

****STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS**

Chairman Brian Hawkins – Hernando County Commission

Good morning and thank you all for being here. It is an honor to stand before you today as Chairman and to report on the State of Hernando County — a county that is growing, stabilizing, and leading with a renewed sense of purpose.

A County on Strong Financial Footing

I am proud to report that Hernando County is on one of the strongest financial foundations in Florida.

Our debt sits at **less than 3%**, one of the lowest levels of any county our size. This level of fiscal discipline allows us to invest confidently in long-term infrastructure, public safety, and quality-of-life projects without burdening future generations.

Recognizing the pressure on working families, your Board has also taken decisive action on property taxes. This Budget Cycle, we voted to set the **maximum millage at the rollback rate minus 3%**, delivering what will be considered **one of the mileage reductions in the State of Florida**. At a time when costs are rising everywhere else, Hernando County is stepping up to provide meaningful relief.

We also froze our fire assessment rates—protecting homeowners—and held landfill fees flat while ensuring these critical services remain fully funded.

Historic Reform to the Capital Budget Process

One of the most impactful changes this year was the overhaul of our capital budgeting process. For more than a decade, the county automatically reserved **20% contingencies** on capital projects — a practice that tied up tens of millions of taxpayer dollars unnecessarily.

We changed that.

By eliminating the blanket 20% reserve and implementing a modern, project-specific approach, we are **saving taxpayers tens of millions of dollars** and ensuring every dollar is tied to actual need, not outdated habits. This is one of the most important fiscal reforms Hernando County has made in years, and I am proud to have led it.

Investing in Infrastructure, Safety & Parks

Because we are financially strong and responsible, we can now focus on delivering what our citizens deserve:

Long-term Infrastructure

We're positioning ourselves to responsibly bond and deliver major regional infrastructure improvements. With low debt and a balanced financial posture, these investments will meet the needs of today without compromising tomorrow.

Public Safety

We continue to strengthen support for our Sheriff, Fire Rescue, and emergency services. Whether it's updated facilities, vehicles, radios, or new technologies, we are ensuring our first responders have what they need to protect this county.

Parks and Recreation

Hernando County is growing, and so is our commitment to recreation and open space. Our low debt ratio gives us the ability to expand and upgrade parks, create new amenities, and support the type of healthy, active lifestyle our families expect.

Strengthening Our Tourism & Coastal Assets

Tourism is a rising economic engine for Hernando County.

We stabilized the bed tax, and we're now using those funds strategically — not only to market our county, but to **preserve the Hernando Beach Tower** and to support the long-term protection of the coastal preserve.

These steps are ensuring that our natural assets remain accessible, protected, and appreciated for generations.

Impact Fees & Growth Stability

We stabilized impact fees to provide predictability for builders, homeowners, and businesses. Stable fees keep Hernando competitive for new investment while ensuring new growth pays for itself and does not fall on existing taxpayers.

A County Moving Forward — Together

The State of Hernando County is strong — not because of any one initiative, but because we are leading with discipline, clarity, and a focus on long-term value for our residents.

We are lowering taxes.

We are reducing debt.

We are reforming outdated systems.

We are investing in the future.

And we are protecting the character that makes this county special.

As Chairman, it is my honor to work with my fellow commissioners, our constitutional officers, our administration, our first responders, and—most importantly—the residents of Hernando County.

We are building a county that honors its past, meets the needs of its present, and prepares boldly for its future.

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless Hernando County.