

## Chairman Sharon Bulova's Inauguration Speech December 15, 2015

Thank you, and welcome to all colleagues, coworkers, friends and family joining us this evening.

People sometimes ask me how I decided to go into politics and I'd like to begin my remarks this evening with a story.

My mom was a Democrat and my dad was a Republican. They both held strong, usually opposing, opinions that they expressed back and forth - like a ping pong game at the dinner table. On Election Day they would both march off to our local precinct in Baltimore County to cancel out each other's vote.

Mom and Dad were united, however, in their enthusiasm for John F. Kennedy during the presidential election of 1960. It was the first election that got my attention, and I recall our family's excitement when we heard *our candidate* was attending a fundraiser at the Pikesville Armory.

My dad, my sister Marmie and I piled into our station wagon and arrived at the armory just in time for the motorcade to arrive. Senator Kennedy and his campaign staffers got out of their car and entered a small building on the armory grounds so that he would have some private time to go over the speech he would give at the \$1,000 a plate dinner.

By this time it was getting dark. Most of our welcoming crowd had dispersed, but a small group of us circled around the building, peeking into windows, hoping to get a glimpse of JFK.

One of the screened windows opened into a brightly lit, sparsely furnished room. Much to our surprise, a door opened opposite our window, and there in the threshold stood John Kennedy. Behind him were media armed with cameras and notepads. I will never forget how Mr. Kennedy smiled and greeted us at the window, then touched his hand to ours through the screen. Flash bulbs went off as he settled into a chair next to our window to go over his notes. Photos from this little encounter appeared in the next morning edition of the Baltimore Sun and then a week later in Life Magazine.

For a twelve year old girl, this was the ultimate introduction into politics. I was hooked. I stayed up all night to watch as election numbers came dribbling in. This would be the first of many such nights.

President Kennedy inspired me with his message, "Ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country."

Years later I followed this advice by volunteering for my Neighborhood Civic Association in Kings Park West. I was perfectly content working behind the scenes as a cartoonist for the newsletter and as a Neighborhood Watch volunteer. I had zero interest in a leadership position, until I was coaxed into the role of Vice President, which I accepted *only* because I was assured the Vice President wouldn't have to do anything.

As luck would have it, on the very day our little slate was sworn in, our new President let me know that he had just gotten orders and was moving to Korea within the month. I would be acting President.

My life flashed before my eyes and I thought this was the worst thing that ever happened to me. Growing up, I was a shy kid. I thought the only thing scarier than dying was public speaking.

To make a long story short, I accepted the challenge which put me on the path for local government and here we are today.

Ultimately I am here, and all of us are here, because at some point, we became involved in our community. Somewhere down the line, all of us had a moment where we said, “Yes, I’d like to help. Yes, I will take this project on. Yes, I can do that.”

One of the greatest rewards of local government, and service at the community level, is achieving tangible results.

At the local level, ribbon cuttings and project celebrations begin with an idea. As public servants, we work with the community to turn ideas into real changes that directly impact our everyday lives. While we come from different political parties, there is no such thing as a Democrat storm drain or a Republican turf field. Basic things we may take for granted like clean parks, helpful libraries, affordable RECenters, stormwater management to prevent homes and offices from flooding, and being the safest jurisdiction of our size in the nation...are the services we expect, and rely upon, from local government.

That’s what we’re all about: ensuring tax dollars are spent responsibly in a way that invests in the priorities of the community as a whole.

And so, as this new Board is sworn into office, let’s take just a moment to review some of these priorities:

## **Transportation**

One of the top priorities for all localities in our area is transportation. This truly is a regional issue. Gridlock doesn’t stop at the county line. A traffic jam in Arlington can cause a ripple effect all the way to Prince William County.

- I-66 in particular, has become a highway that simply doesn’t work.

Fairfax County has been working closely with State officials, and our community, to find solutions to a problem that can no longer be ignored. Improving I-66 inside and outside the Beltway will be an important issue for our new Board in 2016.

- The opening of Phase I of the Silver Line has helped take cars off the road, surpassing first year ridership estimates by over 1,000 travelers a day.
- Phase II of the Silver Line is scheduled to be completed in 2019.

Working with our federal representatives and colleagues in Loudoun County, Fairfax County received the largest TIFIA Loan ever issued by the Federal Government. This loan will help make this transformative regional project happen, and this new Board will see it through to the finish line.

## **Business/Economic Development**

- Investments in major transit projects yield economic benefits in addition to transportation benefits.
- Since the Tysons Plan was adopted, Fairfax County has approved 31 million square feet of new development for the Tysons area. This is predicted to bring in 48,000 new jobs. Property values around the Silver Line are also increasing substantially.
- Areas like Tysons, Reston and Merrifield have attracted corporate headquarters such as Northrop Grumman, General Dynamics, Capital One, and Intelsat. Fairfax County has more Fortune 500 companies than 30 states.

- Exciting revitalization projects and opportunities are taking place in the Richmond Highway Corridor, Springfield and Lorton.
- Our Board is also committed to ensuring our policies and processes encourage business to come here, stay here, and grow here. This year our Board approved our Strategic Plan to Facilitate Economic Success, which calls for \* diversifying our economy \* improving our land use development process \* making strong investments in infrastructure, \* and creating more “destination spots” where people enjoy spending their time.

## **Fiscal Responsibility**

- Even through the Great Recession and years of a sluggish recovery, Fairfax County has continued our tradition of responsible financial management with a coveted Triple-Triple A bond rating.

*Only nine states, 37 counties and 32 cities in the United States have an AAA rating from all three rating agencies, something that has saved county residents over \$700 million over the decades.*

## **Education**

- Business wants to locate in places where their employees can live in vibrant communities, with top-tier **schools**. Even throughout this difficult fiscal climate, our Board of Supervisors has increased funding to the School System by over \$200 million during the past five years, devoting almost 53% of our General Fund budget to education.

To offset State reductions during the past few years, Fairfax County has consistently increased our local share of school funding in order to maintain the excellence our community expects.

Just four days ago, I chaired a gathering of Mayors and Chairs, School Superintendents and Chamber representatives from throughout Virginia to address the inadequacy of state K-12 education funding in the Commonwealth.

This is a priority for us; and it is a priority for Governor Terry McAuliffe. Our overarching priority during 2016 will be funding for the education of our children.

## **Homelessness**

- Almost 30 percent of children in Fairfax County Public Schools are eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches, and for some, that meal is the only food they receive all day. Last year, 1,200 people in Fairfax County were literally homeless, surviving in tents in the woods or in their cars. 46 of these people were Veterans.

Last year, I signed on to Michelle Obama’s “Mayor’s Challenge” where Mayors and Chairs across the country pledged to end Veteran Homelessness as we know it by the end of 2015.

Thanks to our strong partnership with nonprofits and faith-based organizations homeless veterans are now quickly identified and connected to support services and housing.

When homelessness occurs, it must be rare, brief and non-recurring. Our new Board will continue to lead in this effort to ensure our progress to end homelessness in Fairfax County by 2018 stays on target.

## **Housing**

- People who are homeless are not the only ones facing housing difficulties. Recent college grads, servers at restaurants, retail workers, entry-level technicians, teachers, and older adults on fixed incomes, often find it hard to afford to live here in Fairfax County.

It's important that Fairfax County does not price out hard-working people from living here. Creating more affordable housing choices is a priority and allows employees to live closer to where they work. This not only improves the quality of life for many of our residents, but also helps alleviate traffic congestion and our clean air challenges.

## Public Safety

- *Fairfax County is the safest jurisdiction of its size in the nation, due in no small part to the hard work and dedication of our public safety personnel.* We had a wonderful opportunity to showcase our impressive public safety capabilities at this year's World Police and Fire Games.
- To build on and enhance, what is already a great Police Department, I convened an *Ad Hoc Police Practices Review Commission* this year.

Recommendations from the Commission centered on \* use of force \* mental health \* communications \* oversight \* and recruitment. Recommended changes will help foster our culture of public trust and ensure the fair and timely resolution of Police-involved incidents. Our new Board of Supervisors is tasked with following through on the Commission's recommendations.

- Another element of public safety we will be addressing is the treatment of people suffering from mental illness who become involved with law enforcement. Fairfax County needs to focus on diverting non-violent offenders suffering from mental illness into treatment, instead of incarceration.

*"Diversion First"* will help individuals with mental illness get the help they need. Our new Board looks forward to seeing this initiative through.

In closing, Fairfax County is fortunate to have a highly skilled, educated and engaged community. It is important that our community has a seat at the table when important decisions are being made and clouds on the horizon are being addressed.

An informed and engaged constituency is a well-served community.

I am proud to lead a County that appreciates many cultures and celebrates the diversity of all those who live here.

In light of recent racial and cultural tensions rising across the country, let us be grateful we live in a County that *celebrates* our differences and demonstrates acceptance and compassion for others.

These simple values set Fairfax County apart as a fantastic place to live, work, play and raise a family. This Board is committed to maintaining and nurturing this exceptional culture.

Thank you so much.