

**Remarks By James Kennedy  
President  
Butler County Commissioner  
Annual Conference Of The County Commissioners Association Of Pennsylvania  
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As they were for Charles Dickens, so they are for county government: the best of times; and the worst of times.

The worst of times because of economic woes that define our time. The best of times because as a nation we continue to live free and enjoy a quality of life desired by those who know neither. Yet, the world is greatly different since we were last together at the 2008 CCAP Annual Conference.

I am pleased to be with you today to offer this president's report to the membership.

I couldn't miss this opportunity to congratulate each of you on your leadership and outstanding service to citizens throughout this great commonwealth.

I was born and raised in Pennsylvania. This state and the hometown in which I grew up have helped make me the person I am today.

I'm sure each of you feels the same way about your own hometown.

It has been said that "Genuine politics ... is simply a matter of serving those around us: serving the community and serving those who will come after us."

That's the story of my professional life. It also sums up the contributions made by most everyone in this room and by this Association.

Leadership cannot exist without motivation or inspiration. CCAP members have time and again provided both to meet far-reaching challenges with unwavering personal commitment to the people of Pennsylvania.

Communities are where it all happens. They are the places where national policies touch individual lives. They are the places where we live, go to work and raise our families.

Our quality of life is measured on our streets, within our neighborhoods, among our businesses and industries.

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Pennsylvanians want their communities, towns and cities to be great places to live. Counties are crucial to those social goals and economic competitiveness. Counties are the front lines in building a better quality of life.

I speak today about what every county commissioner knows and understands. The people we serve are closest to us. They look to county government to be their main point for coordinating and providing the programs and services they use and depend upon. We are a part of their lives.

Over the last few decades, the federal and state governments have incrementally and consistently made funding cuts in services and in programs county governments provide—often the very ones upon which our communities depend.

Our national economy is now forcing even more difficult and painful decisions—in the short term as we deal with legislative stalemates on the passage of a new budget—and in the medium term as we deal with the local social service and budget effects of the economy.

In the longest term, the economic and political pressures are requiring local government to offer services while at the same time weathering reduced financial support and partnership with state and federal government. This has brought us to the brink of a new era — one that years from now will be nearly impossible to pinpoint. No one, as they say, rings a bell saying the world has changed. It is obvious only in retrospect.

I believe that at some point in the future, when we look back at the last year or so, we will recognize that now, right now, is the time that county government became the recognized and accepted frontline leader on protecting the cultural and economic landscape of Pennsylvania, its communities and its people.

And CCAP will be recognized for sustaining county government, for pressing forward with a common and united theme and for endowing Pennsylvania and future generations with reasonable, workable and pioneering solutions to the overwhelming challenges in an equally challenging world. It will be said that CCAP saw a problem and, with the help of others, made our communities a better place. The results of CCAP's strength will be felt throughout this state now and in a future not yet known.

Healthy, sustainable counties—regardless of whether they are big or small—are essential to Pennsylvania's success.

That is why CCAP has figured so prominently in this year's budget debates. It is why CCAP has been able to demonstrate to all counties that together we have power. Our budget and tax fairness initiatives are all about making the lives of our neighbors better by making the places they live better.

CCAP will continue to work and lead the other levels of government on infrastructure, regional development, technology developments and human services programming. Our Association is committed to strengthening county economies—ensuring our commercial sectors benefit from modern technologies, building on our core strengths in prison and offender reform, being good managers of our natural resources.

If you want to know about all that CCAP has accomplished this year you need only look to the Annual Report CD you received in your Conference registration materials. And I am sure you will be struck, as I was, with the wide variety of issues and programs the Association works on or provides. And I know the long list of volunteers who assist us on these issues and programs will impress you.

Clearly, we are making progress on behalf of county government. And the hundreds of county commissioners and council members, who are responsible for this progress, are here today.

CCAP's effort this past year has had four key elements:

- **The first is in developing a vision of where county governments, their cities and communities of all sizes need to be to meet the needs of the residents they serve.**

That vision is mirrored in our annual priorities. If you ask any CCAP member, legislative representation is CCAP's chief task. This year was a difficult year in many areas, none more visible than the state budget process. Despite all the unique challenges of funding, CCAP was able to instill its own messages into the process with great success. Our Association worked hard on making sure our message that a "no tax increase budget" had to look beyond the state income, sales and corporate taxes and consider local property taxes, too. While the budget is still a question mark, at least the message of its impact on counties has become an indelible part of the deliberations. The Senate's initial budget debate, and every committee meeting and every floor debate after that included legislators voicing concern about the effect of fiscal choices on local property taxes and services. CCAP's message is being heard. We are keeping the focus on property taxes both in the effects of the commonwealth budget and in getting legislation moving on local alternatives to the property tax.

Achievement last year of our prison place of confinement priority was a major success. We will reap huge benefits for our counties, our taxpayers and our criminal justice system in the years ahead.

Late last year we filed a motion with the Pennsylvania Supreme Court to enforce the Allegheny court funding decision, which has lain dormant for more than a decade. As the funding issues surrounding the district attorney salary reimbursement unfolded over the year, we prepared contingent legal strategies. We are working on the legislative response to the Clifton decision in Allegheny County and its potential effect on our property assessment system. We are also CCAP

working on litigation dealing with numerous assessment issues, tort claims, prevailing wage and others.

This year, CCAP added a mandate relief effort to its set of legislative priorities. Our new mandate relief list was extremely well received in Harrisburg and has brought a new focus to our efforts.

Through hard and thorough work, CCAP makes sure the vision of county government is well known.

- **Element number two focuses on maintaining county government's effectiveness.**

CCAP uses many strategies, including written and electronic information, face-to-face meetings, media events, Capitol rallies, and officer, staff and grassroots contacts, along with nurturing county "alumni" in the legislature. We have also done much to raise public and legislative awareness of the county role in delivery of services to Pennsylvanians most in need.

Over the years, we have been involved in a number of projects undertaken with state agencies, including numerous grant programs in cooperation with DCED, PCCD and DPW. We are still involved in database, GIS and other technology projects, along with a project on land use and county planning. Over the last couple of decades we have secured and administered more than eight billion additional dollars on behalf of counties, nursing homes and related operations.

We work with the state on shared database projects, including CJIEP, data quality, various GIS efforts, DPW interfaces, the SURE system and others.

There is no "one-size-fits-all solution" to the challenges facing Pennsylvania's counties and communities. CCAP has worked hard to promote the need for working together to find solutions.

- **Relationships are the third element.**

We maintain excellent relationships with the Governor and key leaders in the administration. The officers and staff meet regularly with members of the cabinet and their deputies. Our staff has monthly meetings with senior Administration staff.

We have also worked hard to improve the cooperative relationship among the local government groups, which includes joint meetings and other efforts. Throughout this year, we have worked with our counterparts at the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors, the Pennsylvania League of Cities and Municipalities, the Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs and others on the passage of legislation to allow a one percent optional county sales tax to help ease the funding pain being felt at the local level.

No one level of government has the means to address the challenges alone. We need to work together—all levels of government, the private sector and society in general—to ensure that our efforts are balanced, alert to local needs and consistent with shared objectives.

- **The final key element is stable, long-term funding.**

Our member-owned programs continue to meet their goals of providing a solid market alternative and relative stability in pricing in insurance and related products. We continue to look at other products to help counties cope with difficult marketplaces. In particular, we have a contract to study alternatives for giving counties options on providing health care coverage to their employees. Our endorsement of the National Association of Counties and Nationwide Retirement Solutions deferred compensation program, along with other programs such as U.S. Communities, gives counties access to exceptional-value goods and services.

Our four elements of vision, effectiveness, cooperation and stable secure funding has equated to success this year. And with good reason.

Counties work for a Pennsylvania in which our communities are thriving and bright, not struggling to keep their governments afloat.

As commissioners, we work for a Pennsylvania where our counties and communities play an increased role in the federal and state debates.

We believe that the active participation of strong, healthy counties will help all levels of government to cooperatively set and reach important new objectives.

Why do we believe this?

Because the work of county government is about family, friends and neighbors. They are our communities. We see our constituents every day. We know the needs of those friends and neighbors.

**As Lady Bird Johnson once said, “While the spirit of neighborliness was important on the frontier because neighbors were so few, it is even more important now because our neighbors are so many.”**

County government works for many.

We work to be a good neighbor.

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The work we do through the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania is all about serving all our neighbors to the best of county government's abilities.

And all of us, together, do it quite well.

Through the best and the worst of times.