

GOVERNOR JAMES S. GILMORE III

**STATE OF THE
COMMONWEALTH ADDRESS**

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



SENATE DOCUMENT NO. 1B

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
RICHMOND
1998**

**State of the Commonwealth Address
Governor James S. Gilmore III**

January 19, 1998

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, Members of the General Assembly, Justices of the Supreme Court, honored guests, ladies and gentlemen:

Let me extend my warm greetings and assurances of good will to all of you, whatever your party, whatever your philosophy, and wherever you come from in this Commonwealth. I know that each of you will work hard to represent the citizens of your respective legislative districts. And I assure you that I will do the same for all the people as their Governor.

Lt. Governor Hager, I understand you gaveled the Senate to Order today like an experienced veteran. We have long been friends and I am eager to put your wise counsel to work and know you are going to make many great contributions over these next four years.

Attorney General Earley, we have worked closely together and as my lawyer, you know we are going to have to work closer than ever during this administration. Your leadership in the Senate is going to be missed but more than compensated through your service as Attorney General.

The inaugural festivities, which took place this past week, were very special to my family and me. It was

special because so many Virginians from all walks of life came together as one.

Virginians have many hopes and dreams. Of all the stories written about the inauguration, my favorite is about a father and a son.

When asked why he came to Richmond on Saturday, Elmer Haas of Franklin County said he came with his 11 year old son, Michael, because "Maybe he'll get some ambition, and someday he'll be up there on the podium himself."

But, what makes this story so special is that his son responded to his father, and said his dream was not to be at the podium, his dream was to one day walk on Mars. Actually, to a Governor, this podium sometimes seems like Mars!

But Michael, I hope someday maybe you can do both of those things. You and so many other fathers and sons, mothers and daughters in Virginia make us proud. I pledge to serve all of you to help make all of your dreams, whatever they may be, come true.

This 1998 General Assembly has already earned a significant place in the annals of democracy's oldest legislative body.

The House of Delegates followed the example set by the Virginia Senate two years ago when neither party could lay claim to majority status. You have wisely laid the foundation for effective governance and public policy.

Hopefully, we are all reminded that we are only temporary servants of the people and that all power is

fleeting. This brings home our duty and responsibility to the people from whom all power flows—and from whom all power should flow.

It is our obligation and responsibility to fulfill the promise that the people of Virginia expect of us during the remaining 55 days of this 1998 Session of the General Assembly.

We must reaffirm today that we are the descendents of great men and great women whose vision changed the world. We are obligated to pay our debt to these Virginians of vision by following their principled respect for the rights of each and every citizen.

My path to this Capitol was a journey of reflection and inspiration as I traveled to all parts of Virginia and the hallowed grounds where our founding fathers ignited the flame of freedom.

We are the descendents of Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, George Mason and the Virginians who gathered at Raleigh Tavern to plan the strategy which won us the rights and freedoms denied to those colonial Virginians.

At St. Johns Church , words cannot express the emotions that touched each of us who witnessed the re-enactment of Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty or give me Death" speech. In that speech, Governor Henry spoke in eloquent anger against high-handed arrogance.

As it was true then, it remains true today: arrogance is a dangerous vice—one that breaks the trust of the people.

We are the keepers of this inheritance. Let us resolve to treat each other with honor, dignity and respect.

We must remember that we have no higher purpose than to govern as servants of the people, never crossing the line where our decisions cause them to be servants of government.

As we gather this evening, in duty to our past and people, let us agree that there are major goals that unite Virginia, among them are:

*** Tax reduction.**

*** High standards of excellence in education.**

*** Zero tolerance for violent crime.**

*** Stewardship of our natural resources.**

*** Improved transportation to provide mobility for our citizens.**

This is what the overwhelming majority of our citizens have asked us to do through the votes they cast last year.

The people have spoken and defined our jobs as Governor and members of the General Assembly. Our challenge is to determine how best to reach their goals. Let us act to keep faith with the people.

Tax relief was the strong mandate of the people in 1998. We are going to cut the car tax.

A Governor of Virginia once said:

"Tax reform lies at the very heart of Virginia's progress"

Believe it or not, those are the words of Governor Harry F. Byrd and he spoke them in 1927.

Progress is dependent on maximizing the creative entrepreneurship of a free people. Progress is not achieved by increasing the size of government, but unleashing the potential of a productive people. Every penny government taxes is a tax on our productive potential.

The people expect us to provide tax relief and they will hold accountable those who would stand in the way.

Later this week, I will present legislation and the necessary budget amendments to implement the Personal Property Tax Relief Act of 1998.

On behalf of the citizens of Virginia, I ask you to pass this legislation. It is the people's priority, it is my priority, and I am confident ...the priority of this General Assembly.

My staff and talented Virginians experienced in finance and policy has worked tirelessly to explore every option to abolish the car tax. One Virginian has been essential to this task.

I want thank Secretary of Finance, Ron Tillett, for his significant contribution and wise counsel. Ron, please accept my sincere gratitude.

We understand the reality that 135 local governments collect this tax in their own unique ways.

We have reviewed vital information that was not available last year to accurately measure the impact of my no car tax promise.

To the extent new information reveals that Virginians pay even more car taxes than originally estimated, the public will get even more of their money back. That is good news!

I'm always amazed when I hear someone refer to the "cost" of tax relief. So, let me repeat what I have said many times: Taxes that are unfair or excessive, place a burden on working families. To the extent we can return even more money to the people than we first hoped---that is a major achievement!

We have conducted an exhaustive and deliberate effort to keep faith with the people of Virginia and eliminate the tax on cars, trucks, vans and motorcycles.

While the actual legislation, the Personal Property Tax Relief Act of 1998, will be ready for introduction on Friday, I want you and Virginians to know it will have these fundamental components:

*** The Plan eliminates the property tax on the nearly 5 million vehicles owned by Virginians.**

***It phases out the tax on the first \$20,000 of value over 5 years beginning January 1, 1998.**

***It replaces, dollar for dollar, all local revenue now collected through this tax and necessary local administrative costs.**

***Because many citizens will have already paid their property taxes by the time this legislation takes**

effect, I propose making direct payments to the taxpayers for 1998.

***In future years, the plan provides payments by vouchers which taxpayers will send to their locality when they receive personal property tax bills. These vouchers will serve to reduce the amount that taxpayers pay each year as the plan is fully implemented.**

***The costs of the plan will be paid from economic growth and will not require a tax increase. This is a dividend to taxpayers who have labored and generated revenue growth far above appropriated expenditures.**

The Personal Property Tax Relief Act of 1998 will be our vehicle to keep faith with the people's mandate. My pen is ready, and the people are eager for the day I sign this legislation.

Virginia has a proud tradition of fiscal management, and our coveted triple "AAA" bond rating must pass from generation to generation. It is the foundation of our economic success.

I wish each of you could have joined me at George Mason University for the Inaugural Technology Showcase. Exciting, almost unimaginable new technology was displayed by Virginians from all corners of our state.

Our daily lives and ways of conducting business have changed dramatically over the past two decades. Virginia is in the forefront of those changes.

Virginia is THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY STATE.

For us to earn this title, we must focus on two objectives:

*** Leading the nation as the premier example of a government maximizing information technology to save money and better serve the people.**

*** Fostering an economic climate that fuels the engine of our existing high tech industry, and creating an economic environment that is a powerful magnet, attracting new technology, investment and business to Virginia.**

I will soon announce the appointment of a cabinet level technology officer.

I will also assemble a 21st Century Science and Technology Task Force to advise me and develop proposals to make Virginia the premier state realizing the potential benefits of technology.

The availability of a strong, qualified workforce is essential to our future success in this area. A top priority of my Administration will be to develop effective workforce training strategies and programs to fulfill the needs of industry.

Our economic development strategy will work for growth in all sectors of our economy. Secretary of commerce and Trade, Barry DuVal, will update the Opportunity Virginia strategic economic development plan to lead us into the 21st Century.

I hope you will join me to place special emphasis on tourism promotion that better centers on the history that is Virginia's great gift to share with the world. Is

**there a better place for people to visit than Virginia?
No there isn't.**

While we work to attract new jobs we must never neglect the workers and businesses that have long been the backbone of Virginia's economy.

Tobacco farmers deserve our support as they face an uncertain future. I pledge the powers of my office to help prevent them from being innocent victims of federal tobacco legislation.

Let me be clear on this subject. I will not tolerate tobacco being sold to children. I will continue to work for effective enforcement of our prohibition on selling tobacco to minors.

My economic development goal is record growth and investment with direct benefits to every region.

Economic growth is a fundamental goal and can only be judged a success when taxpayers and families have more money to spend in pursuit of their own dreams.

Allow me to speak for a moment as a father about education. The title of father, being Jay and Ashton's Dad, is all the motivation any Governor needs to raise the level of education for each of Virginia's sons and daughters.

While on the subject of education, Virginia has a First Lady who is a teacher as well as a great wife and mother. Roxane inspires and educates me about the reality of our classrooms.

I am also proud of my choice of Secretary of Education, Wil Bryant. His experience in this important area will be invaluable to our efforts.

My education priorities are a firm commitment to the new Standards of Learning and hiring 4,000 new teachers.

Adoption of the standards was the first step on the path to excellence in education. We must now proceed down that path with a sense of urgency. The next step is training teachers on the clear expectations we have set for students.

Student testing and Reports Cards on School Performance are necessary measurements of how well schools are teaching and students are learning.

If there are those who think that a change in administration is an opportunity to re-open the debate on the Standards of Learning: Hear me loud and clear....Virginia will not retreat.

With budget authority to start hiring the first wave of 4,000 new teachers, we will begin to meet the instructional needs of Virginia students.

Not long ago, I spoke to an elementary school principal in eastern Henrico.

I asked him if he had room for five new teachers. He told me he could find a place for every teacher I could give him.

The time has come for this General Assembly to put your stamp of approval on Charter Schools. Throughout the nation, a consensus has emerged among liberals and conservatives, Republicans and Democrats, including President Clinton, in favor of public charter schools. Charter schools are an innovative way for

parents and community leaders to come together to strengthen their local public schools systems. Last year, because we failed to enact charter school legislation, Virginia lost millions in federal funds. Each dollar lost represents a lost educational opportunity for our children. We cannot afford to make the same mistake again. I am asking this Assembly to open the door of opportunity for our children by sending me a public charter schools bill.

We also need to provide teachers with Teacher Liability Immunity Insurance.

In higher education, the freeze on college tuition must continue for at least two more years.

I support increasing faculty salaries, increasing TAG grants to \$2,600 and a higher level of student tuition assistance.

Let me say a word about amendments to increase spending for higher education over and above the amount recommended in the budget bill. We have for too long spent whatever money could be found to fund various projects, most of them worthy, on our college campuses. This spending has taken place in the void of a coherent state policy and agreed upon goals for higher education.

Responsible stewardship of public funds dictates that we adopt goals first. Then and only then, we can responsibly appropriate funds needed to achieve our goals. We must resist the temptation to make commitments, which at this time may or may not be justified, by the goals we will soon have in place for higher education.

It is for this reason that I took time during my inaugural address to sign Executive Order Number One creating the Blue Ribbon Commission on Higher Education. We urgently need a blueprint and 21st century goals for Virginia's public colleges and universities.

Public safety is another of state government's most sacred responsibilities.

Tonight we are saddened by the death of Trooper Jessica Jean Cheney who was killed in the line of duty. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the friends and family. Trooper Cheney's mother who is a state police dispatcher and her father who is a weight enforcement officer remind us that the real credit for a safe Virginia rests with those who are on the front lines. We are forever in their debt. I ask all to pay tribute to Trooper Cheney and to her family with a moment of silence.

All of us worked over the past four years to turn the tide against violent crime. We abolished parole and we reformed the juvenile justice system.

Our work is not complete. Every time an innocent Virginian falls prey to the lawless, we are reminded just how much more we must do to create a safe Virginia. My new Secretary of Public Safety, Gary Aronhalt will be my partner in our anti-crime effort.

We must finish the work we began when we abolished parole. That reform stopped the revolving prison door that put dangerous criminals on the street after serving only a fraction of their sentence.

We must now do the same with the jailhouse door. Too many violent criminals are allowed to roam the streets while awaiting trial on bail. These criminals then often

intimidate witnesses and pose a general threat to the community. I ask you to work with me in passing effective bail reform—as has been done on the federal level—to make our streets safer.

We must also renew our efforts to protect our children against the scourge of drugs and gang violence. Over the coming months, I will work to establish a new partnership of state and local law enforcement, private enterprise, volunteers and social services to wage a new war on drugs and violence. Essential to that task is the funding currently in the budget for weed and seed. That program targets some of the most crime-ridden areas of our Commonwealth. It unites community leaders with police and social services to weed out criminal elements in the community and sow seeds of hope.

We must strengthen the hand of law enforcement in protecting our kids. Gangs pose a terrible threat to our children. Too often, when a child goes down the wrong path, it is because an adult led him there. That is why I will ask you to enact legislation providing stiff penalties for any adult who recruits a minor into a gang.

We must also break the link between drugs and violence. I propose tough penalties be enacted for drug dealers or users who are in possession of a weapon.

And finally, as part of our anti-drug message, I am directing my full cabinet to review all state agencies and to prepare a report for ways that state government can work to join the fight against drugs.

The decades long effort to close Lorton Prison is not yet a reality. I ask you to work with me to close Lorton Prison as soon as possible.

We must work as one Virginia to fight alcohol and drug impaired driving. We should improve current efforts to have safe roads by funding the new sheriff's deputies for rural Virginia.

A safe Virginia requires us to do more than focus on crime. Together with my new Secretary of Natural Resources, John Paul Woodley, we will strive to create a Virginia with healthy air and clean water marked by a responsible stewardship of God's gift of our natural resources.

As Attorney General, I came to the General Assembly and asked for changes in the powers of that office to aggressively prosecute those who violate the laws that protect our natural resources. I believed then, as I believe now, that putting such a law on the books will send a powerful message to those who think they can violate our environmental statutes with impunity.

Now that I am Governor I ask that you heed my call to strengthen our environmental enforcement and give our new Attorney General, Mark Earley, the tools he needs.

I am sure we agree that the Chesapeake Bay is one of our most precious natural resources. For generations, we neglected proper care and attention to the Bay.

Over the past decade, Virginia and all states bordering the Bay and its tributaries have made monumental commitments to restore it to a healthy body of water. Generations of neglect require at least a generation of critical care to the Chesapeake Bay.

Fund the \$63 million dollar Chesapeake Bay budget initiative and we will be the generation known for passing on a cleaner Bay to the next generation.

I applaud localities that have initiated creative new ways to enhance their natural beauty. We need to provide localities with more flexibility to provide incentives for individuals to preserve and protect the environment. That is why I will ask you to pass a package of bills allowing localities the option of providing tax incentives to create or preserve wetlands and riparian buffers, to make environmentally responsible improvements to land, and to establish scenic easements to better preserve the beauty of rural Virginia.

My Secretary of Transportation, Shirley Ybarra, will also be a part of our pro-environment administration. When cars sit in congested traffic, they pollute our air. This is one reason we have much work to do in building a 21st Century transportation system.

We must fight for Virginia's rightful funding from the federal government as our citizens continue to pay taxes into the federal highway trust fund that is intended to improve Virginia's roads and highways.

We will support Senator John Warner's determined leadership to obtain Virginia's rightful share of the federal highway trust fund.

There is no time to waste in getting on with the construction of key projects. Among them, the Woodrow Wilson Bridge, the Hampton Roads Third Crossing, Route 288, and Virginia's Smart Highway.

Let me further state my support for Virginia's Public-Private Transportation Act. I stand firmly behind this important law and will fight attempts to weaken it.

My Secretary of Health and Human Resources, Claude Allen, is the grandson of a man who lived to be 114 years old.

Claude recently said that dealing with his families' longevity, illnesses, the challenges of childcare, and poverty, has sensitized him to the needs of people. These experiences are why you will come to view him as one of Virginia's great Secretaries of Health and Human Resources.

Helping people means a solid commitment to the welfare reforms you enacted during the past administration. The implementation of that reform is ongoing. We must never return to the failed welfare system of the past.

As I said Saturday, my veto pen is ready should any bill reach my desk to weaken or retreat from current welfare reforms.

My administration takes seriously the concerns voiced by so many Virginians about managed health care programs. We need a level, fair and just playing field and this must one our top priorities when our attention is focused on the health care of Virginians.

I am committed to a Virginia Kids Care program to better address the neglected needs of too many young

Virginians. This should not be a part of expanded Medicare inviting federal control, but a Virginia program controlled by Virginians.

We have made great progress with the help of the General Assembly in recent years in the collection of child support. We must do even more.

The people who make welfare reform work and collect child support are examples of the people who implement and administer the programs created by this General Assembly.

My Secretary of Administration, Bryan Slater, is charged with helping me create the best possible work situation for these and other state employees.

When I said state employees are by my side in Virginia's advance to the 21st Century, I meant that from the bottom of my heart. As a ten year public servant, I understand the frustrations they face.

Secretary Slater will soon initiate an outreach effort to all state employees so that they can tell us in detailed and specific terms what I can do to make their jobs easier and create a more productive working environment.

Tonight I have outlined my priorities as you and I conduct the people's business over the next 55 days. Time does not permit me to address every issue or include all my ideas of how we create a better Virginia.

I know that each Senator and Delegate has great ideas to place on the table for policy debate and deliberation. None of us have all the solutions and not all of our ideas will prove to be the best ideas.

History will record our actions by the way in which we change the life of working Virginians.

Whatever success I have had in politics and government, is in large measure because I have always had an open door. My door is open to you and to all Virginians.

We are one Virginia and we must work now as one government.

We are so fortunate to live in a time of awesome potential.

Will all young Virginians one day look to us and be able to say, that we helped create for them...a better future? Not just opportunity for entrepreneurship and property and health. Not just material wealth, but in the spiritual wealth of a society free to live as independent people.

These questions should guide our conduct and actions for as long as we hold the temporary power of public office.

Nothing can or will be more powerful than Virginians moving united toward common goals. We are one Virginia with a common vision. We will leave no Virginian behind in our march to the 21st Century.

Tonight marks the beginning of my journey as the people's Governor. I extend now my hand to all Virginians to join me on this important journey. I ask for your prayers and your continued support as we move forward in making Virginia a better place for all.

On Saturday, I remarked that I was a common man with an uncommon chance to serve the people as Governor.

I pledge to you to do my best to be faithful to that opportunity.

Thank you.

