

State of the County 2009

Introduction

Good afternoon county board members, elected officials, county staff members, community leaders and fellow citizens.

Thank you to the Chamber of Commerce and Einar Forsman for providing this forum. You do an excellent job serving as the Voice of Business.

State of the County

At Winnebago County, we never lose sight of our mission, our taxpayers, and our customers. We have been good stewards of the public trust. Through proper planning, building up of our fund balances, the hard work of our dedicated employees and, despite the test of tough times we now face, Winnebago County is strong.

If, over the last several years, we had not measured our performance, demanded accountability, and engaged in lean process improvement, I assure you things would be much worse.

I want to particularly thank and recognize the members of the Winnebago County Board, many of whom are present today. Would the board members please stand. We cannot get it done without hard work and leadership from these men and women.

The budget issues are very real and we have had to make tough decisions. Since last July, we have reduced our workforce by over 160 people as well as cut back the budgets of each of our departments. Collectively, we will have reduced overall expenditures by approximately 11 million dollars from where we were last fiscal year. I would like to recognize all Elected Officials, Departments and their staffs for doing more with less and still delivering high quality services.

We have a specific challenge and a real opportunity. We can and we must come out of these difficult times stronger than ever.

Joint Advisory Commission for Efficiency in Government

That is why today I announce the creation of the Joint Advisory Commission for Efficiency in Government, (JACEG). This Commission is a partnership between Winnebago County and the City of Rockford. I want to commend Mayor Morrissey for his vision and leadership in the area of process improvement, as well as his willingness to take on difficult issues, and of course congratulations on your successful re-election.

This commission is a vital bridge between governments and citizens in order to measure performance and to determine specific operational areas where we can achieve savings and increase productivity for the good of our community.

The commission will consist of county board members, aldermen, citizens, and subject matter experts. We anticipate the group will research and report on economies of scale to be found in our building and permitting departments, road maintenance, law enforcement, purchasing, election authorities, and IT systems. Please look for more announcements on this in the near future.

Economic Development

While efficiency is key to running a successful operation, educational attainment is a key driver of our region's economic success.

As a region, including public and private schools, we have much to be proud of. Our ACT scores are beating the state average. Our graduation rates are also better than the state's average. Most of our children are receiving a very good education, unfortunately, though, not all children.

We have a serious problem within Rockford. That is why over the last four years the County has joined with City of Rockford, District 205, groups such as the Chamber of Commerce and the United Way in combating an epidemic of truancy. We have finally seen success with lower truancy rates and increased attendance rates.

I commend the Rockford School Board in selecting Dr. LaVonne Sheffield as the new superintendent. I met with Dr. Sheffield and I look forward to continuing our partnership with District 205.

But, we must do more, specifically in the area of post secondary aspiration—More kids have to go to college, more of our people county wide need college degrees.

Carol Coletta, the president of CEOs for Cities , recently told us that just a mere 1% increase in the percent of residents with a college degree will bring \$240 million to the region.

Children of parents without a degree have only a 1 in 100 likelihood of getting their own degree; whereas, children of parents with a Bachelors degree are 1 in 4 and children of parents with a Masters degree are 1 in 2 times more likely to get a degree.

As a community, we must set education as a priority, we must lead together, and we must be willing to take bold initiatives.

At Winnebago County, I am instructing our Human Resources Department to prepare and execute plan that will ensure our supervisors and senior managers all have college degrees. I call on you, the business community of greater Rockford and Winnebago County, to push for degree attainment in your own companies, not just for your own good , but, for the success of our entire region. I know many of you are already doing this, but , we must push even harder.

We have outstanding higher education partners in Winnebago County. I know that working together with Rock Valley College, Rockford College, NIU, Rockford School of Medicine, St. Anthony College of Nursing, Rockford Career College, and others, we will accelerate our region's degree attainment and our ability to compete in a global market.

Go Global

The economy has changed. While it may be hard for some to grasp, we are not just competing with other cities in our region; we are competing with other countries, we are competing on an international scale. This is critical to Winnebago County. In 2007 we exported over \$1.44 Billion in goods.

Winnebago County is playing a pivotal role in economic development and that is why I have undertaken a trade mission to Sweden and sent our Director of Planning and Development, Sue Mroz, on trade missions to China and Sweden. We must invest in more of these missions, because, it's paying off. Already, we have received several business delegations from Sweden and China. Along with our other development partners like the RAEDC and the City of Rockford, the County Board invested \$200,000 to help bring Wanxiang (Wang-shung) America to Winnebago County with their solar panel assembly plant and their 240 jobs!

Go Green

Not only does this bring needed jobs but increases our footprint in the new economy of Green Technology and Renewable Energy. This sector of our economy is growing and we can be right in the middle of it.

That is why I am proud to let you know that our Freedom Field Renewable Energy Center of Excellence has advanced to the next phase and is going into production. This year we are installing hardware including solar, wind, and bio-fuel, and will have equipment allowing for constant monitoring and educational research. This is an example of a successful public and private partnership. We have received \$300,000 in grants and contributions. Thank you to the many companies in Winnebago County that are making this important project possible.

Rail Initiative and Call to Business Community for Immediate Grass Roots Support

Freedom Field started at the Rockford Airport which is another great success story in our region. Can you believe that our airport now moves almost 500 million pounds of cargo each year and has served nearly 1 million passengers? The economic footprint of our airport is almost 1 Billion dollars.

This success is exactly why I pushed to evolve the Airport Authority into an Air and Rail Authority.

Now, I know, some think bringing rail to Rockford is about as likely as the Bears ever getting a franchise quarterback. Hey, the Bears did just get Jay Cutler, right? It can happen.

In fact, I need your help right now. There are important decisions being made in Springfield and Washington that will effect whether or not we see improved freight as well as passenger rail service in Winnebago County.

We need to show strong grass roots demand from our business community. Please contact the Chamber of Commerce regarding ways in which you can help.

Partnership and Collaboration

Partnerships and collaboration is key to economic development. Businesses today demand a smooth process in order to relocate. And that is exactly what we are doing at Winnebago County.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PORTION OF THE VIDEO 3:50

Courts, Crime, and Case Management

Crime

Our primary mission is in the area of criminal justice and public safety. Over 80% of our general fund is dedicated to these functions alone.

I would like to recognize Sheriff Meyers, his staff, and the men and women of his department. They continue to use innovative techniques, collaborate with other law enforcement agencies, and provide special focus units that work in weed and seed areas and other crime hot spots. They are doing a good job. According to the Sheriff's Monthly Crime Comparison Report, the total incidents are down 10%. Congratulations Sheriff we appreciate your hard work.

State's Attorney's Office

I cannot say enough about our State's Attorney Joe Bruscato and his team. He is really lighting a fire in that office. Already, this year we have nearly doubled the amount of jury trials completed and are processing cases that are actually dated this year, 2009. Let me tell you, that is a big deal.

He is using a trial team format that puts 2 and 3 prosecutors at the table. This allows for cross training of his lawyers and cuts down on continuances. When the case is called, the answer is "ready"! Mr. Bruscato has also implemented a special detail on elder abuse which is a growing problem. His retail offender diversion program is working to speed up the process and improve our quality of life.

A very large part of this success is due to Chief Judge Janet Holmgren, the Judges and the entire court staff for responding to this high demand. Improvement would not be possible without the cooperation of the courts. I also want to recognize the readiness of our Public Defender's Office run by Karen Sorenson, and our Coroner, Sue Fiduccia for the 24/7 operation that is critical for providing evidence to the prosecution.

Together we are sending a clear message: In Winnebago County,
Do Crime – Do Time.

As an example Deputy State's Attorney Marilyn Hite Ross just prosecuted Ronnie Watts for sexual assault of a child. He was a repeat offender that Marilyn tracked when she worked in Chicago and put him away in Rockford. He was sentenced to natural life in prison. Good job Marilyn.

Early Warning System

We are also doing good work getting our Tornado and Emergency Warning System up and running. All 74 sirens are scheduled to be operational next month.

Courts and Case Management System

One of the most important projects we have undertaken is our Court & Case Management system. Last year I shared with you my motto "In God We Trust—all others bring data." Well, our new system brings in the data.

Late In 2004, the Circuit Clerk's office started this process with a very detailed study of what our system could and could not do.

In 2006, we had 45 specific recommendations from the study that we could implement. To date, 29 are completed, 16 are in progress.

In June of last year, the County Board approved the final investment.

We will finally, for the first time in the history of the County, have all the stakeholders of the criminal justice system sharing real time data, measuring performance, tracking outcomes, all on one system, from officer in the field to judge on the bench.

I want to specifically recognize the many hours of hard work by Tom Klein and the Circuit Clerk's office as well as our IT Director, Gus Gentner and his staff.

This project started producing results immediately just because we put everybody in one room and began talking.

COURT & CASE MANAGEMENT VIDEO 2:08 MINUTES

Alternative Programs

Despite our improvement and success in the area of court and case management, it is very expensive to house, give medical care, and provide remedial education to offenders.

We need to keep people out of jail. It is much less expensive to educate and hire a man than it is to incarcerate him.

That is why I asked you to make education a priority and support the attainment of college degrees.

That is why I asked you to quickly rally in support of rail in order to bring more jobs here.

Now I am asking the business community for a third thing: We need your ideas, your partnership ,and your help with prisoner re-entry.

This is one of the most difficult and controversial parts of the entire process. Obviously there are those offenders who must be in prison; yet, through our assessment and screening processes we

identify those who are willing and able to become productive members of society.

We have had real success over several years with our Mental Health and Drug Courts that have not only improved the lives of the program participants but have dramatically reduced the number of hospital and jail days which has produced a real savings of \$829,000 for the taxpayer.

Since the building of the new jail and justice center we have put a lot of effort into identifying alternatives to incarceration that work, are cost effective, and reduce recidivism like our faith based restorative justice program and our Resource Intervention Center.

ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS VIDEO 6 ½ MINUTES

Closing

I am proud of you Maurice. You are heading in the right direction and so is Winnebago County.

My wife and I recently saw something while watching television that put a lump in our throats and brought to mind the potential of our community. I want to share it with you today.

We are a County of hard work and innovation. Our business community produces over 15 Billion dollars of goods and services. Our manufacturers range from micro-machining to chemical production.

We have over 400 aeronautical engineers in Rockford working in over 81 companies dedicated to aeronautics. One of our companies, Hamilton Sundstrand, has been supplying key parts to the Space Shuttle Program since 1970.

Without some of the men and women in this room today, one of mankind's greatest achievements would never fly, nor even exist at all!

Yes, we are facing difficult challenges today. But, we can complete the tasks before us..... We have the talent and the resources to accomplish anything we desire!

Let's answer the call, unify our vision, and cooperate to get it done.
I know we will be successful.

It is my honor to serve as your county board chairman. Thank you.
God bless you and GOD BLESS WINNEBAGO COUNTY!

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