

**GOVERNOR JAMES S. GILMORE, III**

**INAUGURAL ADDRESS**

**TO THE GOVERNOR AND  
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



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JAMES S. GILMORE, III  
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Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, Members of the General Assembly, My Fellow Virginians,

Virginia's march into the 21<sup>st</sup> century begins today. Virginians have energized me with a contagious spirit and common purpose. We again unite to make history.

It is incumbent upon us to pause and pay tribute to the great Virginians who nurtured our unique heritage. We recognize the awesome responsibility of our inheritance.

We can focus our vision on the next millennium because of the leadership provided by Governor Allen. Governor Allen, your leadership and reforms, have, as you said Wednesday evening, made this a great time to be a Virginian. Governor, Virginia thanks you and your family.

I am humbled to stand in the shadow of Virginia's great Governors. It seems appropriate that I begin my service as Governor by asking you to join me in prayer for wisdom and guidance.

Let us pray.

*Almighty father, we thank you for the many blessings bestowed on us as individuals, families, and Virginians. As we move into a new millennium, we ask you most of all...to unite us as one Virginia. A Virginia where no one is left out. A Virginia where all families will experience renewal in values and commitment of service to our fellow man.*

*I ask for your guidance in leading the Commonwealth of Virginia over the next four years. We look to you for constant inspiration. May our debates be characterized by civility, fairness and justice. May we govern with long term vision.*

*Help me to be open to the ideas of others while adhering to the fundamental belief that your will is done when the people are free to achieve their hopes and to follow their faith and their dreams.*

*With your blessing, we devote ourselves to the goal of improving the lives of all Virginians. AMEN.*

I have been blessed by parents who instilled in me the values of hard work, honesty, and service. Together, with Roxane, we have done our best to pass these values onto our sons, Jay and Ashton. To my family, to Roxane, to Jay and to Ashton, you give me continued strength.

I am a son of Virginia. Born here in the Fan District of Richmond—attended William Fox Public Elementary School. I went to Public Schools in Henrico suburbs; I attended a great Public University of this state; as well as its law school. I have worked in grocery stores, I've been a bank teller, and I have practiced law. I served my country when it needed me in the U.S. Army.

My home has been Virginia all my life, and my life has been the same experience of my fellow Virginians, from all walks of life. Abraham Lincoln said, "God must love the common people because he made so many of them." Well, God has blessed this common man with a truly uncommon chance to serve the people as Governor.

Over the past week, we crisscrossed the state making this a time for all Virginians. We celebrated this inauguration in Abingdon in Western Virginia and in Northern Virginia with a technology showcase and in Hampton Roads home of our great Port.

And we have renewed our heritage of freedom at Gunston Hall, the home of George Mason, and Raleigh Tavern in Williamsburg, where the patriots met, and at Mr. Jefferson's Rotunda at the University of Virginia; and at the place of Patrick Henry's "Liberty or Death" speech at St. John's Church here in Richmond.

It is good to remember on this day these great Governors—Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson, and their historic leadership of our state and our nation.

Now we stand at the end of one century, and the beginning of another and-- in the life of man—the end of one millennium and the beginning of another. Can we in Virginia, the home of the American idea of the rights of man— can we set the course for the future? If we do, we can make Virginia's future worthy of its great past.

We live in a day of great cynicism; which endangers the American spirit. Let us as Virginians reaffirm our commitment to live as a free people— empowered to do what is best for our families, committed to building a more perfect democracy where our votes and voices genuinely affect the course of our public affairs—that we not be frozen by our fears, but enabled to reach for our hopes and dreams.

Virginians from all walks of life have told me that they want their government to empower them to meet their needs. This should not be a request any citizen has to make. But too many citizens feel forgotten and isolated as they pay their income taxes, sales taxes, utility taxes, meals taxes, gas taxes and car taxes. Certainly the people responded to this concern when they voted -- concern that their families were not being full considered in the halls of government.

Today we live within a political culture where people are expected to pay and pay taxes, yet feel detached from the expenditure of their money. Today some in government view citizens as nothing more than a source of revenue—some glory in the growth of government revenue because it means more and more can be spent, without considering the impact that taxation has on the lives of people.

Let us never allow the complexities of billion dollar budgets and highly technical new issues to cloud our minds and prevent us from remembering that it is the people who ultimately pay every dollar.

The young woman working the drive-through window at our local bank should be the light casting common sense on our decisions.

The grandmother whose fixed income doesn't allow her enough money to buy each grandchild a Christmas present sheds light on why we need to give her a tax cut.

The father commuting from Dale City to Dulles with despair in the little time he spends with his children is reason enough for us to make his commute as easy as we can.

Individual Virginians, their daily lives and problems are a light too often dimmed by the process of government. Let their lives guide us to a better Virginia.

Unlike the nation, Virginians have not been complacent in the face of tax increases. Through their votes, our citizens delivered a strong message, not of selfishness, but of an insistent demand that their ability to make decisions over their own lives must be just as important as someone else's decision to spend tax money for someone else's priority.

In the spirit of Patrick Henry, Virginians are saying we don't work for the purpose of funding government. We work to provide for ourselves and our family. We have the right to decide how we spend our own money.

Virginians are generous people, and over the next two years, 40 billions of dollars of the people's money will be spent for public purposes, and most often the spending is needed to lift up the quality of life for all Virginians—but the spending goals of the influential must not overbear the capacity of everyday Virginians to lift themselves up to independent lives. Who speaks for these Virginians? The Governor of all the people must—and I will!

Since the first Virginians settled at Jamestown, Virginia has been a shining example of the right way to govern. To be that beacon for our nation and the world is our aspiration and our fate. I believe at the end of this century and the beginning of another, history looks to us again. As with every generation we are challenged to prove that government can be the servant of the people and not their master.

Let there be no doubt, I am here because working Virginians embraced this very message. They delivered a clear mandate. Now we must deliver on our promise to the people.

The “No Car Tax” pledge grew from the understanding that working families would no longer allow themselves to be left out while watching government prosper.

We have a moral obligation to help families by eliminating this harsh tax on the mobility of people in a modern mobile world. I do not care how they spend their tax savings. It’s not government’s business how private citizens spend their earnings. My desire is to give them the opportunity to make that decision.

My determination to make government work for the people is just as intense as my determination to provide tax relief.

As we improve government services, I will have the honor and privilege of working with one of Virginia’s most valuable assets. Our state employees need to know that they march by my side as we lead Virginia into the next century.

State employees must have the resources to perform their job. Experience in managing public servants has taught me many lessons. I know productivity requires an atmosphere of high morale. Ours is a united mission.

We have an ambitious agenda. On Monday night, I will outline that agenda before the Joint Session of the General Assembly. However, some key items deserve mention today.

Welfare reform is working. We will fully implement these reforms. I will veto legislation to weaken current reform in any way, shape or form.

Violent crime continues to decline but we will not stop strengthening criminal laws and punishment until it can be declared that the war has been won. Our administration commits to protect natural resources, build a better

transportation system, and serve Virginians who use state health and long term care services.

I am passionate in my love for Virginia. With this passion, I will recruit new jobs to Virginia to give new opportunities for our young people, and to improve their quality of life.

We have exciting plans to bolster our growing information technology industries. The economic return these efforts generate will benefit every single Virginian. Virginia is the Information Technology state!

Education requires urgent attention.

I have yet to meet the first public official who is not sincere in support for public education. Virginians are united in support for public education. With all of us seeking the same goal, we can certainly do more for the children of Virginia.

My vision is to demand no less than excellence from our public schools.

No goal could be more noble as we advance into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century than making Virginia's system of public education, from Kindergarten to post graduate, the very best.

Virginians gave us their strong endorsement to move forward on two fronts that will have significant impact as we strive for excellence in education. Voters told us to implement the Standards of Learning and hire 4,000 additional teachers. We are well prepared to move forward.

While raising expectations for Virginia's public schools, more teachers must be hired. No student should be shortchanged in the instruction required to master the Standards of Learning.

Crowded classrooms test the limits of even our best teachers. We are going to reduce class size!



While higher education has become the topic of healthy public debate, global leaders recognize Virginia as home to some of the worlds best colleges and universities.

Higher education faces new challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century because Virginia lacks a formal policy or direction on higher education. We need to chart our course for the future and give direction to our Colleges and Universities. A Blue Ribbon Commission on Higher Education in Virginia will help us chart that course. I am going to sign an Executive Order creating such a commission right now!

Let us advance into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century united, leaving behind the 20<sup>th</sup> Century barrier of regionalism.

The success of Northern Virginia depends on the success of Southwest Virginia.

The prosperity of Hampton Roads depends on the prosperity of Southside.

The standard of living in Central Virginia depends on the standard of living in the Shenandoah Valley.

We are one Virginia. Let us forever be united in common purpose.

At every juncture in time, issues come and go. We must be ever mindful of our obligation to lead, fully focused on our vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Governors and legislators are citizens temporarily given power to perform the awesome requirements of self Government. Governors make mistakes and so will I, but be sure no mistake will be of intentional origin.

Democracy is a fragile institution. I am intent on strengthening that institution, so when it passes to Virginia's next Governor, it will be a little less fragile.

Let no person underestimate our commitment to the vision of a prosperous Virginia filled with strong families and optimism. We march united as one Virginia into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We go forward with the idealism that people

can define and control their own lives, and live independent lives which is the essence of free men and women.

As we go forth, into this new century and millennium—we can have courage and confidence that we can fulfill our hopes and dash our fears, and we can control change, and make it our servant and that the ideals and lessons of our great past can light the way for the future in an even greater Virginia.

May God bless the Commonwealth of Virginia and the United States of America.....



