

STATE of COUNTY ADDRESS
1992

LAWRENCE PERNICK
DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS CHAIR

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Oakland County State of the County Message -

"A Vision For All Seasons"

Lawrence Pernick

Democratic Caucus Chair

Our president likes to joke about "the vision thing." Yet, as we all know, the lack of a clear-cut vision in government is no laughing matter. Without it, there can be no strong motivation and no successful long-range planning and direction.

Vision and direction have never been more important in Oakland County government than they are today. Our county, the most prosperous and fastest growing in the state, is suffering the effects of the tough economic times affecting the nation. Unemployment is no longer the exclusive right of Democrats, and there are no partisan lines at the unemployment office. Executives, engineers, sales personnel, as well as workers on the shop floors, are losing jobs today that they have no hope of recovering -- and that's what makes this recession unique and alarming.

Our county executive, in his March 5th message to this board, stated that he had no programs to offer and would let the new county executive present his own agenda in January of 1993. However, we have to face the fact that at no time -- and especially during times of economic hardship -- can our citizens afford this leisurely approach to problem solving.

As Democrats, we believe that Oakland County government is good. Yet, at the same time, we believe it has the potential to be better, in fact, to be great. But we need to re-examine our problems, redefine our vision and plan an appropriate course of action. Then -- most important -- we must act on our convictions. We cannot continue sending items back to committee and call that "action." What we are urging, though, is real bi-partisan action -- working together as a team to solve the problems confronting us.

Once upon a time when the Democrats were a majority on the county board, there was a pretty fair bi-partisan approach to governing. Committee chairmen were Democrats, but the vice chairman of each committee was a Republican. And membership on boards and commissions were proportionately divided.

Compare that scenario with that of today. Although Democrats receive 45% of the county vote for commissioners, they are virtually ignored on important commissions. There are 3 Republicans but no Democrats on the powerful Road Commission. There are 10 Republicans but no Democrats on the Parks & Recreation Commission. And on the Mental Health Board, there are 10 Republicans but only 2 Democrats.

This is not a sharing of power. This is a hoarding of power. No political party has a monopoly on talent, expertise or dedication -- and our people need all the help they can get from their elected representatives. They need Republicans and Democrats working in tandem. For 100% success, we need to utilize the 68% Republican majority as well as the 32% Democratic minority.

WE NEED TO WORK TOGETHER -- now more than ever before -- to become more efficient and cost effective. To achieve this goal, we are proposing some basic and far-reaching changes.

- o We urge the restructuring and streamlining of our county government by the adoption of County Home Rule, with appropriate amendments to state legislation to allow a County Charter Commission. This Commission, with powers similar to those of Wayne County, would draft a new structure that would consolidate our county's operations.

In the past, our county has not felt the urgent need to become cost conscious and competitive because, as a rapidly growing county, the tax dollars just kept pouring in. But those years of plenty are at an end and, like industry and business, we have to be realistic and trim our operations. The formation of an Oakland County Charter Commission will make this happen.

- o We need to make sense of our complex and confusing system of public services. Our primary, long-term focus should be on the consolidation of the five overlapping commissions ... the Road Commission, the Drain Commission, the Parks & Recreation Commission, the Public Works Department and the Airport Board. A combination of the five into one single, cohesive unit would translate into enormous savings to the taxpayers by eliminating duplicate departments such as personnel, purchasing, risk management and engineering.

- o We believe it's time to stand together on major issues, thereby making our legislative branch an effective and equal check-and-balance to the Executive and Judicial branches. This will happen once we've strengthened our ability to make independent, well-informed decisions without outside partisan influence.

We urge, therefore, the abandonment of political party caucuses as instruments of issue education and information. In their place, we recommend the expansion of the Board's Finance Committee to a committee-of-the-whole consisting of the total membership of the Board. The Finance Committee's responsibilities would remain the same, but all Board members would have equal access to the information necessary to prioritize spending requests.

Our rationale behind this innovative change is that 1) over 95% of adopted resolutions are adopted unanimously; yet under our present system, only a handful of us are aware of the full financial implications involved. And 2) the basic responsibilities of county government -- such as funding in areas of public health, the courts and the construction and maintenance of buildings -- have nothing to do with partisan politics and should be discussed openly among us.

WE NEED TO WORK TOGETHER and heed the advice of our county executive, who has stated that we have to stop spending as if there were no tomorrow. This advice is especially relevant for our county prosecutor, who needs to make the prioritization of staff No. One on his agenda. His assistant county prosecutors are needed in the courtrooms to prosecute murderers, rapists and drug dealers. They should not be spending valuable time on censorship programs or making new law. And prosecuting shoplifters should not be given equal billing with prosecuting murderers and drug pushers.

We Democrats maintain that we would have enough assistant prosecutors if non-vital issues like the Dr. Kevorkian affair were not given such high priority. That fiasco has already cost the taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars -- with no end in sight. Not to mention the recent canine capers in the District Court where the prosecutor insisted on a jury trial in a dog-bites-dog affair.

WE NEED TO WORK TOGETHER to cut costs in other law enforcement areas, for example, the County Jail. Just two years ago, we opened a new addition to the jail, and already it's overcrowded. We continue to build bigger and better jails, yet the sheriff is experiencing a 70% recidivism rate. Any private business with a 70% product failure rate would soon be history.

We must develop improved inmate programs, with an emphasis on those dealing with substance abuse and job training. 75% of all inmates have substance abuse problems while 50% lack adequate job skills. A financial investment in these programs now can only be of benefit in reducing the rate of recidivism and, hopefully, in delaying the construction of additional jail facilities.

It is not good judgment on our part to refuse the state's present offer of nearly a million dollars for the enhancement of programs like these. The county's financial commitment would be relatively small, but our opportunity to change the status quo would be enormous.

In addition, if the County wants to continue contracting the services of the Sheriff's department to communities without their own police force, then we have to charge for those services based on the actual costs incurred.

We cannot continue to expect communities who currently support their own police departments, to also subsidize the Sheriff's Department. Communities like Hazel Park, Troy, Pontiac, Madison Heights, Oak Park, Southfield -- to name just a few -- should not have to bear a double tax burden.

WE NEED TO WORK TOGETHER to formulate a county-wide managed growth plan and implementation strategy to preserve our existing, older urban areas and to protect our rural lands. Development for development's sake, without a workable county and regional program has led to hit-and-miss urban growth and the seeds of urban decay.

Oakland County must learn from previous experience that our cities and townships must be partners in our growth plan development. Our goals and interests must blend and be compatible with those of our municipalities. There will always be new county roads, parks, sewer and water lines, etc. Let's plan for them with all the intelligence and foresight we possess.

With regard to urban decay, the county's vision to date has been more near-sighted than far-sighted. If we want a viable community maintenance and renewal program, we must encourage our older communities to work closely with the county. Together, we can develop new legislation that allows us to use our credit in areas experiencing blight and demonstrating need for new growth.

We cannot ignore this problem, for urban decay is a malignancy which eventually spreads into healthy, viable neighborhoods.

Another area where our leadership has fallen short and **WE NEED TO WORK TOGETHER** is that of solid waste. Our board has studied this complex problem for well over a score of years and yet we have failed to implement a solution. Over \$15 million dollars has already been squandered on this problem, with no success in sight because we failed to find a solution that would be acceptable to the various municipalities.

It's decision-making time now, and the county has set a deadline date of May 15. If, by that time, our communities fail to join us in a county-wide program, let us cut our losses, assume responsibility for education on the value of recycling and composting, and turn the balance of the disposal problem back to local governments. Let's encourage our cities and townships to find their own solution while we move forward in other directions.

The county must also shift gears and change direction in regard to a Regional Mass Transit System. **WE NEED TO WORK TOGETHER** to pay our fair share, along with Wayne and Macomb counties, and develop a long term solution to public transportation. Oakland County, boasting the highest per capita income in the state, can certainly afford its share of funding for a Regional Transit Authority. We do not need a tax increase -- we simply need to realign our priorities.

Our current population totals about 1,100,000 residents. Of this amount, almost 11% are 65 years of age or older, and many of them depend on public transportation. The problem will only worsen for, as the population ages, their need for transportation will increase.

In the area of public health, our county -- like the rest of the nation -- is experiencing a crisis as the number of HIV/Aids and sexually-transmitted diseases escalates. Our public health officials are doing a good job of educating and counseling the public, but more dollars are required to handle the increasing demand for services. We have to re-order our priorities to meet this problem head-on. A finger-in-the-dike approach will not do.

WE NEED TO WORK TOGETHER to persuade the State to adequately fund its responsibilities in the area of Mental Health. If we are to assume the day-to-day operations of a community mental health system, we will need these funds to eliminate the horrendous waiting lists that plague the system and, at the same time, to improve the quality of care. Let us decide we will assume the state's responsibilities only if we are guaranteed sufficient funding to do the job right.

As commissioners, we understand there will always be problems waiting in the wings. And although we differ in our approaches, the best solutions to these problems will be those which emerge after we have deliberated together. Like synergy in other areas, the parts will add up to more than the whole. When Republicans, in concert with Democrats, work together, the county will gain the benefit of 27 commissioners PLUS.

None of us know how much longer we will be serving on this board, representing in good faith the people who elected us. It may be years -- it may only be months. That's why we have to make every minute and every vote count, so that we can be proud of the legacy we leave behind us. In the months and changing seasons ahead, let us be wise enough to work together as a team for the benefit of our county -- and for ourselves as well.

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

MAJORITY PARTY	YEAR	COMMITTEES	(D) CHAIR	(R) CHAIR	(D) VICE CHAIR	(R) VICE CHAIR
D	1970	12	6	6	7	5
D	1971	12	12	0	3	9
D	1972	12	12	0	3	9
R	1973	13	0	13	9	4
R	1974	12	0	12	8	4
R	1975	6	0	6	0	6
D	1976	6	6	0	0	6
R	1977	6	0	6	0	6
R	1978	6	0	6	0	6
R	1979	6	0	6	0	6
R	1980	6	0	6	0	6

SAMPLE BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

MAJORITY PARTY	YEAR	ROAD COMM.		PUBLIC WORKS BOARD		PARKS AND REC.		BOARD OF INSTITUTIONS	
		D	R	D	R	D	R	D	R
D	1969	1	2	3	3	1	6	3	4
D	1970	1	2	3	3	3	5	3	4
D	1971	1	2	3	3	4	5	3	4
R	1972	1	2	3	3	6	3	4	3
R	1973	2	1	3	3	6	3	4	3
R	1974	2	1	3	3	3	6	4	3
R	1975	2	1	3	3	0	7	3	4
D	1976	2	1	2	4	2	5	3	4
R	1977	1	2	2	4	3	4	3	4
R	1978	1	2	NA		3	4	3	4
R	1979	0	3	NA		1	6	1	6
R	1980	0	3	NA		1	6	1	6

D =Democrat

R =Republican

NA=Board Dissolved

MISCELLANEOUS RESOLUTION # _____

BY: LAWRENCE R. PERNICK, COMMISSIONER

IN RE: RULES FOR OAKLAND COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS – AMENDMENTS TO
FINANCE COMMITTEE

TO THE OAKLAND COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

MR. CHAIRPERSON, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

WHEREAS, the Rules for the Oakland County Board of Commissioners set forth the membership and duties of the various standing committees to the Board; and

WHEREAS, matters coming before the Finance Committee are important to all members of the Board of Commissioners; and

WHEREAS, it would benefit the entire membership of the Board to review all fiscal matters by having the Finance Committee meet as a Committee of the Whole; and

WHEREAS, it is necessary to amend the Rules for the Oakland County Board of Commissioners, specifically, Rule IX. A.1. and Rule IX. B.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Rule IX. A.1. shall be amended to read as follows:

"A. The Standing Committees and membership thereon shall be:

"1. Finance Committee-----27 Members"

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Rule IX. B. shall be amended to read as follows:

"B. Membership of all Standing Committees shall be as follows:

"The Finance Committee shall consist of twenty-seven (27) members and shall meet as a Committee of the Whole. The Personnel Committee shall consist of six (6) members of the majority party and three (3) members of the minority party. The Planning and Building Committee shall consist of six (6) members of the majority party and three (3) members of the minority party. The General Government Committee and the Public Services Committee shall consist of six (6) members of the majority party and two (2) members of the minority party."

Mr. Chairperson, I move the adoption of the foregoing resolution.

Lawrence R. Pernick, Commissioner

MISCELLANEOUS RESOLUTION # _____

BY: LAWRENCE R. PERNICK, COMMISSIONER

IN RE: SUPPORT FOR THE AMENDMENT OF ACT 293 OF THE PUBLIC ACTS
OF 1966, AS AMENDED

TO THE OAKLAND COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

MR. CHAIRPERSON, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

WHEREAS, Act 293 of the Public Acts of 1966, as amended, provides for the establishment of charter counties and provides for the powers and duties thereof; and

WHEREAS, certain provisions of that Act relating to population requirements is so narrowly drawn as to apply to only one county in the State of Michigan; and

WHEREAS, it is advantageous to this county to have said Act be enlarged so as to apply to other counties in this state which may choose to organize under this Act; and

WHEREAS, Sections 5(3); 11(a); 14(1)(d)(i); and 14(1)(d)(ii) of said Act should be amended from counties of populations of 1,500,000 to counties of populations of over 1,000,000.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Oakland County Board of Commissioners supports the amendment of Public Act 293 of the Public Acts of 1966, as amended, and directs that specific legislation be drafted and forwarded to the appropriate state legislators for introduction as a bill.

Mr. Chairperson, I move the adoption of the foregoing resolution.

Lawrence R. Pernick, Commissioner