

San Antonio Chamber of Commerce Address
Bexar County Judge Nelson W. Wolff
October 23, 2019

Just recently a recording of Speaker of the Texas House Dennis Bonnen was released. He said “any mayor, county judge that was dumb ass enough to come meet with me, I told them with great clarity, my goal is for this to be the worst session in the history of the legislature for cities and counties”.

I am pleased to report to you I am not a dumb ass – I did not meet with the speaker nor did I seek a meeting.

I served in the Texas House and Texas Senate and know that when a freight train is heading your way, you don’t jump and chat it up with engineer. You work with your friends in the legislature to derail it or slow it down, Senator Jose Menendez, and Representatives Ina Minjarez and Trey Martinez Fisher led the way in helping to slow things down. They slowed the spending cap bill down, by raising the cap from 2.5% to 3.5% and protected our debt fund.

But the Speaker and like-minded legislators attack County government and at the same time jam financial mandates down our throat to the tune of **nearly \$635 million**. Just recently we had to spend **\$12.6 million** for new election machines that will allow voters to vote at any location on Election Day. We had no help from the state. What hypocrisy!

Words do count in Texas. Under pressure the speaker yesterday announced he will not run for re-election. This should be a warning to likeminded legislators who demean moderate republicans, mayors and county judges.

Bexar County knows how to manage a budget and keep taxes low without their dictates. In September, the Bexar County Commissioners Court adopted a

\$1.782 billion budget holding the current tax rate. This continues the trend of either lowering or maintaining rates for property owners, **saving taxpayers \$156 million this fiscal year.**

The County continues to maintain Triple-A bond ratings from all three major rating agencies, making it the only local government to have a Triple-A rating by all three major rating agencies. This has resulted in **estimated savings of \$41.3 million in debt service payments** for the County.

Thank you to our County Manager David Smith and his staff for developing a fully conservative budget.

While we are fiscally conservative, we are taking steps to create good paying jobs that drive our economy and provide resources to address infrastructure, develop a talented work force, improve public transit, preserve our history culture, and protect our vulnerable children.

JOBS

Create an Advanced Manufacturing Hub

We are on the cusp of becoming a center for a State-of-the-Art Advanced Manufacturing Hub. In the last month, we had three major announcements that have set the table.

In 2002, I led the effort to bring the Toyota Plant to San Antonio. **It was predicted that San Antonio's economy would be characterized as pre-Toyota and post-Toyota and it proved to be correct. Today, over 7,000 people work at Toyota and its 23 suppliers.**

Recently Toyota announced they are investing over \$409 million to build a new state-of-the-art, highly efficient, flexible vehicle production assembly line that will allow Toyota to produce trucks with different frames.

With Toyota's additional investment we have been able to attract **Aisin**, a leader in automotive technology manufacturing. The new facility will manufacture automatic transmissions used by the world's leading vehicle manufacturers. Up to \$400 million will be made in investments, creating approximately 900 new jobs.

And then there is **Navistar International Corporation**. On July 9, San Antonio Economic Foundation President Jenna Saucedo and I led a delegation to their headquarters outside of Chicago. We met with the CEO Troy Clarke, CFO Walter Borst and their team. On September 19th, they announced that they will be investing over \$235 million and create a minimum of 598 new, full time jobs. It is our hope, that 6 suppliers will follow them.

Thank you to Commissioner Sergio "Chico" Rodriguez for taking the lead on putting together a financial incentive package for Toyota and Navistar.

To sustain Advanced Manufacturing, Bexar County partnered with private sector employers to create **TEXAS FAME**, a consortium of 9 manufacturers that work together to solve their common skills gaps. They currently use the 2-year Advanced Manufacturing degree whereby students attend classes at an Alamo College campus then work 3 days a week in paid apprenticeships and afterwards, leave with the potential for no student debt.

We are now working with **TEXAS FAME** on developing a plan to create a new 30,000 sq. ft. Advanced Manufacturing Training Center to be located at Brooks City Base. This will provide far more flexible and rapid training to include advanced welding, machine tool technician and robotics. David Marquez, Director of Bexar County Economic Development and Leo Gomez, President & CEO of Brooks are working on putting a plan together.

With Toyota and Navistar and their some 30 suppliers and with our close proximity to Mexico suppliers, we are creating an Advanced Manufacturing Hub anchored by vehicle and parts manufacturing.

San Antonio manufacturing firms employ over 50,000 people and we are continuing to grow. Just recently Commissioner Justin Rodriguez led efforts to approve financial incentives to **FGF LLC**, a bakery using Advanced Manufacturing operations that plans to invest over \$129.5 million, creating a minimum of 600 new jobs as well as relocate their US Headquarters here.

We are producing and exporting and that generates community wealth.

Expand our tech industry

We have major two growth areas, Cyber Security and Emerging Tech Entrepreneurs.

Outside of Washington, D.C., we are the largest Cyber Security footprint with over 40 private firms many of them doing work for NASA along with the recently created 16th Air Force Command that combined the 24th Cyber Security Command and the 25th Electronic Warfare Command. In and around Port San Antonio, numerous private Cyber Security firms are expanding in the County.

The Port built Project Tech, a 90,000 sq. ft building and filled it up with cyber security firms. Port San Antonio is now building a 174,000 sq. ft. building adjacent to it and have half of it is already leased up.

Thanks to Port SA President Jim Perschbach and Board Chair Chris Alderete.

UTSA is providing the trained work force for Cyber Security. They have the best Cyber Security education program in the nation. Under President Taylor Eighmy, they will build a new Cyber Security Collaborative Center downtown.

As the Cyber Security industry is expanding so is our downtown Tech Ecosystem. Since 2015, the County has been able to foster growth of small tech start-up firms in our newly created urban environment through the \$1 million dollar annual Renewal Innovation Fund. These incentives have supported numerous tech firms, as well as Code Up and Cloud Academy students.

Just last night, I went to a Tech Fuel competition that the Commissioners Court funded in the amount of \$100,000. 59 tech firms entered and 5 were selected to receive the incentives. Congratulations to them!

The Commissioners Court invested \$250,000 in the new Cast Tech High School located downtown and recently approved \$2.7 million to build a Bibliotech library on campus. My wife Tracy, President of the Hidalgo Foundation, set a goal to raise \$1 million to buy the latest and best tech equipment.

The County's hard work is paying off. Over 40 tech firms are now located in the downtown area, some of which have spun out from Rackspace, one of our most important tech companies with some 3000 employees. Thank you to Graham Weston, founder of Rackspace and Lew Moorman, former President of Rackspace.

GROW BIO-MEDICINE

In 2008, the Commissioners Court took a major step to build the new state-of-the-art \$700 million 10-story hospital in the South Texas Medical Center and \$200 million in a downtown 6-story clinical and surgery center.

As a result of our investment and excellent management by Bexar County Hospital District President George Hernandez and Board Chair Jim Adams, the Hospital District is a major player in driving innovation with a sprawling network

of clinics, research institutes, and out-patient surgery centers with over 7000 workers.

We are the teaching hospital for the University of Texas Health Science Center, led by President Bill Heinrich. We pay 900 physician residents and fellows associated with UTHSC to practice in our hospital. Annually, we train 420 medical students and 2,792 students from other health professional schools.

Together, we collaborate with the UTHSC, the University of Texas at San Antonio, Texas Biomedical Research and Southwest Research Institute on numerous research projects, totaling \$900 million annually.

Our hospital district also partners with the 425-bed San Antonio Military Hospital located at Ft. Sam Houston. The hospital sustains over 60 accredited education programs that include 25 graduate medical education programs.

Today, approximately 60,000 people work in the South Texas Medical Center, of which about 40,000 work in medical related jobs. There are 75 medically-related institutions including several bio-medical firms such as Galley International Biomedical, Phoenix Biotechnology, and nearby Acelity.

The Commissioners Court continues to invest in the Bexar County Hospital District. On Saturday November 2nd we will break ground on a new \$500 million Women and Children's Tower attached to our new hospital and expect to open in late 2022.

The County is focused on expanding our talented work force.

We continue to financially support employer led SA Works as they focus on apprenticeship programs, summer interns, and job shadow days.

Recently, we have opened a Veterans Service Center next to Ft. Sam Houston and have placed 108 skilled veterans in good paying jobs at the

average salary of \$60,000. Thank you to Commissioner Kevin Wolff who spearheaded this initiative and to Colonel Karen Rolirad, the Executive Director of Military and Veterans Services.

Commissioner Calvert has taken the lead in appropriating \$150,000 to help establish Alamo Promise Program established by Chancellor of Alamo Colleges Mike Flores and the Board of Trustees that will offer scholarships and support for any high school graduate who wants to go to college.

PRESERVE OUR HISTORY AND CULTURE

The Bexar County Heritage Center

Two weeks ago, we opened the Bexar County Heritage Center located in the Courthouse with an outside entrance on the west side of the Courthouse with the purpose of educating the public on the County's history and the role of County government.

Toxey/McMillan Design Associates focused on history and major projects that the County had taken on and completed in the modern era. All of the exhibits include a series of dioramas, projections, virtual reality portals, text and computer games and interactive computer research terminals. Even better, it is completely free and open to the public.

Hot Wells

We have stabilized the ruins of the once-famous Hot Wells Resort and Spa and created an interpretive center. Located on the San Antonio River across from Mission County Park, the 3-acre site is a beautiful setting on the River where people now picnic, hold special events, and learn about the famous resort.

The Alameda Theater and San Pedro Creek

We are now working on the second phase from Houston Street to Nueva St., a section of the creek where the Alameda Theater, Spanish Governor's Palace, City Hall, and the downtown campus of UTSA will be located.

A waterfall, murals, landscaping, an out-door venue for musical events, and water quality improvements will make this a beautiful place for the community to enjoy.

Thank you to Suzanne Scott, General Manager of the River Authority for her great leadership in leading the construction efforts.

Complementing the Creek, Texas Public Radio (TPR) is building their headquarters next to the Alameda that will open next year. The City and County are partnering on the restoration of the Alameda Theater which will open in 2021, in coordination with the second phase creek completion.

Arboretum

Trees are the Earth's largest and oldest living things going back 370 million years. Some trees you see today have lived for over 4,000 years and are as tall as 369 feet equivalent to a 40-story building. They absorb carbon dioxide and turn it into oxygen, provide us with food, medicinal herbs and wood to build our homes and furniture.

Former Mayor Henry Cisneros is working to create an Arboretum that would include a scientific research and education center that would focus on the culture, economic and industrial value of trees and shrubs.

Two weeks ago, Henry, Texas A&M President Cynthia Matson and I met with SAWS President & CEO Robert Puente and Chairman Heriberto Guerra to look at land surrounding Mitchell Lake where the Audubon Society operates the most famous bird sanctuary in the United States.

The San Antonio Water System is developing a wetland south of the lake, located next to the Medina River where the City has built about 10 miles of trails.

Another site could be next to the Audubon Bird Sanctuary. We toured both sites. Either one would be great.

We will work with SAWS, Texas A&M, and the City to make this great project come about. I want to thank my colleague, Commissioner Sergio “Chico” Rodriguez for his support on this project.

PROTECT OUR MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Nationally, from 2006-2016, 6,885 people died from accidental shooting. Of those, 2,529 were children. Another 13,576 children were injured.

Between 2016 and 2018 in San Antonio, there were 3,881 guns stolen from cars. That means bad guys are getting guns that can lead to intentional gun deaths.

We must promote gun safety. Under the leadership of Danna Halff, President of BeSmart and Linda Majid, President of SA Moms Demand Action, Bexar County is launching a program to provide 14,000 gun safety locks free to citizens. VIA and the Sheriff’s Office is also partnering with contributions for advertising and educational outreach to alert citizens to secure firearms.

Thank you to Sheriff Salazar and VIA for your commitment and support.

A 2016 study found that 93% of prison inmates who used guns in their offense did not obtain from a registered gun dealer. This means they’re getting illegally or buying them from strangers. It’s time for the Legislature to act on enhanced background checks and red flag laws.

I support Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick’s quest to enhance registration of guns and not allow stranger selling to strangers without background checks.

Through our Children's Court, Family Drug Court, Early Intervention Court, and 14 Specialty Courts, we seek to help those with drug and mental health issues, and with the support of several non-profits, we are turning the corner in stabilizing families.

Since 2017, we have seen a substantial drop in cases filed and in the number of children being removed from their homes and entering foster care. The number of children being removed from their homes or entering foster care has dropped by 20 percent.

In order to continue this trend, the Commissioners Court included funding in the amount of \$1 million for new program will provide additional support services aimed at keeping families from re-entering the CPS system.

Thank you to Child Welfare Board Chair Marcie Trevino, District Court Judge Peter Sakai, District Court Judge Monique Diaz and District Attorney Joe Gonzales for your combined efforts in protecting our children and working to empower families.

Furthermore, Commissioner Calvert has taken the lead in funding \$1 million for the State-of-the-Art Child Safe Facility in his district. He also led efforts to provide for a \$100,000 grant for Judge Rosie Gonzalez's Domestic Violence Therapeutic Court Program.

INVEST IN PUBLIC TRANSIT

After a decade of work and the County funding almost \$500 million to support TXDOT projects, Commissioner Wolff met with TXDOT Chairman Bruce Bugg to secure an additional \$1 billion dollars. A portion of the funds will be used for HOV lanes to accommodate bus rapid transit. Thank you to Commissioner Wolff.

Bexar County using funds from the Road and Bridge fund and bonds, and the Alamo Regional Mobility Authority, will provide arterial roads and sidewalks that will accommodate a consumer and choice-driven public transit system.

Former Mayor Henry Cisneros is taking the lead on moving ConnectSA forward to create mobility, innovation, efficiency, and decongestion. Improved service delivery and reduced system costs for various modes of transportation will be offered including car pools, vans, small shuttle buses, autonomous vehicles, bikes, scooters, and e-bikes and a trackless rapid transit to run on a HOV managed lanes. They are also looking at a bus rapid transit system to run between San Antonio and Austin. A state-of-the art public transit system would reduce vehicle traffic which contributes about 40% of air pollution.

VIA has only a one-half dedicated cent sales tax while other comparative metropolitan authorities have a full 1 cent dedicated sales tax. **To be able to advance VIA's transit plans, the only funding mechanism we have been able to identify is the 1/8 cent tax that is presently being used for Edwards Aquifer protection be reallocated to public transit.** There are no other funding sources that I know of available for the increased operational funds for VIA.

Since its beginning in 2000, the Edwards Aquifer fund has collected \$70 million with about \$30 million that remains to be collected through 2021.

The San Antonio River Authority plans to secure additional funding for conservation and environmental enhancements which I support.

Thank VIA President Jeff Arndt and VIA Chair Rey Saldana.

CLOSING

We are in a good position. We've had a good year with low unemployment, and have been able to obtain new companies and expansions in Bexar County.

We've taken major steps to job training and education. The best part of the year though is that Trinity Publishing published my book so please go buy one or a dozen so the bookstores don't send them back to the publisher!

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