

County Judge Nelson W. Wolff
Statement before Commissioners Court
January 8, 2002

First, let me again express my appreciation to each member of this Court for selecting me County Judge. Nine months have passed since my first court meeting on May 8, 2001. Working with each of you, I presented an aggressive agenda for the year 2001.

Although no one could have anticipated on the day I assumed this office the events of September 11th and the effects they would have on our country, together, we have been able to accomplish much of our original agenda, along with responding to new needs and priorities.

Partnerships

One of our major objectives when I took office was to form a strong partnership with the City of San Antonio. At our next scheduled Court meeting, we will adopt an overarching agreement with the City for greater City-County cooperation. That plan includes a mission statement, goals, and objectives to create a structure of local government that delivers services seamlessly and that is transparent to the average citizen.

We have already taken numerous steps to strengthen our partnership. We have moved forward with the San Antonio River partnership that the Court initiated under the leadership of Cyndi Krier. The city and county governing bodies have both approved proposals for contracts for the design of the River stretching from Brackenridge Park to Espada Dam. In a few months we will complete the construction of the downtown part of the river, and I am grateful to Commissioners Tejada and Larson for their leadership on this issue.

We have entered into a partnership with the City, City Public Service and Solar San Antonio to create the Metropolitan Partnership for Energy. We have approved a joint budget of \$300,000 and have hired an Executive Director, Linda Calvert. We have adopted the goal of reducing energy use in City and County buildings by 5% a year for the next five years. We will promote the development of renewable energy resources. I believe the next stage in this project should be to broaden the partnership to include the private sector, and to integrate energy conservation into our economic development incentives. Commissioner Adkisson has been a leader on this issue and will continue to guide this project.

We have entered into a partnership with City to develop a San Antonio History Center. We have jointly funded and appointed a commission to develop a plan for this facility and to assess the Hertzberg Circus Building as a potential site. County Clerk Gerry Rickhoff is taking the lead for the County in this initiative.

We have created a San Antonio Mobility Coalition which includes the City, County, VIA, and the private sector. The San Antonio District of TxDOT presently receives the lowest funding of any TxDOT district in the state by virtually any measure. In fact, we receive only about 65

cents for every dollar we send to the state. The Mobility Coalition will focus on correcting this inequity. We have approved a budget of over \$150,000 and have filed our incorporation papers. Commissioner Larson has taken the lead on the project and will serve on the Coalition's board of directors.

District Attorney Susan Reed, Commissioner Larson and I have represented the County in developing a joint anti-terrorism plan with the City of San Antonio. The \$66 million plan - that we will be voting on today - includes number of joint efforts that we will launch to better protect our city against a terrorist attack or any natural disaster. On January 22, Mayor Ed Garza and I will go to Washington to present this plan to federal authorities. In the meantime, we should consider an internal staff realignment to allow County Fire Marshal Carl Mixon to focus solely on emergency planning, and to report directly to Commissioners Court. I would also note that Mayor Garza and I have formally requested that San Antonio host the next meeting of the Governor's Homeland Security Task Force.

Under the leadership of Dr. David Morgan, we have entered into a number of technology partnerships with the City. These range from the implementation of our new radio communication system, to establishing access to the county government through the city's Community Link kiosks in shopping malls. We have contributed to making the SATAI partnership successful, and District Clerk Reagan Greer has been appointed to the Texas Online Authority Commission by the Governor. To follow-up in this direction, we need to establish a presence by numerous county offices in the city's One Stop Development Center, and to coordinate all of our utilities and economic development agencies, including the chambers of commerce, through that center. I will ask our County Tax Assessor-Collector, Sylvia Romo, to play a leadership role in this initiative, and ask that this be a priority project for our new Strategic Management Team.

During the past year we have completed a new contract with the City dealing with the crime lab and we have essentially completed an agreement on magistration and pre-trial services. We have identified approximately \$500,000 in funding that is required to implement this agreement and to move the central booking and magistration functions to the Frank Wing Municipal Courts Building by the end of the second quarter of 2002. This will benefit the county by improving the efficiency in the use of jail space and benefit the city by returning police officers to the streets more quickly.

This year we must renew the animal control and library services contracts, develop a regular mechanism to coordinate housing bond issues, and address a number of opportunities for city-county cooperation in parks and recreation. We will need to implement the one-stop process for subdivision plat approval in the city's extra territorial jurisdiction before a legislative deadline of April 1st. We also need to agree on a unified regional authority for drainage and flood control and to finalize a partnership with the City by the end of the year. All of these issues will be addressed in greater detail in the work program for City-County Cooperation that we will take up at our next meeting. Seth Mitchell has taken the lead on these issues and will continue to pursue their completion.

Budget

The budget will always be among our top concerns, and I am pleased to report that we had a successful budget year. We were able to reduce the tax rate by 6%, thereby reducing it below the effective tax rate. Commissioner Lyle Larson provided the leadership on this initiative.

We gave deputy sheriff's the highest percentage raise in their history. And we initiated a livable wage for all Bexar County employees. Commissioner Elizondo played the major role in both these efforts. In the next budget cycle we will need to address clerical, labor and trades pay scales.

Commissioner Tejeda led the Court effort to reduce the constables by one which will eventually save the taxpayers over \$300,000 per year. We will need to aggressively defend the redistricting suit in order to achieve these savings.

Commissioner Tejeda also led the effort to approve \$50,000 in funding to improve Spenser-Sanchez Baseball Park and to purchase additional park land.

We budgeted \$5.1 million toward restoration and improvements in the Courthouse. Work will begin in February on the exterior. We need to work hard to complete the Children's Court on the third floor. Commissioner Elizondo as chairman of the CIP committee is providing the leadership to complete this project this year. We will depend on the leadership of Gabe Perez to get the work done.

My wife Tracy and District Clerk Reagan Greer have formed the Hidalgo Foundation to help in the restoration and improvement of the Courthouse. They have been successful in securing funds and will be making some important announcements in February of this year. Complementing the new connection between the River and the Historic Civic Center, the design of the Plaza de las Islas will include an enhanced "Courthouse Front Yard."

We have improved the security at the Courthouse by transferring that duty to the Sheriff's office. Sheriff Lopez has assigned first-rate security personnel to the Courthouse. We are completing the Jail Detention Center Annex, and so we must work with the Sheriff on a staffing plan.

We need to devote more attention to being sure that we collect all the fees, fines and court costs that are provided by law. I will work with the judges and justices of the peace to address this issue.

Infrastructure and Economic Development

Infrastructure and economic development are always priorities in local government. I'm pleased to note that under the leadership of Commissioners Larson and Elizondo, the SBC arena is progressing on schedule and on budget. We will continue to cooperate with all parties to stage a successful rodeo around the partially constructed arena. We will also need to make a special

effort this year to work with the state and the city in order to complete the street projects on time for the October opening of the Spurs Season.

We must move into more advanced planning for economic development in the area around the Arena, in partnership with the Spurs and the City. The Greater Chamber will organize a trip to the Orange County Fair Grounds in Los Angeles to give us an opportunity to meet with their officials to determine if a similar development around the SBC Center makes sense. The idea would be over a period of time to replace the older buildings with multipurpose buildings that could be used by the rodeo and for other activities.

We should begin planning for a modernization bond package to be presented to voters in the near future - perhaps in 2004. We will be able to fund approximately \$100 million in debt without a tax increase. Now is the time to begin work as interest rates are at historical lows. I hope that we will be able to work with the City on some joint projects such as the history center, parks, streets and drainage, and other coordinated projects. We should have a public hearing in the near future to hear citizen priorities.

We need to complete the joint city-county Tax Increment Financing districts structured to encourage housing on the south, east and west sides of town. Joe Castillo will provide leadership on these issues.

Health Care

Health care is another traditional priority for county government. I'm pleased to report that in September, Mayor Garza and I convened a successful Health Care Summit that included nearly 400 leaders in medicine, business, and government. We adopted a plan that set goals for five major sectors of health care - financing, mental health, preventive care, trauma care, and work force. Former Mayor Bill Thornton is heading up a commission to pursue these recommendations. In December, Commissioner Elizondo and I joined him when he announced several successful and ongoing projects. This Spring, Mayor Garza and I will launch a "Fit City" campaign to promote healthy practices among our citizens.

We have worked with the University Hospital System to reduce their projected budget shortfalls by half. They will present us a long range plan in April that will address capital equipment needs as well as a plan to achieve a balanced budget. We will need to work with them to accomplish these objectives.

General Government

Issues of general governance and internal housekeeping will always be with us. In 2001, we approved the creation of a five-member Election Commission. The Commission hired Cliff Borofsky as its first Election Administrator. The Court budgeted \$700,000 for the installation of a computer touch-screen system for early voting. We will soon vote on which of the three systems that were demonstrated to the citizens we will use for November early voting. We need to plan to eventually expand the new voting system to election day voting.

We have approved a new Strategic Management Team to be chaired by Marcus Jahns. They will hold their first meeting this month. It is critical that all county offices work together under the leadership of this team to insure critical thinking, planning, and execution of court policies.

In December, we had a very successful procurement conference for small, minority and women-owned businesses, which over 1000 local vendors attended. We need to make this an annual event, in partnership with the City, CPS, SAWS, UTSA and other sponsors.

We have recognized three citizens for their great public service contributions. We had ceremony in which we announced the naming of the Juvenile Corrections Treatment Facility in honor of former County Judge Cyndi Taylor Krier. We approved the naming of the Justice Center in honor of Judge Carlos Cadena and Judge Blair Reeves and we will have a dedication ceremony later this Spring.

Legislative Agenda

We must begin work on our legislative plan for the 2003 session. We need to develop partnerships in our quest for funding as well as additional authority for County government. We should help the City to achieve their objectives and vice versa.

We should work with the Laredo-San Antonio Corridor on legislative issues that affect South Texas - particularly in transportation improvements. We must work closely to insure that we receive real economic development benefits from cross-border trucking. Commissioner Larson will provide the leadership for the Court in this area.

The County should be an advocate for and partner with UTSA, the UT Health Science Center and the University Hospital System in supporting their legislative agenda. The University Hospital System and the UT Health Science Center, the anchors of our biomedical industry, must work together on a joint effort for financial support to increase the number of nurses graduating. We need legislation to recover the costs of trauma care for residents of other counties. We also need to work with our military for federal legislation that will allow military hospitals to recover their costs for treating civilians at civilian Medicare rates. We should support the Health Science Center and UTSA in their efforts to expand the Life Sciences Institute, and UTSA's efforts to increase the number of doctoral programs.

2001 was a tough year for our country, but as always, Americans came together and we have prevailed. In Bexar County, 2001 was a year of accomplishment and progress. Now, there are new challenges to meet. With your help, and with the leadership of my colleagues on Commissioners Court, I am confident that we will continue to make great progress for the people of Bexar County. Now, let's get on with the job!

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