

2018 State of the County Address

March 21, 2018

Progress Through Partnerships

Mr. Chairman, members of the Council, tribal leaders, and people of Pierce County:

I once served in the Navy with a man named Wes.

One day, when we were deployed in the Philippines, it must have rained 10 *inches*. The water rose high and fast, and it devastated a nearby village where people lived in shanties propped up by cinderblocks. I'll never forget the sound of the rain pounding on those tin roofs, or the destructive power of all that moving water.

When the mayor of the village pleaded for search and rescue volunteers, Wes didn't hesitate. Soon, he was fighting through chest-high water looking for folks in need of help.

And when Wes found someone, he would literally carry them to safety. And then he would go back and do it again. And again.

Until the work was done and people were safe.

In the Navy, I was fortunate to serve with some of our nation's best - people like Builder Second Class Wes Minster. They were true heroes in every sense of the word.

And now, as County Executive, I once again have the honor of serving with heroes who selflessly run toward danger so that others may escape it.

When hurricanes Harvey and Irma devastated Texas and Puerto Rico, our urban search and rescue team quickly deployed to help those in need. In Pierce County we have the privilege to host Washington Task Force 1, a team of heroes from throughout our region, and I was pleased to sign an agreement last month to ensure they can respond quickly to *local* emergencies, too.

Last summer, I saw our volunteer firefighters, from Buckley, Greenwater, and Crystal Mountain step up to battle the Norse Peak Fire. The fire was massive- over 52 thousand acres burned.

While many homes and businesses were threatened, thanks to their work, not a single structure was lost in Pierce County.

And none of us will forget last December when Amtrak 501 jumped the tracks at Mounts Road. Tragically, 3 people were killed.

It was a miracle we didn't lose more. With the eyes of the world upon us, our emergency personnel responded quickly and professionally, transporting 70

people to area hospitals, removing the train, and reopening I-5 within a couple of days.

It was nothing short of extraordinary.

For all they have done for us, I would now like to invite those in this room who have served - or are currently serving - as police officers, firefighters, first responders, or members of our armed forces to please stand and be recognized.

Thank you.

As we remember the great work done, let's also remember the tremendous sacrifices that have been made by those who wear the uniform.

Earlier this month I visited the national law enforcement memorial in Washington, DC. Carved into the walls of the memorial are the names of over *21,000 men and women* who have died in the line of duty.

But what struck me powerfully was line 27.

Panel 34, Line 27: Walter Kent Mundell, Jr.

Panel 7, Line 27: Ronald Wilbur Owens II.

Panel 58, Line 27: Mark Joseph Renninger.

Panel 25, Line 27: Tina G. Griswold, and Gregory James Richards.

Jake Gutierrez is on that wall.

So is Shandon Wright.

And, sadly, Pierce County Deputy Daniel McCartney will be, too.

There are far too many names on that wall - and far too many names from Pierce County.

The national law enforcement memorial is a fitting tribute to our fallen officers, but it shouldn't take a special trip out of Pierce County to pay our respects.

To honor those who have made the ultimate sacrifice, Council Chair Doug Richardson and I propose we create our own public memorial in Pierce County for law enforcement officers and firefighters killed in the line of duty.

This afternoon, I will submit to our Council a request for funding to build a memorial worthy of those who gave their lives in service to others - a place where our citizens can honor and reflect upon their sacrifice.

We must never forget.

Thanks to the work of the Prosecutor, Sheriff, and our many partners throughout County government, we are working hard to improve public safety.

We are:

- **Putting career criminals behind bars with the High Priority Offender Program,**
- **Cleaning up drug houses and other nuisance properties,**
- **Embedding mental health professionals with our sheriff's deputies, and**
- **Investing in preventive behavioral health services.**

On top of this, we have funded more deputies and increased our recruitment efforts. Over the past 5 years, the Council has funded 23 additional deputies, and I support the efforts led by Councilmember Dan Roach to add even more.

Our heroes spend their lives helping us and sometimes those heroes need our help too.

As an employer, Pierce County makes a special effort to hire veterans because it's good for them *and* it's good for us. They are hardworking, highly trained, and can contribute from *day one*. In 2017, 17% of our new hires were veterans, and in 2018 we plan to hire even more.

Last year, we worked with our partners at the WestCare Foundation and

Washington Department of Veterans Affairs to launch the Betsy Ross Project to help women veterans experiencing homelessness. I'm pleased to report that Betsy Ross Hall is up and running, and women veterans now have access to safe and supportive housing at the Washington Soldier's Home in Orting.

Another powerful partnership is allowing us to provide more services to veterans. I am excited to announce we have teamed with the Cohen Veterans Network to establish a new mental health clinic for post-9/11 veterans *and their families*.

At this clinic, if a veteran is struggling with PTSD, they can get help - *regardless of insurance or ability to pay*. If a veteran is in crisis, they can get in *that same day* for treatment.

The Cohen Veterans Network is a national non-profit leader with extensive experience helping veterans. The facility will be in Lakewood, and we expect it will be up and running by the end of summer. Veterans in our area will soon have better access to the kind of quality care they deserve.

Of course, it's not just veterans who need access to high-quality behavioral health care. As Councilmember Connie Ladenburg knows well, we still have a lot of work ahead. According to a comprehensive behavioral health study commissioned by the Council, more than 19% of our County's residents meet the criteria for a mental health disorder.

Fundamentally, our strategy is to be *proactive, intervene early*, and get people connected with the *most appropriate treatment option* for them. This approach gets folks better care and saves money. A great example of this is the Mobile Community Intervention Response Team program, also known as MCIRT.

When people need emergency help, they call 9-1-1. When people need non-emergency help, a lot of them *still* call 9-1-1. And when a fully loaded fire engine responds to these non-emergency calls, it's not good for anyone. That's where the MCIRT comes in.

Teams of mental health and human services professionals in mobile vans help those struggling with mental illness, drug addiction, and other challenges.

To give you an idea of what they do, let me tell you about Laura. She is 49 and lives in Spanaway. Laura worked full-time until she had a brain aneurysm and stroke, causing her to permanently lose function on her left side. She would get very anxious and scared when she was alone at night.

At the time Laura was referred to the MCIRT, she had made twenty-six 9-1-1 calls over the previous 12 months and was taken to the emergency room 5 of those times.

The MCIRT team worked with Laura to manage her anxiety and depression. They helped her become self-sufficient and retake control of her life. They even helped her adopt a little dog named Bo. It's a great honor to have her with us

here today. Thank you for coming, Laura!

The care Laura received prior to MCIRT was more expensive and less effective for her. She didn't need a firetruck; she needed a case manager. But she's not alone.

Last year, 22 people with behavioral health needs made a little over 100 calls per month to 9-1-1. Once we started the MCIRT, these calls dropped to about 40 a month—a 60% reduction. This represents a massive savings of time for our first responders *and* more appropriate care for the callers.

These encouraging outcomes are a direct result of the hard work and long hours of the MCIRT team. My thanks go out to Traci Krieg and her team for all their great work!

Another team that put in long hours to deliver results is the Criminal Justice Diversion Steering Committee. Thanks to their work, we earned two multi-million-dollar grants to send people with mental illness to treatment instead of jail. These grants also pair mental health professionals with Sheriff's deputies as they respond to people in crisis.

We began providing these services earlier this month.

Thanks to Carol Mitchell and the rest of the Steering Committee for making this happen!

A third example of our strategy is helping people in crisis. People who are a danger to themselves and others. People like Isabel.

Isabel frequently called 9-1-1 and was well-known to law enforcement and St. Claire's emergency room staff. She struggled with substance abuse, frequently heard voices in her head, and thought about ending her own life.

Eventually, law enforcement was able to take Isabel to the crisis stabilization facility in Fife. Staff there provided one-on-one support, built trust, managed her medications, and made sure she formed a strong relationship with a community case manager.

Thanks to effective care, her contacts with law enforcement dropped from 153 to 4. And since the first of this year, Isabel hasn't made a *single* 9-1-1 call or ER visit.

The problem is there are many people like Isabel out there who *don't* have access to this kind of care. Our job is to make sure they get it.

Thanks to our partners at Optum, the Accountable Community of Health, the Council, and other partners, we have secured \$6 million in funding to build a new crisis center where it's needed most - the Parkland/Spanaway area. As many as 2,000 individuals in crisis will receive appropriate care each year.

We are moving fast and hope to break ground by the end of 2018. Many thanks to Steve O'Ban for spearheading this effort.

With opioids ravaging our communities, we can't build this center fast enough. We are experiencing something Councilwoman Pam Roach has rightly declared an opioid epidemic.

In our nation, an average of 115 people are killed by opioids every day. 115 people *every single day*. I remember visiting our Medical Examiner's office when they were working through a thick stack of case files for people suspected to have died from opioid overdoses. That stack of files was from a single weekend.

Fortunately, we have a group of local leaders taking on this challenge. My thanks to Councilmember Derek Young for co-chairing a task force focused on this issue, and for his active involvement in developing recommendations for what we must do to stop this epidemic. I look forward to reviewing the final recommendations and taking action.

Making significant progress on treating behavioral health will also help us deal with a related challenge - homelessness. To help us understand the scope of that challenge, hundreds of volunteers fan out across the County each year to count the number of people experiencing homelessness. This past January, our volunteers counted 1,628 people - 878 of them in area shelters, and another 750 simply out in the cold.

Each one of these folks has their own story of how they became homeless. And because the causes of homelessness are varied, our solutions must be too.

Sometimes, it's a large security deposit that stands between a person and stable housing. A woman fleeing domestic violence may not be able to save up for a deposit, especially when her abuser controls every penny she earns. That's why we set up a fund and engaged private sector landlords in a partnership to keep people off the street.

Other times, people need a job-and the dignity that comes with earning a paycheck. This summer we will be launching a new program to pair those experiencing homelessness with the opportunity to work. It's a day labor program known as the *Homeless Empowerment Labor Program, or HELP*.

Modeled after a program in Albuquerque designed to end panhandling, this program will provide people experiencing homelessness with a job for the day. And when the workday is over, workers not only receive their pay but can also receive job training and counseling. It's all about helping people help themselves.

This kind of immediate help is important, but it's really the private sector that creates the type of family wage jobs we need to lift people out of poverty long-term. Government plays a supporting role by helping create the conditions where businesses can thrive. And, frankly, sometimes that means just getting out of the way.

Red tape can choke off badly needed economic growth. That's why one of the first things we did last year was reorganize County government to process permits *faster*.

That's also why we convened a Red Tape Reduction Task Force to identify and eliminate unnecessary and wasteful regulations. Thanks to Bill Riley, Kurt Wilson, and Sean Gaffney for their leadership and hard work on this task force.

But we're just getting started.

Right now, in the unincorporated areas of Pierce County, we have 105 different commercial zones. We're working to get that down to 5 - simplifying things for permit applicants and reviewers, without compromising quality.

We need to make it easier to start a new business in Pierce County so our citizens can get those new jobs. When entrepreneurs look to invest, they look for places they can get up and running as quickly and cost-effectively as possible.

Therefore, I have directed department staff to find ways to *significantly cut* the upfront fees we charge businesses to connect to our sewer system. This eliminates one of the key barriers to new entrepreneurs investing in Pierce County.

Fortunately, we're already seeing how cutting through red tape can unleash job creation and economic development in our community. Working collaboratively, we finally broke the regulatory logjam holding up Point Ruston, a project representing \$1.2 *billion* dollars in private investment in Pierce County.

Thanks to Tacoma Mayor Victoria Woodards, Ruston Mayor Bruce Hopkins, Loren Cohen from Point Ruston, and everyone else involved for getting the project back on track. I'm excited to see things starting to move out there, again!

I'm also excited to be the first to share some news about a great program coming to Pierce County this summer. It's about helping young girls get a start in technology so they'll be ready for the tech jobs of tomorrow.

Randi Zuckerberg is the Founder and CEO of Zuckerberg Media and a New York Times bestselling author. Randi has accomplished quite a bit in the technology world. In fact, she invented Facebook Live, which we are using to stream this speech!

Randi used to get frustrated that she was often the only woman in a room of technology leaders. To help get girls excited about tech, Randi created *Sue's Tech Kitchen*, a travelling hands-on lab. Kids will be 3-D printing cakes, coding with candy, and using liquid nitrogen to make ice cream.

She launched it in New York and has identified 10 cities to host the three-day

experience. And Tacoma beat out San Francisco to be *the only West Coast city on the tour!* The program will be here in August.

My thanks to our partners at the Chamber of Commerce, City of Tacoma, Broadway Center, and our local schools for helping bring this incredible opportunity to our young people.

Sue's Tech Kitchen recognizes that one of the best ways for our kids to learn is through play. It's also one of the best ways to build communities.

Just ask Councilmember Rick Talbert. Thanks to his leadership, more than 70 neighbors came together to build a new playground in Parkland - and they have stayed together as a community. They call it the Mayfair Dream Project, and I'm grateful to see this group so invested in the place they call home.

Our parks are key to Pierce County being a great place to raise a family. Last year alone, we had over *2 million* participants in parks programs, and people used our trails over *1 million* times. And that number will go up in 2018.

We recently completed some long-awaited trail connections, so now cyclists, walkers, and runners have 21 miles on the Foothills Trail to enjoy. We're also working on further development of the Pipeline, Cushman, and Chambers Creek Canyon trails.

The Parks Department has also been hard at work making improvements to the

golf course at Chambers Bay.

In collaboration with the US Golf Association, we continue to improve the course to make future championships even more successful.

We've already replaced a couple of the greens you heard so much about during the 2015 US Open, and this fall we will start the process to replace the rest of the greens. This means we will be closing the course for a few months during the winter season to get the work done as quickly as possible. At the same time, we'll be adjusting the layout of the course to improve the spectator experience.

We're also actively negotiating a ground lease agreement with our resort development partners so we can add a hotel, spa, and restaurant to the grounds while enhancing the trails and open space at the park. More to come on this soon.

The golf course is beautiful, but what makes Chambers Bay so special is the spectacular natural beauty that surrounds it. In fact, it's this sort of natural beauty that Pierce County is known for. Each of us has a responsibility to protect it for the next generation and the generations to follow.

Our conservation efforts have yielded some good successes. For instance, we are now using 157,000 *fewer* gallons of fuel in our vehicle fleet each year. But I'm hopeful we can do even better than that. To help protect our environment, I am directing our department staff to evaluate the potential of *converting our*

ferries to electric power. Our hope is that electric ferries will turn out to be more environmentally *and* fiscally sustainable than our existing diesel fleet.

Tribal governments are important partners in our effort to conserve and protect the environment. No one has a closer connection to the land, air, and water than the people who first hunted in local forests, fished in local streams, and canoed through local waterways.

In fact, this summer many native peoples from throughout the Northwest, Alaska, Canada, and all the way down to Northern California will once again be canoeing through local waterways. To preserve their heritage and underscore their shared culture, Native Americans from the region gather and paddle together on an annual canoe journey.

The Puyallup Tribe has the honor of hosting this year's paddle and 60 canoes have already registered. They will be coming from their homelands, through the Salish Sea, down Commencement Bay, and ending on the Hylebos Waterway north of the Port.

I have seen two previous canoe journeys and they are powerful events for participants *and* spectators. Therefore, I have offered Pierce County's support in any way that is helpful - from volunteers directing traffic, to escorting the paddlers as they make their way through Commencement Bay.

One of the key priorities of my administration is to develop and strengthen the

government to government relationships between Pierce County and local tribes. At the beginning of this year, we welcomed Quinault tribal member Sarah Colleen Sotomish into the newly-created tribal liaison role with the County. She is going to play a key role going forward as we strengthen important partnerships with the Puyallup, Nisqually, Muckleshoot, Squaxin, and other tribes.

But we have a special and historic relationship with our friends in the Puyallup Tribe and I'm pleased that Councilmember Tim Reynon is here on behalf of his tribe. Councilmember, I'm honored you could join us today. We look forward to deepening our partnership on the key interests shared by *all* the people of Pierce County - economic development, transportation, human services, and the environment. Thank you for being here.

We are also working on increasing transparency and accountability in county government.

Last week was "Sunshine Week" throughout our country-a week designed to highlight the importance of open government. *Every* week should be sunshine week in Pierce County. As the voters said in the Public Records Act, "The people . . . do not give their public servants the right to decide what is good for the people to know and what is not good for them to know."

That's why we recently launched a new online public records portal to make it easier for people to get access to their records. We are also going to post more

records online so folks can access them without even having to make a request.

We did a similar thing to help improve transparency and customer service for nuisance property complaints. Thanks to an ordinance passed by the Council, the county launched a website that allows complaints to now be submitted and tracked online. This helps speed up the process. I want to thank Councilmember Jim McCune for his strong leadership on cleaning up suspected drug houses and other problem properties.

Other transparency and performance improvements are coming soon. Over the next few months, we will roll out our “Open Pierce County” initiative. It has three main components: open data, open performance, and open budget - all of which are designed to give citizens and decision makers easy access to high-quality information about Pierce County government.

With open data, we’ll compile data from across county government in one easy-to-search place so that anyone with an internet connection can access them. With open performance, we’ll display our performance goals and then track progress toward achieving them so that we can deliver better results for the public. And with open budget, we’ll provide interactive budget displays so that it’s easier to see the link between our spending and our results.

Today, I’m also proposing a significant shift in the way Pierce County budgets. This afternoon I will submit to the Council a request for a Charter Amendment that allows us to adopt two-year budgets. This is how the state and many other

local governments budget. It is more efficient, encourages us to plan over a longer term, and frees up more time for the critical work of evaluating program performance. Right now, we go through the mechanics of rebuilding full budgets each year - a process that begins in March and ends in November. We can do better.

At the beginning of this speech, I told you about that day in the Philippines. I told you about the rain, and I told you about Wes. But there's more to the story.

Wes wasn't there alone. A whole team of Seabees was there wading through those waters right beside him. And while the rescue was under way, other Navy units started gathering food and water for the victims, *while other* people started collecting up donated blankets and clothing, *while even others* worked to line up short-term housing for those who lost their homes.

That's how we take on big challenges. We do it together. And that's how we need to take on Pierce County's toughest challenges, too.

So, today, I ask for your partnership. I ask our community leaders, tribal leaders, union leaders, nonprofit leaders, business leaders, military leaders, leaders of faith, and all our citizens to partner with us to build a vibrant Pierce County where people choose to live, work, and raise a family.

The state of our county is strong. We're moving in the right direction. And with your support and partnership, it will only get stronger.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

May God bless us in the work ahead.