**Board Reorganization Speech**

**by San Mateo County Board of Supervisors**

**President Warren Slocum**

January 5, 2016

The Grove, Cańada College, Redwood City

Good evening - welcome to Canada College and the 2016 Reorganization meeting of the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors.

Thank you for being here.

Not long ago, I had the opportunity to read a story to pre-schoolers who were seated on a classroom floor in a small semi-circle. I remember looking at each of them with their bright smiles and energetic spirits full of hope and wonder - I thought about their future and the future of their families.

And that’s what I want to talk about tonight – the future. Albert Einstein once said about it, “I never think of the future - it comes soon enough.” Despite what Einstein said, isn’t thinking about the future what we do as elected officials?

Those pre-schoolers and their parents often come to mind. That, coupled with a strong belief that government works best when community and government work together, I’ve held many neighborhood meetings and met with citizens, residents and constituents who’ve asked for help on quality of life issues like illegal dumping, streetlight outages, noise, gang activity, parking, displacement, parks, housing and flooding. These conversations provided an immediate “to do” list.

None of that “to do” list would have gotten done without my colleagues on the Board of Supervisors. Thank you also for choosing me to lead the board this year. It is truly an honor and I am humbled. I especially want to thank Carole Groom, our outgoing Board President. She has led us with a steady hand during the past year and her hard work, enthusiasm for our community and her compassion for residents have kept us moving in the right direction.

The men and women in County government also helped on my “to do” list. They are inspired professionals who dedicate their time and talent to make a difference.

I also thank County Manager John Maltbie and Deputy County Managers Mike Callagy, Reyna Farrales and Peggy Jensen. And a shout out to County Counsel John Beiers and his entire team for their excellent legal guidance.

My District 4 staff are committed to our work and they do a fantastic job. A big thank you to Irving Torres, Marci Dragun, Maya Perkins, and Carol Marks.

And most of all, I want to thank my family. My wife, Maria, and our boys, Jonathan and Justin. All keep me on my toes and grounded at the same time. Thank you for being so supportive.

I am inspired by the work of this Board. So much has been accomplished. Here are a few examples:

* We invested in and created additional affordable housing units;
* We opened new parks and closed a 1/2 mile gap in the Bay Trail;
* We funded additional mental health services;
* We approved Middlefield Road improvements;
* We affected prostitution and human trafficking by closing 9 illegal massage parlors forever;
* We earned prestigious AAA ratings from Moody’s and Standard & Poors for our financial condition; and,
* We increased funding for emergency shelters and social service programs and insisted on higher accountability standards and measurable results

Stepping back and reviewing that partial list, we can all be proud of those accomplishments – but there is also work underway that is specific to each member of the board.

**DAVE PINE (District 1)** - Supervisor Dave Pine has taken on the increasingly urgent issue of sea level rise and the related flooding and water issues facing residents of our County. He is, along with Supervisor Groom, also leading the charge on clean energy options for the Peninsula.

**CAROLE GROOM (District 2)** - Supervisor Carole Groom is one of the leading proponents of The Big Lift, a San Mateo County initiative to ensure the future success of all children by increasing reading proficiency from 50% to 80% by the time they enter 4th grade.

**DON HORSLEY (District 3)** - Supervisor Don Horsley has worked on farm labor housing initiatives for low-income workers and their families. He’s also focused on saving Surfer’s Beach on Highway One which was in danger of collapsing because the embankment supporting the roadway has been eroding at a

rate of over 1.5 feet per year.

**ADRIENNE TISSIER (District 5)** - Supervisor Tissier helped establish The Coalition for Safe Schools and Communities which formed after the Beyond Newtown countywide convening. The goal: keep our kids safe at school.

As you can see, San Mateo County continues to be on the leading edge nationwide in the work that we are doing.

While we are incredibly fortunate to live in the center of innovation, during a time of great prosperity, we face real challenges. The corporations of Silicon Valley have generated immense wealth. At the same time, the lives of working people and the poor grow more difficult. The cost of housing skyrockets and significant inequalities exist in areas like education and healthcare. The bottom line is that there are powerful new forces reshaping our county – and it’s a different place than it was just a few years ago.

It’s clear to me that our overarching challenge is how to build and sustain livable communities on the Peninsula. By that I mean communities in which prosperity is broadly shared, children have the opportunity to succeed and are prepared for the jobs of tomorrow, resources are used in a sustainable way and people are civically engaged.

Our issues are complex, they require courage and will call on \us to think through new approaches. That’s what makes this such an exciting time to serve the public. We are in the perfect place at the perfect time. San Mateo County has never been stronger.

I am looking forward to the next year and I’d like to share my priorities as Board President. They center around housing, transportation and quality of life issues.

**Housing** - In mid-2016, the Closing the Jobs/Housing Gap Task Force will complete its original mandate which was to develop a menu of housing solutions and commit to bring those solutions back to our communities for further discussion and potential adoption.

At the county level, we drafted an “Affordable Housing White Paper” and we are in the process of making our way through the housing topics set forth. The Board of Supervisors should complete policy discussions on those items in 2016 so we can move ideas into actions.

Hopefully, we can all agree that owning a home is an effective means of accumulating wealth but important too is the peace of mind that comes from being in your own home - especially for families with children. There are tremendous gaps in homeownership rates by income, race and ethnicity and therefore our work on housing must include the creation of housing units we can all afford. Doing that will produce home ownership, stability and opportunities for a viable path out of poverty.

Also, we have a chance to end veteran homelessness in 2016. I’d like us to focus on doing just that.

**Flooding** – Have you seen the billboard on Highway 101 on the Redwood City/San Carlos border? It says, “In the next severe storm, this freeway will be underwater.” Throughout the county, much work has been done on flooding. But more needs to happen. We need to invest in water infrastructure like pumps, rebuilding and repair of creeks and canals as well as other strategies to help divert water from areas that regularly flood. This kind of infrastructure work is expensive, takes a long time - and only government can do it.

**North Fair Oaks** – The 18,000 people who live in North Fair Oaks want us to work on two fronts. The first is parking. In 2016 we must identify and acquire property that will be suitable as parking areas so that neighbors, shoppers, visitors and the business community have more parking options.

The second important issue is code enforcement. To tackle these issues head on, we have created a Neighborhood Response Team that is addressing complaints. This effort will be fully operational in 2016 as we leverage all the resources of the county to work together in a coordinated and cooperative manner to produce results that will mean a better community for all.

We should also pursue with vigor, the development, in cooperation with Redwood City, of a new community center, library and affordable housing development in the North Fair Oaks area. In order to partially address gentrification, I would like to ask that we explore the creation of a NFO Cultural District as well as a series of new ordinances that will target safety, liveability, parking and help businesses.

**East Palo Alto** – Another community where transformative work is being done is East Palo Alto. This past year community stakeholders collaborated with the County to recalibrate the David E. Lewis Re-entry Program which aims to help those formerly incarcerated transition back to home and community life. We kicked off the Students with Amazing Goals program whose mission is to get more at risk youth graduated from high school. These organizations produce benefits to the community and in 2016 we should strengthen our relationships with those initiatives and continue to ensure their sustainability.

**Government Operations** – I am pleased with our progress in the areas of the Open Data Portal, mobile apps, network access and the use of social media. We must continue those efforts. But we also must strive to make county government more understandable, accessible and accountable, especially for the Latino Community. It’s clear to me that we should design and conduct a Latino Citizens Academy and the county website should be made completely trilingual, like our election materials.

We also need to build on the success of November’s mail ballot election and identify ways to better serve voters, increase voter registration and expand participation. This is important because it’s part of a larger mission which is to bring more people into the practice of democracy, especially underrepresented populations.

**Transportation** - Like housing, growing traffic congestion is reaching a level where we all know down deep something must be done. There is no easy fix, no silver bullet, and I know that our options are limited. But this cannot be a reason to bury our head in the sand and hope it magically gets better. It is clear the ultimate scenario will take substantial public and private investment and must focus on how we move people around the Peninsula more easily. Through hard work, colleagues have led the way for:

* The Electrification of Caltrain;
* High Speed Rail, and
* Additional Grade separations to lessen gridlock and unsafe backup conditions.

These will become realities within the decade. And they will make a difference.

But more work must be done to:

* + - Move cars on the 101 more efficiently;
    - Improve the easy flow of east-west traffic,
    - AND, **I think** it’s time to seriously reconsider the Dumbarton corridor.

SamTrans is embarking on a comprehensive study funded in large part by Facebook, exploring all options. They will look at a number of alternatives including rail across the bay and how it might be financed. Anyone who has looked at this project knows there are a number of obstacles but I believe it is vital that we collectively determine what is realistic and do whatever we can to improve this east-west corridor, lessen the stifling congestion while improving our environment.

**Partnerships** - All of the work I’ve described can’t be done alone. In my term as President I will be engaging industry to play a meaningful role in tangible solutions. I will be active in seeking partnership of all kinds, bringing in professionals with expertise who can assist in meeting the challenges we face as a community.

I see these partnerships not as challenges to solve but as opportunities to grow in a smart and efficient manner as we build sustainable communities for the future. Only by rolling up our sleeves together can we achieve the success we expect in San Mateo County.

President John F. Kennedy said :

“All this will not be finished in the first one hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first one thousand days, nor in the life of this Administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin.”

The simple truth is that we have begun and by doing so, we have set out priorities and once again reaffirmed our commitment to the noble idea of a county government working for a better future for all people.

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