

STATE OF THE COUNTY SPEECH

BY

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OAKLAND COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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Mr. Chairman, members of the Board of Commissioners, citizens of Oakland County ...

I come before you today for this, the second state of the county address by an elected county executive, in a mood of hope, a spirit of optimism, an attitude of watchful, cautious realism.

We have passed through a year of testing and tumult, of reorganization and realignment, of difficult and sometimes wrenching transition, but also, a year of achievement and fulfilled expectations.

During a year in which New York City, the largest local government in the United States, fell to its knees - during a year in which other governments across the nation tottered lamely toward fiscal and managerial chaos as they struggled to cope with the ravages of inflation and recession, during a year in which the people of the United States lost confidence in government's ability to respond effectively to crisis - the new and untested Oakland County government stood tall and firm.

Our new County Executive government responded to the misery of the unemployed, but without blinding its eyes to the realities of the free enterprise system. We did not make work, we made work available, useful, productive work, to the willing and needy.

Our new form of government responded to insidious, cancerous inflation, not by political artistry, but by prudent, responsible, financial restraint.

We responded to legitimate demands for increased services, when those services were appropriate and within our means, but avoided the political expedient of passing out frills, of baking the cake before the bread. We made no false promises, created no false expectations.

We began 1975 under the clear mandate of the people of Oakland County to provide them with a new form of government - a unified government that would be more manageable, possess greater visibility and identity, and be

more responsive and accountable.

A reorganization plan calling for the streamlining of the executive branch was implemented early in the year. The 37 divisions of the executive branch were consolidated into six departments. Much overlapping of functions was eliminated. Lines of authority were more clearly delineated. Responsibility for particular actions became certain and definite.

At the same time, the Commission reorganized its committee structure to make itself more responsive to the new system. And the members of the Commission committed themselves to transforming the Board from its traditional role of administrative-policy making, to a body restricted solely to policy making. The intent of the Commission, and of Public Act 139, was to establish a role for this Board similar to that of the United States Congress or the Michigan Legislature.

Most of the transition from one form of government to another has been accomplished and, for the most part, it has been accomplished with grace and dignity.

It was not accomplished without difficulty - no change worth making ever is. But most of the difficulty resulted from honest differences among honest men and women.

Overall, I believe the Commission and the administration worked well together during the transition period, and I ask that we rededicate ourselves to a spirit of harmony and cooperation in this Bicentennial year. In this regard, I now formally renew my proposal, made in my first state of the county message last January, that the Democratic and Republican caucuses each select from their membership two commissioners to meet with me on a regular basis.

1975 was truly an age of anxiety for America, and no less so for Oakland County. Establishing clear goals, setting sail toward definite objectives,

was as difficult for individuals and families as it was for government. We were all of us buffeted by the shifting seas of recession and inflation, and frustrated by the fact that the traditional cure for the one is the traditional cause of the other.

In Oakland County our dilemma was heightened by the need to form a new government.

Nevertheless, progress was made across a wide spectrum.

Our new government attacked unemployment through implementation of a Comprehensive Employment Training Act in a manner unsurpassed by any other local unit of government in the nation.

Approximately \$40 million of CETA funds have been received for fiscal years 1975 and 1976. Of this, some \$28 million has already been allocated to provide jobs. Nearly 3,000 persons have been employed through more than 100 participating local units.

The balance, approximately \$12 million, has been used to provide training for the unemployed and underemployed in such needed skills as nursing, auto mechanics, radio and TV repair, dental technician, welding, and others.

In addition, CETA provides a work experience program for youthful members of our society year round and has provided summer jobs for nearly 2,000 young persons. The CETA program has been uniquely successful in involving private industry through the on-the-job training program. We have been able to negotiate contracts with approximately 150 businesses which provide jobs and training opportunities for approximately 500 persons.

The net result of CETA has been to provide training, job opportunities, and support services to approximately 7,500 of our county's unemployed, underemployed, and economically disadvantaged. Presuming an average family

size of 3.5 persons, CETA has improved the lives of more than 26,000 Oakland County residents. And all of this was achieved with an administrative overhead cost of less than three percent.

We have also secured approximately \$2 million in Title 10 grant funds which will be used to provide 200 additional jobs in projects designed to improve county parks and public works facilities.

After 10 years of inaction, our new government vigorously moved the solid waste master plan forward in 1975. Approval of the revised plan was obtained from local units of government and the Board of Commissioners and a contract was signed for a final market feasibility study. Serious negotiations with utilities and major contractors were begun and are continuing.

A county-wide, coordinated emergency medical service system, long a dream of mine and many others in this room, came much closer to reality in 1975. The administration and the Emergency Medical Service Council devised an EMS system that uniquely fits the needs of our diverse county. Federal funding has been applied for and we can expect elements of the system to begin operation in 1976.

Also in the field of Public Health, the administration proposed that Oakland County become the first governmental unit in the nation to establish a mass screening program for breast cancer to assist in early detection. The proposal will be on the Board agenda in the near future. For the sake of the mental as well as physical well-being of the women of this county and their families, I urge that you take speedy, favorable action on this measure.

Public health nutritional programs and services for senior citizens and the disadvantaged were improved and expanded in 1975, through a cooperative effort of the administration, Cooperative Extension offices, and, especially, the Oakland-Livingston Human Service Agency.

More than 1,000 needy senior citizens now receive nutritious meals daily at 27 separate sites in Oakland County. In the coming weeks, a Senior Citizen Discount Program will be implemented by OLHSA that will further the effort to give those on fixed incomes a fighting chance against the hazards of inflation. Hundreds of businesses have already agreed to participate in this county-wide program.

And I would like to point out that one major food chain recently began its own discount program for senior citizens. I believe those of us in government should do all we can to encourage similar efforts by other businesses and private organizations.

In the vital area of law enforcement, a number of actions were taken to improve our ability to fight crime.

The administration encouraged the use of CETA funds to expand area police departments and, as a result, the number of police officers on the street in eight townships has nearly doubled. We also proposed CETA funds for certain areas of the sheriff's department.

In December, I recommended that LEAA funds be used to purchase 70 portable radios and related communication equipment to upgrade the capability of the Oakland County Sheriff's Department. The Board of Commissioners has approved a \$369,000 LEAA grant for this purpose and we expect to receive the funds in the near future. Also during the year, nine municipalities received LEAA funding to assist their efforts to combat crime.

The potentially dangerous situation of overcrowding at the Oakland County Jail, with its corollary problem of inadequate space and facilities for women prisoners, was addressed forthrightly. Several reforms recommended by the administration have been implemented and others are due to come under consideration by the Board of Commissioners.

A combined laboratory serving the needs of both the Medical Examiner and the Sheriff was proposed by the administration and is now nearing completion. In addition to improving facilities for identifying drugs and other chemicals involved in suspicious deaths and possible crimes, combination of the two functions will result in a savings to county taxpayers of approximately \$80,000 a year, plus an additional \$68,000 in indirect cost saving.

Also in the area of law enforcement, Phase One of the Court and Law Enforcement Management Information System became more than 50 percent operational in 1975. CLEMIS now serves 24 of the 44 law enforcement agencies in Oakland County.

In other action last year, our Computer Services Division was reorganized and improved and a special study undertaken which will lead to further improvements in 1976. And the West Oakland Service Center Office Building was opened during the year, providing residents of the Western part of our county with much greater accessibility to state government services. This is the first step toward providing a county service center in that area.

In 1975, we began implementing the Community Development Act in Oakland County in a manner which, I believe, will become a model for other local governments. Federal officials are so impressed with our construction contract guidelines that they are adopting them throughout the United States.

Procedures and guidelines for 50 participating local communities have been established and we are now preparing to launch the most comprehensive home rehabilitation program ever attempted by Oakland County.

I have recommended to the CDA Council that \$500,000 of the approximately \$2.7 million CDA grant be used to subsidize interest on loans to rehabilitate homes of low and moderate income families. The interest subsidy will allow local banks to loan \$3.5 million to individuals and families demonstrating a

need and a willingness to upgrade housing. The loans, made through local banking institutions, will be repayable in approximately five years.

At the expected average of \$3,500 per loan, this program will allow rehabilitation of 1,000 homes a year.

The need for this kind of effort has existed for many years in Oakland County, but until now a financially sound and responsible program has not been available to us. Individual incentive and initiative will be encouraged, not stifled. Pride of home ownership and maintenance will be rewarded. By helping upgrade individual homes, we will be taking the single most important step toward upgrading and stabilizing entire neighborhoods.

Furthermore, this multi-million dollar infusion of new money into the construction industry will expand employment opportunities for many of our citizens, helping insure continued work for those already employed and creating new jobs for the unemployed.

Perhaps the most challenging and, in the long run, most important aspect of forming this new government came in the area of defining its role in relation to other governmental units.

As everyone in this room knows, much local control of government has slipped away from us in the past simply because we did not have the strength to resist encroachments by state and federal power. Too often, we permitted a vacuum to exist, and federal and state power seek a vacuum just as relentlessly as water seeks its own level.

To fight this trend, the administration took steps to unify city, village, and township leadership in several key areas last year.

One of these was the lakes area flooding which has caused so much hardship in the last two years, and is a problem involving a number of different communities and agencies of government. None of them, acting alone, could deal effectively with the total problem.

Working with the Drain Commissioner, we brought representatives of all the involved communities together and hammered out a consensus on the most comprehensive, scientific study of the lakes area ever attempted. The study will be completed soon and we expect it to present a clearer picture of the problem and possible solutions.

In another area, we all learned last spring of a proposal to levy a special tax on the citizens of Oakland, Wayne, and Macomb Counties to finance mass transit for Southeastern Michigan. In effect, this would be a local tax levied on our citizens, - not by their local government, - but by the state. And it would be levied without any formal input from local elected officials.

In response, we convened an assembly of elected officials from Oakland, Wayne, and Macomb Counties. We have followed through on that initial meeting and have influenced the course of the mass transit proposal. Alternative methods of financing, alternatives more acceptable to the citizens of Oakland County, are now being actively considered.

Similarly, the possibility of a discontinuation or drastic alteration of federal revenue sharing created a need for the people of this county to united in support of that concept. A second assembly was convened, and a strong, united front has been presented to the lawmakers in Washington.

To present the interests and concerns of all this county's nearly 1 million citizens, I testified in Washington on several occasions and members of my staff appeared there at other times. This administration represents more citizens than the governments of such cities as Washington, Cleveland, Milwaukee, and San Francisco, and 13 states, a fact which vastly increases our ability to get things done in our nation's capitol.

In the coming year, we will continue to take the initiative to enhance

the principle of local control over local affairs.

But we will continue to do so carefully and prudently, always respectful of the prerogatives and powers of the cities, villages, and townships in Oakland County. And, if the need arises in the future, this administration will vigorously fight any attempt, by any legislative body or government agency, to usurp the rightful powers of the 61 units of local government in this county.

The greatest test of our new government structure came in the area of government spending. Inflation pushed costs up so relentlessly that, for individuals, families, business and government alike, only firm, disciplined control could hold spending in line with income.

The new form of government permitted us to respond quickly to the vicissitudes of the inflation-recession syndrome, and to gain a firmer grasp on government spending than ever before. Travel and expense account regulations were revised as one of our first actions after creation of the Department of Management and Budget. These regulations, and those the Board of Commissioners imposed on themselves and other elected officials, have proven more restrictive and less susceptible to abuse than the controls commonly found in private enterprise.

This is one area, and I believe there are others, where business would benefit from the application of our government's fiscal policies.

The new system also permitted us to respond effectively to the problem of overtime costs. The overtime control program, instituted in the last three and a half months of 1975 and still being refined, has already saved county taxpayers \$182,000 over the like period of 1974. These savings are not the temporary results of a meat-axe approach to budgeting, but the lasting by-products of increased productivity by county employees.

Our efforts to reduce and control spending have met resistance and criticism in some areas of this government. That is to be expected.

But I want to emphasize that, regardless of criticism, and regardless of the fact that this is an election year, we will continue to squeeze this government until the last penny of unneeded expense drops back into the taxpayers hand.

Culminating our cost control effort was the proposal and adoption of the tightest budget in the recent history of Oakland County. I pledge to you, as I did in last year's state of the county message, that we will live within our means again this year. There will be no increase in taxes. There will be no deficit spending.

In saying this, let me remind everyone here that our financial success last year, and our tight budget this year, are largely the result of the high degree of cooperation on the part of the 3,000 county workers.

I know it is fashionable to criticize the way civil servants spend tax dollars, but I am sincerely convinced that the employees of this government are at least as conscientious as any found in private industry.

In looking at programs and policies for the year ahead, we have adopted this basic premise - government can only give what it has first taken away. New programs, no matter how vote-catchy, will not be implemented until after they have passed the toughest cost benefit analysis. Overpromising and underachieving, the bane of American Politics in every election year, will not prevail as long as I am County Executive.

Always keeping these fundamentals in mind, this administration will concentrate on the following areas:

- A solid waste system that limits, for all time, the expansion of landfill operations in Oakland County.

- An emergency medical service system that will save the lives of hundreds of our citizens who now die needlessly for lack of speedy and efficient medical care at accident scenes.

- A program to prevent the flooding of the lakes area and the entire Clinton River Basin in Oakland County.

- A breast cancer screening program that will add immeasurably to our efforts to control this dread disease.

- A jail improvement program that will, if necessary, include the expansion of the Oakland County Jail and Trusty Camp.

- A CLEMIS program that will continue to improve law enforcement in Oakland County, particularly at the municipal level.

- A CDA Home Rehabilitation Program that will upgrade as many as 1,000 homes a year and stabilize neighborhoods throughout Oakland County.

- A CETA program that will continue to fight unemployment and improve job skills of the underemployed.

- Programs to help Senior Citizens experience the security and well-being they have earned.

- Active participation in the decision-making processes in Washington and Lansing to insure that our citizens receive a fair return on their state and federal taxes.

The final area of concentration concerns administration of the Oakland County Road Commission. It is a well-known, carefully documented fact that the road system under the jurisdiction of the Road Commission falls far below acceptable standards. This situation has existed for some time and, in my opinion, progress in correcting it has been unacceptably slow.

For example, despite the pressing need for road construction and reconstruction, the Road Commission reduced its 1976 construction budget by 6.12 percent

compared to 1975, even though expected revenues increased more than 4 percent.

Voters in Oakland County are virtually powerless to correct the problems of the Road Commission. No elected official can be called to account, because none exists. The appointed Road Commissioners are not accountable to the public at election time, or at any other time. In a sense, the Road Commission is a kingdom unto itself.

This situation can no longer be tolerated. We must take action now.

At my request, a bill calling for abolition of the Oakland County Road Commission will soon be submitted to the Michigan Legislature. The bill places administrative responsibility with the County Executive, and policy setting responsibility with the Board of Commissioners, in line with the unified government concept mandated by the voters in 1974.

When the bill is submitted, I will ask the Board of Commissioners to pass a resolution urging the Legislature to take immediate, favorable action.

Should the Legislative course fail, I am prepared to lead an effort to have this proposal placed on the ballot as a county-wide referendum. The voters of this county clearly want better roads and road maintenance and they have already spoken at the polls in favor of government that is more accountable to them.

It is time for elected officials to carry out the will of the voters in regard to the Road Commission.

Our citizens are also concerned about the cost of government services such as construction and maintenance of roads. One year ago, I pledged to carry out the voter mandate to reorganize county government, and to do so at a cost not to exceed \$100,000. That promise has been kept. The actual reorganization cost was \$84,000.

Today I pledge to you that, upon assuming full administrative responsibility

for roads in Oakland County, I will cut more than a half million dollars of fat out of the present road budget. And I will immediately convert the fat into muscle and put it to work on our road system.

Here are some examples of how this initial improvement will come:

- The Road Commission Finance Department will be combined with our Department of Management and Budget.

- The Road Commission Purchasing Department will be combined with our Purchasing Department.

- The two separate Personnel Departments will be combined, as will the two separate Planning Departments.

- We will also shift the functions of their Public Assistance Office to our Department of Public Information, and eliminate a portion of funds for public relations now budgeted through the Managing Director's Office.

- Some of the Road Commission's contracted legal services will be shifted to attorneys already on staff and drawing county pay.

- Certain computer functions of the Road Commission will be shifted to our Computer Services Division.

- The managing director's contingency fund will be cut by more than half.

Again, I urge the Board of Commissioners to join me in this effort to improve roads in Oakland County.

As we look back on the first year of unified County Government, it is clear that much has been accomplished. We have constructed a solid foundation, and we can move ahead with confidence in our ability to get the job done.

But we have not left our problems behind. We are still beset by inflation and unemployment, and a host of other situations demanding effective, dynamic government leadership. I think every member of the Board of Commissioners,

and every member of this administration, is aware of a fact perhaps best expressed some time ago by the Philosopher Bertrand Russell, who wrote:

"In our complex world, there cannot be fruitful initiative without government, but, unfortunately, there can be government without initiative."

We must, and we will, continue to exercise the power for fruitful initiative that is inherent in our new government structure.

But the time has also come to set aside the unrestrained New Dealism of the past in favor of a New Realism more suited to the problems of the present.

New Realism demands that we appraise social spending programs more carefully than every before. New Realism demands that we labor ceaselessly to improve efficiency of government, and not just its size. And New Realism demands that government spending be curtailed whenever and wherever that is realistically possible. We must never forget that the income we receive is restricted by the willingness and ability of our citizens to carry their tax burden and that the best way to increase the amount of money available for services and programs is to stretch our dollars as far as they will go.

In this Bicentennial year, I propose that we adopt a motto which I am confident would have appealed to our cost-conscious Founding Fathers. That motto should be: "In government, thrift is income."

With that thought always in mind, we can go forward together - working to provide the citizens of Oakland County with the best government possible, and the citizens of Michigan and the rest of the nation with an example of the effectiveness and efficiency that can be achieved by strong, united, local government.

Thank you.