

Good afternoon Commissioners.

Thank you for giving me a few minutes to speak.

I want to talk about something simple today – something even a fifth-grader could understand.

When we were kids, we were taught that rules matter, and that the rules apply to everyone. We were taught that bullying is wrong, and that if someone hurts you, you're supposed to tell a teacher – and the teacher is supposed to help. But as an adult working for the County, I learned something very different.

I learned that sometimes the people who are supposed to protect you... don't. Sometimes the people who write the rules... don't follow them. And sometimes the people with the most power use it to stay silent, instead of fixing what's broken. I never voted to give anyone that kind of power over the people who pay them.

None of us did. We pay taxes because we expect fairness, honesty, and transparency in return. We expect the people in charge to follow the same rules they enforce on everyone else. But that's not what happened to me. For years, I watched bullying happen inside the County. Not playground bullying – workplace bullying. The kind that makes good employees quit. The kind that makes people afraid to speak up. The kind that teaches everyone to stay silent, because silence is safer than telling the truth.

And when I finally spoke up, I didn't get help. I didn't get protection. I didn't even get a fair conversation.

Instead, I was fired over my first small mistake – something that normally wouldn't get anyone fired in government.

People say it's "almost impossible" to fire a government employee.

But somehow, I became the exception. Not because I was the worst worker. But because I was the one who told the truth.

And here's the part that still hurts: When I reached out to HR, Risk Management, and the County Attorneys – the same people who say employees are the County's "greatest asset" – they didn't help me. They only responded after I was fired, and they said, "We can only help current employees."

So I learned something important: They weren't there to protect me. They were there to protect the business. A business is lifeless.

A business doesn't feel pain. A business doesn't lose sleep. A business doesn't cry in the car on the way home.

People do. People like me. People like the coworkers I tried to protect. People who serve this community every day.

And that's why I'm here today. Not to fight. Not to accuse. But to ask a simple question:

How can a system be ethical if it doesn't follow its own rules? Who stops the people in power when they won't stop themselves?

Where are the checks and balances that protect the public – and the employees who serve them?

We deserve better. The public deserves better. And the County employees – your "greatest assets" – deserve better.

I'm not here to tear anything down. I'm here to shine a light. Because sunlight is the best disinfectant, and transparency is the promise this County makes to the people who fund it. Thank you for your time. And thank you for listening.

Created by Joe Passaretti for the leaders in our community

Here's a speech crafted in my voice and carrying that quiet fire I bring when I stand at this podium. 6-Minute County Commissioners Speech

Good evening Commissioners.

Thank you for giving me the time to speak with you tonight.

I want to talk about something simple, but important: what happens to a community when the foundation shifts and how leadership responds when the old ways stop working.

History gives us plenty of examples.

A gold mining town hits the end of its vein. An oil town watches the wells run dry.

A steel town sees the last factory close its doors.

And suddenly the local government has a choice: rebuild with honesty... or survive with duct tape.

Now, duct tape works.

And don't underestimate a little bubble gum either. But duct tape and bubble gum are supposed to be temporary fixes – not long-term policy.

When a town loses its economic engine, the real test isn't the crisis itself. It's how the people in charge respond.

Some towns faced the truth early. They said, "We need to rebuild. We need transparency. We need to earn the public's trust."

Those towns survived.

Other towns... well, they chose denial.

They said, "Everything is fine," even as the lights flickered. They patched holes quietly. They hid the cracks. They pressured employees to stay silent.

They protected the institution instead of the people. And those towns didn't just fail economically – they failed morally.

We like to think that kind of thing only happened in the old days.

But the truth is, the same pressures exist today, just with different names: budget shortfalls, staffing shortages, public trust issues, internal culture problems, and the temptation to "hold it together at all costs."

When leadership feels cornered, the instinct can shift from serving the public to protecting the system.

And that's when good people inside the system start feeling trapped.

They're told to keep quiet.

They're told to "be a team player."

They're told the reputation of the department matters more than the truth.

That's how ethical drift begins.

Not because people are bad – but because the system rewards silence and punishes honesty.

But here's the thing:

A community doesn't collapse because it faces a challenge.

A community collapses when it refuses to face the challenge honestly.

We've seen this in history.

Centralia, Pennsylvania – a coal fire burned under the town for decades, and officials downplayed it until the ground literally opened up.
Flint, Michigan – a water crisis born from cost-cutting and denial.
Rust Belt cities – where leaders ignored the warning signs until the tax base evaporated.

Every one of those stories had a moment – a turning point – where leadership could have chosen transparency, accountability, and courage.
And every one of those stories also had people – ordinary citizens – who stood up and said, “We deserve better.”

That’s why I’m here tonight.
Not to criticize. Not to accuse.
But to remind us all – gently, respectfully – that public trust is the most valuable resource a county has.
More valuable than gold.
More valuable than oil.
More valuable than any budget line.

And once trust is gone, you can’t mine more of it.
You can’t drill for it.
You can’t order it in bulk.
You have to rebuild it – slowly, honestly, and with humility.

I believe this county has the potential to be one of the success stories.
A place where leadership chooses transparency over convenience.
Where employees feel safe to speak the truth.
Where the public sees integrity not as a slogan, but as a practice.

And I believe that starts with acknowledging something simple:
We don’t need perfection. We need honesty.
If something is broken, say it.
If something needs fixing, fix it.
If something went wrong, own it.
If someone speaks up, listen.

Because the alternative – the duct tape, the bubble gum, the “everything is fine” approach – that’s how towns become ghost towns.
Not because the gold ran out, but because the courage did. So tonight, I’m asking for something small but meaningful:
Let’s choose the path of transparency.
Let’s choose the path of accountability.
Let’s choose the path that rebuilds trust instead of patching over cracks.

And commissioners... don’t worry. I’m not asking for approval for any \$30 parts tonight.
Just your commitment to the kind of leadership that keeps a community alive long after the gold is gone.
Thank you for your time.