



Loudoun County

VIRGINIA

WHERE TRADITION MEETS INNOVATION

STATE OF THE COUNTY

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Chair At-Large, Loudoun County Board of Supervisors

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As I recall, my parting words at last year's State of the County Address were, "I'll see you next year." Could any of us have imagined that just one year later we would be in the middle of a worldwide pandemic that has shut down nations large and small, sickened millions... and worse claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands, including 49 of our Loudoun Citizens. We stand in almost unprecedented times, not for over 100 years has a pandemic so devastated the world. COVID-19 has robbed us of our ability to gather for parties, and parades, for relaxation and recreation, for work or worship, for high school games and high school graduations.

On a random Wednesday in March, all 84,761 Loudoun County students left their school buildings with no idea they would not return the next day, the next week, or the remainder of the year. Among those students, 6,395 Seniors who were looking forward to the second semester of their Senior year. To early dismissal, senior trips, yearbook signing, prom, and most importantly their graduations. These amazing young people, born in the wake of 911, raised their entire lives with their country involved in a war, are members of Generation Z. If you take a moment to read about this generation, you'll learn they are the most technologically advanced generation in history; they have never known a world without the internet and social media. These remarkable young people are self-confident and independent, self-aware and caring. They are concerned about the environment and justice and overall, they are very accepting, in fact welcoming, of differences. They are curious about their counterparts, not just in other states, but other countries. They deserved to have their senior year experience. Over the past months, I've heard some people dismiss the importance of the many singular, unique elements of the second semester of a Senior year; people who don't understand why High School Seniors and their parents are heartbroken they won't have the joy and great satisfaction of walking across the stage to receive their diploma. Class of 2020, I don't want you to listen to them. You know why? because those people telling you missing your Senior year is not a big deal had the opportunity to have a Senior year experience. So, don't listen to them. Listen instead to your Senior Class Presidents. They have a message for you. Following their message, I will return with the remainder of the 2020 State of the County address.

Class of 2020 you are amazing young people, and as your County Chair, I speak on behalf of the Board and the County when I say congratulations on reaching this milestone, and the very best of luck in all your future endeavors. At some point, in that bright future that lies ahead of you,

please consider volunteering or working, not just for financial gain but for a non-profit organization with a mission that speaks to your passions.

Now more than ever, the importance of our nonprofit community cannot be overstated. Loudoun, just like every other part of the country, we have seen a significant increase in the number of citizens utilizing our non-profits. Everything from re-entry services, to homelessness mitigation, domestic violence assistance and of course food services. The Executive Director of Loudoun Hunger relief reports that on average they have seen an increase of twenty-six new households a day coming in to receive assistance. In the month of April, they distributed 102 tons of food and provided over 170,000 meals.

Not a week has gone by that I've not had many of you reach out to me asking how you can be of assistance to our Loudoun friends and neighbors during the COVID Pandemic. Two weeks ago, that question was answered when on Give/Choose Tuesday, Loudoun citizens donated almost 600 hundred thousand dollars to assist Loudoun County's nonprofit community. During this year's budget process, the County Board allocated over two million dollars to nonprofits serving Loudoun. It is now and has always been my belief that our nonprofits extend our county budget as they serve citizens who are often most at need. Quite honestly, it is not possible for County Government to fulfill the various needs of every Loudoun Citizen. Nonprofits stand in the gap and complete our circle. In a compassionate, respectful manner they deliver an invaluable service. Because our nonprofits work directly with families, they realize that with the exception of robbing many of their livelihood and some of their lives, the most sinister result of this virus is that it has robbed us of our ability to feel safe, to hug, to touch, and to be near loved ones when most needed.

However, as treacherous as this virus has been, it has also revealed something about us as Loudouners, we are a community of people who truly care about one another. It has confirmed we are a County where teachers upend their lives to teach the students they care about in ways they weren't trained for and using techniques they may have just thought of the night before. A county that seeks to protect our senior citizens and at-risk populations by volunteering to run errands, take them meals and call those who are isolated in their homes. A county that establishes social media groups with the sole purpose of offering support and encouragement during these uncertain times. And of course, a County where our hospital and medical staffs, first responders and essential workers put themselves on the line every day to offer indispensable and needed services.

COVID 19 has redefined, or maybe just clarified, what a hero is. Not someone who leaps tall buildings in a single bound, shoots a spider web from their hand, or flies an invisible jet. No, a hero is someone who does a job even while realizing that job could put them, and sadly their families, at risk; yet they go to work, gloved up, masked up and often fed up. When we speak of heroes, of course our First Responders come to mind. Women and Men who, when answering their call to duty, routinely and knowingly put themselves in harm's way. In Loudoun, 5 members of our sheriff's department and 9 of our combined Fire and Rescue system have

contracted COVID 19. Thankfully, all are recovering, as are their families. I especially want to highlight the members of crew number four of the Sterling Volunteer Rescue Squad who have been particularly hard hit. Please know that your County Chair, your Supervisors and all of Loudoun stands with you. To our hospital and medical staffs, especially Respiratory Therapists, we understand the risk you take to take care of us. We know the hours you're working, the sacrifices you're making, and the dangers you're facing. We also know that a simple thank you may not be enough, but for now, please accept our words of thanks as a down payment until the day we can adequately show our appreciation. And for all of you who have been pressed into service, who we never really thought of as essential but who have proven to be absolutely vital to our health and safety we thank you.... To Grocery store workers who have more contact with the general public than any other profession. Custodial staff, who clean and sanitize work place...Truck drivers, who continue to deliver needed items...Postal service workers who have always been, and continue to be vital to our County, Commonwealth and Country. And so many others who have been recruited into service. We see you, we respect you and we thank you.

My colleagues and I also appreciate the service of County employees. Many of whom are working from home and still completing their daily workloads. Others, because of the nature of their jobs, must go into homes and have contact with clients. Our employees in the areas of Child and Adult Protective Services, Mental and Behavioral Health, Court Services, Emergency Management, and of course our Health Department are among the County Departments that are essential. Also, essential is our Department of Economic Development and the Office of the County Administrator. Early in the pandemic, DED Director Buddy Rizer and County Administrator Tim Hemstreet realized the devastating toll on Loudoun's economy this pandemic would inflict. Loudoun, after taking the dais, your new County Board immediately began work on the Fiscal Year 2021 Budget. After many budget and public hearings, we completed the budget, adding 150 new positions and maintaining current county service levels. However, following the prudent advice of County Administrator Tim Hemstreet, the Board of Supervisors immediately froze most of those newly approved positions. In addition, we took the very difficult step of freezing merit pay for all County employees. Loudoun, let me be clear; this Board realizes our employees are hardworking, dedicated public servants who deserve merit increases. However, as a body we believed it was important to ensure all our full and part time regular staff, as well as our full-time contract staff, remained employed at their current pay structure, to include the pay increase from the Compensation and Classification Study. This goal could only be accomplished if we froze all new local tax funded positions and postponed merit pay increases.

During the budget process, your Loudoun Board adopted a real property tax rate of \$1.035 (a dollar three and a half cents) per \$100 in assessed value, which is 1 cent below the current real property tax rate of \$1.045. In addition, if devaluation of the real property portfolio occurs due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the new tax rate of a dollar three and half will likely fall below the projected equalized tax rate for Fiscal Year 21. On the advice of Loudoun County Treasurer,

Roger Zurn, the Board extended the date that personal property taxes are due by one month to June 5, 2020.

To prepare for the unknown and unknowable cost to come due to the COVID 19 pandemic, this board cautiously acted to reserve 100 million dollars in the Fiscal Year 2021 budget. As many of you know, traditionally two thirds (2/3) of the County Budget is allocated to fund the Loudoun County Public School System while one-third funds County Government needs. As a County Board we froze all base budget increases, new money for the Board's Strategic Initiatives, funds reserved for Capital Facility Openings, and all unallocated budget balances. In total, the amount of money frozen on the County side of the ledger was 40 million dollars.

However, we knew that would not be sufficient. Thus, with the concurrence of Loudoun County Public School Superintendent Dr. Eric Williams and his staff, the decision was made to freeze 60 million dollars on the school side of the ledger; over half of that money was allocated for teacher and staff merit increases. Like our County staff, the LCPS staff, many of whom are working through this pandemic, deserve their raises. We realize this fact, and we respect their service to our students and our families. In the initial budget, this board did vote to increase this year's school funding by 72 million dollars. So, while we placed 60 million of that in reserve, the remaining 12 million will be transferred to our schools and will be available for projected increases to include welcoming additional students.

As Loudoun, the nation and the world face not just a medical crisis but a financial crisis that will likely last for months and definitely into the new Fiscal Year, your County Board reserved 100 million dollars, lowered your real property tax rate and kept all current county staff employed. Loudoun, we realize the efforts made by the County Board do not in any way relieve the financial pressure your families are experiencing due to a lay off or the loss of a business, but it is our hope that taking these prudent, pragmatic steps will ensure that County Government Services remain available to meet the needs of our citizens.

As a nation, we have experienced and survived other crises, even wars. However, not in 100 years, most of our lifetimes, has a pandemic forced people to choose between their lives and their livelihoods. COVID 19 has devastated large companies and small businesses and forced over 29,000 Loudouners onto the unemployment rolls. The harm, particularly to the people who work in our hospitality industries, has been almost unbearable. The truth is, not at the local, state or federal level is there an answer sufficient enough to sooth the suffering or calm the fears of families watching their saving accounts dwindle, their dreams of a thriving business slipping away. Yes, as a county, we instituted a Business interruption fund to assist our small businesses with 10,000-dollar grants, but we realize that is a very short-term solution for a long-term problem. I won't offer our business community empty platitudes, because I realize they will ring hollow to people who are financially suffering. However, it might be helpful to inform all our small business owners of the efforts made to support you, and your business during this difficult time.

Beginning March 16th, the Department of Economic Development redirected all of their resources to gathering and disseminating information to directly assist small businesses in Loudoun. Through personal outreach, targeted email and social media, Buddy Rizer and his team have now had tens of thousands of touch points within Loudoun's business community. They used the input received from businesses to shape our county response.

DED created an information clearinghouse and website providing resources for small businesses and workforce needs. When we heard from businesses that they were struggling with Federal Government Emergency Loans and Payroll Protection Program applications, DED offered assistance and counseling to hundreds of businesses. With unemployment increasing, we launched the Loudoun Jobs Portal which markets every position currently open in Loudoun County. And when our farms lost their restaurant and hotel enterprise buyers, we launched the Loudoun Made, Loudoun Grown Marketplace, an e-commerce platform that connects consumers and producers. Finally, with the help of Visit Loudoun and the Loudoun Chamber of Commerce, the county actively marketed more than 500 businesses as part of our Take Loudoun Home campaign.

In addition, I directed the staff to bring an item to the Board to review the requirement for acceptance of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act, also called the CARES Act. As a body, the board received that report yesterday. Loudoun, our countywide allocation of CARES act relief, totals over thirty-six million dollars, with approximately six million of that being reserved for our seven incorporated towns. On June 1st, the County expects to receive 30 million dollars of CARES act money. Almost seven million dollars of that funding is being used for grants to Loudoun's small businesses who have been financially harmed by the COVID 19 Stay-at-Home order. In addition, we will now be able to fund every small business that applied for and was certified for the first round of business interruption grants. I want to now talk directly to small business owners. I know you did not work your entire life to realize your dream of owning your own business, only to see that business stagnate week by painful week. I also know you don't want to be given anything by the government. You've always taken enormous pride in working to build your business. I respect that, but this pandemic, this virus does not respect work ethic. So, although it may feel uncomfortable, I ask that you consider that these grants are not a hand out. They are being made available in response to a crisis of historic proportions beyond the control of any of us.

I also want to take a moment to thank the many businesses who have offered assistance during this pandemic. Anyone who has ever driven into Leesburg knows the little shop that sits at the point of Market and Loudoun Street, Mom's Apple Pie. Realizing how this pandemic could negatively impact her businesses and her employees, Avis Renshaw quickly pivoted to online ordering and distanced retail service. This allowed Mom's to continue operating while keeping both employees and food safe giving customers a one stop shopping experience that supports both her businesses and the rural economy. Mom's brought in more vegetables, meats, and grains from fellow farmers and are now seeing an uptick in interest for locally grown foods. As

this pandemic has exposed a weakness in national and global food supply chains, we are seeing a renewed appreciation for local small farms, and locally grown food.

Also, very impressive is the team at Catoctin Creek Distillery. In the wake of the coronavirus crisis that led to a shortage of sanitizing products, Catoctin Creek shifted some of its production to provide free sanitizing alcohol to families, first responders, hospital staff and even a senior center. In early April, Catoctin Creek released its now FDA-approved 6 oz. hand sanitizer bottles to the general public which sold out almost immediately. And just in case you're wondering, Catoctin Creek is still producing and selling its award-winning whisky, gin and brandy.

To review, our high school seniors were denied the rituals of their senior year, yet we are confident they will rise to achieve their full potential, and we are excited to follow them as they make their mark on the world. Loudoun's hospitals, first responders and essential workers have shown us all what it is to be true heroes as they have cared for and protected Loudoun citizens. The Board of Supervisors ensured all county staff remained employed at their current salaries and, by making prudent, long-term financial decisions such as reserving 100 million dollars in new county spending, we safeguarded our triple—triple A credit rating. Our non-profit community is stepping up and scaling up to respond to citizens who never expected to need these services. They're doing so in a compassionate, respectful manner. And our businesses, while struggling, have found innovative ways to retool and continue while helping their neighbors.

Loudoun, I feel very secure in telling you the State of our County is caring, resilient, compassionate and strong. Together, we will weather this storm. We will stand as an example for every county in our nation, of what it means to be a diverse, caring county that resolves to take care of one another. In the face of this great challenge, we won't simply achieve what's Loudoun possible, we will achieve the seemingly impossible.

Thank you, God Bless you, and I will see you next year.