

Good afternoon and welcome to the 2024 State of Summit County.

It is my honor to stand before you today. I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to each of you for being here and for your unwavering commitment to the betterment of Summit County.

Every year, I deliver this address in partnership with the Akron Press Club. The proceeds from today's luncheon supports scholarships for students pursuing a career in journalism. Certainly, we live in a time when a free press has never been more critical.

Please join me in thanking the staff of the John S. Knight Center who always host our community's largest events with style and professionalism that is unmatched. And for the seventh year, the staff here partnered with ReWorks to make this a zero-waste event.

And for the third year, we partnered with ArtsNow to host the "Artistic Excellence" show, featuring incredibly talented artists who live, work, and create here in Summit County. Please take time on your way out view the incredible pieces on display.

An earnest thank you goes to our community leaders, business partners, nonprofit organizations, elected officials and their representatives from across the state. Your dedication and collaborative spirit are the backbone of our efforts and the reason we can face opportunities and challenges together head-on.

There are no words adequate to express my heartfelt appreciation for my incredible staff. They are truly the engine that drives our progress, working tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure our collective success.

Summit County is no stranger to the problems that exist across our country, but what sets us apart is our remarkable ability to come together and tackle these issues with unity, determination, and foresight.

I often talk about how I see my role as County Executive, as highly strategic, highly facilitative, and highly relationship driven. We think strategically about the present and the future, and we are always looking to leverage our resources and try to anticipate what is coming five, ten, even twenty years from now. We facilitate conversations and partnerships between all our stakeholders and support them so they can do what they do best. We invest in relationships. From the smallest nonprofit to the largest city, our door is always open for dialogue. In everything we do, we seek to do it together, with all of you. And so, it is through our collective efforts and shared vision that we continue to make strides, overcome obstacles, and create tomorrow.

Simply put, we move Summit County forward—together.

Last year, it was exciting to share an update about the Unite Us platform. You may recall, together with County Council, we invested local opioid settlement funds into this closed loop referral system. This system is based on the social determinants of health and better enables us to connect residents to the services and care they need in real time. This network truly helps to prevent

people from getting lost in the system. The platform is literally “uniting us” and leveraging Summit County’s celebrated culture of collaboration to provide more timely, robust and universal assistance to those in need.

At this time last year, we were in the early stages of implementation. Today, I am proud to share that 232 local community organizations, that provide over 600 different resources and programs, are now receiving and sending referrals through Unite Us and have served over one thousand residents.

In addition to better serving our residents, we can learn more about our social service system. Even now, we have already seen the value of this investment. All of this is value added and is free to our non-profits.

One notable finding is that most residents are referred for more than one type of service, which proves that many of our most vulnerable residents have complex social needs. Currently, the most common service requested is housing. While Unite Us is a great tool for linking residents to existing programs and services, it does not itself increase capacity for requests like housing. It does validate what so many of us already know: the need for affordable housing continues to be a struggle for many people.

Last year, by investing \$1 million in homeless prevention and rental assistance, my office helped to keep people safe at home. We also continue to move the needle with home rehab and repair. Our Department of Community Development continues to make a difference by providing a myriad of needed

improvements like home weatherization, minor home repair, lead removal, and assistance for older adults with the “Aging in Place program.”

These programs not only benefit individual homeowners, but our community as well.

When we are looking from a community level, these programs work to keep some of our most vulnerable residents safe and strengthen our neighborhoods by improving our housing stock. In the long run, this is a win-win for all of us. By the end of this fiscal year, we will have provided rehab and repair to over 300 units, the most we have ever done in any year. Each unit received an average of \$7,000 to remedy issues.

Please join me in thanking my dedicated team for carrying out this important work.

There are numerous organizations in Summit County that work to reduce housing insecurity. For example, I'd like to give a shout-out to the Continuum of Care leadership, board, staff, and their partners for their work in addressing the growing need for emergency housing.

Folks, this is a complicated issue that cannot be solved with one solution or organization. Thank you to our community partners, many of you who are here today, for your continued time, energy and resources as we collaboratively work to house those in need. This is an ever-present issue affecting communities across our nation. To that end, beginning in early 2025, my office

will convene stakeholders across a broad spectrum of the housing ecosystem. We will identify gaps, needs, and resources, creating a map to chart our course forward.

However, housing is not the only significant issue. Like water and electricity, access to high-speed, reliable and affordable internet is an absolute necessity in today's world. In response, we continue to leverage our partnership with the FairlawnGig to help address service gaps in certain areas.

For example, by the end of this year, our investment will connect three low- and moderate-income census tracts in Copley Township to the Fairlawn Gig. Thereby, offering every resident and business in these areas access to high-speed Internet. In addition to paying for the infrastructure, we will be utilizing the County's Community Development Block Grant funds to cover a portion of the monthly service charge for income-eligible residents and those businesses who employ low-income workers.

We also used ARPA funding to link the brand new I Promise Health Quarters and their providers to the Fairlawn Gig. This high-speed and secure digital connection is critically important to the operation of a facility like this, allowing them to leverage today's technology to better serve their patients. We are extremely grateful to the City of Fairlawn, Mayor Sharnsky, councilmembers, and for our continued partnership with the Fairlawn Gig.

Beyond improving physical access to internet services, we are also taking steps to remove the systemic barriers that prevent full participation in today's digital world. Digital literacy is a critical need. It is not enough just to provide a device and connection; we must educate folks about how to safely and effectively navigate the digital world. Since 2023, our Digital Equity Steering Committee has been meeting to develop a strategic plan. Thank you to those of you here today who have contributed to that group's work.

Recently we used this work to apply for a \$12 million federal grant in partnership with AMHA. If this funding is received, it will pay for 2400 devices and six navigators who will travel throughout the county and to AMHA properties providing specialized digital education.

This work is already underway. From senior citizens to seniors in high school, there is a clear need for enhanced education, especially as it relates to digital financial scams. Too many of our residents are falling prey, every day, to scams originating from social media, email and text messages. That is why we launched our "Outsmart the Scam" event series in June in partnership with Sheriff Fatheree, Prosecutor Kolkovich, Clerk Galonski, the Better Business Bureau, and many others. We have held two events educating our residents about detecting, preventing and responding to scams.

Our partners are there to answer your questions. Our goal is to have an event in each community. The next one will be held October 19 at Tallmadge High School. Our first two events were very well-attended, and I urge you to

share the event information that is on the screens and tables to help us spread the word. These scams continue to evolve, becoming more sophisticated and more harmful. We must take them seriously and protect those most likely to be impacted, especially our seniors and our young residents.

In addition to educating our young people about scams, we are also committed to putting them to work. After a brief enrollment decline due to the pandemic, I am proud to share that our collaborative Summer Youth Employment Program placed nearly 800 Summit County kids in meaningful summer jobs.

Jobs began in June and ran for eight weeks. Participants worked up to 20 hours a week, earning up to \$2,400 for the summer. In total, participants earned more than \$1.5 million in gross wages across 335 employers. This was made possible thanks to the partnership of our Department of Job and Family Services, Youth Success Summit, Jobs for Ohio Graduates, Akron Public Schools, and the City of Akron.

It is hard to overstate the importance of programs like this. Gaining real-world experience in a field of their interest, earning their own money, and making connections with professionals who are intentional about nurturing the next generation – all of these positive experiences can truly make a difference in the lives of our young residents. I am grateful to the local businesses who agreed to participate.

This program is also one example of the investments we make to strengthen our communities. The downstream outcomes of these investments in children and families are monumental. They result in violence prevention, improved reading and math scores, and even long-term financial well-being.

Our JFS team is constantly looking to expand this positive impact in the community. For the past two years, they have been quietly expanding the NEXT program to more residents and providers to eliminate the so-called “benefits cliff.” Take a moment to imagine you are a single mother with three kids working as a nursing assistant at a long-term care facility, living from paycheck to paycheck and receiving SNAP food benefits.

You are a hard worker, and your employer wants to reward you with a \$1.50 an hour raise, which would increase your yearly wages by nearly \$3,000. But because you currently receive \$300 a month in SNAP benefits to offset grocery costs, a raise threatens this monthly benefit that you rely on.

So, let’s do the math. By taking the raise, she could end up losing \$600 on an annual basis. And, that is before taxes. So, now let me ask you, which decision would you make?

This is a scenario we see and hear about all the time. Faced with the potential loss of benefits, a parent may choose to turn down a raise, keeping them locked in at the edge of the cliff. In order to encourage our clients to take

promotions and raises, we offer the NEXT program as a BRIDGE for those wondering how to get off of the CLIFF.

SNAP clients who are working and experience a reduction due to increased income receive a success coach, financial empowerment sessions, and peer mentoring. The program also offers supportive services like car repairs and financial incentives.

Since 2021, our participants have received a collective \$450,000 for meeting goals of sustained employment, financial literacy, wage progression and more. We also provided funds for computers, uniforms, daycare costs, and housing and utility assistance.

We are committed to helping our residents not just survive, but to get to the NEXT level in their career so they can really begin to thrive. The success of this program of course lies with our team at JFS and our partners in the community. This holistic approach to support requires all hands-on deck.

It also required a platform to help us manage the many programs and resources available to clients. We used to rely on Excel spreadsheets and email. In 2022, our resourceful team was looking to grow the NEXT program and realized that the Unite Us platform, which I mentioned before, with its near universal functionality, was the perfect option needed to bring organization and cohesion to this large operation.

Unite Us has become the backbone of our NEXT program, allowing partners to better communicate and coordinate with one another and the client. Additionally, partners can use Unite Us to refer clients for other services available through the network, like housing programs through our Department of Community Development.

Ask any one of our “NEXT” partners what they think about Unite Us and I guarantee they will tell you how it has improved their operations and ability to serve clients. If you are not currently using this platform or are not using it to its full capability, you might be missing an opportunity to more effectively help those you serve.

My team and the Unite Us team will walk with you through every step to get you connected and will stay with you through implementation to ensure your success. Since day one, our team has set an example of how to use this platform. JFS is looking to expand its use to other programming, and our Community Development team uses it every day as they visit residents’ homes. Now, if we at the County and 232 other organizations can integrate this into our operations, I know you can do it too. And remember, there is no cost for our nonprofits. On your tables, you can find QR codes for more information to find our monthly progress report and to register for an information session.

Unite Us truly feels revolutionary. Each organization on the platform is utilizing technology in ways we had not previously imagined. It is just one part of a suite of technology that moves our County forward.

The reality is that the technology needed to keep our communities safe is expensive, and that expense continues to grow. A core safety service is 9-1-1 dispatching. Consolidating our resources and building a strong team of dispatchers was a cost-effective and forward-thinking approach to supporting our emergency responders and our communities.

Last year, I was thrilled to share that we had 5 municipalities join in creating our Summit Emergency Communications Center, the S-E-C-C, with the City of Akron co-locating at our state-of-the-art facility. Today, I am excited to say that we are now serving nearly half of our communities, which represents 350,000 residents. Our dispatchers have answered a quarter of a million calls since opening. That's 250,000 times they have connected a resident to a needed service. That's not even including the calls coming into Akron's co-located operation.

After this successful transition, staying up to date on the latest technology and expanding services was the next logical step. Today, the S-E-C-C and several other dispatch centers are now able to receive Text-to-9-1-1. And within the next few weeks, all of Summit County will be able to send texts to-9-1-1.

Our dispatchers have asked me to share a phrase to help you determine whether you should call or text 9-1-1: call first, and if you can't call, text. Their other ask was, please, no emojis!

Text-to-9-1-1 is lifesaving for those who may be in a situation where the noise of calling is more dangerous than hiding or staying silent. It is also beneficial for

the Deaf community, those with hearing loss, or speech disabilities. It also features automatic translation for non-English speakers. These long-needed accessibility and inclusivity improvements can make all the difference in an emergency.

Our S-E-C-C dispatchers have tackled more than text-to 9-1-1. They are now transferring calls to our local 9-8-8 provider at Portage Path Behavioral Health in response to a growing number of mental health calls. 9-8-8 is the nationwide Suicide and Crisis Lifeline for anyone experiencing a suicidal crisis or mental health-related distress. Starting last month, S-E-C-C instituted a new process of Emergency Medical Dispatching.

In the past, someone having a mental health crisis may have called 9-1-1 looking for help. With our new process, if a caller meets certain criteria, the S-E-C-C will directly connect them to 9-8-8 so they can speak with a trained mental health professional as soon as possible. We are the only county in the State of Ohio utilizing this process. By triaging and routing calls straight to 988, we are connecting residents to the direct care they need, faster. Not only does it help our residents in crisis, but this process also helps keep first responders available for other emergencies. Connecting callers to the most appropriate personnel for their individual situation as quickly as possible enhances our entire public safety response.

At the core of all our dispatch operations, is a connection to high-speed and secure internet. That is why we continue to move forward with Summit

Connects, which is our public safety fiber network. When complete, the 135-mile fiber-optic ring will connect all 31 communities, from Clinton to Reminderville, from Mogadore to Bath, starting with public safety operations. It is a project poised to match our county's unique spirit of communities coming together to see beyond our differences, to identify common problems, and to forge bold, creative solutions that strengthen all of us. We look forward to beginning construction by year's end.

As we keep talking about technology, let me tell you how it is saving us time and money. Last year marked the launch of our Virtual Courtroom project. In 2024, our Common Pleas judges have held over 4800 virtual courtroom appearances. That is nearly 5,000 separate times that an inmate at the Summit County Jail did not have to be transported from the jail to the court, and back again. By holding remote proceedings when appropriate, we are saving money in staff resources and transportation. This is just one of the many technology-based initiatives we have implemented to make life simpler and safer.

Thank you to our Common Pleas Judges, Sheriff Fatheree and their teams for their partnership in this project.

Alongside this effort, we are also working to improve efficiency in all aspects of our criminal justice system. In fact, Summit County was chosen by the State's Public Defender's Office to develop and pilot a remarkable system advancement. Until this year, our process to pay court-appointed attorneys entailed a lengthy and, often expensive, shuffle of papers back and forth from the attorneys to the courts, to finance, and then down to Columbus. At each

step, a single missing signature could add days to the process, delaying payment and taxing our general fund. But not anymore—as of this week, Common Pleas and each municipal court in Summit County are utilizing the state’s digital billing system, reducing the amount of paper and time needed for this essential service.

We have already processed 2,000 applications, demonstrating to the rest of the State what’s possible when technology is embraced. Imagine the impact statewide. It’s working so well that some defense attorneys who had stopped participating as appointed council are now asking to rejoin the program. I think we can agree that making our criminal defense attorneys happy is an immense mark of progress.

It is important to implement solutions like this because our courts continue to be busy. Now, I am not a judge or a law enforcement officer. There are other officials and organizations that get up every day to work directly on reducing violent crime and increasing prevention. But, as I noted earlier, my office continues to provide supports which strengthen families and neighborhoods. As part of those efforts to respond to community concerns about violent crime, my office has provided \$650,000 to support two special prosecutors to address gun violence. Because gun violence continues to affect our community, we have now made those grants permanent. I would like to thank our County Prosecutor Elliot Kolkovich for his commitment to protecting and advocating for all victims of crime.

A key partner to the prosecutor and law enforcement in solving homicide crimes, is our Medical Examiner. Dr. Lisa Kohler, the first and only woman Chief Medical Examiner in the State, and her team provide critical scientific and technical information.

Late last year, she purchased new technology that speeds up the process of fingerprinting. Previously, fingerprints would have to be scanned and physically sent to state labs to confirm identities. With this device, that process is shortened to just one or two minutes. Every second counts when families need answers. Over the years, Dr. Kohler and her staff have seen the impacts of some of the most pressing challenges of our time, not the least of which has been the opioid epidemic.

Let us go back to 2016, when Summit County faced an unprecedented crisis that shook the very foundation of our community. The surge in opioid-related deaths reached alarming levels, driving our local leadership to take urgent action. I declared a State of Emergency in October of 2017. It was not just a formal response—it was a critical call to action, underscoring our immediate need for a comprehensive and coordinated response.

Recognizing the gravity of the situation, we took a bold step in December 2017 by initiating what became a landmark lawsuit against the pharmaceutical manufacturers, distributors, and pharmacies. This legal action was not merely about seeking justice; it was about holding accountable those who wreaked havoc in our community and whose actions contributed to the suffering and loss of countless individuals and families.

The pursuit of this lawsuit was a monumental effort, driven by the relentless dedication of my county staff, the Public Health Department, our levy agencies and numerous municipalities. These teams worked with extraordinary commitment to gather evidence, build a compelling case, and advocate tirelessly on behalf of those affected by the crisis.

On the day of the trial, a historic settlement was reached—one that not only provided critical financial resources for treatment and prevention, but also signified a profound commitment to healing and recovery. Our settlement was a beacon of hope, highlighting the power of unity and determination in confronting one of the biggest challenges of our time.

As we move forward, the lessons learned from this experience will guide our ongoing efforts to combat addiction and build a healthier, more resilient community. The most important lesson we have learned, not only in this battle but in others as well, is that nothing stays the same and we must move forward.

With the future at hand, I stand before you, proud to announce, I have introduced legislation to County Council that will establish the Summit Health and Safety Innovation Fund, which will be a supporting organization at Akron Community Foundation. My legislation proposes to Council an investment of \$45 million to come directly from our local opioid litigation settlement. This full circle moment demonstrates that the unique collaborative efforts my team and I led certainly set this community apart. This new organization will be

dedicated to making a generational impact on the people of Summit County and will help safeguard the community long into the future.

We understand that addiction is an evolving challenge, which is why this funding will prioritize innovative solutions to enhance public health and safety. To John Petures, John Garofolo, the board, and everyone at ACF, I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude and the gratitude of all of those who will benefit from this commitment. Thank you for your unwavering support, patience, and assistance in this significant endeavor. The creation of this supporting organization will touch all corners of Summit County for many years to come.

A special thank you to the Opioid Abatement Advisory Council members and Stakeholders. Because of our collective commitment and dedication, we help ensure these settlement dollars serve not only those in need today, but those individuals we have not yet met. Everyone deserves the opportunity to receive the best care and treatment available. Which is why I have asked the OAAC to continue to invest the settlement dollars that will remain with the County to meet the immediate needs of our residents.

I would like to recognize someone, without whom, all of this would not have been possible—our very own Health Commissioner, Donna Skoda. Donna, your steadfast presence and the assistance of your team, continue to be game changers in our community. I could spend the rest of this speech talking about the importance of public health and my gratitude for Donna, her expert command of what ails our community and how we can make it better—together. Donna, from the bottom of my heart, thank you.

As you all know, we at the county work hard to make our community safer and healthier. We know that safe, healthy communities also support economic development and growth.

Within the last year, you have surely heard the phrase “Polymer Cluster.” If you are not sure what that means, let me take a minute to break it down. Akron has long been known as the Rubber Capital of the World and while we still make some tires in Summit County, one significant offshoot of the rubber industry is polymers.

In 2021, The Greater Akron Chamber, led by Steve Millard, identified 30+ polymer-related companies in our community including the industry leaders Goodyear and Bridgestone. Thus, the Polymer Industry Cluster was formed to seek investment, identify opportunities, and collaborate across industries, non-profits, and governments. The research and development of polymers, especially sustainable polymers, is critical to shaping a more environmentally responsible future.

With the University of Akron, led by President Nemer, and our companies at the forefront of this innovation, our region is well positioned for new technologies and investment. I am proud to say that Summit County was an initial partner to the Cluster, and pledged \$750,000 in funding to help spur additional investment.

Since 2021, as a result of the CHIPS and Science Act, an unprecedented amount of economic investment has poured into communities throughout the

nation, including our own. Earlier this year, the United States Economic Development Administration designated Greater Akron as the Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub. This resulted in a \$51 million investment for our community.

As if that wasn't exciting enough, just last month, Governor DeWine announced that Greater Akron and the Polymer Cluster will be home to Ohio's third innovation Hub, with a \$41 million investment from the State of Ohio. These historic investments are a sure sign that we are on the right track for a brighter future, benefitting our region for generations to come, with new jobs, and new opportunities. And I'm already hearing about nationwide interest in the Polymer Cluster and its future.

In addition to working to attract new investments and opportunities, my Economic Development team, along with the Elevate Greater Akron partners are working hard to retain and support our Summit County businesses. In 2023, our Business, Retention, and Expansion team met with 295 local businesses to discuss opportunities for growth and make critical connections with the County and its partners. Nearly half of these meetings were with diverse business enterprises that are owned by women, people of color, LGBTQ individuals, or veterans.

By helping our current businesses grow and expand, we are deepening our business roots, which in turn, increases our likelihood of attracting new businesses to our welcoming economic environment. Here are just a few

examples of our communities' success in attracting new business to our region:

In May, A M L 3D, an Australian advanced manufacturing company, announced its first U.S. Headquarters in Stow. The company produces large-scale 3D Metal printing for a variety of markets. They anticipate creating dozens of new jobs over the next 3 years.

In December, Kraftpack announced its first U.S. location will be opening in the City of Twinsburg. It manufactures paper and plastic products. This will bring 30 new jobs to Twinsburg with plans to triple the workforce in three years.

Commercial Metals Company, a leading rebar fabricator, received an JobsOhio revitalization grant this year to invest in a vacant Akron location. CMC is the largest producer of rebar in the United States. They will be adding around 50 new employees over the next five years. The County is providing on-the-Job training grants to assist the company with filling new, good paying jobs.

We are also helping our communities secure the necessary roadway improvements to attract and grow businesses. This year, The Village of Richfield was awarded state funds for the Crossroads District project. The project will provide access to future commercial development off Wheatley Road.

Similarly, my office secured state funding for the Wooster Road West Project in the City of Barberton. This project includes a full reconstruction of the road, which is a primary commercial corridor serving many employers.

Summit County is also busy preparing potential sites for development. Just last month, the state of Ohio granted the Summit County Land Bank \$22 million to demolish 124 vacant and blighted buildings. To put this in perspective, the state awarded \$50 million to Ohio communities through this program, and nearly half is coming to our Land Bank. This is a testament to the leadership of Executive Director Patrick Bravo, Board Chair and Fiscal Officer Kristen Scalise and all the board members.

These funds will provide a fresh start for sites throughout Summit County, including in Boston Heights, Cuyahoga Falls, Hudson, Lakemore, Northfield Center Township, Northfield Village and Tallmadge. Some of the notable sites include the vacant hotel off Route 8 in Boston Heights and our former sewer office building on State Rd. Freeing up all these sites opens the door to transformational development in our communities. poised

One key tool used to spark development is federal New Market Tax Credits. I am excited to share the Development Finance Authority recently received \$45 million in credits to incentivize development for projects in Summit County. In the past, these credits supported projects like Hamlin Newco, Canal Place, the East End Hilton. The DFA continues to be an incredible partner to my office. We owe Executive Director, Chris Burnham, much gratitude for his many years of service and stewardship in growing this agency. Chris is handing over the reins to Rachel Bridenstine, who is, is well-suited to continue this collaborative work. Thank you, Chris.

Let us take a moment to reflect on our economic development accomplishments. The projects I just mentioned represent over \$160 million from federal and state agencies. This is no small feat, and we should all be proud of our collective efforts to attain it, and position Summit County for future success.

When planning for economic growth, we know reliable infrastructure is essential. It allows our businesses to operate without worrying about internet, water, or sewer services. This year, we are excited to announce significant investments in critical public works projects that impact the health, safety, and well-being of our communities.

Over the next six years, we plan to invest more than \$200 million in much-needed improvements to our sanitary sewer system. This is not just about upgrading pipes and treatment facilities; it is about safeguarding public health, preserving our natural resources, and maintaining the quality of life that we all value so deeply.

In addition to our focus on sanitary sewers, Summit County has also committed \$20 million to various regional stormwater and surface water management projects. Stormwater management is a critical component of our infrastructure that often goes unnoticed until a storm hits.

In August of this year, we saw the importance of these systems when a 500-year storm hit our communities. Our continued investment in this area will help to prevent flooding, reduce erosion, and improve water quality in our

streams and rivers. By tackling these challenges head-on, we are not only protecting our homes and businesses but also enhancing the resilience of our entire region.

Let me share a few examples of how our commitment to improving infrastructure is already making a tangible difference across the County. Last year, we collaborated with Copley Township to extend the sanitary sewer line along State Route 162. This is a big boost for economic development in the area. We are also working on a second phase, which will stretch east of Copley Circle and is set to be completed in 2025. This phase will allow Copley Middle School to eliminate its outdated waste-water treatment plant.

In Peninsula, we are making progress on a long-standing goal: bringing sanitary sewer services to the village. These old septic systems are a concern for the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency due to the location near the Cuyahoga River and the National Park. Last year, we integrated Peninsula into the Summit County Metropolitan Sewer District. This project, which is a key environmental sustainability effort for the region, is now in the design phase, with construction expected to start in 2025.

We are collaborating with Mayor Adamson and the City of New Franklin to extend sanitary sewer service along Route 93. This paved the way for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources to start work on a new visitor center at Portage Lakes State Park. Looking ahead, we are planning additional joint infrastructure projects, including a new pump station. All of this will support

thoughtful and sustainable growth in the New Franklin area. I would like to give Mayor Adamson a special shoutout for his steadfast pursuit of state and federal funds to support these projects.

You all know the bridge that connects Cuyahoga Falls and Akron? I can tell you that our Engineer, Al Brubaker does. He and his team have been working on replacing the High-Level Bridge, also known as the N. Main Street Bridge over the Cuyahoga River for some time now. This bridge is the largest and the costliest, owned by the County.

We have secured over \$9 million to design the new bridge, thanks to our partners in the state and federal government. We are incredibly grateful for the Engineer and his team, Senator Sherrod Brown and Representative Emilia Sykes hard work in helping us secure these critical funds. We also greatly appreciate the support of Akron Mayor Shammus Malik and Cuyahoga Falls Mayor Don Walters.

To further our role in protecting our planet, we previously announced our membership to Power a Clean Future Ohio, an organization dedicated to helping local governments develop and implement climate solutions. Since joining, we have submitted a grant request for public charging infrastructure and created two new resources. First, an Inflation Reduction Act guide for residents, businesses and nonprofits looking to utilize clean energy tax credits. And, second, a sustainability webpage, “Go Green Summit County!” to help residents learn more about green practices like EVs, composting, native planting and more.

As we move forward, let us remember that these investments are not merely about infrastructure. They are about ensuring a better quality of life for our residents, protecting our natural environment, and preparing our county for the challenges of tomorrow.

I do not often get a chance to sit back and think about all of what we have going on across this county. We build things, we create things, we bring people together. But, when I sat down to look at what I wanted to share with you today, the list is far longer than time allows.

We have not talked about: Animal Control, STABLE accounts, Thrive House, workforce collaboration with partners like Ohio Means Jobs and Stark State College, Downtown Akron investments, the unveiling of the amazing Sojourner Truth Plaza, and the list goes on.

We do all this while balancing our budget, maintaining our strong bond rating and operating on the lowest county sales tax in the state. So, let's be clear, there is a lot of really good stuff going on here in Summit County. In sharing all this, I hope you take away one lesson—Summit County truly embodies the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Thirty-one diverse communities coming together to form one of the most successful and collaborative counties in our great state. And, each year, I reaffirm that our strength comes from the remarkable people who make up this community. While we face challenges that are not unique to us alone, it is our

approach to solving those problems and reaching for opportunities that sets us apart.

Summit County's success is rooted in our unwavering commitment to teamwork and collaboration. It is through this collective effort that we forge unique solutions and turn obstacles into opportunities. Together, we demonstrate that by harnessing the power of unity and shared purpose, we can overcome any challenge and build a brighter future for Summit County. As we all move forward—together.

Thank you all for being here and for investing in our collective success.

The State of Summit County is indeed strong.