan. His achievements are too numerous to mention, his impact on law enforcement too far reaching to chronicle tonight. Suffice it to say that he cast a long and respected shadow throughout his remarkable career. His leadership set a high standard for professionalism, training, and yes, candor.

It bodes well for Oakland County's future that two worthy successors have stepped in to pick up the cudgel, Dr. Bill Caddell in the Clerk's office and Mike



Bouchard in the Sheriff's office. We wish these two gentlemen well.

I would like to thank all of you for your continued support of Oakland County, and on a personal note, I wish to thank you for your continuing support of my programs as County Executive. We do live in a world class community. It is a great place to work, invest, recreate and raise a family. And it's a privilege to serve you and the good people of Oakland County.

We'll see you all back here in the next millennium. Thank you and good night.

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