

## **Year as Chair Loaded with Challenges**

By County Supervisor Dianne Jacob

*Last month, Supervisor Jacob wrapped up her fourth tour as Chair of the Board of Supervisors, an honorary position that traditionally rotates among Board members. As the County's official representative on legislative matters, the job entails a lot of extra work. Recently Supervisor Jacob took time to reflect on her year as chair.*

When I delivered my State of the County Address last February, our County was in solid financial shape. However, we were battenning down the hatches for three different storms, each potentially catastrophic: declining revenues, massive Wall Street losses and, of course, the State budget.

The threat was unprecedented. The solvency of our County was at stake. I stated that the County would use innovation, technology, creativity and outsourcing to survive. I said we would likely be a smaller government, doing more with less, but our doors would stay open.

Turns out the financial challenges were worse than we anticipated. We spent 11 long months defending our budget. Today, our credit rating is AAA and we retain our title as one of the best managed local governments in the nation. Meanwhile, our pension fund has a AAA rating and funded ratio of 91.5 percent. We held the line in 2009!

### **• *Protecting Public Finances***

We managed the financial crisis with what has become our Board's trademark: strict fiscal discipline. In February, we made an angry trip to Sacramento to shake-up the Legislature and demand true structural reform.

Together, we blocked Sacramento from cutting cash aid payments to 63,000 vulnerable children. We also carried though on our commitment to outsource certain positions in order to keep those services alive.

Our employee unions recognized the gravity of last year's budget crisis and together, we reached labor agreements with all of our unions. An under-recognized accomplishment, we rolled back pension benefits for all new hires to what they were in the 1970s.

As quickly as we received Federal Stimulus dollars, we got them out the door to spark the local economy.

### **• *Infrastructure Matters***

To position our government to perform core services into the future, we broke ground on the first phase of the new \$500 million Operations Center. This is the largest infrastructure project in the history of the County. And, we opened the new \$73 million Medical Examiner & Forensic Center on-time, under budget and paid for in cash.

### **• *Public Safety Top Priority***

In a seamless and organized process, we appointed a new Sheriff after the retirement of our friend and colleague Bill Kolender.

When the lease expired on the Superscoopers, we found a better deal. We invested in year-round firefighting aircraft through the Aerial Fire Protection Program recommended by the Unified Disaster Council.

We put in place tougher brush abatement and vegetation management plans to

stop wildfires before they start and we funded a sweeping review of the region's \$450 million fire protection system to find out what's working and what needs to change.

Using a model developed by the San Diego Gang Commission, we're launching an innovative venture to fight gangs in East County. I can't give too much away but let's just say community and faith-based groups are working with law enforcement to fight back!

Also, we were the driving force behind state legislation to stop repeat DUI offenders with ignition interlocks.

• ***Public Health Put to the Test***

How do you alert the public to a surprise health threat without causing unnecessary panic? The County managed the H1N1 outbreak with flying colors. We had a plan and stuck to it. Our strong, existing partnerships with schools and the region's network of providers helped disseminate the vaccine in an orderly fashion.

When the federal government fumbled on the supply-side, we stayed calm and were careful not to be alarmists.

Last year, a *Union-Tribune* investigation revealed conflict-of-interest concerns at the First Five Commission. In response, we overhauled Commission rules to maintain integrity. That's important because the Commission is entrusted with administering precious Prop.10 revenue.

We devised a strategic plan to be laser-focused with those First Five dollars. We're going to put them in the places where the problems are; where they will do the most good for most kids.

We opened the new \$123.5 million Edgemoor Hospital for our weakest residents. The more efficient facility was funded in part by federal dollars and saves taxpayers \$4.1 million annually in operating costs.

We got to work rooting out waste, fraud and abuse within the state's In-home Support Services program. We're now requiring background checks and fingerprinting. Similar reforms are being made at the State level.

• ***Green Revolution***

In December, we plugged into the CaliforniaFIRST program. Soon, San Diegans will be able to spread the cost of rooftop solar electric systems over 20 years on their property tax bill. Similarly, we sponsored State legislation signed into law in October to compensate solar customers for surplus solar energy.

The new County Operations Center will meet the U.S. Green Building Council LEED standards. It will be the largest LEED campus anywhere in the County, public or private.

We adopted an ordinance mandating waterwise and firewise landscaping on all new development.

To top it off, we won the 2009 "Organizational Excellence SANDEE" award from the California Center for Sustainable Energy and beat out all other governments in the region for the highest honor of the night.

• ***The Finest Quality of Life***

We debuted the Lakeside Baseball Park in a community that really needed something to boost its spirits. It's got classic ballpark architecture and state-of-the-art turf on its diamonds.

We secured a State historic landmark designation for Camp Lockett, the WWII

Army base in Campo that was the last home of the famed Buffalo Soldiers.

We broke ground on replacement libraries for Ramona and Fallbrook.

We're in talks with Mayor Sanders to explore funding options for a new Chargers stadium. I need to stress that any deal will have to be a good deal for taxpayers.

Finally, in 2009, we added nearly 1000 acres of public parkland. It will have riding and hiking trails so that San Diego families can get out there and take in the natural wonders of our great County!