



Loudoun County

VIRGINIA

WHERE TRADITION MEETS INNOVATION

PHYLLIS J. RANDALL

CHAIR AT-LARGE

2021 STATE OF THE COUNTY

“LOUDOUN, THIS IS WHO WE ARE”

I'm going to start this State of the County address how I have started hundreds of meetings this year: with an update on our COVID and vaccination numbers in Loudoun.

Many years from now, our children will learn about the year 2020. Their lessons will primarily focus on two issues: a 100-year pandemic that swept the globe, sickening and killing millions and a long overdue reckoning on systemic racism that has plagued America since its birth. Loudoun joined every other county in the nation as we made our way through a life-altering year that brought countless heartbreaking and heartwarming moments.

Loudoun, as many of you know, our County is the first in the region to complete our annual budget. In early April of 2020, we had no idea the effect COVID would have on County services or finances. In fact, the Board of Supervisors was about to take our final vote on the FY 2021 budget when County Administrator Tim Hemstreet called me with the very prudent advice to hold in reserve \$100 million. After speaking with Board leadership, and then the full body, I made a motion to create the reserve and it passed unanimously.

Using the standard, average proportional split of 60% of our revenue going to the school system and 40% remaining on the County ledgers, the Board of Supervisors froze \$100 million. What did that mean for County employees? Well-deserved merit pay increases were delayed, as

was hiring new employees to meet County growth. Although the Board of Supervisors realized that not having a pay increase or new staff would place a strain on existing staff, we decided maintaining existing County staff at their current pay levels was more important than bringing on new staff or worse: cutting or ridding staff. That forward-thinking, long-range planning is the likely reason Loudoun has been able to offer uninterrupted County services to our citizens.

From our Information Technology staff, to our amazing, highly adaptable Parks and Recreation and Community Services staff, not only did every department of your County government continue to operate, but many employees took on new tasks, new job descriptions, and new duties to adjust to the ever-changing needs of a large county faced with a 100-year pandemic for which there is no manual and no clear guidelines.

Loudoun County senior staff and employees were lifting as they climbed, responding in real time, and adjusting services to meet the needs of a county of 420,000 people. In addition, Loudoun's Board of Supervisors never missed holding a meeting where at least some Supervisors were present on the dais, ready to welcome citizens – masked and socially distanced in this room. These accomplishments were not by accident. Although he never wants attention, so many of our successes this year should be credited to County Administrator Tim Hemstreet. Ladies and gentlemen, he deserves our appreciation.

Although the increased costs of COVID made this year's budget process one of the most difficult in many years, the COVID stimulus money received through the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security Act, (also called the CARES Act) was instrumental in helping Loudoun's businesses, nonprofits and residents survive the negative economic impacts of COVID.

By July 2020, Loudoun received two rounds of CARES Act funding totaling \$72 million. Of that amount, \$12 million was allocated to Loudoun County Public Schools, with another \$12

million going straight to Loudoun's seven incorporated towns. Of the \$48 million that remained in County Government, \$9.3 million was set aside for the purchase of personal protective equipment, and \$4.5 million was dedicated to compensating County employees who were working overtime and honestly putting their own safety at risk. In addition, \$1.5 million was used to upgrade our County network infrastructure and equipment.

Being keenly aware that CARES Act money would be needed to help Loudoun businesses keep their lights on, residents remain in their homes, and Loudoun's nonprofits have the funds to assist some of our more vulnerable populations, your Loudoun Board also made the decision to use CARES Act funds to assist those who, through no fault of their own, were substantially, financially damaged by the impacts of COVID.

Our Economic Development Director Buddy Rizer implemented Loudoun's Business Interruption Fund. Through an objective application process, the Business Interruption Fund provided \$12 million to almost 2,000 of Loudoun's businesses. According to many business owners, the Business Interruption Fund money was absolutely instrumental in keeping them financially solvent. In addition, another \$2.4 million was sent to Loudoun's rental assistance program, \$2 million was provided to our non-profits, and \$650,000 went to emergency food assistance.

During this pandemic, we were joined by partners that stepped up to ensure Loudoun residents did not experience hardships that would significantly impact their everyday lives. Calls went out to all of Loudoun's utilities. Every one of them agreed to keep the lights, water, gas, and electricity on for residents who could not pay their bills and to forgo any late fees or penalties. Loudoun Water, Washington Gas, Dominion Power and NOVEC were not required to make those concessions, but they did and we appreciate their support.

By far, some of our most valuable County partners are the members of our nonprofit community. In Loudoun, our nonprofits always stand ready to assist those in need. However, the demands on them during this COVID crisis have been exponentially greater and more complicated than ever before. The Loudoun Human Services Network reports that during COVID, the number of residents accessing free or reduced-cost health care increased by 40%; the number of residents requiring emergency food assistance increased by over 300% at Loudoun Hunger Relief and 54% at the Dulles South Food Pantry. Most distressing: the number of people who sought shelter and safety at the Loudoun Abused Women's Shelter increased by 153%.

The Director of Loudoun's Family Services and the Veterans Services Program Coordinator, Ina Fernández and Tom Grant, reported a marked increase in stress and anxiety disorders among Loudoun's active duty and veteran population for whom forced isolation can be debilitating.

COVID-19 has significantly impacted the physical and financial health of the veteran community. Older veterans are especially impacted by health implications while younger veterans feel the financial impact of the pandemic in the form of unemployment and loss of income. This has made paying for basic expenses such as food, rent and utilities difficult. Throughout this pandemic, Loudoun County has partnered with other governmental organizations – both at the federal and state levels, as well as local, community-based veteran service organizations to address challenges experienced by our veterans. These organizations play a vital role in our community.

Going forward, as we emerge from COVID, our nonprofits will be asked to do more, to stretch further, to work longer hours and serve even more people. For what they have already

done and for the important, heavy-lifting work yet to be done, our nonprofits deserve our thanks and recognition. Here with us tonight from the Loudoun Human Services Network, the Loudoun/Fauquier Community Foundation and Loudoun's veterans' community: Please join me in showing our appreciation to Jennifer Montgomery, Amy Owen, Nicole Acosta and Ina Fernández.

Another person who merits not only our appreciation, but a long vacation, is Loudoun's State Health Director, Dr. David Goodfriend. Dr. Goodfriend and the state and County employees in the Health Department, as well as the volunteers of Loudoun's Medical Reserve Corps, have been unsung heroes. Throughout the pandemic, Dr. Goodfriend has been a steady, grounding, advice-giving, meeting-holding, email-answering, call-taking, test-coordinating, vaccine-giving, never-sleeping, regional leader on COVID.

Founded by Dr. Goodfriend in 2003, the Loudoun Medical Reserve Corps, or MRC, has only been activated two times. This year, the number of volunteers in Loudoun's MRC swelled to over 4,000. Led by MRC Coordinator Francis Rath, the services of Loudoun's MRC included, but were not limited to: assisting at COVID testing drive-thru events, staffing the COVID information hot line, providing logistics and administrative services and, of course, running a mass vaccination site that – at the height of operations – vaccinated nearly 5,000 people a day. If we apply a monetary value to the 91,000 hours of services delivered this year by members of Loudoun's MRC, it amounts to over \$2.6 million of in-kind service to the County.

There is simply no way to express our gratitude to Dr. Goodfriend and all the employees and volunteers at the MRC. Please join me in recognizing Loudoun's State Health Director, Dr. David Goodfriend, and Loudoun's Medical Reserve Corps Coordinator, Mr. Francis Rath.

Dr. Goodfriend and Loudoun had other community partners; organizations that worked alongside County Government to help reach hard-to-serve communities with information, testing and eventually vaccinations. Although COVID exposed inequities in the nation's health care system, Loudoun's chapter of New Virginia Majority, the Loudoun County Branch of the NAACP, and the All-Dulles Area Muslim Society refused to allow any citizens to be overlooked or underserved. Together, these three organizations helped get vaccines to approximately 7,000 people.

No state or county government should ever forget our nonprofit and faith communities make a difference. They are a force multiplier for governmental agencies, they are needed and they are appreciated. Please join me in thanking Isamar Ortega from New Virginia Majority, Pastor Michelle Thomas from the Loudoun NAACP, and Rizwan Jaka from the ADAMS Center.

When yet unborn historians recall the year 2020, the 100-year COVID pandemic will not be the only thing our children's children and their children will learn about. The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery were for many Americans a tipping point. After hundreds of years and generations of African-Americans being unjustly imprisoned and murdered, in 2020 a long overdue reckoning on racial injustice swept the country even faster than the COVID pandemic. Likeminded people of all races, ages, orientations and demographics flooded American streets, masked up and fed up. Loudoun residents joined millions of people not just from across the country, but from around the world. We called names like Dan Anderson, Orion Anderson, George Stinney, Emmett Till, Tamir Rice, Philando Castile, Jordan Davis, Sandra Bland, and thousands more. For the first time, millions of Americans across our nation were coming to realize the words spoken by actor and activist Will Smith, are correct: "Racism isn't getting worse. It's getting filmed."

As equity marches were being planned in Loudoun, I received a call from Pastor David Milam – who informed me that six young men, all friends who grew up and attended Loudoun County high schools, were planning an equity march in Purcellville. They asked if I could join them. I, of course, said yes.

When I arrived, I was simply astonished that these young men had done the seemingly impossible. In western Loudoun County, they planned a march that brought out almost 1,500 people. They were joined by Purcellville Police Chief Cynthia McAlister – who not only supported the efforts of these young men, but also spoke at the event about the importance of community policing. Also joining the march were religious leaders, high school students and other elected and community leaders.

During the summer, there were hundreds of marches planned by organizations – mostly by adults, but these six young men orchestrated what I believe was one of the most powerful displays of unity in Loudoun County’s history. They confirmed my long-held belief that Generation Z will save us all. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in recognizing these six young men. In the room with us this evening, are Noah and Zack Franco, Ushindi Namegabe and Purcellville Police Chief Cynthia McAlister.

Amidst the pandemic and the historic reckoning on racial injustice, the Loudoun County Board recognized the importance of a strong economy. Using business-friendly policies and strategic marketing incentives to attract and retain businesses in Loudoun, the past year saw almost \$7 billion in new commercial investment from already announced projects. We also saw the sale or lease of 5.2 million square feet of nonresidential space.

Although in April of 2020, Loudoun’s unemployment rate hit a COVID high of 9.9%, today that rate sits at 3.9%. Put another way, our unemployment rate is only about one point

higher than before the pandemic. In addition, during the FY 2022 budget process, your Loudoun County Board lowered the real property tax rate by 5.5 cents while funding almost every new County position that was requested by staff. And just this week, we learned that all three credit rating agencies have renewed Loudoun's triple-a bond rating.

Loudoun's small businesses continue to have great potential for growth. Approximately 89% of Loudoun's businesses have fewer than twenty employees. In Loudoun, we continue to focus on creating an entrepreneurial ecosystem where our small businesses can thrive.

The industry hit especially hard during the pandemic was, of course, our hospitality and tourism sector, or as Buddy Rizer likes to call it, "our touch industry." So many of the experiences we love in Loudoun: our restaurants, wineries, shops and historic sites were faced with the unimaginable. Seemingly overnight, these businesses shut down, completely closed and faced an uncertain future. Thankfully, Loudoun's Department of Economic Development partnered with Visit Loudoun and the Loudoun Chamber of Commerce to support the small business and tourism industry. Buddy Rizer, Beth Erickson and Tony Howard spent untold hours providing critically needed information and assistance to help businesses gain clarity on federal loan programs. They brainstormed ways to ensure restaurants could survive with curbside pickup and increased delivery services. They even encouraged every Loudoun resident to "tip big when we buy local." Most impressive, the award-winning "Loudoun is Ready" program boosts consumer confidence and drives demand to hundreds of businesses that committed to following all COVID safety protocols.

Loudoun, it is clear our hospitality, restaurant and tourism industries help make Loudoun a great place to live, work, learn and play. It's equally clear that Buddy Rizer, Beth Erickson and Tony Howard helped to guide so many in this industry successfully through the economic crisis

caused by COVID. Here this evening representing the Loudoun Chamber is Grafton DeButts and Stacy Metcalfe. Please join me in recognizing and thanking all of them.

In addition to supporting the small business community, Beth, Tony and Buddy also joined the Board of Supervisors, County staff, the Dulles Area Association of Realtors, New Virginia Majority and other community organizations to offer feedback and solutions regarding Loudoun's looming housing crisis. A few weeks ago, the Board received the draft of the long-awaited Unmet Housing Needs Strategic Plan. Unfortunately, the results confirmed some of our worst fears. Like the nation, Loudoun has a dearth of attainable housing options. In fact, according to DAAR, Loudoun only has a 12-day supply of available housing stock.

Loudoun, over the coming months we have decisions to make. How many new neighbors can we welcome to Loudoun, and where will those homes be located? How do we build infrastructure in advance of or in conjunction with new housing? Is it important for us to have a community where college graduates and retirees can live? And very importantly, what is the connection between attainable housing and a strong economy? Loudoun, my ask of you is this: join the Board of Supervisors, County staff, and community partners in this critical conversation.

Of course, as we welcome new residents, we will welcome new students to our schools. In 2020 and 2021, one of the groups most impacted by the pandemic was our young people. In March of 2020, then Loudoun County Public School Superintendent Eric Williams, made the hard but judicious decision to close every LCPS building and send all 81,708 students home. That single decision meant that overnight, every kitchen table immediately became a classroom. Parents of elementary school kids were forced to scramble to find child care, and many parents of high school juniors and seniors were forced to re-acquaint themselves with high school calculus.

Sadly, the closing of our schools created a rift in our County that, if we are not careful, could become a lasting, negative effect of COVID that has nothing to do with contracting the virus itself. Loudoun, the fact is this: every parent wants the best for their children, and every parent's belief about what their student needs is valid and deserving of respect.

Our educators were also facing this uncertain world like the rest of us; they had to make immediate changes to their lives. They had to find new ways to teach and stay connected to their students. Over the course of the year, I was asked by quite a few Loudoun educators to join them in virtual classroom settings. One of these teachers, Darren Brady, a special education teacher at Riverside High School, asked me to virtually teach a class with him. Although it was immensely enjoyable, I realized how hard it is to teach a class online. I later learned that as a teacher for students with differing abilities, Mr. Brady knew his kids could not adequately learn in an entirely virtual setting. Weeks before our special education population returned to the classroom, Mr. Brady made the decision to return in person. Masked up and during that time socially distanced, he held one-on-one sessions with his students. Multiple times a week, Darren Brady had live interaction with his students to ensure they received the attention they required and to let them know he would always be there for them. Like so many educators, Darren Brady went the extra mile, and he is with us tonight. Please join me in thanking him and all educators for their commitment to teaching the kids they love.

Like Mr. Brady, so many of our Loudoun County employees deserve recognition and appreciation. Loudoun County employees went above and beyond and brought an entirely new meaning to the words "performing other duties as required." The dedication of the Loudoun County staff during the COVID pandemic was extraordinary. County staff worked early mornings, late nights and weekends for one reason: to ensure as few people as possible would

contract COVID and fewer still would become very ill or die. The fact that COVID stole the lives of 278 of our Loudoun friends and neighbors will never be forgotten. We know they were not just numbers; they were real people who had family and friends who loved them. While we will always honor and cherish those we lost, we remain grateful for the exemplary work of Loudoun County employees who surely saved so many others.

If I were to name every employee deserving of recognition, I would be here for hours, but I do want to highlight some County departments and the dedicated staff who essentially ran parallel government services: one for normal operations and one to respond to COVID.

The Department of General Services, led by the incomparable Ernie Brown, retrofitted office space, the Board Room and the Government Center lobby with COVID-mitigation barriers that allowed normal County business to proceed uninterrupted. General Services staff joined the Parks, Recreation and Community Services department and Library Services, led by Steve Torpy and Chang Liu, in setting up and staffing testing centers and vaccination pods and delivering food to seniors who were unable to leave their homes.

Public Affairs and Communications Officer Glen Barbour, and his staff kept the County informed regarding daily changes in COVID numbers and pandemic safety guidelines. In addition, they put up signage in all County buildings, as well as the vaccination POD at Dulles Town Center, helping to make that entire operation seamless.

Nurses and staff in the Department of Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Developmental Services, led by Margaret Graham, worked to ensure services never paused for individuals with serious mental health issues or developmental disabilities living in our group homes or supervised living settings. Even when the facilities were in quarantine because of exposure and diagnosis of COVID-19, the staff continued to provide excellent direct support and

treatment. The team worked to educate individuals about the vaccine and arranged for vaccine clinics to ensure all individuals who wanted the vaccine were able to get it.

The procurement staff, led by Cheryl Middleton, immediately began seeking out and purchasing PPE and setting up contracts with our testing partners. In addition, the department spent hours contracting with medical labs that helped obtain and administer the COVID vaccines.

Our County Attorney's office, led by Leo Rogers, kept us compliant regarding ever-changing, seemingly never-ending executive orders, CDC and VDH guidance. Mr. Rogers' office wrote, and re-wrote, and then had to re-write again the continuity of government ordinances that allowed the County to operate during the pandemic.

Community Corrections and Court Services Staff, led by Jim Freeman, went to homes of clients recently released from incarceration and continued to meet with high-risk clients – many of whom were using substances or experiencing mental health issues. They were doing this not only before vaccinations, but before mask wearing. The risks they took serving potentially COVID-positive clients cannot be overstated.

Virtually every operation we have is supported by the Department of Information Technology (DIT) under Acting Director Erin McLellan. During the pandemic, DIT provisioned hundreds of new laptops to support telework and the implementation of new applications for the many operations that allowed us to seamlessly serve residents remotely.

In short, over the past 15 months, it was the dedicated employees of the Department of Information Technology that made thousands of virtual meetings possible. In addition, DIT also created new applications that supported the logistical efforts of the Emergency Operations Center and the Health Department.

Led by System Fire Chief Keith Johnson and Sheriff Mike Chapman, our Fire and Rescue teams and Sheriff's deputies were what they always are: heroes. Early in the pandemic, our Sheriff's deputies joined Family Services staff on Child Protective Services and Adult Protective Services visits, ensuring the scene was safe and helping with PPE. In addition, the Sheriff implemented a medication drop-off program. Deputies took medication to the homes of seniors, ensuring their other health conditions would not worsen. It also allowed the deputies to physically assess the condition of a senior in isolation.

Fire and Rescue personnel have been on the front lines of COVID since day one. They never stopped answering calls or responding to emergencies. With the help of our men and women in the Combined Fire and Rescue System, more than 70% of Loudoun's adults have received at least their first dose of vaccine. We are the first health district in the Commonwealth to achieve this milestone.

During a 100-year pandemic, you can imagine a department with the name "Emergency" as part of its title would most likely be very busy. Under the leadership of Kevin Johnson, the Office of Emergency Management immediately activated the County's Emergency Operations Center. The County's entire COVID response ran through Emergency Management. Loudoun, with the exception of the County Administrator, there may be no other Loudoun employee who deserves more recognition than Kevin Johnson. Formerly recognized as Virginia's Emergency Manager of the Year, during COVID, Kevin "put on a clinic" on how to effectively run a mass vaccination POD. On a weekly basis, Supervisors hear how organized the Dulles Town Center vaccination POD is. My response is always, "I'll let the staff know." Well Mr. Johnson, on behalf of a grateful County, thank you.

Finally, it's difficult to adequately express my appreciation for the dedication and commitment of our executive staff. The long hours, laser focus and consummate professionalism of Charles Yudd, Valmarie Turner, Erin McLellan, Monica Spells and John Sandy, led by the aforementioned Tim Hemstreet, may not be evident to every Loudoun citizen, but I can assure you they are, in a word: phenomenal. I don't have the words to adequately relay the many accomplishments of our executive staff, but to be sure: all the work I have cited could not have been accomplished were it not for them. Loudoun, we are forever in debt to our County staff, and they deserve our appreciation.

Loudoun, this is who we are. During a year with so much uncertainty and unrest, six young men planned a remarkable equity march. Every single day, neighbors helped neighbors with food runs, babysitting, or just a kind word. Parents adjusted their lives to help their children tackle a school year full of new challenges and disappointments. Teachers taught themselves new tools to teach the students they love. Students worked to find opportunities to stay connected – especially our high school seniors who rightly refused to forgo the one-time traditions of their senior year. First responders put themselves on the line to serve our County. County staff worked day and night creating new ways to serve Loudoun's citizens. Community organizations moved aside all obstacles to ensure every single person in the County had access to a lifesaving vaccine. And eight remarkable young ladies are joined by thousands of remarkable young people throughout Loudoun who are generous, smart, talented and caring.

This is who we are, Loudoun. And together we will face this post-COVID world with grit, determination, and kindness. I know this. I know this with every fiber of my being. I know this because I know us. I know this because I know the State of Loudoun County, Virginia is indeed strong.

Thank you and I'll see you next year.