



**Office of the County Executive  
Steuart Pittman**

*Prepared remarks for the Inauguration of Steuart Pittman, December 5, 2022*

**“It’s Time To Heal”**

I will begin by recognizing and thanking some very special people, starting with the person who tunes my moral compass and grounds me every day, my wife Erin.

To my sons Sam and Drew, my daughter Jesse, my mother, my five sisters, my brother, and my father, who is looking down from heaven approving the fact that we are outside in the cold roughing it today, I say thank you.

I also want to thank and recognize my work family, the extraordinary, battle tested, hard-working public servants - in my office, leading county agencies, and throughout county government. You and the work that you do was on the ballot in last month’s election, and you won. Congratulations.

I thank and recognize every candidate for public office who sought to serve in the November election, and to those who came out ahead and will be inaugurated today or in the coming weeks, I look forward to being your ally in service to the people, regardless of the district you represent, or your party affiliation.

I particularly want to recognize Pete Smith, Allison Pickard, Nathan Volke, Julie Hummer, Amanda Fiedler, Lisa Rodvien, and Shannon Leadbetter, the Anne Arundel County Council that will be sworn in this afternoon. Once again the voters of this county chose to be represented by diverse political viewpoints and a supermajority of women. I believe that the voters chose well, and I look forward to working with each one of you.

And finally, I want to thank and recognize you, the taxpayers, the voters, the residents. The business owners, the workers, the renters, the homeowners. The communities that make up our county, whether defined by neighborhood or by common interest.

I want to thank you for doing what I asked you to do in this speech four years ago. You organized and you engaged with your government, at our town halls, through our online portals, and at the polls. I always say that the hard stuff only gets done with community engagement, and during the last four years you engaged, and we got hard stuff done.

On December 3, 2018, I stood before you at Maryland Hall and laid out what the Capital Gazette described as an ambitious agenda. It was hard stuff, and we did it. All of it, and more.

We created a smarter, greener, more equitable twenty year development plan, and we brought back the community-based planning process that empowers our residents.

We delivered the pay, the staffing levels, and the equipment that our public safety agencies had been going without for far too long.

We restored those eight years of back step increases to our school staff, added over 500 new teachers, and fully funded our school construction program.

We did those 200 Town Halls, including seven each year on the budget, and we created the open data portal through which you can monitor the performance of every county department and map what we're doing in your neighborhood.

We passed the fair housing bill and the workforce housing bill, and we created the Housing Trust Fund.

We confronted racism and we created tools to overcome it - our new offices of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion; and Health Equity and Racial Justice.

We passed forest conservation, the Green Infrastructure Master Plan, the styrofoam ban, the first county-wide no discharge zone, and we stopped ignoring the environmental laws in our code.

We not only created the nation's first independent Resilience Authority to address the impacts of climate change, but we funded it, staffed it, and put it to work.

We acquired land and made it available for public use at Quiet Waters, Forney, Deale, Tanyard Springs, and the 544 acre green heart at the center of our county where we gather today to heal.

We did all of these hard things and many many more in a fiscally responsible way. We took advantage of federal support and a strong economy to protect ourselves from future economic challenges. Our rewards were the county's first-ever Aaa bond rating from Moody's, and a crowning final budget that earned nearly unanimous support on the County Council from both political parties.

All of us who made these things happen have every right to celebrate success.

But now, let's take a much-needed pause, set aside our pride, our politics, and even our self-interest, and take a hard look at our moment in history.

Our county is a microcosm of America, politically and demographically, and more than ever, the threats we face are threats to all of humanity - climate change, pandemic, war, greed, intolerance, and concentration of wealth.

It's easy to lose hope when faced with these challenges, but perspective helps. That's why not long before he died, I asked my Dad if he was optimistic about the future of humanity.

He'd lived through the Great Depression and World War II, worked on the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe, and was President Kennedy's director of civil defense during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

My father's answer was that amidst our cycles of crisis and progress is a slow evolution toward common purpose, toward a more humanitarian humanity. He was optimistic.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said it more clearly. "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

Let's assume they're both right. Let's proceed with faith that we will come together, we will achieve peace, and we will take better care of one another.

If we have that faith, it's a simple step to put ourselves at the front of that evolution and take responsibility for bending that arc. Doing so gives us the purpose we all seek in our lives. It inspires us.

So here we stand in the geographic center of Anne Arundel County on ground and amidst trees that saw a recent cycle of history in which human beings created an institution where those of a different skin color, those left out of economic prosperity, those who behaved in ways that made others uncomfortable were kept apart, drugged, and experimented on.

The state of Maryland took pride in its progress. Those people were allowed to live, they reasoned, and some were offered treatment, but very few were healed, and thousands were buried in unmarked graves at the end of Farm Road on the other side of what is now I-97.

Only this past summer did volunteers review death records of 1,772 African American Crownsville patients who were buried here. I visited those volunteers as they worked at the Maryland Archives and looked over the shoulder of one at the record on her screen. The cause of death was listed. It was strangulation.

I promised in my inaugural speech four years ago to begin the process of acquiring this land and its buildings from the state of Maryland so that the people of Anne Arundel County could,

and I quote, “transform this tainted jewel at the heart of our county into a place where healing happens through the powerful medicine of nature.”

We are here today standing upon this ground because today it is ours, and today we begin that healing.

Today, in this place, we launch Crownsville Hospital Memorial Park, and its campus for the community-based nonprofit organizations that so effectively deliver behavioral health services, food assistance, job training, and anything and everything that promotes the social determinants of good health.

Today, in this place, we accept the facts presented in the recently published report called Poverty Amidst Plenty, about the extraordinary movement of wealth in our county to the top end of our economic scale while one third of our families live paycheck to paycheck, unable to save for the next pandemic or economic downturn because the cost of housing, child care, transportation, food, health care, insurance, and clothes is at or above take-home pay.

Today, in this place, we lock arms with our new Schools Superintendent Dr. Mark Bedell and our Board of Education and commit to livable wages for ALL AACPS employees so that we can fully staff our schools and provide ALL kids with the education that will prepare them for college or career upon graduation.

We commit today that our Police Department, our Fire Department, our State’s Attorney, our Sheriffs, our Office of Emergency Management, and our Department of Health will not rest until gun violence is a rare occurrence in our county.

We commit to eradicating the racism and hate crimes that divide and hold back our workplaces and communities.

We commit to housing our people at all ages and income levels in livable, affordable homes.

We commit to increasing our rates of kindergarten readiness for children of all backgrounds, with universal access to childcare and pre-k, and expanded programming at our libraries.

Today, in this place, we commit to implementing our Green Infrastructure Master Plan, forever protecting 30% of our county land by the year 2030.

We commit to purchasing or producing from renewable sources all county government power by 2030, transforming the county fleet to electric, and creating the infrastructure for a renewable energy future.

We commit to making it easier to do business in this county, by streamlining permitting processes, delivering an educated workforce, and building a 21st century multimodal transportation system.

And today, in this place, we commit to making county government more efficient, more effective, more transparent, and more connected to the communities it serves.

That's a lot of promises, I know. But I want to close by telling you why it's possible.

COVID made us stronger, despite having divided us and having taken the lives of 1,197 of our neighbors. We saw the food distribution lines and learned that our neighbors are vulnerable. We were isolated and learned to communicate in more effective ways. We needed county government to act with urgency, and we proved that we could.

Political threats to the institutions of government showed us what we have to lose. Some may still believe conspiracy theories, but both our town halls and our elections have demonstrated that most people don't want to shrink or attack our government. They just want it to work better.

Here in Anne Arundel County we have an alignment of values and priorities with our outstanding delegation to the Maryland General Assembly, our responsive and forward-thinking Congressional Delegation, and starting on January 18, a Governor whose mother lives in Pasadena and whose commitment to all of us is Leave No One Behind.

Leave No One Behind. To the forgotten souls of Crownsville, those four words have come too late. But to those of us who stand here in their presence, those four words inspire action.

So yes, our brilliant, dedicated, battle-tested public servants, and our passionate, engaged, and battle-tested communities can deliver on these promises.

By placing ourselves in our history as we have done today, and choosing to follow our fundamental instinct to care for one another in recovery, all of us really can heal. We really can bend the arc of history toward justice. We really can become a more humanitarian humanity.

Or, as our signs say at every road entering this land, Anne Arundel County really can become The Best Place - For All.