

STRAIGHT TALK ABOUT OAKLAND COUNTY

January 1975

An address by:

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OAKLAND COUNTY EXECUTIVE

TO:

THE OAKLAND COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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Mr. Chairman, members of the Board of Commissioners, People of Oakland County, it gives me great pride to stand before you as Oakland County's first elected Executive.

As I thought about what I would say to you in this first formal communication with the Board of Commissioners, many thoughts went through my mind as to how to set the stage for our deliberation and cooperation in the months and years ahead.

Today, I would like to share what I consider to be the most important of these thoughts and ideas.

First, it seems to me that the people of Oakland County and for that matter, the people of America, are asking for and have a right to receive - Straight Talk - from their elected officials. That is what the Board of Commissioners has received from me during the past 11 years as Chairman of the Board of Auditors...and that is what the people of Oakland County will receive from me for as long as I am their County Executive.

Today I stand before you as Michigan's first elected County Executive. A new role - a role I accept with the humility gained by the knowledge that a million people will be affected by the decisions that we make together ... and a role I accept with confidence...a confidence gained through 23 years of experience dealing with the shaping of Oakland County government. The lessons of the past, I believe, will help me to provide leadership for our future actions which will determine the quality of life in Oakland County.

Now we embark upon a new course in County government - and we begin with some STRAIGHT TALK about the role of County Executive --- as I see it. I believe the key words are leadership and cooperation.

Leadership in solving county-wide problems.

Leadership in achieving for Oakland County some straight talk and some straight results from all of our representatives in Washington and in Lansing in order to meet the needs of the people of our County.

Leadership in communicating with the people of Oakland County --- not always telling them what they want to hear --- but always telling them what they need to know.

Cooperation with the County Board of Commissioners --- working together to achieve the best results for all of Oakland County - my constituency includes all of the people of this County...each of you were elected from a district. However, the problems we face together are not geographical or parochial in nature...they are the problems of all of the people of this County and must be dealt with as such.

In a spirit of genuine cooperation, I propose that the Democrat and Republican Caucuses each select from their membership two commissioners who would meet with me on a regular and informal basis to discuss approaches to problem solving for the people of this County. Some straight talk between us that will hopefully result in a high degree of cooperation and results. (This is not to imply that my door will not be open to all 27 of you. It will.)

Cooperation with local units. I will continue to meet on a regular basis with local community leaders to discuss their problems and potential county assistance in solving those problems. Again Straight Talk between responsible people that will lead to constructive and progressive problem solving.

Now, some straight talk about the issues that County Government must face in the immediate future.

First, the unemployment problem. While Oakland County is one of the wealthiest, its people are not immune from the problems that plague our chief industry, the automotive business. We in County government and local government have the responsibility to do all that we can do to alleviate the unemployment problem for our people. Oakland County has been able to secure approximately \$17 million in federal funds to help the unemployed. This represents nearly 30% of the total county budget. This administration has been doing and will continue to do all that it can to see to it that this money gets into the hands of the individual citizens of this county immediately so that they can feed, house and clothe their families during these difficult times.

One of this County's most urgent problems is solid waste disposal. We have had not less than 3 studies in the last 10 years done by 3 different agencies on this subject and as of this date, not one dollar of County money has been directed toward solving this problem. This administration believes that it is imperative that the County, in 1975, begin directing some of its federal revenue funds toward a solid waste disposal system.

And let me state emphatically that I do not believe that land fills will solve this problem in this County in the 1970's and beyond.

There are in existence systems that are environmentally clean - that provide energy and resource recovery - that can meet E.P.A. standards and it seems to me that Oakland County, and its one million people, are deserving of our best efforts to solve this most serious problem. Those systems that are viable today will be vital tomorrow. I urge this County Board to begin work immediately towards solving this problem.

More straight talk about another serious problem that we have in many parts of Oakland County --- the quality of roads. I might begin by saying that much of the solution of the road problem is dependent upon adequate and sound funding.

In short, the funds currently available to Oakland County are not adequate to meet the County's needs. This administration and this Board of Commissioners, I am sure, will cooperate and work in every way possible to assist in securing more adequate funding for the County Road System.

I might add - and it is no secret to anyone in this room - but to clarify for the public ... This County Executive and this County Board of Commissioners has no control of the day-to-day decision making of the County Board of Road Commissioners. However, I am hopeful and confident that this administration and this Board of Commissioners will have some input into the Road Commission's decision making process. We must all work together to solve this pressing problem.

No county-wide elected official could address himself to the issues of the county without discussing the problems of crime and law enforcement. As County Executive, the law enforcement community, the citizens and the criminals should know that I will work together with the entire law enforcement community to bring about the best possible results in abating crime. The local police agencies, the prosecutor, the sheriff and this County Government should and must work together for the safety of our citizens.

Now, allow me to turn to another area of people services for Oakland County. The Board of Commissioners, in cooperation with this administration, recently took a major positive step by funding the directorship of the new Emergency Medical Services system and I compliment you for that. I am sure that we can continue to work together to bring about in Oakland County an

Emergency Medical System operation that will include the best efforts of private enterprise, local government and county coordination. However, I must hasten to add that we should recognize the ability to fund a complete government operated EMS program such as the City of Detroit has is not within our local funding ability at the present time and moreover, a 100% government funded system, in my judgement, will not best serve the people of the County.

Now, let me turn to the subject of county service centers. During the past weeks, I have instructed my staff to investigate and to report to me possible locations for a west county service center. I hope to be able to report to you some progress on that subject for your consideration. I am hopeful that you will be prepared to approve such a center in the near future.

Another subject we must address. We live in an affluent county to be sure. However, we must be ever mindful of the problems of our senior citizens and others who live on fixed incomes. Property taxes in Oakland County have continued to rise as the value of property increases. I believe as this Board has resolved in the past that legislation to provide a wider range in assessments would be helpful not only to our senior citizens but to the vast majority of the residents of this county. This fair and equitable approach to slowing down the constant rise in assessments should be pursued. We can do no less.

Now, allow me to turn for just a moment to the very positive note of the County's financial condition. Oakland County is indeed fortunate through the prudence of its elected and appointed officials and its substantial tax base to have an outstanding financial condition. This County has not had to turn to deficit financing and as long as I am County Executive, it will not and we will not raise tax rates in order to avoid deficit spending.

With respect to the future of Oakland County in terms of population growth and planning, we have been nationally recognized for our "partners

in planning" program and I believe the citizens of this County can take justifiable pride in residing in a county rich in natural resources and natural beauty and having a rare combination of urban, suburban, agricultural and recreational facilities. This we must maintain and improve upon. And it will take the constant vigilance of all of us to accomplish this goal.

George Washington, on April 30, 1789, closed his first inaugural address with these remarks. I believe they are appropriate for this occasion. He said: "Having thus imparted to you my sentiments as they have been awakened by the occasion which brings us together, I shall take my present leave; but not without resorting once more to the Benign Parent of the human race in humble supplication that since He has been pleased to favor the American People with opportunities for deliberating in perfect tranquility, and dispositions for deciding with unparalled unanimity on a form of government for the security of their union and the advancement of their happiness. So his divine blessing may be equally conspicuous in the enlarged views, the temperate consultations and the wise measures on which the success of this government must depend."

In closing, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to appear before you and bring to you my observations and suggestions dealing with some but not all of the problems and opportunities that face us - the elected officials of Oakland County. I have come to you today with some straight talk about our future. The people of this county deserve straight talk from all of us and this administration will give them no less.