

REMARKS *(as prepared)*

The Honorable Thomas E. Dernoga  
Chairperson, Prince George's County Council  
Exchange of the Gavel, Legislative Year 2010  
Tuesday, December 1, 2009

*"ADVOCATE FOR THE PEOPLE"*

Good Morning! It's another great day in Prince George's County and another very special moment in the history of this Council.

Acknowledgements

I want to begin by recognizing the unwavering support and the sacrifice of my wonderful and talented family—my wife Lenora, son Matthew, and daughter Danielle – who wisely chose to focus on school today. The truth is my work as a public servant makes real demands on them and I am grateful beyond words that they are willing to embrace the challenges ahead. They mean the world to me and I love them deeply.

And, I want to thank the Reverend David Harrington, former Council Chairman and current State Senator for his profound words on our behalf this morning. It is always wonderful to see our colleague return to our Chambers.

Thank Council

To my Council colleagues, I acknowledge God's perfect handiwork in our achievements over the last seven years, and I know that collectively we continue to thank Him for every blessing.

I am honored and humbled by the great faith you continue to place in my ability to lead...choosing once again to entrust the Gavel of Leadership to me.

I thank each of you who have expressed your support, enthusiasm, and eagerness to continue our work as advocates for the people. You live out the directive of Proverbs 31:8, *"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute."*

If our efforts are crowned by accomplishment, as I expect, it will be because of this team's hard work and energy—our passion and commitment to the citizens we serve.

Prince George's County has a rich history of great leaders who have been assigned this gavel, including former Council Chairs Tony Knotts, Samuel Dean, Camille Exum, Marilyn Bland, and State Senator David Harrington. When I reflect on the deep and abiding commitment to the success of our County that we all share, this moment becomes all the more meaningful. To be following in their footsteps is reassuring...because a solid foundation has been laid with their steady leadership. I am committed to continue their good work.

It is with great appreciation that I accept this gavel from Chairperson Marilyn Bland, for whom I have much admiration. Thank you Marilyn, for accepting the challenge to lead this Council through one of the most daunting times in the history of Prince George's County. It has been my personal honor to work alongside you as you demonstrated tremendous grace and poise as you rose to meet the challenges. I invite my colleagues to join me in applause for your leadership of this Council.

I welcome the opportunity to work in tandem with each of my colleagues on this Council—Marilynn Bland, Will Campos, Samuel Dean, Camille Exum, Andrea Harrison, Tony Knotts, Eric Olson, and Ingrid Turner; our County Executive Jack Johnson; our State Legislature in Annapolis, the citizens we serve, and every stakeholder in Prince George's County as we continue on this remarkable journey to enhance our quality of life.

This leg of the journey begins with the partnership with our new Vice-Chair Andrea Harrison—a lifelong resident of Prince George's County and her own District 5, who, prior to her election, served for more than 15 years as a community activist. She shares my deep passion for education, my zeal for civic and community activism, and my desire to preserve and protect our environment, and my commitment to growth management and land use issues.

I have admired Andrea as she has worked with the Council for years, and even more so since she was elected to replace Senator Harrington. Thus, I am truly delighted for the opportunity to work with her, and I appreciate her affirmation of our values as advocates for the people.

### The Framework

The past year has been difficult in historic proportions. And we know by now that the coming year is certain to present additional fiscal challenges. As I receive the gavel, I pledge that we will continue to work tirelessly to represent the citizens of this County as their advocates to the absolute best of our ability. There will be a smooth transition into 2010 no matter how rocky the landscape may become as a result of potential budget shortfalls.

I envision a Council in the coming year where we continue to work together in a spirit of cooperation and collaboration. The tough economic times are continuing and the budget is going to continue to need our full attention and our willingness to work together. However, despite the challenges in front of us, the additional issues facing Prince George's County are too important to just "put on hold."

While maintaining a balanced budget is our priority, we will also work for safe communities through the continuing reduction in crime by maintaining and enhancing public safety staffing, quality education, quality housing, a better transportation system, further enhancement of our environment, and appropriate land-use centered around Smart Growth and Transit-oriented development that promotes economic development and job creation.

Our committees, through which most Council work is accomplished, will be hard at work on housing and foreclosure solutions and updating the five-year Consolidated Plan, a collaborative process whereby a community establishes a unified vision for community development actions. It will offer Prince George's County an opportunity to shape our housing and community development programs into effective, coordinated strategies for neighborhoods and communities and create a chance for strategic planning and citizen participation to take place in a way that makes sense. Simply put, it will be our framework for assisting those who need affordable housing; improving the safety and livability of neighborhoods; and promoting job growth and economic development.

We'll be working with the state to update our Storm Water Management plan. The Maryland Department of Environment has required that all counties create a Storm Water Management Policy and Plan to comply with the state's new Storm Water Management Ordinance enacted in 2007. It is my hope that the Council, which will ultimately review and approve the new standards for Storm Water Management, will create a plan that serves as a benchmark for the State, with the innovative use of green roofs, rain gardens, porous concrete, and more. And, it is my hope that we will have the vision to change some of our most polluted waterways into destinations that promote economic development.

Much has been said lately about the need for taxicab reform. The Council's newly established Taxicab Task Force will be closely studying the operation of taxi service and its impact on our residents and the industry stakeholders in the County. I want to thank Chairperson Bland for her leadership on this issue, along with Council members Tony Knotts and Camille Exum. In the coming year, the Council will consider recommendations made by the Task Force to improve licensing, operating and regulating taxi service in the County.

Speaking of reform, this Council, sitting as the District Council on land use issues, will also continue its review of County Zoning Ordinances. Proposals are now being sought by the Planning Department from qualified consultants to evaluate the effectiveness of Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations to implement the policy recommendations of the General Plan, streamline the development review process, and rewrite the regulations in a user-friendly format.

I am deeply grateful that Council Member Samuel Dean will continue to lead the Planning, Zoning and Economic Development Committee. He has been a steady hand on these important issues and having him lead on these issues is reassuring to me as Chair of the Council.

Council Member Camille Exum will chair the Council's Public Safety and Fiscal Management Committee. Through the course of her tenure, she has been singularly focused on financial stability for the County and has the personal resolve to tackle the tough issues without flinching. This is the leadership we need in these times.

Chairperson Marilyn Bland will lend her leadership skills and her recent experience as Chair of the Council to lead the Rules and General Assembly Committee.

Transportation, Housing and the Environment will be headed by Council Member Eric Olson. I have been fortunate to have Chaired this Committee for the past three years, and it is my one regret in being selected as Chair. I will miss my partnership with Committee Director Hawi Sanu, but I am comforted in knowing that Mr. Olson is up to the challenge of dealing with the multitude of complex issues that come before the THE Committee.

My colleague from District Four, Council Member Ingrid Turner will take charge of the Health, Education and Human Services Committee. We need her attention and concern for social service issues, public health and maintaining a quality education system, and I look forward to her leadership.

More Thanks

In closing, there are a few more acknowledgements I must make. The Council is supported in its work by an amazing and dedicated staff who do all they can to assist us and serve our citizens. I want to make special note of our Clerk's Office – Ree Floyd (who cannot be with us) and Donna Brown. In addition, I want to make note of Karen Campbell, who is tending to her mother's health issues today. Also, I want to acknowledge the strong leadership of our Administrator, Craig Price, and his capable staff.

I am especially grateful to my own office staff who work so diligently to respond to the needs of District 1 and Prince George's County: Alex Hirtle; Laura Moore; Laura Polk; Tiara Brown-Prescod; Chelsea Joseph; Eugene Huskey; (college students Juan Diasgranados and Renford Freemantle), and my Board of Education interns David Murray and Edward Burroughs. To you, my staff members, I offer my sincerest gratitude.

I am also very thankful to all of my friends in our community who took time to join us today for this very special occasion, and who continue to provide me with a strong moral compass.

Close

In the words of one of my favorite lyricists: "Everything is temporary --- if you give it enough time." As we all know, Term Limits makes this the final year on the Council for a majority of the members. That is why it is important to see our newer colleagues taking on strong positions of leadership this year.

I want to note that the class of 2002 has been an extraordinary Council and it is my desire to see us finish even stronger than when we started. This Council has graduated two Senators and it has demonstrated how to operate as a strong and independent legislative body. We may, at times, have been imperfect, but we have always been dynamic. I am proud to be a member of this group of leaders.

There is much more to be done this year, of course, but the direction is clear. Working together we can shape, create, and invent the future of Prince George's County. That is our opportunity and our challenge. It will be our legacy.

I close with the immortal words of Robert F. Kennedy:

*But history will judge you, and as the years pass, you will ultimately judge yourself, in the extent to which you have used your gifts and talents to lighten and enrich the lives of your fellow men. In your hands lies the future of your world and the fulfillment of the best qualities of your own spirit."*

Thank you and God bless.

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