

**State of the County Address
Noon, Friday, April 21, 2017**

Early on the morning of November 8, I was standing in my bedroom, in front of my closet. Like every other working mother, I was racing to get dressed, trying to remember everything I had to do and hurrying to get everyone out the door on time.

In my closet, I didn't have any suffragette white. But I did have a black pantsuit. And I very deliberately put it on – in solidarity with other women and in anticipation of the historic day ahead. I thought of my daughter, Anna who was as eager as I was to see a woman in the White House.

That night, as the outcome of the presidential election became clear, I was filled with grief. Anna was devastated. We couldn't take our eyes off of the TV. We kept watching the election results, willing them to change.

But something else came clear to me that night – that voters here in our local community bucked that national trend. We passed the first ever housing bond to build more affordable housing. Voters here in Multnomah County stood up and elected an all women board of county commissioners. When I think about the colleagues who I get to work with on the board of county commissioners, I feel hope.

Women of color make up the majority of the commission for the very first time. We are all mothers. We are all committed to moving our county through the challenges ahead. And we're here to get things done.

Each of my colleagues brings their considerable talents and leadership skills to Multnomah County. That means new insights and new perspectives applied to our work. Already, I'm seeing a difference.

Commissioner Loretta Smith is passionate about jobs for at-risk teens who face disparities in education and work opportunities. Multnomah County's SummerWorks puts hundreds of kids in summer jobs, providing what she calls "life lessons about personal responsibility and the pride of earning a paycheck." By partnering with local businesses and government, we can provide job training and inspiration that will last a lifetime.

Commissioner Jessica Vega Pederson worked on transportation and safety investments in the Oregon Legislature. Now she's working to improve safety on our roads in Multnomah County and repeat our Sellwood Bridge success on the Burnside Bridge. Our goal is to make sure that the Burnside Bridge, which is on a lifeline route, is usable after a major earthquake.

Commissioner Sharon Meieran is focused on addressing our mental health crisis. As an emergency room doctor, she brings an important perspective to the problems we face in health care and mental health. And those years in the ER give her a sense of urgency that I appreciate.

And Commissioner Lori Stegmann is working with businesses, nonprofits and the cities in East County to make sure families are getting the services they need. As a successful small business owner, Commissioner Stegmann excels at numbers and she makes sure that every dollar counts.

I'm inspired by how much progress Multnomah County has made in confronting our community's challenges. We've housed homeless veterans and families, restoring dignity and independence. We expanded physical and mental health services, extending care to thousands who previously had none. We launched an aggressive replacement of obsolete buildings and bridges, ensuring a safe and functional future.

I'm ready to work with this board to tackle what lies ahead. And I can tell you, it is no easy path.

We have worked hard to put the county on sound financial footing. But we are bracing for a storm of an unknown size. State and federal commitments to our community are uncertain. We do not know whether critical investments in housing, mental and physical healthcare and other services will continue. And the question before us is how do we maintain our humanity and our ability to keep Multnomah County a community that people want to – and can afford to – live in?

Yesterday I released my Executive Budget. The uncertainty we face has led me to develop a budget that builds on our progress in key areas, keeps the organization fiscally sound and directs county dollars to where they can accomplish the most.

If we are not careful, we will spend more and more each year on emergency rooms, homeless shelters and jail beds, and at the end of the day we will still

have thousands of people who are homeless, incarcerated and suffering from curable and preventable disease.

I know that many of you today are mad about the state of politics in Washington, D.C. So am I. But know this: We can't wait for Washington to solve our problems. But we can come together around our values of decency, compassion and fairness. We can come together for our children, for their air they breathe and water they drink, for the education they require and the opportunity we can create. We can face our racist and homophobic past and work for a more equitable, and just future.

We can change the way government works, and put people ahead of process and, through a common mission, change the trajectory for our community – making it the place we want our children to inherit.

We can make a difference. And I'm ready to lead the way.

The journey of this new Board has just begun here at Multnomah County, but over the next several minutes, I want to tell you about the things that we are doing that should give us all hope.

HOUSING: VETERANS

When I was elected as Multnomah County Chair, I sat down with leaders from the cities of Gresham and Portland to talk about how we could work together to better serve the growing number of people in our community who find themselves without a home.

We formed a partnership, A Home For Everyone, that brought together faith, philanthropy and business leaders, along with local government to change the way we were addressing the homeless crisis.

The first challenge we gave ourselves was ending veteran homelessness.

Homelessness is tragic. It shouldn't happen to anyone. And the sad reality is that the need in our community is far greater than our resources. But when we tell a veteran who is sleeping on our streets that she is not a priority, that is indefensible.

I know I'm not alone in thinking that.

When President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama challenged us to step up and end veteran homelessness, matching federal resources with local dollars to get vets off the street, we didn't struggle to find allies.

Landlords, business owners, churches, nonprofits – they all pitched in.

And by setting a clear goal, a shared mission, and knocking down problems as they popped up, we got results.

Over the past two years we have housed more than 1,300 veterans. We were the first West Coast city to be recognized by the White House for effectively ending veteran homelessness.

And it's proof that if we dedicate resources and time, we can get big things done.

In December we got together with federal officials to talk about this effort and recognize the hard work that it takes.

That's when I met Daniel Kallunki [Kuh -lun -kee].

Daniel served four years in the U.S. Navy, and when he got back he found a job as diesel mechanic. He was doing well. He got promoted to supervisor, and he got a raise.

Then he started having trouble walking. This went on for three months until one day, he fell and got a concussion. He went to the ER and, at 38 years old, was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis.

Everything changed. He couldn't work, he got behind on bills and he lost his housing.

The next few years were rough – Daniel alternated between sleeping on the floors of friends' and family's homes, staying in residential programs, sleeping in his car, and camping in the backyard of a friend's house.

Mostly, he worried he'd never be able to live close to his daughter again.

Then he called Transition Projects' Veterans Hotline and got enrolled in Supportive Services for Veteran Families. SSVF connected him to Veterans

Affairs to improve his health care. And most importantly, he got a federal housing voucher that allowed him to afford an apartment near his daughter.

Daniel is housed today because of our work locally to match the effort that the federal government put into ending veteran homelessness. And he's giving back. He's apprenticed to become a mentor in Transition Projects' mentoring program, helping others through his experience and his heart.

Unfortunately, this work is being threatened by the Trump White House, which wants to claw back money tied to veteran's housing, threatening to dismantle the very system that got Daniel into a home.

If these cuts go forward, this is a rebuke of the hard-working men and women who serve us abroad everyday. It sends a clear signal that we're with you today – while you're fighting for us. But once you get home you'll be forgotten.

That's not what Multnomah County is all about. We take care of each other. And it's that basic dignity of mutual respect that makes our community strong and resilient when times are hard.

HOUSING: EFFICIENT SERVICES

I wanted to start out talking about housing today because the housing crisis in this community is real. And housing plays a critical role in almost every service we deliver. But mostly, because I believe there is nothing so fundamental as the need to have a roof overhead, a place to call home.

Last fall, I sat down with some caring and heroic teachers and their grade school students who were staying at our family homeless shelter. The kids were delightful, funny, friendly, smart and resilient. But as we talked, I very quickly saw the toll the housing crisis took on their young lives. The stress of parents facing massive rent increases and eviction. The upheaval of moving in and out of neighborhoods, friends' houses, and motels. They had to change schools, change friends. How can we expect those kids to succeed in school when they don't have a place to study and don't know where they're going to sleep?

Housing can also make the difference in drug treatment. We know now that addiction is a disease, not a moral failing, and that with treatment and support,

people can and do recover. Evidence shows that supported housing helps people maintain their sobriety, and begin rebuilding the life and work skills they need to go on with their lives.

Housing can also help someone successfully return to the community from prison.

Despite record low unemployment, Multnomah County residents don't make enough money to meet their basic needs: food, housing and medicine. So when housing costs are spiking, there are a lot more families having difficult conversations about what they're not going to pay for this month.

Our budget at Multnomah County isn't big enough to help everyone who is being priced out of the housing market. So how we spend our dollars really counts.

That's why when I started as Chair, I wanted to fix some of the inefficiencies of our system so we could serve more people.

It used to be that the City of Portland cared for homeless individuals, while the county was responsible for helping homeless families.

That never made any sense to me. So I worked with city leaders to form the Joint Office of Homeless Services, bringing together city and county resources in one office.

Having these vital services in one place makes it easier to track the tax dollars we spend on homeless services, ensuring that we're getting our money's worth for every dollar spent.

It's also allowing us to reduce duplication and create more efficient services.

And when crisis strikes, like it did this winter, having a clear chain of command to lead the response is vital.

Every year, Portland, Gresham and Multnomah County brace for cold winter weather. We open up temporary shelters and we maintain staff on-call for when the temperatures drop and our most vulnerable neighbors face deadly danger.

This year we partnered with Tom Cody and Project development to open up an 80-bed shelter in a downtown building set for renovation. And just a few weeks later, we opened another temporary shelter donated by the Menashe family. These facilities were on top of the new year-round shelter beds we opened last

year, providing a safe space for families, seniors, veterans and people escaping domestic violence.

But the winter storms that arrived – at one point dumping nearly a foot of snow on our region in one day – stunned us all.

These kinds of events are historic – I’m certain my son Jacob will tell the story of the winter without school for many years. But they are also incredibly dangerous.

As anyone who braved our streets during the worst of our winter weather will know, it was difficult to get to work in a Subaru. For those who only have a pair of broken shoes, things were much worse.

This is where I have to stop for a second and make it clear that this story has two aspects.

Our community came together in unparalleled ways to open up government office buildings, American Legion halls, and community centers.

At the peak of the response, we had an additional 748 shelter beds open just for the storm. And most importantly, no one was turned away from shelter.

The stories of those who came inside were heartbreaking. A young woman turned out of her boyfriend’s hotel room in the dead of winter, her mother too far away to pick her up. A young man who sleeps beneath a bridge, who arrived at the Portland Building shelter just as he was experiencing the early stages of hypothermia. A woman who sleeps in the Portland Airport and has become a familiar face to the vendors who is looking for a permanent place to stay, but can’t afford the rent.

Rising rents and stagnant wages are turning our streets into a resting place of last resort for working people. And when the streets turned deadly, hundreds of everyday people, government employees working double-shifts and members of the faith community stood up and said – we will help.

Our community cares so deeply for one another that we will come together when things are scary. When danger is on the horizon, we hold tight. And it makes the difference.

But not for everyone.

The reality is that six people died on our cold streets this winter. Each of their stories is unique. But they were all homeless.

Seven years ago I worked with Street Roots and its Executive Director Israel Bayer to start Domicile Unknown, an annual accounting of those who die on our streets homeless.

When you read the report online, it makes clear that the way our nation has defined poverty is fundamentally wrong. Poverty isn't a problem inflicted upon the poor by their own actions, it's a product of a lack of good-paying jobs, affordable health care, and a stable home. And it's also a product of institutional racism at the foundation of our economy, our healthcare system and in our very neighborhoods.

I think it's important to make it clear today that there is no magic solution to homelessness and poverty.

People become homeless because they can't pay the rent.

We get them back into housing by helping them find a way to afford that rent.

In 2015, a Portland woman named Randi was counting her blessings. She had her sobriety. And she had a husband who earned enough that she could stay home and raise their daughter and son (and their hamster, cat and two dogs).

Then her husband went back to using drugs – and took off. She found out he hadn't been paying the bills. Their car was repossessed. An eviction notice arrived.

Randi borrowed her father's red Fiat. The whole family, kids and pets, crammed in with her. They stayed at her mom's a few nights. But some nights they all slept in the car. Eventually, Randi put up a tent on the Springwater Corridor trail. That's where another camper told her about JOIN, one of the many nonprofits that works with the new city/county Joint Office of Homeless Services.

The nonprofit, which helps support individuals and families as they transition off the streets, enrolled her children in state health care coverage and helped her sign up for food stamps. The organization paid the back rent on her old house, so she could move back in. JOIN even helped with Christmas presents for the kids.

In April 2017, Randi unwrapped her family’s first real portraits since her husband left. Her kids, thriving in school now, were beaming. She’d wanted to give up, she said. She knew she couldn’t. Her kids needed her.

“I was scared, but they weren’t,” she says. “Because I was there.”

Finding the dollars to help families like Randi’s – that’s the enormous challenge. And one that’s made worse when the federal government is pulling back on investments in housing vouchers and affordable housing development.

That’s why it’s even more important today to identify the best way to spend the limited dollars we have.

Working with business leaders and the community, we can lower the cost of our operations and help more people. Just this week, we celebrated the opening of another 100-bed shelter. For those of you Portlanders, you’ll know it as Shleifer Furniture on SE Grand Avenue. The space is being donated by Brad Malsin, Beam Development, and Urban Development Partners.

Since we opened the Joint Office of Homeless Services last year, we’ve doubled the number of shelter beds in our community, and are moving thousands of people into permanent housing. Last year, 25,000 people took advantage of these services.

This is all possible because of the unprecedented financial commitment from the City of Portland and Multnomah County. We added \$20 million in new funding to these vital services last year. My budget keeps our commitment in place and I had to make some tough trade-offs to make this happen. I’m counting on Mayor Ted Wheeler and the City Commissioners to make good on the city’s commitment to this work.

This strong partnership isn’t just about Portland. Gresham Mayor Shane Bemis and Councilor Karylenn Echols have been important voices at the table, bringing a focus on East Multnomah County’s needs.

This last year we opened the first shelter in Gresham, providing a safe place for 90 women every night, including victims of domestic violence. And in the City of Gresham, the county is funding outreach workers and homeless service

specialists for the first time. Putting these boots on the ground have made a big difference.

This is all part of the plan that A Home For Everyone put in place. It relies on three strategies: The first is preventing people from becoming homeless in the first place. The second is getting people directly into permanent housing as quickly as possible. And the third is funding a safety net of shelter beds for those who currently don't have housing.

We have made incredible progress on all three goals over the last year. And this winter's storm proves that we can't back down.

We need to show the federal government and state government, what it looks like when a community is willing to make a commitment to those who have no place to call home. And we need them to keep up their commitments to this work. That's funding for the emergency housing account and state homeless assistance program at the state level.

And it's housing vouchers and new resources for building affordable housing at the federal level.

I will keep fighting for more support from the state and federal government. But we need to show them what a commitment looks like.

KIDS: MORE EFFICIENT SERVICES IN SUN

Intervention and crisis response are a critical part of Multnomah County's mission. But often the best intervention comes before a crisis strikes and this is especially true when it comes to kids and families.

That's why Multnomah County originally built our network of SUN schools.

At each of our 84 school sites around the county, we offer a safe place for kids to be after school. And we bring services to parents, too, making sure that even when they're overworked and overburdened, they have the support they need to help their kids thrive.

Everyone loves the SUN program, and everyone loves their SUN school. But last year, we determined that it was time to make some changes. As the community we serve becomes more diverse, we need to invest in strategies that will meet the needs of all our children and families. So, we changed the way we organized

and allocated our resources.

We now invest more than half of our SUN resources in culturally specific services that we believe will help eliminate structural barriers and improve outcomes for kids and families.

By working with providers like Latino Network, NAYA, Self Enhancement Inc., and IRCO, we are building on the deep connections that these organizations have in our neighborhoods, making sure that each one of our kids gets the support they deserve. And for the first time, this year our SUN program will be partnering with the City of Gresham, bringing a new mentoring program to kids in east Multnomah County.

In January, when I heard that families at the Normandy Apartments in Cully had received up to 100 percent rent increases I knew we had to act and act quickly.

I asked county staff what we could do to at least help the families stay through the school year. But Latino Network, our SUN provider, was already on it. They were ready with flexible rent assistance money available to help keep those 26 kids at Rigler Elementary.

The landlord later put off the rent hike. But we know that having a system in place that can keep kids in school and solve problems as they arise is the best way to ensure that our kids have the support they need.

And it gives our staff the ability to work efficiently to prevent problems from getting worse.

Making sure kids have a place to go after school, and someone they can talk to when things are difficult, can go a long way to making sure they succeed in school – and stay out of trouble.

That means investing in our kids is the right thing to do and it's the financially smart thing to do.

SAFER COMMUNITIES

Last year, we started the process of moving public safety dollars away from our jails and instead, directing those dollars to making our community safer.

Setting out that goal in my budget last year made the county's commitment to this real. And it brought people to the table.

Today we have a solid commitment from District Attorney Rod Underhill, Sheriff Mike Reese, police and our parole officers to find ways to divert people from jail into the treatment that helps them get back on track.

On February 27 of this year we started the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion program. Modeled after a successful program in place in King County, Washington, LEAD will allow police and prosecutors to divert people with a low-level drug possession charge into services instead of sending them to jail.

By partnering with Central City Concern, we are responding to a public health problem with services instead of handcuffs.

We're working hard to reduce our reliance on jail because not only is it the most expensive option, in some cases, sending someone to jail for a low-level offense makes things worse.

That's particularly true for people experiencing mental illness.

Earlier this year, Disability Rights Oregon issued a report that detailed troubling – and heartbreaking – conditions in our county jail.

I was appalled by the report and I immediately directed Health Department head Joanne Fuller to assume responsibility for Corrections Health and to work with Dr. Michael Seale, medical director for Corrections Health, to increase access to treatment and recovery for people in jail.

My budget includes new funding for mental health counselors at the jail booking area to improve coordination of community services for individuals leaving the jail. I also included funding to expand clinic hours and directed our corrections health leadership to work closely with jail command staff to ensure that the care provided in jail is timely and meets the unique needs of the individual. I'm encouraged that Sheriff Reese is committed to improving training for his corrections deputies and putting in place clear standards and expectations.

While these changes are necessary, we know that jail is not an appropriate place for treating people with mental health and substance abuse issues.

I'm proud that Multnomah County provides crisis intervention and peer navigators who can help people across the county during a mental health crisis. And, that we are investing more in mental health services in our schools.

My budget includes a new investment in mental health case management services, furthering our collaboration with teachers, improving our outreach and prevention efforts in schools. Those dollars are going to go where there is the biggest gap between existing services and need. And that is in East Multnomah County.

It will take all of us working together to make sure that our neighbors, parents, sons and daughters get the help they need.

BETTER HEALTHCARE

I talked a bit earlier about emergency rooms. What I think has been lost in the debate over Obamacare is the direct benefit we all experience when the government makes healthcare affordable for working people.

Because we decided long ago that no one should be turned away from an emergency room or left bleeding in the street, we created a system of care that relied upon the government to fund healthcare for the poor in times of crisis.

But that crisis care is the most expensive health care we can provide.

The Affordable Care Act said let's turn this problem around. Instead of forcing the American people to buy only the most expensive care, we would help them buy the healthcare that reduces costs in the long run.

Accessible, affordable healthcare – that's a family doctor, it's free birth control and family planning, and it's preventive care that stops problems before they occur.

Here in Multnomah County, we've been working with families to improve their health before they even see their physician.

Angela Reed gained 70 pounds during her first pregnancy. She hated the extra weight and was terrified she'd die young and leave her kids. She was checking in for a medical appointment at Mid-County Health Center when staff asked if she wanted to sign up for a farm share. Instead of the usual \$100, one that puts it out of reach for many working families, she could get a full share for just \$5 a month.

Every week, Zenger Farms popped up a full farmers market at the clinic and hosted cooking classes to teach families how to use these unfamiliar vegetables. It was an idea dreamed up by Health Department staff – and funded by grants – and Angela and her kids dove in. Due to her new healthy eating habits, Angela lost 50 pounds and said her kids now eat A LOT of vegetables. She said: “I feel better than I have in 10 years.”

For a small investment, we can change a mother's future and the future for her children.

CLEAN AIR AND CLEAN WATER

As a mother of three, I take seriously our community's commitment to our children. So when I heard last year about toxic metal emissions in Portland I was shaken.

My son Alexander attends Cleveland High School. And in his school's auditorium, I heard from hundreds of parents who were worried – just like me – about their children's health.

They wanted to know what the government was going to do about it. I did too.

I added my voice to the chorus calling on the State Department of Environmental Quality to step up and enforce regulations that protect our air and water from polluters.

And I'm happy to say that by standing together, we made a difference. We have beefed-up air monitoring to better track emissions. And the state has brought glass manufacturers into compliance with clean air regulations.

But the real fight is over diesel. We need to make sure that our children aren't riding on school buses that are emitting toxic exhaust and the trucks idling on the freeway aren't polluting their lungs.

Along with many of you, I have been pushing the Legislature to put in place new restrictions on diesel pollution but it's an uphill battle.

I'm not giving up and one thing was made clear that night in the Cleveland High School auditorium – our voice matters. When we stand together, we can force change and make our community stronger.

Earlier this month, I was proud to stand with Mayor Wheeler and other local leaders to announce Portland and Multnomah County's commitment to transition our community to 100 percent clean energy by 2050.

Showing the world that local government will step into the void left by Washington, D.C. is important. But the most powerful speaker there that day was Jeremy Clark.

"The leaders of Portland and Multnomah County – have great power," Jeremy said. "But with that great power comes a great responsibility. You have the responsibility of keeping my future bright."

He's 12. And he's right.

If we don't address climate change today this problem will slip away from us. And so will Jeremy's future.

If we let this go, we will face a generation of children whose life expectancies are shorter, whose lifetime incomes are lower and whose prospects for a better life are worse than ours.

Failing to take action today is accepting a legacy of failure.

BUDGET

We are facing challenging times. The federal government is threatening to end energy assistance for the poor and elderly, and I expect that we will be dealing with efforts in Congress to dismantle the Affordable Care Act throughout the summer.

My budget takes into account this uncertainty, and it offers a balanced path forward for Multnomah County.

First off, we need to continue to make significant investments in the Joint Office of Homeless Services to address our housing crisis, particularly by working to prevent homelessness in the first place.

My budget includes new resources that will fund local housing vouchers for seniors. We learned by housing homeless veterans that having the resources to keep an apartment stabilizes people and keeps them from experiencing a crisis in the future.

I am also proposing a new eviction outreach effort, that will connect tenants who are facing eviction directly to housing resources so that they can keep their housing instead of being forced to sleep on a friend's couch, in their car or on the streets.

We will also work with our public safety partners to ensure that our criminal justice system is providing fair, just outcomes for everyone, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender or background.

The racial disparities we see in our jails and throughout our criminal justice system are a reminder of the worst of our nation's history.

All across the county we need to ensure that our departments are working to close gaps for the people we serve. We know there are racial disparities just like in our criminal justice system, in health outcomes, in student achievement and in the job market. If we're going to enable every one of us to succeed, we are going to have to work together to reduce these disparities.

We also need to focus on the root causes of poverty, sickness and violence. We know that multigenerational poverty sets kids back and makes it hard for families to get ahead. And we know that getting people preventative care – and a doctor's appointment – will keep them out of the emergency room in the long run. Prevention is more humane – it saves people the trauma of homelessness or a jail cell – but it's also more cost-effective. In this budget climate, we have to invest our dollars where they have the greatest impact.

Even in a tough budget year, we still need to invest in our infrastructure, and I will continue to fund the replacement of unsafe buildings and crumbling roads and bridges today so that we will save on debt service in the future.

My time at Multnomah County has proven that spending wisely today pays off in the end.

Thirteen years ago, Multnomah County knew the Sellwood Bridge was in bad shape. It had a rating of two on a scale of zero to 100.

But we had no plan, no partners and no money.

Over time, the community pulled together a plan, we went to work bringing the City of Portland, the federal government and state lawmakers in to fund the project and we got to work.

Today, the completed bridge offers expanded bicycle and pedestrian connections between Sellwood and Southwest Portland and it is one of two bridges sound enough to withstand a Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake.

On the first day the bridge was open to the public hundreds of community members – many of whom helped plan or build the bridge – came out to celebrate.

I've never seen so many people excited about a new road project.

My daughter Anna even managed to muscle her way to the front of the line and cut the ribbon.

She both wanted to be the one to cut the ribbon and inherently knows a good photo op when she sees one.

But I think at the end of the day, people turned out to celebrate the end of construction gridlock and the new connection that was made in their community.

I've seen a lot of ideas and plans put on a shelf and forgotten and it drives me nuts. Voters didn't elect us to talk about problems, they sent us in to fix them.

So as Chair I've pushed for the county to replace our Central Courthouse, which has been talked about for decades but is now under construction. And we broke ground on a new health department headquarters which will bring hundreds of good-paying jobs to the Old Town-Chinatown neighborhood.

Together, these three projects total three-quarters of a billion dollars. Those dollars are building safe, accessible and efficient infrastructure that will last into the next century. And for the first time, we have entered into a Project Labor Agreement for the Courthouse and Health Department Headquarters – to ensure that public dollars are invested in our community and create living wage, local, union jobs and expanded opportunities for Minority and Women contractors and workers.

My budget includes \$25 million for these infrastructure projects and every dollar we can spend today on these big projects saves us money in finance costs later.

That's important because we are looking at cutting programs this year while thousands of families across the county are on the edge. Rent increases and no-cause evictions are destabilizing households and creating a crisis for families. And my budget this year takes into account their struggle and the public trust that's been put in me and my fellow commissioners.

That means spending where it matters. For example, we have established a side account with the Public Employees Retirement System, allowing us to bring in a greater return on the dollars that Multnomah County has set aside to smooth out the rising cost of our payroll. This makes good on our promises to our employees and to our taxpayers.

And my budget is balanced for the next three years. This fiscal oversight has led to an upgrade in our bond rating, now we have the highest rating Moody's offers.

This financial stability is important because this budget cycle will be tough. There will be reductions in services and there will be cuts. But my commitment to serve those who are most vulnerable remains the same.

IMMIGRATION

I take seriously the responsibility in front of me as Multnomah County Chair, to make sure that each investment we're making is the right one.

And every new expenditure in my budget is there because I believe it will reduce our long-term financial responsibilities, improve the life of children and families who will build up our community over the coming decades, or because it reflects our core values and represents a promise that we've made to uphold them.

And so I find it ironic that a nation whose economy was bolstered by immigrants is now tearing itself apart to vilify them.

Like many Oregonians, my family history is an immigration story. My great grandfather came to the Northwest from Syria. He started a business, creating jobs for local workers. He raised his family and became a central part of the community of Ilo, Idaho. And eventually he became the mayor of that small town.

Nader Kafoury, like so many immigrants in Multnomah County today, came to the United States in search of a better life. And he found one.

And by being a shining beacon of light, our country has, for generations, inspired people of all walks of life to leave the country that they grew up in, to take their savings, their smarts and their hard work and bring it to the United States.

When immigrants come to Multnomah County, they bring with them a culture of resilience. They come ready to learn and to teach and to work. And they enrich our community.

And when we describe in sweeping generalities who immigrants or refugees are, we ignore their individual experiences. The stories that they tell their children and grandchildren. And the lessons they can teach us.

We also ignore the values that bind us together.

Earlier this year I was invited by a group of young people to a demonstration in front of the Portland offices of Immigration and Customs Enforcement – ICE.

The organizers were DREAMers. Young people who came to this country with their parents as children – who know no home better than Multnomah County.

They were fearful of the rhetoric and the actions from the federal administration. They were fearful that they might be deported. And so they did the thing that any American would do. They called their friends. They got together. And they went downtown to tell the government, “You’ve got it wrong.” Instead of moving forward, this administration is turning back the clock. That needs to change.

These young people were voting with their feet because that’s the only vote they have. And that is the real irony.

We don't want to be a nation that says to some of its most promising young people who've been working to make their community better: Get out of here.

We can't solve everything here at Multnomah County. But we need to pull together during these hard times and show the rest of the country what some hard-working people can do when they put their minds to it.

I'm going to keep calling on our federal government to designate our courthouses and health clinics as sensitive places where people can go to hold an abuser accountable or to seek life-saving care.

And I'm going to keep calling on our federal government to recognize that everyone who lives in Multnomah County deserves access to opportunity and justice. We need a rational pathway to citizenship in this country for the millions of people who have been left behind by a Congress that won't act when the people tell them to.

OUTRO

If there's one thing I've learned since I've been at Multnomah County, it is that I am never alone in this work.

Everyday, nearly 6,000 county employees bring their excellence, passion and commitment to this mission. From the crisis line workers who stayed at their desks overnight during the ice storms to the community health workers who dreamed up the farmer's markets for patients and then found the funding for it. To the health inspectors who work with business owners everyday to make sure our food is safe and their restaurant and food carts are thriving. Thank you. You make all the difference.

But don't just take my word for it. All around this room are people whose lives have been transformed by this work. Their stories are in front of you, and I'm going to ask them to stand, because their stories show the difference that local government can make:

JAH- KWAY-US Montgomery (Jaques Montgomery)

Wendy Shumway

Pedro Delgado

Carole HEE-NA-HO-SA (Carole Hinojosa)

Daniel Kuh-lun-kee (Daniel Kallunki)

JAZ MEE KA Weathers (Jazmica Weathers)

Thank you for coming and allowing us to share your stories and success.

We've got to build a legacy worthy of our efforts and of passing along to our children. This isn't just a political imperative, it's a moral one.

Because our children will inherit what we don't accomplish.

If we let go of our values and let our democracy waiver, our kids will be left to fix it.

And if we spend poorly, on programs that don't work, or a wall we don't need on our southern border, our kids will be the ones to pay for it.

And if we don't find a way to bring together people with different outlooks, political views and backgrounds, it will be up to our kids to find a politics that does.

I watched my mother challenge the idea that women should be excluded from political dialogue. I watched her challenge the notion that the poor were on their own – that no one cared. And I saw her fight to her final days for better housing, better healthcare and equality for all people.

She left us a world that is more just and fair than the one that she was born into. And my only hope is that my daughter Anna will say the same of me someday when she reaches her goal of being President of the United States.

And I know that it's in us all here today to live up to that challenge. Together, we can all give our children a community, and an inheritance we are proud to pass along.

Thank you.

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