



Building Our Future Together

By

George Shirakawa
President
Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors

State of the County Address
January 24, 2012
Board of Supervisor Chambers
70 West Hedding Street
San Jose, CA

Good afternoon everyone! Please join me in thanking Monica Gomez for introducing our community's leaders. And...thanks Monica for your gracious introduction.

Thank you, Pastor Ybarra, for your inspirational words. I hope you can inspire the Raiders to have a better season next year.

Thanks to my fellow elected officials from throughout Santa Clara County who are here... we appreciate your presence.

Also, please join me in welcoming my Board colleagues on the dais – Vice President Ken Yeager, former Board President Dave Cortese, Supervisor Liz Kniss, Supervisor Mike Wasserman – and the County’s elected and appointed officials – Sheriff Laurie Smith, Assessor Larry Stone, County Executive Dr. Jeff Smith, County Counsel Miguel Marquez, Public Defender Mary Greenwood, Department of Corrections Chief John Hirokawa, probation Chief Sheila Mitchell, Clerk of the Board Maria Marinos, Fire Chief Ken Waldvogel, and Presiding Judge Richard Loftus. Thank you for your commitment to our community. I’m honored to serve with all of you.

I want to express my appreciation **FIRST** to members of the public who are here and in the Isaac Newton Senter Auditorium, and my deepest appreciation to all County employees who are here in the chambers, listening at your workspace, and watching online. You are the heart and soul of Santa Clara County. Your hard work is appreciated. Your commitment to the County is valued.

You've put your money where your mouth is and reached into your own pocketbook to make sure that we can continue serving those who need our help. For that, I'm honored to work with you and I humbly, say ...

THANK YOU.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for joining me. I've asked them to sit here at the table.

I'm most comfortable when the kids are playing, **AND** even fighting.

It's just like being at home.

Like my family, Santa Clara County is the most diverse in California, and that's what makes us strong.

Como mi familia, somos el condado con más diversidad en el estado, eso es lo que nos hace fuerte.

Shung hsang tze suwoa yi Chiang tzuang, Ying way shung hsang shu jia zhou tzuway duo yuan hua duc hsang.

The different customs and languages we share help us understand the needs of this vibrant part of the world. We should use our diversity to

strengthen our resolve to build a safe and healthy community. We can start by making sure our signage here at 70 West Hedding and all our County building are mutli-lingual so that we welcome all those who visit.

During my two decades of public service, I can say that the past three years on the Board of Supervisors has been the most rewarding AND the most challenging. In Washington, Congress is struggling to make ends meet. In Sacramento, the State Legislature is fairing no better. The decisions made there greatly impact us here...and not in a good way. The County of Santa Clara is looking at another potential round of cuts at mid-year – after more than a decade of cuts totaling **OVER TWO BILLION DOLLARS**. The 2012-13 budget looks like more of the same. The tough decisions we have to make impact our employees, their families, and the community.

We're going through some tough times. The most vulnerable in our community become more vulnerable as the income gap between the rich

and poor expands. And, it's these vulnerable communities that need the County's services.

A recent audit report prepared for the Board of Supervisors found that **62%** of the County's clients receive services from two or more County programs.

28% of our clients are families.

64% of those who use our services live in San Jose.

Another **5%** in reside in Gilroy.

These statistics highlight the damage our nation's weak economy has wreaked on the most vulnerable in our community. This creates a vicious circle that can lead to crime, health problems, and desperation.

That's why the County of Santa Clara is so important. We serve the

vulnerable and provide a safety net for those who need a boost to improve their lives.

Despite these difficult times, we continue to look for ways to maintain the vital services we provide to the community...especially those who are most vulnerable.

We continue to ask our employees to do more with less.

We continue to be concerned about those we serve.

If it's true that they say it's darkest before the dawn, then I see hope for this County. Due to the leadership on this board, in 2012, the sun is beginning to peek over the east foothills.

When Liz Kniss served in this seat, she set the foundation of ensuring that our community is educated about County services. President Ken Yeager followed with his landmark leadership on public health initiatives. Dave Cortese's presidency is marked by this County's

commitment to children. Supervisor Wasserman has stepped right in and provided strong leadership on homeless issues. Thank you ALL for your leadership.

The state of the County is challenging.

It's during these times of crisis when we have to come together, just like a family, to build for the future.

I know first-hand what it's like to work through difficult situations.

Today, some of our family members are out of work...some since 2008.

In the past, my family, like many families, worked hard and struggled just to get by. My mom's family came to California from the mid-west dustbowl and worked in the fields in order to survive. More times than not, home was a labor camp on the side of a highway. My dad's parents suffered the discrimination and humiliation forced on mixed-race families that worked on the ranches and farms of the Central Valley during the middle of last century. Our matriarch was my grandmother,

who knew that the only way to ensure survival was keeping the family together. I always knew when times were the tough...because all my grandmother had to feed the family was rice, beans, and tortillas.

When my parents moved to San Jose looking for a better life, they settled in the *Sal Si Puedes* neighborhood of east San Jose. Here there was more discrimination, more struggles, more rice, more beans, and more tortillas.

Through all of those tough times, we stood together and worked together as a family. And, as a family, we sacrificed together for a better life.

I'm proud of my humble beginnings. I'm proud of my grandparents and my parents.

I'm proud of how we always stuck together as a family during the darkest hours before the dawn. AND TODAY...I'm proud to stand here as the President of the Board of Supervisors with our Santa Clara County family. As we look forward to the upcoming year, I humbly ask

YOU, members of this very large family, to join me as we continue building our future together.

We all know that strong families need to stay healthy, feel safe, take care of their elders, nurture their children, and provide the resources necessary to thrive. That's also what the County needs to do. As the board looks forward to our work in 2012, I ask for your support on the following:

First, we need to make sure that all our communities are healthy.

With President Cortese's leadership, this county completed a health assessment of the Vietnamese community last year. I will propose to the Board that we continue these critical efforts...**AND**...conduct a Latino Health Assessment in 2012.

Latinos represent **27%** of the County's population.

Over **70%** are under the age of 44.

By mid-century, Latinos are projected to comprise **43%** of the County's total population.

Only **60%** of Latinos under 65 living in Santa Clara County have access to healthcare coverage...that is nearly **20%** lower than the County as a whole.

Almost **70%** of Latinos in this county are overweight and are more likely to have diabetes and other chronic diseases related to obesity.

The County must do a comprehensive health assessment to ensure that this growing community stays healthy for the future.

On that note, I too will focus on being healthier. Since I started on the County's "Re-Think Your Drink" initiative by taking sugary soda out of my diet, I have lost weight. **BUT, STILL I MIGHT HAVE A DIET SODA EVERY NOW AND THEN.** I will continue to walk the talk. I

will ask the students at Cesar Chavez Elementary School, the school I attended as a kid, to join me for the President Shirakawa Challenge. I will challenge students to exercise by regularly walking with me and sharing a healthy afternoon snack of fruit and water. I hope this challenge will begin a lifetime of exercise and healthy eating for all who participate, including me.

The County should continue its support of confronting the obesity epidemic. **AND, OUR RESPONSE MUST BE BOLD.** I propose development of a Healthy Corner Store policy that encourages the availability of healthy foods, like fruits and vegetables, in neighborhood stores that often serve low-income residents. By collaborating with Working Partnerships and other community groups, we can design a program that promotes good health and increased shopping at local businesses – a win-win for families and the economy.

We **ALSO** need to integrate the countywide service system for current and new Medi-Cal beneficiaries. The board should ask the administration to develop an **INTEGRATED SYSTEM OF CARE** that could function as an Accountable Care Organization, by eliminating unnecessary administrative expenses and expanding community-based prevention services.

With the Downtown Medical Clinic well on its way to completion and opening, we now can expand plans for Downtown medical services with other delivery systems. I will ask the board to direct staff to respond to an upcoming RFP for a new VA clinic, so that we could partner with the VA to expand our services in the downtown community.

As a community, we need to look at more preventative ways to maintain our health. We have the largest community in the nation without a water fluoridation system. Last year, at one clinic alone in the Tropicana neighborhood of east San Jose, over 10,000 patients were treated.

MORE THAN 9,300 OF THOSE WERE FOR BABY ROOT

CANALS. This is **UNACCEPTABLE** in the Silicon Valley. We need to come together to develop a funding mechanism for this critical investment.

While we focus on these public health initiatives, let's make sure that we provide the best service possible. Although the State has oversight of our Public Health Department, we could and should set higher standards. I urge support for the County to seek and earn accreditation for quality service by the nationally-renowned Public Health Accreditation Board. This will give us an opportunity to look at our system and make adjustments to be the best in the nation.

Second, we need to strengthen our commitment to public safety.

The City of San Jose has been nationally recognized as a leader in gang prevention through its Mayor's Gang Prevention Task Force, an effort that the County participates in.

The South County Youth Task Force, the North County Task Force and the Mountain View/Los Altos Challenge Team have followed suit. I join many voices in commending these cities for their work. As funding dwindles and the cities focus on delivering core services, it's becoming more difficult to maintain the current level of commitment. The County already dedicates a significant amount of resources to gang prevention, intervention and suppression. We know that gangs don't recognize city limit borders. Now is the time to broaden the focus and include all communities in the County that need resources to address gangs. I will ask the board to support a proposal to establish the Santa Clara County Anti-Gang Alliance. This will allow a broad group of stakeholders, in collaboration with cities, to share information and provide resources to all communities impacted by gang activity.

The County has the know-how and resources to lead this effort. **WE WILL PROVIDE THIS LEADERSHIP!**

Last year, on the heels of a court-order to reform the corrections system, the State legislature thrust the responsibility of housing and serving low-

level offenders to counties. Under the leadership of Sheriff Smith, Chief Hirokawa, Chief Mitchell, and Mental Health Director Nancy Pena, Santa Clara County was recognized throughout California for our plan to implement the Realignment of these obligations.

We were ready then, and I urge the board to support our efforts to continue leading the state on Realignment.

In 2011, we were also widely recognized for the creation of the County Re-Entry Network, a network of agencies and community-based organizations that provide services to those recently released from custody. The network provides an array of drug and alcohol, mental health, housing, and job-training services.

To strengthen the network's efforts, I've asked Pastor Tony Williams of the Bay Area Maranatha Christian Center, **who for the past 40 years has been a leader in this field**, to chair a Blue Ribbon Committee on Re-Entry Jobs Initiative. Pastor Williams' committee will bring together public agencies and private businesses to make jobs available to those

who are seeking a better and more productive life after release from custody.

Third, we need to renew our commitment to a Senior Agenda.

In coordination with the Health Trust of Santa Clara County, community-based organizations, and our neighboring cities, we can develop a bold plan to ensure that our community's seniors have access to the services they need. I can't help but think about my grandmother and all she did to keep the family safe and healthy. As a County, we need to show our commitment to those who provided for our future, by providing opportunities for a safe and healthy life today. The Board should ask the administration for a study of the **SENIOR NUTRITION PROGRAM**, with a focus on meeting community needs with integrated services. When the study is complete, the administration needs to develop a new RFP to distribute resources more effectively.

Seniors are financially vulnerable more now than ever. I will urge the Board to ask the administration to report back with a plan to maximize

Public Guardian services that ensure the assets of needy seniors are protected from elder abuse **PREDATORS**.

Fourth, we need to protect and provide opportunities for our needy at -risk youth.

In Santa Clara County, we have a silent, growing problem with child pornography and its damaging effects on vulnerable children. A recent study by the Mayo Clinic and the American Federal Bureau of Prisons, reported that **76% to 85%** of individuals arrested for Internet pornography last year, had molested a child.

Today, there are 20 search warrants waiting to be served in the County on alleged child-pornography charges. Unfortunately, due to limited staff resources, an estimated two-thirds of these offenders are not brought under investigation. The sheer volume of people sharing child pornography in just Santa Clara County alone at any given time is alarmingly high. We need to stop hiding our heads in the sand on this insidious crime. We need resources and more detectives to protect

children **WHO ARE IN REAL DANGER** and of becoming victims in the future. I hope the board provides leadership on eradicating this problem and allocates the resources needed to get the job done.

In this challenging economic environment, young people who are most vulnerable to negative influences can get distracted from achieving their dreams and aspirations.

Our youth is also feeling the squeeze of the bad economy and the lack of opportunity. For young people who turn to crime and ultimately get lost in the juvenile justice system, we need to deliver services that positively impact the whole child. I will ask the board to direct the administration to review “wrap-around” juvenile services and the current RFP for these services to ensure that there is equity in the system and every community is served well. As chair of the Public Safety and Justice Committee, I will ask the Blue Ribbon Committee on Re-Entry Jobs Initiative to develop a strategy for our juvenile population.

We also must do all we can to help our children get a solid education to prepare for a bright future. In 2010, the East Side Union High School District approved the A-G Initiative – a landmark policy that makes college entrance requirements the default curriculum. President Dave Cortese made it a priority last year for the County to support this initiative countywide. I urge the board to support the Silicon Valley Education Foundation’s initiative to make A-G the default curriculum at every school district in the County.

Supervisor Cortese and I led the effort to revive School-Linked Services in our public schools. This year, the County will roll out the program at 53 schools by integrating State Mental Health Services Act and Early Intervention funding. The program works. Let’s make sure we maintain our strong support.

Fifth, we need to identify additional resources to ensure that we can continue providing vital services for our community.

The state legislature's efforts to end redevelopment funding used to boost local economies has been upheld by the courts. We need to continue our commitment to creating jobs for the local economy in this new environment caused by the state legislature's actions. The board should direct the administration to develop, in cooperation with community and business interests, a comprehensive Economic Development Plan as redevelopment funding decreases, in order to fill the voids where appropriate.

Recently, the board received a report about consolidating Fire Services in the County. As you know, we now consolidate ambulance services, and its works. Although there are more questions than answers, we should continue having this discussion to ensure that we look for ways to effectively AND efficiently serve the public.

Last year, in a settlement with the City of San Jose, the County assumed ownership of the former City Hall building located next door at 801 North First Street. The building and its surrounding grounds situated

along the VTA light rail system is an ideal location for innovative redevelopment that could provide sources of revenue for the County.

With his extensive experience on these types of projects as a San Jose City councilmember, I've asked Vice President Yeager to chair a Special Ad Hoc Committee on Economic Development to identify the best and most beneficial use for the County's newly acquired property next door.

There will be much to do in 2012 as we work our way toward prosperity and better days. There is still a tough road ahead, but the economy is showing signs of a slow but steady recovery. We can achieve success by focusing on the sun beginning to peek over the horizon.

We have a Board of Supervisors that has demonstrated time and time again, that good public policy, not politics, works for the common good.

We have elected and appointed officials with visionary leadership recognized throughout the state and nation.

We have an administration that has been innovative in the delivery of services needed to meet the high demand required in today's economy.

We have employees committed to delivering those services with pride and sincere concern for the community.

We're a big family that is sure to get into squabbles along the way. But, as my grandmother knew all too well...**WE WILL HAVE TO COME TOGETHER TO BULD A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR OUR COMMUNITY.**

Now, I'm going to ask Pastor Tony Williams to come up for closing comments.

In honor of my grandmother, please join me and my board colleagues in the breezeway for refreshments, beans, and tortillas.

Thank you, God Bless you, and God Bless Santa Clara County.