

**County of Santa Clara**  
**Office of the County Executive**  
70 West Hedding Street, East Wing 11<sup>th</sup> Floor  
San Jose, CA 95110  
(408) 299-5119  
www.sccgov.org



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

January 27, 2005

Contact: Gwendolyn Mitchell/Laurel Anderson  
Office of Public Affairs  
(408) 299-5119

## **Kniss Advocates a Healthy Vibrant Community in State of the County Address**

*Chair Signals New Initiatives to Enhance the Environment, Promote Wellbeing*

SAN JOSE, CALIF.—This evening, Supervisor Liz Kniss (District 5), who took the helm as Chair of the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors earlier this month, addressed the packed Board Chambers with her message about the State of Santa Clara County. Kniss cited a healthy, vibrant community and signaled plans to introduce several new initiatives that will enhance the wellbeing of County residents and the County government.

Kniss cited numerous examples of how the work of County government contributes to the health of the community and improves the lives of residents. She stated that the County is primarily a provider of service, a lifeline to assist people when they cannot stand on their own.

“We help people gain self-sufficiency. We provide health and safety to the entire community, 24 hours a day, seven days a week,” she remarked. “In fact, while most of us are sleeping, service doesn’t stop,” Kniss continued citing examples of workers who answer 9-1-1 calls, provide law enforcement and health care.

**-more-**

## **Kniss Advocates a Healthy Vibrant Community, Page 2**

Kniss spoke about the priority the Board gives to prevention programs, and while these programs reflect compassion they also make sound economic sense. The CalWORKS program provides participants with education and job training skills so they become self-sufficient and can support their families.

“The Senior Nutrition Program serves almost 5,000 meals daily to elders. ... For every \$1 invested in nutrition programs, \$3.25 is saved in health care costs,” she said.

She also spoke of cost savings associated with the In-Home Support Services (IHSS), a program that allows people to stay in their homes. On average, the In-Home Support Services Program is one-fifth of the cost of nursing home care. IHSS is one of the programs targeted in Governor Schwarzenegger’s proposed budget. If approved, the salary of IHSS workers would be cut back to minimum wage, forcing many workers into poverty.

Kniss said that the County is fortunate to have one of the few publicly owned health care systems left in California and the Board has demonstrated its commitment to increasing access to care by adding community clinics in Milpitas and Gilroy and rebuilding the Fair Oaks clinic in Sunnyvale.

Since 2001, non-violent drug offenders may receive treatment instead of serving jail time. Because of the effective partnership between the County Drug and Alcohol Department and justice services, Santa Clara County’s jail population has dropped dramatically – about 20% - and more people are getting a chance to rehabilitate. For every person who enters treatment rather than the jail, taxpayers save \$5,000 a month.

### **FISCAL HEALTH OF COUNTY**

Kniss stated that as far as economic recovery is concerned, she would characterize the events thus far as "fits and starts," with a healthy dose of “hopeful.” She outlined the steps the County has taken to save, consolidate, and invest. “Our commitment is to balance our budget now and into the future,” she said.

**-more-**

### **Kniss Advocates a Healthy Vibrant Community, Page 3**

In early 2004, the Board of Supervisors adopted a savings plan to support a contingency reserve - set at 2.5% in FY2005 and will continue to increase to 5% in FY2008; consolidated programs; and eliminated those that could no longer be sustained. The Board has invested in the community with a range of strategies as diverse as funding for housing to support those at the margin of self-sufficiency, to developing property.

Soon, the County will be entering a fourth year of significant general fund deficits. The total impact of budget reductions over the four years, including the estimated \$127 million for FY 2006, is \$652 million dollars. The County, known for prudent financial management, has the highest rating that any California county has – Standard and Poors AA+ and Moody's Aa2.

“We have worked diligently to maintain our outstanding bond rating, a claim that few Counties in California can make,” said Kniss. “We have done so by making the tough decisions, working through our challenges and crafting a balanced budget, and we will do so again this year.”

#### **NEW INITIATIVES**

Supervisor Kniss will continue her work to champion the environment and promote health. She has been at the forefront of County efforts to become healthier and more energy efficient. In 2002 she led the drive to institute the Integrated Pest Management Program that has cut the County's pesticide and herbicide use by 50% - 100%. In 2004, she also supported the Board's policy to purchase low emission vehicles and to build new energy-efficient county facilities.

Kniss stated that in the year ahead, she will promote public awareness of “green” building standards, and take steps to address the issue of electronic waste. She believes owners will make more of an effort to have energy-efficient buildings, if they know how.

**-more-**

“Electronic Waste contains chemicals that need to be disposed of properly, and is perhaps the most pressing solid waste issue facing us today,” Kniss said. “By building on County efforts currently underway to manage household hazardous waste, we will be tackling an issue that is of our era.”

Kniss will propose that the Board adopts Best Management Practices for electronic waste and support purchasing policies that address the entire life cycle of a product - from the point of production to the point of disposal.

She also will build on the County programs that focus on prevention. According to Kniss, the County spends one-third of its \$3 billion budget on health care; and many deaths from heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes could be prevented by making different life enhancing choices in the area of nutrition, weight management, tobacco and physical activity. She plans to propose that the Board adopt a health and wellness resolution to promote awareness and serve as a basis for others; endorse a strong workplace wellness program supported by a nutrition and wellness council; promote healthy food choices through County cafeteria and vending machine policies; encourage movement at work; and become an active partner in the Healthy Silicon Valley Collaborative.

### **CONCLUSION**

“The leadership of this County has demonstrated its commitment to support programs and services that contribute to the community’s wellbeing,” said Kniss.

“The challenge ahead of us is to reconcile the need for services with the resources that are available. In the year ahead, there will be more difficult decisions to be made. I believe we will prevail by balancing reason with compassion and firmness with flexibility. It will take all of us working in partnership to continue to maintain a healthy vibrant community.”

# # #