

Remarks by Wayne County Commissioner Gary Woronchak upon being elected to a third term as commission chairman.

Jan. 8, 2015

Let me begin by thanking my colleagues on the Wayne County Commission for allowing me to serve as Chair of this distinguished body for another two years. I appreciate your trust and confidence and, quite often, your patience and understanding.

I want to also thank my wife, Vivian, for being here today and for her support and encouragement that helps me to do the best I can at this job.

I'm sure all Commissioners will agree we owe a great debt to our central staff, who provide us with analysis, counsel, organization, special projects and so much more. I thank you all for the quality and professionalism in your work and the energy with which you perform it. And this absolutely applies to my executive assistant, Marianne Rea, who is well known as the best at what she does.

Special thanks to our Wayne County Clerk, Cathy Garrett, not only for presiding over this organizational meeting, but for providing outstanding service to the people of Wayne County. We're very happy to have County Executive Warren Evans and Sheriff Benny Napoleon with us this morning. And I want to also acknowledge Barbara Johnson, representing our Register of Deeds Bernie Youngblood. You are all dedicated, hard-working public servants who do your best every day.

I want to welcome our two new commissioners, Al Haidous and Terry Marecki. We are fortunate to add such seasoned local government officials to our ranks. Commissioner Haidous was the Mayor of the City of Wayne, and Commissioner Marecki was City Clerk for the county's second-largest city, Livonia. They bring not only their unique skill sets, but also the valuable perspective of local community leadership.

They will fit in well with the seasoned group of veteran public officials on the Wayne County Commission. There are no rookies among us. We're not in a rebuilding period. We have a depth of government experience that could be argued is greater than any of the state's 83 counties. A majority of us have served in either the state House or state Senate, some of you in both.

Look at the leadership team with whom I'm proud to share this podium. Vice Chair Pro Tem Jewel Ware is the Dean of the Commission, first taking office 20 years ago. Vice Chair Alisha Bell is beginning, I believe, her 13th year as a Commissioner, and is well-

established as a leader not only in the City of Detroit, but in national county organizations.

It's a good thing we have such a strong roster on the Wayne County Commission. Because the challenges that face the county – mostly financial -- are still about as serious as in any period in our long history. I will be relying on each of you for your experience and your leadership as we face tough votes to do the right thing to get Wayne County back on course.

This week, we gained a new partner in our collective efforts to meet Wayne County's challenges. For just the fourth time in more than 30 years as a charter county, a new Wayne County Executive has taken office. Please join me in formally welcoming and congratulating our new County Executive, Warren Evans.

Warren Evans has served this county with distinction for many years in many roles. He's been our Sheriff, of course, but also has experience working in the offices of the county executive, prosecutor and even the Commission.

Mr. Evans, we thank you for your willingness to continue serving our county, and for taking on this challenge at a time when leadership like yours is more needed than ever. We know you will lead with integrity and honor to restore the public's confidence in their county government.

The Wayne County Commission looks forward to working with you and your new administration.

At the same time, we remain mindful of our distinct, separate roles in the running of this government.

Wayne County has had more than its share of challenges over the past four years. It has been a difficult period of great financial concerns, various missteps, assorted embarrassments and even scandals.

But if anything positive has come from the past few years, it's that the Wayne County Commission got its voice back. We remembered why we were sent here. We declared our independence and got back to the business of being a check and balance.

I'm proud of how this Commission stepped up when it needed to most, with ordinances and charter amendments and practices to strengthen not just our oversight, but, by extension, the oversight of the people we represent.

It took some very bright people to invent and refine our nation's system of representative democracy. One of the smartest things they established was the concept of separation of powers -- separate but equal branches within government to

increase the likelihood that the people's business will be conducted with fairness and openness, and sometimes even smoothly.

In its purest, theoretical form, when it works as it's designed, the structure of our government is brilliant. Whether federal, state or local, there is a chief executive to administer the daily operations and delivery of basic services ... but then we also have a legislative branch in place to directly represent the citizenry, so that the executive branch operates in the best interests of the people, and makes decisions that need to be approved by the people, through us, their representatives.

Our role and powers as our county's legislative branch are spelled out in the county charter and in state law – as are the powers and duties of the executive branch.

Our job as Commissioners – as the people's direct representatives in this government – is to review, to question, to challenge and, whenever possible, build consensus. In order for the relationship between the legislative and executive branches to work as it is designed, there must be, in the quest for solutions, occasional times of disagreement, discord and discomfort.

My pledge to the new administration, and to this Commission, is to maintain the high level of decorum, respect and professionalism that I have always sought for this body.

We may disagree among ourselves, and we may collectively disagree with the administration, but the discussion will always be respectful, professional and honorable. Never personal, and never losing sight of for whom we really work.

As messy as the process of government can become, let us always keep in mind that we have a common destination, even if we may sometimes argue over which road we should take to get there.

The public expects and deserves a Wayne County government that delivers the best services possible while being good stewards of their tax dollars and getting our fiscal house in order.

This new year brings us a new term, with two new Commissioners, and a new county executive and administration. Let us begin the year with new optimism as well. I know that, together, we can do much good for the people of Wayne County.

My colleagues, it is a privilege to work alongside each of you. And it is an honor to serve you for another term as your Chairman.

Thank you.