

2023 State of the County Address
Robert Rickman, Chair, San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors

Thank you, Maria, for the warm introduction. I would personally like to thank you and the Tracy Chamber of Commerce for your help in arranging the State of the County address and for the Chamber's support to the business community.

I further would like to thank The Sheriff's Office Honor Guard, Nichole Lee, Deacon Ryza, President Callahan, Carissa Lucas from the City of Tracy, Scott Tyrell, San Joaquin County ISD, County staff, the Grand Theater, the caterers, our A/V folks, our sponsors, and everyone who made the day possible.

It's always a humbling experience to be on this stage. I have delivered 4 State of the City addresses here when I was mayor and now I have the honor to deliver my first State of the County address on the Grand Theatre Stage. The Grand Theatre is the crown jewel of Tracy, and we are celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. I appreciate each and every one of you for taking the time to hear about our county's accomplishments, our vision for the future, and our broad economic outlook from our guest speaker-UOP President Christopher Callahan.

As Chairman, this year I brought the State of the County to Tracy, District 5. As we say in the county, 5th District, best District. This is the first year that it has been outside of the Board of Supervisors Chambers. The 5th district incorporates Mountain House, Tracy, Escalon, Ripon, and unincorporated San Joaquin County. Tracy is my hometown, the place I was born and raised. The love I have for my hometown, the pride of being a resident here, we learned it from our family, our neighborhood, our community, and in our schools. This town is something special, as are all our hometowns. But we can all agree that the 5th District has the best high school sport teams. Here in San Joaquin County, we are special in the way we come together in a time of crisis, the way we come together in time of celebration, and the way we come together to get things done.

And now to the main event.

Members of the Board, staff, residents and friends of San Joaquin County, welcome to our 2023 State of the County. I am honored to be here with you today as Chair of the Board and the Supervisor for District 5, and grateful for the opportunity to serve you as a steward of what I believe is among the most beautiful, innovative, productive and welcoming counties in California.

San Joaquin County is truly: ***A Place to Thrive and A Place Where Greatness Grows.***

As the Chairman, I'm 1 person on a team of 5, and I would like to take this opportunity to formally introduce my colleagues:

Miguel Villapudua, District 1

Paul Canepa, District 2
Tom Patti, District 3
Steven Ding, District 4

Together, we are working for you- the County at large. I believe we are an aggressive and forward-thinking board that is highly invested in making San Joaquin County the most prosperous community that it can be. I would also like to recognize our County Administrator, Jay Wilverding, for his steadfast dedication to fiscal solvency in partnership with our Board.

Now I would like to recognize the dignitaries that are with us today.

I would also like to recognize our county leaders in attendance. These senior leaders implement the policy and vision of the board, and work very hard to ensure our county operates efficiently.

I would also like to thank my wife Karen who has continued to make me a better father and husband. Karen still looks the same, she doesn't appear to age. I wish I could say the same about myself.

I would also like to recognize my parents, Leroy and Belmida.

I cannot begin this annual address without reflecting on the challenges we as a County, state and nation have faced in recent years. While thankfully we emerged from the crisis of a global pandemic, **the experience we endured collectively has impacted each one of us.**

From loved ones lost, to local businesses forced to shutter, to an epidemic of isolation and mental health impacts, to educational and social setbacks, we naturally want to put that chapter behind us.

But let's not forget that these times of adversity can make us stronger, more connected and determined.

The Board adopted a new set of **Strategic Priorities** through 2025. As an elected governing body these priorities guide our financial investments, initiatives and the provision of services. **The six priorities are:**

- Fiscal Optimization
- Organizational Capacity/Technology Utilization
- Homelessness
- Public Safety/ Criminal Justice/Quality of Life
- Economic Development; and
- Water Management

Today I'd like to provide you with an overview of some of the many accomplishments of the past fiscal year. Governing and managing a County the size of San Joaquin - with its

790,000 residents over 1,426 square miles, with seven cities - Escalon, Lathrop, Lodi, Manteca, Ripon, Stockton and Tracy - and including 35 square miles of ecologically and economically critical waterways - **requires the work of nearly 8,000 employees throughout 26 departments and agencies.**

On a side note, just recently on Sept 14th, LAFCO unanimously approved Mountain House's application for Incorporation. So, on March 5, 2024, the residents of Mountain House will vote to decide if Mountain House becomes the newest city in CA. and the 8th city in San Joaquin County.

We are the 14th largest County in California and the heartland of our great State.

Our employees, departments, agencies and elected officials focus on delivering the highest quality, most responsive governance and services possible by focusing our efforts on clear, strategic priorities.

I want to share some shining examples of how we have put these priorities into concrete action garnering great results – because they each deserve to be highlighted and celebrated.

Fiscal Optimization

Among our most important priorities is delivering a Structurally Balanced Budget. Each department in the County is responsible for producing a sound and responsible budget that also seeks to leverage resources to ensure accountability to taxpayers, grantors and investors. In fact, Standard & Poor's recently upgraded the County's credit rating from A+ to AA-, demonstrating our County's commitment to fiscal responsibility.

I'm pleased to report that the fiscal state of our County is as strong as ever. This past June, the Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a \$2.59 billion structurally balanced budget for Fiscal Year 2023-2024.

The budget reflects an increase of \$370.8 million when compared to last year's budget.

As you might imagine, this multi-billion-dollar budget doesn't happen overnight. Many hours of hard work and collaboration were spent by the County's dedicated employees and executives to develop this spending plan. On behalf of the Board, we extend our sincere gratitude for their efforts.

Here are some actions taken by our departments to identify funding sources to help pay for critical services and programs:

- We reached agreement on 13 contracts with seven employee organizations resulting in 100% of the County's represented employees remaining under contract.
- We entered into tax sharing agreements with the cities of Lathrop and Lodi for more equitable distribution of tax dollars.

- The Auditor-Controller identified \$1.8 million in assessments paid in excess of costs for the East Stockton Sewer District Project and is working to return those funds.
- The Treasurer Tax Collector generated over \$133 million of interest income and property owners provided over \$1.3 billion in property taxes to fund essential services. This was an increase from \$1.2 billion the previous year.
- The Department of Public Works had a windfall in grant funding this past year:
 - They invested \$17.2 million in grants to expand and enhance water related services, including \$6.5 million in grants for major water projects for San Joaquin County, North San Joaquin Water Conservation District and the City of Stockton, as well as \$3.3 million in State funding to develop the County's Mokelumne River water right application.
 - They received \$70,000 in grants to purchase hybrid/electric vehicles to reduce vehicle procurement and fuel costs while improving air quality.
 - They also secured \$4.7 million in grants to create a master plan for pedestrian improvements on over 300 miles of roads, and new transportation infrastructure near Harrison Elementary School.

Our departments are constantly searching for funding opportunities to enhance services for County residents.

Organizational Capacity/Technology Utilization

Turning to Organizational Capacity/Technology Utilization. When the Board enacted this strategic priority, we did so with the intention of:

- Improving Recruitment and Retention Rates
- Formalizing Succession Planning
- Demonstrating Leadership Development; and
- Augmenting Digitization and Automation

Here's a few examples:

- We transitioned to 100% electronic plan review for all building permits resulting in more streamlined, transparent and flexible processing of building and solar permits to make our permit process less complicated, more efficient. In short, getting back to basic customer service.
- We implemented a new Security Information and Event Management system and contracted with a Security Operation Center to complement a multi-layered suite of cyber-defenses to protect resident data and County systems.
- We approved a new Hard to Recruit Incentive Program offering eligible new hires the opportunity to receive stay bonuses of up to \$6,000, and other incentives.
- And I want to take this opportunity to say to all of you: **SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY IS HIRING** among all Departments and all levels. Check out our newly updated website. We'd be happy to have you join the County team.

Quality of Life

I want to talk a little bit about the outstanding quality of life here in San Joaquin County. Every decision we make is intended to increase the quality of life for our residents through accountability, transparency, responsiveness, equity, and effectiveness. It's what makes us a **Place to Thrive**. While that means different things to different people, as a community and society there are certain support systems, services and comforts that the County provides that residents rely on to make day-to-day life better. Here are just a few examples during 2022-2023:

- Established an Elections Advisory Committee of local residents to incorporate voter input into how the Registrar of Voters can best serve the community.
- Began construction upgrades to the former In Shape building for County Law and Justice offices.
- Opened the Jack J. Williams, M.D. Public Health Building. This phase one project provides a new administration building and lab facilities.
- Commenced a Master Service Agreement with Dignity Health that is resulting in clinical, operational, and fiscal best practices at San Joaquin General Hospital.
- Allocated \$74 million for housing, veterans, behavioral health, and illegal dumping prevention.
- Invested \$6.4 million in facility repairs and upgrades at the eight Community Centers located throughout the County.
- Allocated \$5.2 million to strengthen the mental health workforce by offering paid opportunities and student loan forgiveness in exchange for service commitments within the County.
- Through SJ Health primary care efforts and "Street Medicine" outreach, hundreds of mobile health services are now offered in neighborhoods and to the unhoused.
- Allocated more than \$2.5 million to pay for facility repairs, upgrades and equipment purchases at six local Veterans Service Organizations.
- We allotted \$2 million to UOP for capital renovations of Manor Hall for Military and Student Veteran Services
- As well as one million in total matching funds for the Delta College Student Career Internship Program
- We also launched the SEE IT, REPORT IT, STOP IT public outreach campaign to reduce illegal dumping in the County. And just a little PSA. if **YOU** see illegal dumping either report it using the My San Joaquin App or call County Public Works.

Homelessness

I'd like to turn our focus on an issue that is currently **the** most pressing in our County: **Homelessness**.

This is a humanitarian emergency for California, and a cost of living, mental health, public health & safety, and substance abuse crises. I am confident that working together and working locally, we can make significant progress, look at its root and broad causes and decrease this homeless crisis in the long term.

Let me be blunt. The housing first model doesn't work! This state has spent billions of dollars on this model and the problem has only gotten worse.

Therefore, we cannot view the issue just as one of housing; that's only one component of the overall issue. People experience homelessness for a variety of reasons including substance abuse, serious mental illness, a lack of available resources, and personal accountability. As a law enforcement officer for the better part of two decades, I have seen these issues firsthand.

We have to look at this crisis holistically and regionally. As a result, the Board has invested in diverse solutions to address the crisis of thousands of unhoused residents.

In the past two years alone, San Joaquin County invested nearly \$200 million for Countywide projects ranging from permanent supportive housing, emergency shelter, responding to calls for service to the unhoused, hospital treatment, and enhanced care management. These investments will result in the addition of over 700 new units of permanent supportive housing and increase shelter capacity Countywide by 166 percent.

Here are a few examples of what we have accomplished:

- The development of the conceptual plan for the SJ Be Well Campus. The Board approved 53 million over the next 18 years from the National Opioid settlement. This will be a one stop shop with a campus of facilities, proposed in 2 phases on 23 acres of county owned property in French camp. Phase one will include dual diagnosis point of entry, a sobering center, medical detoxification, a psychiatric health facility, and a crisis stabilization unit with a completion date of FY 2025/2026. The second phase includes transitional residential cottages, expanded perinatal programming, a youth substance use disorder residential treatment facility, and youth after-care outpatient programs.
- \$14.3 million in Behavioral Health Bridge Housing grant funding for various housing projects throughout San Joaquin County. The primary purpose of the funding is to address the treatment and housing needs of justice-involved severely mentally ill individuals.
- We adopted an ordinance strengthening San Joaquin County's ability to protect critical infrastructure, including along waterways and levees.
- Just last month we partnered with the City of Stockton to expand the Pathways Project, which is a low-barrier emergency shelter.
- We supported the development of low-barrier emergency shelter in the City of Manteca.
- We allocated \$20 million from the County's second allotment of ARPA funds, which so far has provided:
 - Roughly \$832,000 for facilities improvements and expansion of transitional housing for clients of Lodi House, a shelter for women and children.
 - \$2 million for shared supportive housing developed through a partnership with St. Mary's Dining Room and STAND Affordable Housing.
 - \$5.3 million to the City of Lodi to complete construction financing on phases 2 through 4 of the Lodi Access Center emergency shelter.

- And just recently, the Board allocated more than \$7 million for the completion of an Emergency Shelter in the City of Tracy. This funding follows the Board's July 2021 allocation of \$3.6 million to support initial construction and related development costs for the emergency shelter. The approved investment will provide funding to complete Phase 4, which includes 68 additional beds.
- We broke ground on Sonora Square, a permanent supportive housing project for homeless behavioral health clients in partnership with the Housing Authority of San Joaquin.
- We opened Victory Gardens, a permanent supportive housing project for homeless veterans in partnership with the Housing Authority of San Joaquin, providing permanent housing for 49 formerly homeless veterans and their families.
- We funded Park Center Apartments, a permanent supportive housing project.
- We celebrated the remodel of the Women's Recuperative Care Center through our Housing Authority along with Gospel Center Rescue Mission.

Public Safety/ Criminal Justice

And now moving to a subject that is personal, and close to my heart – public safety. The first priority of government is to keep our citizens safe. For close to 28 years, I have worked as a sergeant for the CHP and have worked in every city in San Joaquin County. I have devoted my life to public safety. With that being said, I want to thank those in law enforcement and fire for being here today: Our police, sheriff's, CHP, fire personnel, DA staff and the Probation Department. **Thank you for all that you do and the sacrifices you make each day to keep the public and our communities safe.** We owe you a debt of gratitude. I speak on behalf of the Board when I say that we support you all and the great job you do.

A few highlights to report from our departments that oversee Public Safety:

- The DA's Office has made great progress to eliminate a backlog of Crime Report Referrals. They hired 20 new staff, 7 of whom are Deputy DA's, and renewed efforts to prosecute quality of life crimes: increasing the charging rate from 53% in 2022 to 72% in 2023.
- Recently, the Board of Supervisors approved a \$2.2 million appropriation to establish the San Joaquin County DA's Fentanyl Intervention and Response Safety Team, or FIRST, adding 11 dedicated staff positions to the department. Thank you DA Freitas for your leadership. Know this, if you are going to deal in this poison that is killing our children, we are going to use every available resource at our disposal to make sure you spend time in prison.
- The Probation Department has bolstered Career and Technical Education and Vocational Programs for juvenile offenders to help put them on the path to a productive and hopeful future.
- The Sheriff's Office, along with the Community Development Department, began a pilot program to remove unwanted junk, trash, and abandoned vehicles from private properties at no cost to the property owner.
- A sensitive subject of utmost priority is school and safety in public settings. The Sheriff's Department hosted an intensive training to prepare for active threats, and

rescue and reunification in a shooting scenario. While we never want to use those skills, if a real-life situation were to occur, we must be prepared.

- We broke ground on the San Joaquin Detention and Program Facility at the Sheriff's office.
- The County committed more than \$12 million in ARPA funding to 16 fire districts for everything from staffing ambulance dispatch centers, ambulances, and other vehicles, to watercraft, training centers, and radios.

Economic Development

- A vital economy keeps our County moving forward, growing, and innovating.
- Significant business incentives and economic development opportunities allow the County to continue its smart growth, and further position itself as a highly attractive location for employers to expand and invest.
- Employment growth has been dominated by an expansion in the transportation and warehousing sectors. The San Joaquin County industrial real estate market is one of the region's key economic assets, based on its strategic location, and numerous transportation networks.
- Approximately 32.4 million square feet of new industrial space was constructed between 2018 and June 2023, with about 10 million square feet of additional space currently under construction.
- We pride ourselves on attracting major employers—and top taxpayers—like Amazon. They recently opened a new 3.5 million square foot facility in Tracy, increasing Amazon's total combined footprint in Manteca, Stockton and Tracy to more than 8 million square feet.
- Tesla opened its megafactory in Lathrop last year – the company's fifth facility in San Joaquin County - with 650 employees in that facility alone. There are 2,220 Tesla employees between the megafactory and Tesla's other electric vehicle parts manufacturing/logistics facilities in Lathrop.
- And despite rising interest rates, the housing market in San Joaquin County continues to grow with an average home value over \$530,000.
- Mountain House, River Islands, Tracy Hills, Ellis, and other housing developments, will add thousands of additional housing units over time. In addition, a number of multi-family and affordable housing projects have been completed or are under construction. These are critical to easing the housing crisis for many working families.
- San Joaquin's gross value of agricultural production increased by 5.34%, to \$3.2 billion in 2021 with agricultural commodities exported to 94 countries!

- The Stockton Port is also having record success with their second busiest year ever including 278 vessel calls transporting nearly 4.5 million tons of cargo to and from locations worldwide. The Port provides over 10,000 jobs, generates \$1.6 billion in economic activity, and nearly \$78 million in state and local taxes annually.
- And big plans are underway to improve the Stockton Airport. Our airport is currently expanding their cargo ramp space and conducting pavement rehabilitation of their taxilanes to attract prospective cargo operators, increase flight services, and contribute to the region's economic development.
- The tourism and hospitality sector in San Joaquin County continues to experience significant growth. 6 major hotel brands have been constructed or are under construction in cities throughout the county.
- Just a quick update on Airpark 599, a master-planned logistics park on 275 acres of County-owned land adjacent to the Stockton Airport and Highway 99 in Stockton. As a hub for all major markets in Northern California, Airpark 599 will add 3.47 million square feet of Class A space suitable for e-commerce fulfillment, distribution, or advanced manufacturing while improving area infrastructure and bringing new jobs to a large, skilled workforce. In fact,
- Target Corporation has entered into a lease of a 1.4 million square foot logistics facility currently under construction on about 112 acres. Planned occupancy is in the third quarter of 2023-2024 and Target will hire approximately 2,500 employees, with seasonal fluctuations.
- And I want to take a moment to acknowledge our Employment and Economic Development Department, or E2D2, as well as our Economic Development Association for their efforts to provide jobs, workforce training, and funding to local businesses.
 - They assisted 2,690 participants with job search services and provided nearly \$4 million in grants and loans to small businesses throughout the County.
 - To date, they've administered over \$8 million through the Relief Across Downtown program to help businesses impacted by the pandemic.

Water Management

And finally, turning to water. San Joaquin County's defining waterways - comprising the San Joaquin Delta which is the hub of California's water supply, rivers and estuaries - are our most valuable natural resource. Protecting and managing that resource is critical.

The past year showed us that nature remains unpredictable and powerful. After a decade of severe drought, the winter storms of late 2022 through spring 2023 brought a torrent of water that threatened, and in many cases destroyed or damaged property.

However, our County's emergency response was swift and prepared, mitigating impacts significantly and kept residents informed of changing conditions and evacuation plans, when necessary.

- The Office of Emergency Services activated their Emergency Operation Center on New Year's Day, operating 24/7, and the Board of Supervisors ratified a Proclamation that declared a local state of emergency during a special session on January 4. The County immediately began to collect documentation to support federal assistance.
- On January 18, San Joaquin County was added to the Department of Homeland Security, FEMA's major disaster declaration for the State of California.
- January 28, the County opened a Disaster Recovery Center at the Ag Center. Multiple local, State, and Federal agencies were available to assist County residents who were impacted by floods.
- The Sheriff's Office spent over 2,100 hours between January and April conducting evacuations of five separate locations and provided 24-hour a day security for each location to protect the homes and possessions of residents.
- Public Works oversaw repairs totaling \$1.27 million on critical transportation infrastructure, and \$1.1 million in repairs when the MacArthur Road bridge and Kasson Road washed out. It took Public Works less than 1 month to repair and reopen those roadways.
- Throughout the storms and potential future snow melts, we worked with our federal and state delegates and agencies, received approvals and conducted emergency levee maintenance.
- On March 28, the Board directed staff to facilitate the transition of OES back to a stand-alone department. reporting directly to the Board instead of General Services. The Chair of the Board of Supervisors will serve as the Director of Emergency Services and the new Office of Emergency Services Department head will be reclassified as Director of Emergency Operations.

We are actively preparing for the next flood event. In fact, we purchased three drones to assist engineers in spotting potential levee vulnerabilities using thermal imaging to identify seepage and boils.

I would be remiss if I didn't highlight the County's efforts to defeat the Delta Tunnel Conveyance Project. The County has been fighting various forms of this tunnel battle, that would ship the Delta's water south, for nearly 15 years and we aren't going to stop until the proposed project is dead in the water.

This summer, the County, in partnership with the Delta Counties Coalition and our State and Federal legislative delegations defeated the Governor's sneaky proposal to ease environmental rules and expedite the highly controversial and outrageously expensive conveyance project. I want to thank Supervisor Patti and Ding for their leadership efforts in putting an end to this disastrous project that would devastate the precious Delta environment and its 4 million residents.

In Conclusion

I hope that I've been able to remind you of the reasons we enjoy such a wonderful quality of life in San Joaquin County. There are thousands of people who play a large part in why we are successful and why we live in such a unique and special part of the world. All of you sitting in the fabulous Grand Theatre this morning, have contributed to that success.

This Board has covered a long distance in the last few months. I want to thank my colleagues, and our staff for your dedication and leadership. I want to thank everyone here today and the residents of San Joaquin County for your trust and confidence.

San Joaquin County has a bright future ahead. We will continue to foster a county government that is more accountable, inclusive, and accessible as well as more efficient, effective, and transparent. We will continue to break through ceilings and go farther than we have before. So, in the weeks, months, and years to come, I look forward to working together with all the Board Members, our staff, and most importantly, you, the residents and business owners, to create a great future for all San Joaquin residents. We will continue to deliver essential services and programs that make San Joaquin County a great place to live, work, and play.

As Carl Sandburg said, all we need to begin with is a dream that we can do better than before. All we need to have is faith, and that dream will come true. All we need to do is act, and the time for action is now."