

**2012 State of the County Address  
By Allen Ishida, Chairman  
Tulare County Board of Supervisors**

Good morning and thank you for your attendance at today's meeting. It is an honor to serve as Chairman of the Tulare County Board of Supervisors for the second time.

I would like to publicly thank past Chairman Mike Ennis and fellow Board members, elected officials, our CAO and his staff, and County of Tulare department heads and employees for their collective efforts, contributions, and leadership during 2011. Tulare County government truly has a diverse and highly skilled workforce.

This morning I would like to touch on Tulare County's financial situation, share some success stories from last year, and focus on a few of Tulare County's key issues moving forward.

I believe that the status of Tulare County Government is stable. As a result, we are financially sound. One of the main reasons why we are in good shape is our retirement system.

While other Counties are struggling with their pension systems, Tulare County's is 90 percent funded. We are better off than other jurisdictions because of conservative measures. Tulare County is no longer a training ground for other government agencies. It's a destination. Because our retirement system is sound, we are experiencing employment inquiries from applicants who have serious concerns about their current retirement system.

Another measuring tool of our success involves staff reductions and furloughs. Many jurisdictions are still making hundreds of staff reductions and are sending employees home for 5, 10, and even 15 unpaid days through furlough programs. These furloughs, in some cases, mean deep salary cuts. In 2011, Tulare County offered our employees the cancellation of furloughs. As a result of this action, approximately 50 percent of our employees received almost a 2 percent increase in compensation. The remaining 50 percent of our employees turned down this increase in compensation. The Board certainly appreciates the cooperation and dedication of all Tulare County employees.

It's with great pleasure that I get to share some of the success stories that my fellow Board members and our employees have apart of. For example:

- Measure R continues to be a great success. Highway 99 widening is under construction in Tulare County. We have made major road improvements in our unincorporated communities and rural roads. Tulare County has more than 3,000 miles of road in our local system, therefore please be patient. We are doing our best.
- In our effort to increase transparency and accountability of County government, Chairman Ennis instituted the Speakers Bureau that provides our residents the ability to request our department representatives and elected officials to speak and answer questions in front of civic and non-profit organizations. Since its launch in June 2011, more than 25 requests from service organizations have been made. More than 1,200 people listened and asked questions of County representatives who have provided presentations regarding County services.
- The Customer Service Program has been developed and small focus groups are being conducted to evaluate and fine tune the program for roll out this year.

- The Sheriff's Department achieved its goal to reduce gang violence through the implementation of gang injunctions and specialized patrols.
- The Board of Supervisors recently authorized the Sheriff's Department to apply for a \$60 million state grant to fund construction of a new 200-bed jail in the Porterville area. Public safety is the number one priority for the Board.
- Tulare County's Museum of Farm Labor and Agriculture Farm Worker and Agriculture has been very successful. The museum has educated our general public and students about the importance of our many ethnic groups' contributions to the agricultural industry in the San Joaquin Valley.
- Supervisor Steve Worthley led the way to update our information and technology department. The Board's investment in upgrading our technology has helped us maintain service levels with reduced staffing.
- Step Up continues to be a success story. Through this program we have been able to see positive results from our at-risk youth. We have expanded this program to reach junior high school and grammar school youth. Thank you, Supervisor Cox for being the lead over seeing this program.
- We have also continued to implement a legal training program for our elected board members of special districts. Supervisor Vander Poel worked with County Counsel to initiate this program to ensure that our local officials are aware of the laws that govern their conduct as board members.
- Tulare County is the lead agency in the current Tulare Lake Basin Study of the water needs of disadvantaged communities in the Tulare Lake Basin. We have had several meetings with stakeholders from Fresno, Kings, Tulare and Kern counties and we are currently preparing for outreach meetings in unincorporated communities. The County's involvement is a direct result of the formulation and ongoing work of the Tulare County Water Commission.

While there is many more success to share, I would now like to focus on upcoming issues.

California appears finally ready to address some of our State's water issues. Water is not just a regional issue, but also a statewide issue. However, Sacramento politicians have made it a regional issue because they want someone other than the State to pay for the needed improvements. We need a comprehensive State solution that will benefit all Californians and the solution should be paid for by every Californian. I believe that the State's 58 County Board of Supervisors have a chance to directly influence statewide water policy because of how this issue impacts their respective areas.

The Mountain Counties have an immediate need to reduce the threat of catastrophic fire through fuel reduction measures. Thinning the forests would increase water supply.

The San Joaquin Valley Counties need additional storage on the San Joaquin River for flood protection, additional water for farming and urban use.

The Delta Counties need additional storage on the San Joaquin River for flood protection and to improve the health of the Delta's eco system. The Delta Counties also need money to clean up their wastewater discharge and even salmon fishermen need more cold fresh and clean water for the salmon population.

Southern California needs additional storage and an alternative way to receive water from the Delta in case of a catastrophic failure of the Delta Levees.

There is a concern about catastrophic flooding as a result of global warming

Why not use additional surface water storage and ground water recharge basins to help minimize the potential flood threat? Tulare County will continue to work with Counties statewide to bring forward solutions for everybody's needs.

Another major goal this year is Economic Development.

We will actively market the many benefits Tulare County has to offer businesses that are ready to expand or relocate. We have a young workforce with 30 percent of our population the age of 18 or younger who will be eager to get to work when they are finished with school. The cost of housing and land is relatively inexpensive compared to the Bay Area and Southern California. We have land available for large industrial projects and large rail served industrial parks. We have two community colleges and private higher education opportunities. In order to further support business expansions and relocations, we will concentrate on updating our ordinances to streamline the requirements to expand or locate new businesses in the county.

Tulare County has had a longstanding vision to create an economic development website that includes relevant industry information about local agribusiness, workforce development partners, site selection, zoning assistance and other factors considered essential to implement an effective campaign to foster increased economic development. The Tulare County Resource Management Agency (RMA) and other departments are bringing this vision to fruition.

In December, RMA staff presented an overview of a new Economic Development website to the Board of Supervisors. This website will be unveiled at today's meeting.

The website includes industry portals designed to quickly inform prospective business site selectors about Tulare County's dominant industry, agriculture. The website also provides detailed information about important local demographics, and is a guide to local educational institutions and other business development partners who can provide access to a local workforce with the relevant specialized skills a particular business desires.

The next issue Tulare County will continue to address on is Public Safety Realignment. One of the cornerstones of California's solution to solve its budget issues was to shift responsibilities for certain state inmates from the State to Counties.

Tulare County's Probation, Sheriff, District Attorney, Health & Human Services Agency, and Public Defender offices, in partnership with local law enforcement, the Tulare County Superior Court and workforce agencies have done an excellent job in putting together a plan to absorb the influx of State inmates and parolees into the County's jail and Probation systems.

However, Realignment does create a need for additional jail capacity and the Board of Supervisors supported the Sheriff's Department's grant application in December to seek State funds for a new jail facility in Porterville.

We will continue to lobby Sacramento for adequate funds for Realignment in future years. We are especially watching the health care costs of those prisoners.

In addition to water, economic development, and Realignment, there are a few more items to mention for 2012.

- We will increase the enforcement of the county's marijuana growing ordinance. If you grow marijuana outdoors, expect a visit from our County Marijuana Task Force.
- The General Plan Update is scheduled to come before the Board by the end of the second quarter.
- We will update our Strategic Business Plan this year.
- And last, but not least, we will increase the number of paid call firefighters (volunteers) and increase their training.

As we move forward in 2012, I would like to thank County management and staff in advance for all their hard work and dedication.

Thank you for all in attendance. Have a great year.