

January 7, 2015 Chairman Steve Chucuri

Thank you very much.

I consider myself a very lucky man. I have a beautiful and supportive family, my wonderful wife, Christine, who is a devoted mother to our two great sons, Grant and Will, and the honor to represent one of the largest and best-run counties in the nation in one of its most distinctive and gorgeous states.

In fact, I have two of the best jobs imaginable, tending to a restaurant industry I love and a government big enough to get the job done, yet small enough to care.

My vision is a government that listens; a government that understands we may not reach perfection, but if we keep working trying, we will make amazing progress.

A year ago, on this very occasion, Supervisor Denny Barney challenged us to care more than others think is wise, risk more than others think is safe, dream more than others think is practical and expect more than others think is possible.

Led by his example and guided by the leadership of Tom Manos, we have done exactly that. And we have accomplished far more than we had expected, precisely because we have cared more, risked more, dreamed more and expected more.

Together, we crafted and are implementing a countywide strategic plan.

We, the collective we, have initiated sweeping regulatory reforms with the intent of more customer service and less red tape. We have adopted zero-based budgeting across several departments. And we have won 36 NACo awards for excellence.

Yet, more challenges await.

As Supervisor Andy Kunasek once said: "At Maricopa County, we don't go around looking for new things to do, new programs to fund. But what we do, we want to do very well." And we want to deliver more at a lower cost. And constantly strive to get better.

Our vision, our mission, is a government that listens, that best serves its people.

That resolves the problems that individual citizens cannot solve on their own and addresses those issues that recognize no city boundaries, like crime, disease, air quality, transportation and flooding.

And in doing so, we take a collaborative approach, expanding our resources by partnering with other jurisdictions, the private sector and non-profit organizations.

Citizens serving citizens.

A government as nimble and innovative as our people, willing to break precedents, but not promises. A government that listens.

Because ...at its core ... Democracy is a conversation.

Before any government can initiate a reform, implement a policy, or take positive action, it must have the credibility, confidence and trust of the public. We must be open, we must explain why we do things, why we make certain decisions, especially the hard ones.

This is not something we put on and take off of a shelf, because, in these times, public trust is not a given. It must be earned.

I'm proud to say we have taken a few good steps to win that confidence.

Our fiscal transparency website, OpenBooks, is a good one, perhaps a model for others to emulate. Under Supervisor Barney, we began archiving our board meetings.

Today, for the first time, we are broadcasting live; streaming these proceedings online for the public to follow at this very moment. Our fellow citizens shouldn't have to travel downtown to follow our discussions. And from this day forward, they won't.

And in this day of advanced technology, the time has come to better deliver county services in a convenient manner.

This is not new. Supervisor Hickman asked the question: How can we provide our constituents access to information about services offered to veterans? And because of his leadership today, we have a portal for our veterans' to help them find what they need.

But we won't stop there.

Through the use of social media and technology outreach, Maricopa County will work to convert our current dialogue with the public into an instantaneous, two-way, real-time conversation. We can increase citizens' access to information on evolving issues.

And we can provide them with an up-to-the moment and comprehensive public forum so we can listen more directly to their concerns, a virtual town hall for Maricopa County government and its citizens, giving our residents and taxpayers a stronger voice as we forge solutions.

I have often spoken about making Maricopa County "best in class," and "cutting edge." This is another step that will move us toward that goal. And so, we will take it.

Of course, all these ambitious plans depend on having a professional and committed Work Force. The public has come to expect this high quality service and we must do all we can to keep delivering it, even improving it.

However, as the 4th largest county in the nation, we face some serious challenges and we must address them. Many departments, including some of our largest and most critical, see employee turnover as a worrisome drain on our resources, a needless flight of talent to other jurisdictions.

And so the time is right to expand our focus beyond just what we do and examine more closely those who actually do the work.

To ask the question: Can our efforts to achieve exemplary customary service and lean, efficient operations be enhanced by giving greater attention to our employees, our personnel rules, policies and practices?

This effort cannot and should not be grounded in anecdotal evidence or negative stereotypes about government workers. They're neither justified or needed.

Colleagues, ours is a complex business with more than 50 separate lines of service, operating in a fiercely competitive market. We must find a way to capitalize on the knowledge and skills of our experienced Work Force while we attract the next wave of skilled, motivated and engaged professionals into public service.

And frankly, I don't think we can do that with out-of-date personnel and compensation practices and a decades-old merit systems designed for a different time.

Did you know?:

Currently, at least 50 percent of those applying for a county job must be interviewed? Even though, some applicants may not be the most qualified. This contributes to delays and the loss of qualified candidates to other employers.

There is nothing magical about probationary periods of six months. This is not an adequate measure for new hires to demonstrate proficiency in the job or for managers to assess them.

And finally, we have to concede that our compensation system is presently weighted toward years of service and not performance. And that erodes our ability to keep our most productive employees.

We need a county personnel system as productive as our most outstanding employees here; a system that will attract, hire and reward a great workforce, employees in the mold of:

- Valerie Beckett, the Ombudsman for Planning & Development
- Alva Tovar, the Adopt a Highway Coordinator for Transportation
- and Steven Goode, former Deputy Director and now Director of Environmental Services.

Each of these employees takes the notion of public service to heart.

Like the dozens of employees whose suggestions through the rewarding ideas program have saved county taxpayers more than \$2.6 million, just in the past five years.

And heroic, courageous deputies from the sheriff's office like Sgt. Wes Kueffer, pilot Mike White and deputy Joe Scudella, who last August, at tremendous risk to their own safety, waded into fast moving flood waters to pull an elderly woman out of a stranded minivan.

Folks, it's who we are as a county. It's what we do, day in and day out.

I ask you: Where do we find people like this and our many other shining stars for the county?

My view, my goal, is to reach out and recruit professionals who share our passion for engagement, our willingness to think in imaginative new ways, and seek only to serve the public better and at a lower cost.

There is another major challenge. Our 2016 budget deliberations.

It is said that Maricopa County is successful because we don't wear rose colored glasses when we're projecting revenues. And many in this room are the ones who designed and implemented that impressive fiscal legacy.

But as you all know, we in county government are not always the masters of our own destiny. We are an arm of state government. This year promises to be an uphill climb as the state considers its budget goals. There will no doubt be more problems than solutions.

However, we should all remain confident in having two influential allies at the Capitol this session with Doug Ducey as Governor and Supervisor Hickman at the helm of the County Supervisors Association, two individuals who understand the partnership of state and local government.

With the great recession taking a toll on both our fiscal capacity and our public infrastructure, we need to plan our next steps with wise policy and sound management decisions.

We have just completed master plans for our jails and courts that outline the infrastructure needs of our growing county. As our population increases – and it does – and our facilities age – and they do –we have to invest in capital assets, new jails, new court buildings. And when we build new facilities, we must have the funding to operate them. There is no other option.

And this is a task we must address in the not- too- distant future.

This past fall, two unprecedented 1000-year floods battered parts of the valley. Some residents, especially in parts of Laveen, New River and Mesa are still reeling from the effects of the storms. They won't soon forget.

We can explain, too often after the fact, various levels of flood protection, and their relative cost. Realistically, no one can protect every structure in a flood plain against every flood, much less a catastrophic event. But we can explain to residents about the potential dangers. And we can plan with other jurisdictions to address the most pressing needs. We can collaborate on projects that will balance needs, costs and local participation.

I hope that we do. As the public will know we have listened.

And, Supervisor Rogers, I hope that you know, as we move forward in this new year of 2015, we will remember your steady yet subtle passion for issues and look to your example as we face these challenges I mentioned. Thank you.

This is not a light agenda. And it doesn't even cover the full plate of tasks that each of us elected officials, public servants of Maricopa County and everyone here, must undertake.

We are here to do the people's work. They are the ones who elected us and put us here. They are the ones who get up every morning, meet their own responsibilities, while paying the taxes that finance the work we do and more importantly, that they expect us to do.

It is to them we owe our best effort, the best of our abilities.

President Reagan once said ... "History is like a ribbon, always unfurling. History is a journey."

We continue that journey today.

Proud of our rugged frontier history, diverse heritage, independent, enterprising culture and forward-looking optimism. We will indeed dream more, risk more, expect more. And in doing so, we will accomplish more.