

# THE STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS

Presented by

THE HONORABLE ANNABETH SURBAUGH  
Chairman of the Board of County Commissioners

\* \* \*

Tuesday, March 29, 2005  
12 o'clock noon  
The Ritz Charles  
9000 West 137th Street, Overland Park, Kansas 66221

---

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for joining us today, and welcome to this—the 2005 State of the County Address. This year marks the second occasion I've had the privilege of reporting on the state of our great community. And I've got some good news, and some bad news.

The good news is that we have many accomplishments to share with you. The bad news is, we don't have enough time in this format today.

I'd like to start by acknowledging the Johnson County Public Policy Council for their support in co-sponsoring and hosting this event. Thanks, once again, for helping county government bring this annual message to the people of our community.

I'm also proud to acknowledge my fellow county commissioners who are here today. Please stand to be recognized as I call your name.

Ed Peterson, representing the First District;  
John Segale, representing the Second District;  
David Lindstrom, representing the Third District;  
Dolores Furtado, representing the Fourth District;  
Doug Wood, representing the Fifth District;  
And John Toplikar, representing the Sixth District.  
I'd also like to introduce our County Manager, Mike Press.

Today, it's my duty and my privilege today to report to you that the state of Johnson County is strong, and we have a great future ahead of us.

In 2003, I took office as the first popularly-elected Chairman of the Board of County Commissioners under the auspices of the Home Rule Charter, the first of its kind to be adopted in the State of Kansas. At that time, I promised certain core principles would guide my service to this community. First, I said that as good stewards of the public trust, our top priority would be fiscal accountability. I also said we would work to sustain the positive growth and development that promotes our strong local economy. And finally, I said that we would protect the natural resources of our community, including the preservation of more open spaces to ensure a legacy for future generations. As your county's Chief Elected Official, my first two years in office have gone by in what seems like a blur of meetings, events, challenges, problems solved, and hundreds of issues and opportunities— many already seized, and many still before us.

This is an historic year for Johnson County. It's the year we celebrate our 150th anniversary as a Community of Choice ... an important milestone in our history of success. The first federal census—which was conducted in 1860—found that Johnson County had just more than 4,000 citizens. Today—150 years later—we've passed the half-million mark. And we continue to grow at a steady pace!

Our community's population boom can be traced back to the early 1940s, in the midst of a world that was at war. That was when the Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant was carved out of farmland in the northwest corner of the county to produce bombs and explosives for the nation's military. The plant attracted thousands of workers, who made their homes in Johnson County, and then stayed after the fighting ended. The population in Johnson County almost doubled between 1940 and 1950, and more than doubled again in the following decade. That growth paved the way for this community to emerge as one of the most prominent, prosperous, and successful counties in the nation.

This year, we stand on the verge of a new chapter in Johnson County's history. That's because this past year, your County Commission —after many, many years— successfully secured the future transfer and redevelopment of the Sunflower property. As a result of our efforts, that federal enclave—consisting of 9,065 acres— will generate new homes, new jobs, new businesses, new parkland, new schools, and many new opportunities.

Thirteen years ago, when I first joined the County Commission, the question of what to do with the Sunflower property was already being discussed. I remember my very first trip to Washington D.C. as a County Commissioner. I was in a meeting with (then) Senator Bob Dole, joining with the other commissioners to plead for a tiny seat at the table. Nothing significant, mind you. We simply asked that the county be included in discussions about what might someday happen with Sunflower.

Over time, the County Commission continued to strengthen its stand in the negotiation process—demanding the right to retain zoning authority over the property and to retain local control over its future development. Today, I'm proud to report: Mission Accomplished! The light at the end of a very, very long tunnel is finally in sight.

In January this year, the Board of County Commissioners officially designated Sunflower Redevelopment, LLC, as the primary developer of the property, which gave them the right to acquire, remediate, and develop the entire property. The agreement Johnson County has put in place with the redevelopment firm is based on a concept plan we call "Community in a Park." It's based on a well-planned, sustainable community of residences, schools, businesses, and commercial and light industrial uses. It also includes state and university research facilities, churches, and parks.

The accompanying presentations—shown on these screens—illustrate our plan and show where land uses and developments will occur. I'm very proud to report that the transfer of the Sunflower property is on schedule for completion by this summer. Thanks to the leadership of the Board of County Commissioners—as well as the outstanding work of our chief counsel, Don Jarrett— this transfer and future redevelopment comes with great advantage to Johnson County.

Primary among these benefits is the fact that the county will not bear any direct responsibility for the property transfer, its clean-up, or its future redevelopment. Nor will the county be a party to any contractual arrangements between the federal government and the developer. As a result of these conditions, any potential responsibility or liability for remediation and future development is removed from the county government.

According to the developer, cleanup costs are estimated at about \$200 million. But, I'd especially like to emphasize that Sunflower Redevelopment has agreed to clean up the entire property without the use of any local tax dollars. Let me repeat that fact: there will be no costs to Johnson County or Kansas taxpayers in the remediation of the land.

The agreement includes the transfer of approximately 2,600 acres of the property to dedicated public uses, which equals roughly 30 percent of the entire property. Of that amount, 2,000 acres have been earmarked to be transferred to the Johnson County Park and Recreation District. The remaining acreage for public benefit transfers will go to KU and K-State for research purposes, as well as to the De Soto School District for future schools.

And, with assistance from De Soto city leaders and the work of their own district commissioner, John Toplikar, the county has been successful in assuring the continuation of the city's water treatment from a plant on the Sunflower property.

Success is where preparation and opportunity meet. We've been preparing for more than a decade now; and the door to new opportunities has finally opened for us. Together, we're planting seeds of success at Sunflower that will be harvested in the future. And while Sunflower represents future economic opportunity for our community, we have and we continue to benefit from a strong economy today.

During the ten-year period from 1993 to 2003, Johnson County's population increased by more than 100,000 new citizens. In that decade, Johnson County accounted for 60 percent of the state's total population growth and almost 50 percent of the metro's population increase. According to Ingram's magazine, our strong, steady growth over the past 20 years has placed Johnson County among the top eight metro areas in the nation. More chapters in Johnson County's success story are revealed in the 2005 Economic Primer prepared by the County Economic Research Institute, which we have provided to each of you.

Despite this amazing, sustained growth, Johnson County remains on solid financial footing. We've retained our coveted AAA bond rating and healthy reserves. In fact, Johnson County is one of 40 out of more than 3,000 counties in the nation to boast the AAA rating.

*[VIDEO: Testimony on the economic strength and role of the county government provided by David N. MacGillivray, principal with the firm Springsted, Inc., financial advisors to the Board of County Commissioners; Doug Davidson, president, County Economic Research Institute (CERI), and Ed Eilert, Mayor of the city of Overland Park, Kansas.]*

As you know, in 1997, the Citizens' Visioning Committee submitted its plan for this community through the year 2020. The Board of County Commissioners has used that vision as a guide in its improvement processes. Today, we've got good news to report. We've substantially completed

the recommendations given to us by the Citizens' Visioning Committee, well before the goal of the year 2020.

But therein lies one of our greatest challenges. We cannot—in fact, we must not—allow good to become the enemy of great. We have to take the next visionary step. Last year, I reported that the County had undertaken a strategic planning process to focus our efforts on a set of common goals. Through that process, we're transforming the way we do business in order to serve our citizens better, at a lower cost, with better results.

Of course, I have to brag a bit. Partly because it's my job; but mostly because I'm proud of what we've done to take the county to the next level. Of course, as the saying goes, "It ain't braggin' if you can back it up."

In May last year, in a study conducted by the America City Business Journals, Johnson County ranked seventh among all U.S. counties for its overall quality of life. We achieved the 99th percentile! That study ranked more than 3,000 counties according to a set of 20 statistical indicators which included: education, income levels, housing values, affordability, transit, and diversity.

And while that rank is absolutely amazing, it's even more remarkable when you understand that the six counties that scored higher than us have significantly lower populations. In other words, they are smaller communities, serving smaller populations, capable of retaining many of the desirable qualities and characteristics that are usually associated with "small town" environments. Keeping that "small town" community feeling while accommodating rapid growth is a significant accomplishment!

This year—as part of our strategic planning process—the county is conducting a citizen survey, and has received your input! We were fortunate to partner with the local firm, ETC Institute, to conduct this survey. Although the results of the survey have not been finalized or reported to the Board, here to give us a sneak peek at the findings is Chris Tatham, the Vice President of the firm.

[VIDEO: *Testimony of Chris Tatham, vice president, ETC Institute, Inc., concerning the quality of life provided to Johnson Countians, as determined by a recent citizen survey conducted by his firm.*]

Yes, Johnson County is strong, and growing stronger day by day.

But despite the fact that we are strong and financially secure, we still have challenges to address. We're vulnerable, in large part because of the shifting winds of change in our state and national capitols.

Three years ago, I was happy to support a ballot question to defer the last quarter-cent of the county's general sales tax authority to provide much-needed funds to our local public school districts. The sales tax—diverted in the form of economic development grants—began January of 2002, and is scheduled to sunset at the end of this year. Since that time, the county has passed along its portion—totaling about 64 percent of the revenue—to local schools, in lieu of

appropriate and adequate funding by the legislature. The amount dedicated by county government to local schools to-date is currently estimated at \$45.7 million.

Unfortunately, we have no idea, at this point, what the state legislature will or will not do in this session to address public education. But we stand with our schools in advocating for long-term, fair funding that meets the needs of schools across the state.

Sixteen cities in Johnson County also receive revenue from the remaining portion of this sales tax, which is roughly 36 percent of the total sales tax collections. During the three-year course of this sales tax, the cities will have received more than \$25 million for their own uses.

The county, however, has not received a single dollar.

And, as I already mentioned, this quarter-cent sales tax is the last remaining general sales tax authority available to the county. Believe me, Johnson County could have used that \$45 million. For example, the total tab of a much-needed jail expansion project—estimated at more than \$44 million—could have been paid in full without other revenues. Or, those funds could have paid for three years of annual CARS [*County Assistance Road System*] programs for road improvements in partnership with cities.

We are fully aware that education is a high priority in Johnson County. We've proven that we're committed to doing our share to help our schools by literally putting our money where our mouth is. But adequate school finance is a state responsibility, not a county one.

This isn't about finding fault; it's about finding the remedy. We've provided a temporary fix to the problem. But even this band-aid does not meet the long-term needs of our schools.

The County's needs are growing—and we must regain our sales tax authority so that we can incorporate that funding source in our future budget projections. Last year, I said that county government needed to identify a dedicated, long-term funding source for its future building and infrastructure requirements. That critical need has only grown in the past three years. And it will not go away.

This is not a question of schools versus infrastructure, or whether you support one over the other. In reality, we need both to maintain our quality of life. But taking from Peter to pay Paul doesn't get the job done. In fact, in this case, it simply extends the burden at both ends.

We must ensure that adequate infrastructure is in place, that it is maintained, and that it can support the growth of our community. And that means supporting our cities, our neighborhoods, our businesses, our families, and—yes—even our schools. The county's infrastructure is the community's backbone. It's what all of our assets are built upon.

Therefore, in the absence of any corrective action by the state legislature, I'm proposing that we join together—cities, schools, and county—to develop an action plan that will meet all our needs. In my opinion, renewing the existing sales tax for a longer, multi-year term is a solution that could help meet the needs of our schools AND the infrastructure needs of both our cities and the county. By implementing a cooperative, staggered approach—where schools get more funding in their first half, and the county gets more in the second half—we could continue to provide the

much-needed help to our schools while also gaining at least a portion of the dedicated funding we desperately need to meet our growing infrastructure requirements.

This crisis situation affecting our local schools affects us all. Without excellent public schools, our entire community—the quality of life, the growth, the economic prosperity—it all goes away. You can't eat your seed corn, and our schools are the seed corn to the economic prosperity we have enjoyed in this community.

But the question of school finance raises yet another important point, and that is the question of continued devolution of services with less and less support from federal and state levels of government. The economic strength of Johnson County turns out to be a double-edged sword. While enjoying the benefits of high wages, rising property values, and a strong local economy, Johnson County has the disadvantage of being targeted by the State as a kind of Fort Knox, to be held up at random whenever the needs arises. We agree we should pay our fair share. But, as community leaders, we must make Topeka and Washington understand that Johnson County can no longer endure this shell game. We need—and we want—meaningful reform that removes uncertainty about how local governments will be funded with respect to mandated services in the future.

Despite the added burdens of devolution and decreasing funding, we've been able to meet the increasing demands of our citizens for quality services at a reasonable cost.

Johnson County's 2005 budget, as adopted, represents a \$607 million spending plan that balances our operational expenses against our anticipated revenues. The average homeowner will see an increase of about 75 cents per month from last year. And the county government is providing big returns on that added investment. These graphs illustrate the variety of revenue sources that support the county government, as well as where these monies are used by the county government to support, serve, and sustain this great community. As these graphs illustrate, only 14 percent of your total property taxes go to support the county government. For the average home appraised at \$210,000 that equates to about \$43 a month. Our sliver of the property tax bill represents the largest portion of our revenue streams, at about 26 percent.

Our top three critical, core services in county government are public safety, health and human services, and public works. Collectively, these three functions represent the largest chunk—about 63 percent—of the county's current operating budget. Taken together, these core services total more than \$382 million of our 2005 budget.

A vital component of our success story—one that we couldn't do without—is the county's workforce, our employees. Once again, I stand before you and take a bow for Johnson County's success. That's the nature of the job. But I want you to know that behind every positive headline, behind all of our achievements, behind every award that I happily accept on behalf of the County Government, there are more than three thousand honest, hard working, committed, and caring county employees who strive each and every day to provide the entire community with the best service possible. They are true public servants in every sense of that term.

At this point, I must stop to also thank the 22 members of the county staff who have been called to serve their country as members of our military. Clearly, this service is above and beyond the call of their contributions as members of our county staff. We have great pride, respect, and

admiration for these men and women—and for all men and women in our armed services today—who are defending the ideals of freedom around the world. On behalf of the Board of County Commissioners—and all the people of Johnson County—I extend to them my most heartfelt thanks. Please join me in a round of applause for all our troops.

I've said many times that my personal goal is to bring the county government to the people, and the people to county government. We're making that goal a reality. This year, we've introduced a new service to improve our responsiveness to our constituents. The Constituent Services Team—a unit in the Board's Office—is a resource available to all our citizens. It's intended to increase public awareness about county services and provide a single point of contact for residents who need assistance. We've provided you with a business card for the Constituent Services Team. Please feel free to use this service, and pass this information along to others.

Finally, I'm pleased to inform you about another proposal I have for bringing county government to the people. On Thursday, I presented a plan to establish a Future Focused Task Force structure that will allow us to move forward in addressing future policy questions in a more timely and effective manner by dividing the workload among our members. This proposal also will move us forward to the next level of excellence in serving this community.

Under my proposal, each commissioner will lead a task force that will study and report back recommendations and ideas to the County Commission on these areas of interest to our future.

The First Task Force will focus on sustainability, energy, and environmental issues. I've asked First District Commissioner Ed Peterson to lead this effort, which will focus on issues related to the protection, use, and maintenance of our community resources. As a long-term mayor from the northeast portion of the county, Ed has firsthand knowledge of the critical need for maintaining our community's sustainability. Plus, he has a strong interest in these subject matters, and has served as our point person with respect to air quality, stormwater management, and many other similar issues.

The second task force will focus on issues related to future transportation planning. We all agree transit issues are a major concern facing our community, and I believe that the county must play a leadership role in advancing the creation of a metro-wide, multi-modal public transportation system. I've asked Second District Commissioner John Segale to lead this task force. Given his involvement in transportation planning as a member of the Shawnee City Council, as well as his service on the MARC Total Transportation Committee, and his service on transportation policy committees for both the National League of Cities and the National Association of Counties, I think he is a great choice to lead this endeavor.

The third task force will focus on planning, programming, and coordinating area recreational activities, both in conjunction with the Park & Recreation District, cities, and other organizations or entities, as well as with new public-private partnerships. The task force should emphasize opportunities that support the creation of appropriate venues for youth activities, as well as semi-professional and professional sports. I've asked Third District Commissioner David Lindstrom—our very own Number 71—to run with the ball on this one and to tackle the challenge head-on.

The fourth task force will focus on how Johnson County can assume a more proactive local, regional and national leadership role in the delivery of public health and wellness services. I've

asked Fourth District Commissioner Dolores Furtado to lead this task force. With her doctorate degree in microbiology, coupled with her many years as a professor at the KU Medical Center, I think she is a great choice to lead this endeavor.

The fifth task force will focus on workforce planning and development. Today, the availability of a well-trained, educated work force is an important decision-point for many companies looking to locate their offices in various parts of the nation. And although it has been the focus of many discussions, we still do not have a solution to the problem. I've asked Fifth District Commissioner Doug Wood to lead this task force. For the past six years, he has served as the Board's liaison to the workforce development board, and he has taken it upon himself to get involved at local, state, and national levels. He is respected as a knowledgeable person in this area, and I think he is a great choice to lead this effort.

Finally, the sixth task force will focus on economic development, and the role of the county government in supporting sustained, positive growth in our local economy. I've asked Sixth District Commissioner John Toplikar to lead this task force. Given his background as a member of the Olathe City Council, and his many years in the Kansas House of Representatives, as well as his service on its Economic Development Committee, including in leadership positions, I believe he is very qualified to lead this charge.

Each commissioner—acting as the chair of their task force—will work with the community to provide input, direction, and advice as we move forward. And each of the task forces will report back regularly to the full County Commission, so that our accomplishments can be shared with our citizens.

I'd like to personally applaud the willingness of my fellow commissioners for taking on these additional responsibilities. I think their support of this proposal speaks volumes about their commitment to Johnson County. It also speaks to their desire to truly embody the concept of a local "citizen legislature" as originally envisioned by the Charter Commission to focus on future policy questions in the best interests of this community.

In addition to these task force groups, I'll be calling for two community summits to provide additional input and advice in our strategic planning processes.

The first summit will be a gathering of all the local elected officials in Johnson County so that we can—for the first time ever—meet as a group and discuss the pressing needs of this community from our various perspectives. The summit will be an opportunity to generate and share ideas, strengthen our network, and identify issues that are of common concern to all of us.

The second summit will be a larger gathering, including our other community partners and stakeholders from the private sector, nonprofit community, and other segments of Johnson County, including the general public. The purpose, however, will be very similar. It'll allow us to talk about ideas for the future, to brainstorm possible solutions to some common concerns, and to strengthen our broader community network.

As we celebrate our sesquicentennial this year, I want you to consider this my personal invitation to each of you here today to step up and get involved in writing the next chapter in the history of Johnson County. I hope you will offer your time and talents to participate in these important

efforts for our collective future. The bad news, in this case, is that when times are good, it's more difficult to convince people to get involved and participate in the process. The great news is that Johnson County has always had strong, active citizen participation. It's been a hallmark of our success.

I started off noting that this year was Johnson County's 150th anniversary, and I would like to note—on behalf of the Board and our Sesquicentennial Leadership Committee—that a county-wide celebration has been set for September 17 at Shawnee Mission Park. That date also happens to mark the anniversary of the signing of the Constitution of our great nation. Please also accept this as your official—though not engraved—invitation to join us in celebrating the history and achievements of Johnson County in its first 150 years.

Our founding fathers and mothers believed in hard work, family, and faith—and they used these core values to create a place called Johnson County on August 25, 1855—one of the first thirty-three counties settled in the Kansas territory. One hundred and fifty years ago, these brave men and women set out with little more than hope, determination, and a spirit of adventure to fulfill their dreams and create new opportunities for success. Now, more than a century later, we must have that same spirit of adventure, that same sense of optimism and determination, to create a better future for ourselves and our children.

A Chinese proverb reminds us that: “One generation plants the trees, another generation gets the shade.” Again, excellence is not a chance, it's a choice. In all our plans, we must be mindful that we are working to improve this community...to leave it a better place than when we found it.

I look forward to the challenges that lie ahead, and I look forward to working with each of you as we strive together to make Johnson County an even better place to live, work, and raise a family in the next 150 years.

May God bless the United States of America, and may God continue to bless our home, Johnson County! Thank you.

\* \* \*