

## Family & Children First Association

Thank you for welcoming me back today to honor our initial sponsor and leader, George Voinovich.

At this first State of the State – in the midst of an economic crisis – he drew a line in the sand saying he would not let another generation of children falter.

The Senator – whom I will always call “Governor” - became famous for his “line in the sand” quote. Many in this room remember a few other well-worn phrases...

*We need to work harder and smarter and do more with less.*

*Together, we can do it.*

*With God all things are possible.* – the State motto – carved in the State House because of him.

We remember these lines because, as a public servant, he lived *into* these lines. He was mission-driven, but he savored the journey to get there. He loved problem solving. He focused us on measuring results before all the performance management books were written. The Governor always told us, “*if you can’t measure it, don’t do it.*”

Having worked with many, many public officials, I respect the fact that George Voinovich didn’t just set goals, he knew how to accomplish goals. He understood the need for investments, capacity building, communicating value, winning support... all the things that make a priority vision a reality. George Voinovich was a great Executive because he knew how to execute.

One example of matching vision to implementation...under his watch, spending for early childhood increased 40% at a time when overall state spending witnessed the lowest eight-year state spending growth in over 30 years.

As a man, it was easy to respect George.

He loved his family and showed all of us what making family a priority looked like. The way he treated his wife was an example to all of us! George loved Janet.

He also loved Ohio University – an alumni bond we shared.

He established a culture in the Governor's Office that was vibrant, passionate, and pragmatic. He empowered his staff and reined us in when needed. He monitored our progress, wrote endless comments on our memos, and called us on the carpet when we deserved it. Because of who he was, we all worked hard because we wanted to earn his trust and respect. He made us want to serve the public.

The Governor's heart probably always lived in local government. There is a consistent theme in many of his accomplishments --- empowering those closest to service delivery. Respect the need to localize services and build on local relationships. And, the guy hated "unfunded mandates."

You guys – Family & Children First Councils – are a prime example of his philosophy. The counties adopted Councils... it only became law after they were voluntarily present in almost every county (87 or so). The vision and the incentive to work together came first.

Your genesis came from the belief that a neutral table was needed to bring local systems together in a way that could hear family voices. The mission was to bring cross-system data to the table to plan and problem solve and create. The Council built upon “the Cluster” which set the table to work on behalf of individual children. Now, the table was set to work at the programmatic and system level.

#### ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Reduced infant mortality (9.4 per 1,000 live births to 8.7). Improved the immunization rate from 50% to 77% for two-year-olds and to 90% by age three. Achieved one of the lowest percentages of uninsured children nationally.
- Adoption Reform – huge, time-consuming lift. Increased adoptions by 59% and became the role model for a new national law.
- Foster Care reform. Ohio was one of two states who agreed to pilot the “family-to-family initiative” - emphasizing the importance of re-unifying families at a time when the predominant philosophy was to remove children. He understood “trauma” before it had a diagnosis. He knew families could heal, and families healed children.
- Medicaid Waivers – we received permission for some of the first in the nation to allow medically fragile and/or developmental delayed children to be served in their homes. We will never forget the faces and tired eyes of the moms who showed us this was the right public policy.
- Sponsored the largest public-private partnership in the nation focused on wellness and children... Help Me Grow. From tv spots, to billboards, to coupon

books, grocery store check-out magazines, direct-mail post cards and Teddy Bears (P.J. Hugabee) ... the word went out about early childhood brain development and a parents' important role in preparing their child for kindergarten. Mrs. Voinovich was a key messenger for this.

- Created Welcome Home and Early Start home visitation programs – now Help Me Grow.
- Established program to help drug and alcohol-addicted pregnant women get clean and programs for babies born addicted – touching 2,000 babies... way before its time.
- Grew publicly funded child care from 18,000 children to 82,000 children.
- Funded bricks-n-mortar early learning centers in communities across Ohio.
- Made “The First Three Years” a national initiative when Chairman of the National Governor’s Association. Used that platform effectively.
- There are so many more things we did together, and not enough time to do them justice... Partnered with PBS to empower parents in the home, Adopt-A-School, Seniors in the Schools, Wellness Block Grants, Family Stability Incentive Funds, School Readiness Resource Centers, Reclaim Ohio and welfare reform!
- And, we gotta love the bureaucracy busters... rule waivers, eliminated 8 state plans, adopted a universal confidentiality agreement, wiped out 1,426 HHS rules.

- And, in his signature initiative, led Ohio to become the first State in the Nation to fully-fund Head Start. In today's vernacular this means we were the first state in the nation to fully fund preschool for any child living below poverty whose family wanted a slot – an 87% take-up rate. Moved from 6,300 children in 1991 to 66,000 in 1998. (*\$18m to \$181m*)
- For me, his signature accomplishment was to mainstream the notion that learning begins in the womb. He elevated knowledge about early childhood brain development. He made it bi-partisan to invest in children. The Governor also ushered in a series of “culture” change that seem obvious today, but were new guiding principles in the 1990s.
  - Families look and are different, and that's okay. The story he shared in the video about his Uncle showed this understanding.
  - Family voice should be at the table.
  - Home-based services should be part of the mix.
  - Child-serving systems should collaborate, sign joint grant applications, shared funding, shared service models, etc.
  - Data can be shared to inform decisions, and measure performance!
 There are more, but time is almost up.

Beyond stats, many of you remember George and Janet's infectious enthusiasm when he came out and joined your Council meetings. When you took him to programs, he always wound up on the floor with the children! After each visit, I would get a memo saying I had to figure out a way for the State to do more to support you... that we needed to pick up the pace!

As you move forward, remember that George Voinovich believed in your power to set a neutral table that drove discussions using data. He believed in setting goals, creating work plans, and holding people accountable for follow-through. Above all, he believed in listening to parents and families. Continue honoring the core values set for the Councils.... Elevate parental leadership and community involvement. And, do your best for children who deserve your best.

It will always be the professional honor and privilege of my life to have served as George Voinovich's Deputy Chief of Staff. He brought me along on his amazing quest to lift an entire generation of children up to be all that God saw in them. George Voinovich was my mentor, and, in so many ways, a loving support in my life.

He is missed. He is loved. Thank you for allowing his spirit and his vision to remain strong and carry on. You are an important part of his enduring legacy.