

Hello, I am Corey Stewart, Chairman of the Prince William Board of County Supervisors. I would like to begin by wishing all of you and your families a Happy New Year. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to all of the new residents of Prince William County. We are proud that you have chosen Prince William County as your home.

Over the past 10 years, Prince William County has risen to national prominence. We have become one of the most desirable communities in the nation in which to live, and our quality of life continues to attract thousands of new residents. We are now the home to more than 430,000 residents.

Families are particularly drawn to Prince William, with its safe neighborhoods, excellent schools, growing job base and rising prosperity. Our community has worked hard to achieve this quality of life. Our school system, which is now one of the largest in America with more than 86,000 students, has opened 17 new schools in the past 10 years and offers parents an unrivaled choice of specialty programs and schools. On transportation, Prince William boasts the most ambitious road construction program in Virginia, and motorists will soon enjoy more than \$500 million in road improvements over the next five years alone. And thanks to our Police Department and other law enforcement personnel, our violent crime rate has been cut in half since 2007, making us one of the safest communities in America.

Perhaps what is most astounding of all is this: we have made all of this progress while keeping Prince William County tax bills the lowest in the Washington, D.C. region. Average tax bills in Prince William are 30 percent lower than those in neighboring Fairfax and Loudoun counties. We have accomplished this, in part, through focusing on core priorities – education, transportation and public safety – and by reducing spending in other areas. We had to make some hard choices, cutting \$143 million during the recession. We also instituted a zero-based budgeting process to continuously search for more savings. That process has saved County taxpayers an additional \$27 million and will assure that our County government will continue to be lean going forward. This conservative approach on budgeting has resulted in the County achieving a triple AAA bond rating from all three bond rating agencies, resulting in an additional \$30 million plus in future bond financing savings.

But improvements to education, transportation and other services have been funded primarily through economic growth. Prince William is business friendly, and it shows. The County has been rated number one in Virginia for job growth; number three in America. Last year alone, the Economic Development Department worked on 20 projects worth more than one billion dollars to the Prince William County economy. This is the highest annual investment total in the 17 years that Prince William County has been tracking economic development investment. And, with a median household income of more than \$93,000, we are among the wealthiest counties in the United States.

So, things are good, but we have much to do. Class sizes in Prince William schools are still too high. Our school system has developed a plan to begin reducing class sizes starting next fall. It is a modest plan, but it will, at a minimum, get us started in the right direction. The plan will require the cost of hiring of a significant number of new teachers, but the impact

of these new ongoing costs on taxpayers can be mitigated if we approach this problem gradually. Achieving this plan will also require that our school system incur no new cuts from the Commonwealth. We need the General Assembly to restore Cost-to-Compete funds, which cost Prince William County Schools more than \$20 million. County taxpayers cannot continue to make-up for these cuts, which have had a disproportionate impact on Prince William County.

On public safety, we must make certain that we keep pace with our growing population. This means that we must restore the police as well as the fire and rescue staffing plans. Our Department of Fire and Rescue needs additional staff to provide the entire County with top-of-the-line, 24-hour fire and life support coverage. For police, this Board approved a comprehensive plan that calls for 25 new officers per year, but we have only approved a budget to provide 10 sworn officers per year. While this is a necessary step in the right direction, we, as a Board, must provide the necessary support to meet our goals.

Finally, with regard to parks and recreation, we need to make good on the wishes of the community and fund the remainder of the 2006 park bond. We need to meet the demands of more field space for soccer, little league, softball, lacrosse, field hockey, swimming, youth football and other growing sports. We took a step in the right direction last year by appropriating \$3.1 million in one-time money for field improvements at Saunders Middle School, Gainesville Middle School, Godwin Middle School, Long Park, Veterans Park and Fuller Heights Park. But we also need to find ways to build indoor recreation facilities, which are necessary not only for youth, but for adult athletic participation as well. The quality of life and health of our residents require a multitude of recreational options, and we are a community that can deliver on those needs.

Building a community is no easy task. It requires one to seek out the voice of the everyday resident. The residents who make no clamor or political speeches. The residents who go to work every day, tend to their families, and speak to their neighbors about what they want in this community. We all know them. We all meet them every day. But are we willing to listen to them and move forward to strive to finish the work we have been tasked? How will we be remembered? Let's be remembered as a generation of great stewards who worked hard, made tough choices, invested in the future and made a great community even better.

I again want to wish you all a Happy New Year. May God bless you and your families in 2014.