

**ADDRESS OF
GOVERNOR TERENCE R. MCAULIFFE**

**The State of the Commonwealth
Address to the Joint Assembly
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Speaker Howell, Leader Norment, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Virginia General Assembly, thank you for inviting me to speak to you this evening. And to the people of Virginia who are with us tonight or watching from home, thank you for the honor of serving you as this Commonwealth's 72nd Governor.

We are joined here this evening by Lieutenant Governor Ralph Northam and Attorney General Mark Herring.

These two Virginia leaders have been great partners as we work to build a stronger, more open, and more prosperous Virginia.

And of course, our First Lady is with us this evening.

Dorothy – your work expanding access to healthy nutrition, promoting national service and making our Commonwealth more welcoming to military families has made our state a better place to live. Thank you for your leadership and for your partnership over these past 28 years.

We are free to meet here tonight because of the brave men and women at the federal, state and local levels who risk their lives to keep us safe.

The head of the Virginia National Guard, General Timothy Williams is with us here tonight – thank you and your troops for your service to Virginia and to our nation.

We are also joined this evening by one family that embodies the service and commitment our men and women in uniform and their loved ones make to protect our country and our Commonwealth.

Shawn Talmadge is a key member of our Commonwealth's emergency management and disaster response team. He is also a Lieutenant Colonel in the Virginia National Guard. While we were celebrating the holidays with our families this past year, Shawn was separated from his on a deployment to Kuwait with the 29th Infantry Division.

Shawn's wife Melana and their two children are with us tonight. I hope you will join me in thanking them and every Virginian who serves and sacrifices in uniform to keep us safe.

Before we begin, let us pause for a moment of silence in memory of our friend and colleague Chuck Colgan.

Senator Colgan was the longest-serving member of the Virginia Senate and a true example of a Virginia gentleman. He will be dearly missed.

On this day, three years ago, we met on the steps of this historic building, and I was honored to take the oath to serve the people of Virginia as their governor.

That was a day of celebration. But significant work lay ahead.

Virginians hired each of us to work for them here in Richmond to solve problems and make their lives better. In a state as large and diverse as ours, that can be a daunting task at any time. But we began our partnership at a unique moment in our Commonwealth's history.

For years, Virginia's economy had floated atop a massive wave of federal spending that created millions of jobs and brought billions in economic activity to Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads. That relationship created economic opportunity, but it also made us overly reliant on federal spending.

We all know what happened next – as other states began their climb out of the Great Recession, congressional dysfunction led to defense cuts and sequestration that severely hampered Virginia's ability to regain its footing.

Sequestration cost Virginia \$9.8 billion and 154,000 jobs between 2011 and 2013 alone. And unless congress takes action, another more severe round of sequestration will hit our economy this October.

And so as we began our work three years ago today, we had a choice. We could sit back and watch external forces limit our growth – or we could work together to open a new chapter of opportunity.

We needed to build a new Virginia economy that would grow and create opportunity no matter what happens in Washington, Beijing, or anywhere else in the world.

We needed to redouble our focus on economic development and make Virginia more attractive to job creators in sectors like cyber security, bioscience, data analytics, advanced manufacturing, and autonomous vehicles.

We needed to align every public system, from transportation to public education to workforce development, with the needs of a 21st Century economy.

We needed to build a more open and welcoming climate to attract families and job creators from every walk of life.

And so we got to work.

Recognizing that 95 percent of the world's customers live outside the U.S., we took the Virginia story to 19 countries in every corner of the globe. We took every meeting we could get and convinced job creators to bring new operations to our Commonwealth, or to buy the world-class goods, agricultural products, and services our businesses create.

And those efforts are paying off.

As of tonight, we've helped close 853 new economic development deals worth \$14.23 billion in capital investment. That is nearly \$5 billion more than any administration in Virginia history.

And let's start the year out with a bang. Tonight, I am proud to announce that Navy Federal Credit Union has agreed to locate 1,400 new jobs and invest \$102 million in Frederick County.

I hope you will join me in welcoming Navy Federal CEO Cutler Dawson and Vice Chair of the Frederick County Board of Supervisors Gene Fisher, who are here tonight to celebrate this major victory for our Commonwealth.

And, I am particularly pleased that we beat out the state of Florida for this important project.

Bringing new projects like this one to Virginia is critically important. In fact, I just took the red-eye back after two days of business outreach in California, and we are closing in on bringing thousands of new jobs and billions in investment to Virginia, which we will announce this year.

But we also need to build lasting infrastructure that will generate even more jobs and economic activity for generations to come.

And, working together, we are doing just that.

Last year we passed a budget that invested more than \$1 billion in public education, the highest level of investment in Virginia history.

We are transforming our K-12 system to prepare students for the jobs of the 21st Century, with a particular emphasis on modernizing the SOLs and how we deliver high school education. I want to recognize Delegate Tag Greason, and the late Senator John Miller for their partnership in transforming our Commonwealth's education system.

Thanks to the leadership of our First Lady, we are connecting more students with the nutrition they need to thrive in the classroom and grow healthy minds and bodies. Virginia students are hungry to learn, but they cannot learn if they are just plain hungry. That is why I am so proud that, last year alone, Virginia schools served 5 million more school breakfasts than the year before.

That success would not be possible without leaders who recognize that strong, accessible nutrition programs are essential to a quality education. Dr. Scott Brabrand is one of those leaders. As Superintendent of Lynchburg City Schools, Dr. Brabrand helped oversee a 20 percent increase in school breakfast participation in just one year, adding 550 students to the program. He has also thrown his support behind after-school and summer meal programs to help ensure that the more than 6,000 students who rely on school meals do not go hungry when classes end.

Let's welcome Scott here this evening and thank him for his leadership on behalf of our students.

Over several sessions we have reformed Virginia's workforce development system and incentivized institutions and students to complete degrees and credentials in high-demand industries.

And this work comes at a critical time. Virginia is unique – our problem is not that we don't have high-paying jobs available – it's that we don't have the trained workers to fill those jobs. Last year,

Virginia saw 149,000 jobs open in the technology sector alone. And we have 36,000 jobs open today in cyber security.

Parents – listen to me. The average starting pay for these jobs is \$88,000. Our mission is to prepare students with the skill sets to fill these jobs so they can lead our economy into the future.

We helped veterans get into the private workforce faster by offering workforce credit for military training.

We expanded the Virginia Values Veterans program to help more than 20,000 veterans find work.

We funded the opening of two new veterans care centers so that Virginia men and women who have served in uniform no longer have to wait for the federal government to get its act together to get the health care they need.

We launched “Healthy Virginia” to extend services to 10,000 Virginians with serious mental illness, and help 378,000 Virginians access health insurance through the Affordable Care Act.

We took great strides forward on transportation, undertaking significant projects in high-traffic corridors across Virginia like I-95, I-64 and I-66.

We passed the Smartscale prioritization process so that decisions are based on data about the benefits to taxpayers and our economy, not backroom deal-making.

After several disastrous public-private partnership deals that cost Virginians hundreds of millions, we transformed the process and brought a taxpayer-first approach to negotiating these deals. The results of our efforts are clear.

If we had followed the old process, the I-66 outside-the-beltway project could have cost taxpayers \$1 billion. By reforming our system and strengthening how we negotiate, the final deal will not require Virginians to invest one single tax dollar. And, the winning consortium has agreed to include an additional \$800 million in private funding for transit, \$350 million in corridor improvements, and a \$500 million payment to the Commonwealth at closing. Our reforms and leadership resulted in a \$2.5 billion turnaround on this one project alone.

We won a \$165 million federal grant for the \$1.4 billion Atlantic Gateway Project, which will unlock travel and commerce on road and rail all across the Commonwealth.

We returned the Port of Virginia to financial solvency and made record investments to position our Commonwealth as a leader in global trade for generations to come.

As a result, the port, which had suffered seven straight years of operating losses and was once unwisely put up for sale, is now profitable and leading the nation in import volume growth.

We ensured a bright future for private spaceflight in Virginia by strengthening the MARS Spaceport.

We leapt from the back of the pack on cyber security, bioscience, autonomous vehicles, and renewable energy to become a national leader in these cutting edge industries.

I am particularly proud of the work we have done on cyber security. This is a critical issue for Virginia. Last year, we experienced more than 70 million cyber-attacks, or one every 4 seconds. We have a responsibility to protect our data from cyber criminals and to realize the economic opportunity this industry presents. As Chair of the National Governors Association I have made cyber security the centerpiece of my agenda – and I am proud to say that Virginia is leading the way.

We made Virginia safer by reforming our juvenile justice system, and posting the lowest adult recidivism rate in America.

We took action to protect Virginia from the threat of climate change and sea-level rise, winning a \$120 million federal resiliency grant for Norfolk and other communities in Hampton Roads. That is the largest grant given to any state in America.

We have made great strides protecting Virginia's historic and natural assets as well. After 30 years, Attorney General Herring and our team finally reached an agreement with DuPont on the largest natural resource settlement in Virginia history – bringing \$50 million back to Virginia to improve our environment in Waynesboro and the surrounding area.

We undertook an initiative to preserve 1,000 Virginia natural and historic treasures for the enjoyment of generations to come and we accomplished it one full year ahead of schedule.

And tonight, I am proud to announce that we have finalized negotiations with the United States Army to expand Virginia's historic Fort Monroe so that Virginians and visitors can fully explore its unique place in our nation's history.

These three years have been defined by significant substantive accomplishments on one key policy issue after another. Those achievements are not victories for one party or another. They are victories for Virginia. We achieved them by working together and doing what it takes to build a new Virginia economy from the bottom up.

And if you look at the numbers, it's clear we are making substantial progress.

When I took office, Virginia's unemployment rate was 5.4 percent. Over the course of this administration it fell to as low as 3.7 percent, which represented the steepest decline in any Governor's term in 32 years.

Today, as more and more Virginians respond to our strengthening economy by returning to the labor force, our 4.2 percent rate is 1.2 percent lower than when we began our work together and the second lowest rate of any major state.

In total, Virginia has created 167,100 net new jobs over the past three years.

These are important indicators that our efforts are working and that our trajectory is indisputably upward.

But we should also remember that these numbers represent real people, with real stories. I would like to take a moment to tell you about a few people who have benefited from actions we have taken over the past few years.

One of the proudest moments of my life came on April 22nd of last year when I stood on the steps of this Capitol and brought Virginia into line with 40 other states that restore the civil rights of people who made mistakes and served their time.

That action was greeted by cheers from some corners of this room and lawsuits from others. But the principles of redemption and second chances are essential to a healthy society and I was proud to fight for them.

Since that day, my team has worked hard to restore the rights of individuals who have served their time and reentered society to build productive lives.

And tonight I am proud to announce that, thanks to those efforts, we have given more than 127,000 Virginians a second chance at citizenship since I took office.

I want you to meet one of them tonight. Terry Garrett was born in 1968 and grew up in Northern Virginia. After two decades of substance abuse and frequent incarcerations, she found sobriety and turned her life around.

Today, in addition to her role as a loving mother and grandmother, Terry is a respected community leader and a sponsor to recovering addicts and former offenders.

Terry made mistakes. She served her time. She became a productive member of her community. But our policy of disenfranchisement made her a second-class citizen.

Until last year.

After Terry's rights were restored in August, she walked into a voting booth for the first time in her life this past November, regaining her place in our society and showing all of us how powerful a second chance can be.

Terry is with us tonight on behalf of so many Virginians who are proud to have a voice in their Commonwealth's future again. I hope you will join me in welcoming her to the Capitol.

When men and women volunteer to fight for our country in the armed forces, we have a responsibility to support them when they return to civilian life.

Unfortunately, too many end their military service and face enormous challenges and too few resources or opportunities for success. Many find themselves without a place to call home.

Shortly after my administration began, First Lady Michelle Obama sent a challenge to the Mayors of our nation – to end veteran homelessness in their cities.

I can still remember the look on Secretary John Harvey's face when I suggested that we take that challenge, not just for Virginia cities but for our entire Commonwealth.

But he and the fantastic teams at the Department of Veterans Services, Social Services and Housing and Community Development got to work finding safe, affordable and permanent housing for our homeless veterans.

And on Veterans Day 2015, I was proud to announce that Virginia was the first state in the nation to be certified as functionally ending veteran homelessness.

That accomplishment should be a source of pride for all of us – particularly when you meet the men and women who have benefited the most.

Deotis Roberts is with us tonight from Chesapeake. He bravely served in the Army Airborne in several missions, including Operation Desert Storm. Like too many others, Deotis faced challenges when he returned.

After nearly 11 years without a reliable roof over his head, Deotis finally received permanent housing thanks to the great work of our Virginia public servants.

Deotis, thank you for joining us this evening and for your service to our nation.

These Virginians, and their stories, are an uplifting reminder of the impact we can have on people's lives when we work together. As I have traveled Virginia and met the families we serve, I have taken great pride in the progress we have made for them. But despite our enormous strides, we still have problems to solve.

The agenda I present to you this evening builds on the work we have done together over the past three years. Every single proposal is tied directly to building a new Virginia economy that creates opportunity for families from every walk of life and every corner of the Commonwealth.

One of the most severe challenges facing our Commonwealth today is how we care for our fellow Virginians who suffer from behavioral health disorders. As too many recent tragic events have taught us, our current system is too fragmented and underfunded.

The budget I submitted to you last month includes new funding to allow our community services boards to offer same-day service to Virginians experiencing a behavioral health crisis. This will allow our CSBs to serve Virginians rather than turning them away, at risk to their health and the health of others.

One result of our challenged mental health system is that too many individuals who suffer from behavioral health disorders wind up in jail, where there are not enough resources to properly care for them. To solve that problem, I have proposed legislation and funding to expand mental health screenings in local and regional jails.

As we work to prevent future tragedies, I have proposed legislation giving the Virginia Board of Corrections the authority to investigate deaths in Virginia jails so that its role is clear if one does occur.

Before we move on I want to thank Senator Creigh Deeds for his vision and leadership on this important issue.

We cannot fully reform our mental health system without tackling the massive epidemic Virginia and states across the nation are confronting with respect to heroin and prescription drugs. In 2015, we saw more than 800 of our fellow Virginians, of all ages and walks of life, die due to opioid addiction and overdose – and when final data is available, we expect total deaths in 2016 to have exceeded 1,000. Tackling this problem is a matter of life and death for people in every corner of Virginia.

My budget proposal includes \$5.3 million for increased substance abuse disorder services and new tools to prevent overdose deaths. I have also introduced a package of legislative reforms that include limiting opioid prescriptions written in emergency departments to three days, requiring e-prescriptions for all prescription narcotics and allowing community organizations to distribute Naloxone during opioid response trainings.

The men and women affected by this crisis are sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, husbands and wives. If we act together boldly, we can fight this epidemic and keep these Virginians, their families and their communities healthy. I look forward to working with Members including Delegates John O'Bannon, John Bell, and Todd Pillion to confront this urgent problem.

These investments and policy changes will enhance our mental health system and confront our growing opioid epidemic.

Additionally, as we wait for congress to determine the future of the Affordable Care Act, we should remember that Medicaid expansion offers us an additional \$300 million per year to strengthen our behavioral health system.

As you know, the budget I submitted gives the Governor the authority to expand Medicaid if an enhanced federal match is available after October 1, 2017.

And even if that is not the case, we should all agree that we have a responsibility to help as many people as we can access health care. Virginians elected us to solve problems. 400,000 people living without health care is a problem. We should never stop seeking ways to solve it.

Another matter that deserves our attention is ensuring that our criminal justice system is keeping our communities safe in an effective and cost-efficient manner.

I am proud of the progress we have made transforming Virginia's juvenile justice system from an adult-style incarceration system to a data-driven enterprise aimed at putting our young people on a better path.

We can build on our progress reforming our criminal justice system with smart policy choices this session.

One way to accomplish that goal is to increase the Commonwealth's threshold for felony larceny from \$200 to \$500. Right now Virginia is tied with New Jersey for fiftieth out of fifty for the most punitive felony threshold in the nation.

Let us work to bring Virginia up from the bottom of the rankings on this important issue.

Another step we can take to protect Virginians' economic productivity is to limit the number of people whose driver's licenses are suspended due to unpaid court costs and non-driving related offenses.

Suspending people's driver's licenses limits their ability to work, which only makes it more difficult to earn the money to pay off their debt and build better lives.

Additionally, I am proposing to make it easier for people who have been wrongly convicted of crimes to clear their names. This bill will allow individuals to petition for a writ of actual innocence if new evidence indicates they were wrongly convicted, even if they pleaded guilty.

Last month I submitted my amendments to the Commonwealth's biennial spending plan for fiscal years 2016 through 2018. The plan I presented to you addresses the Commonwealth's revenue shortfall, while protecting core services like education and public safety. It hasn't always been easy, but our work together on the budget has always been marked by bipartisan cooperation. I particularly want to thank Chairmen Jones, Ware, Norment and Hanger for your continued partnership on Virginia's spending plan.

Our state workforce is the best in America, and they deserve more compensation than they currently receive. I am proud that we have worked over the past three years together to pass two such salary increases.

While language in our budget restricted the second raise due to our revenue shortfall, the budget offers Virginia's teachers, state employees and state-supported local employees a 1.5 percent bonus as a stopgap until our revenue conditions allow for a permanent increase in base pay.

If our revenue conditions do improve, I am eager to work with you to prioritize a more significant pay increase.

Even as we have dealt with a challenging revenue picture, the budget I submitted to you does not make any program cuts to K-12 education.

It also requires fewer reductions from our higher education system than originally anticipated.

I am proud of the work we have done together to strengthen Virginia's education system from Pre-K through higher-ed and mid-career workforce training. This session we can build on those accomplishments together.

We all agree that technology provides us with the opportunity to offer high-quality education to students who are unable to attend school in a traditional setting. This year I am proposing to offer full-time, high-quality virtual learning to every Virginia student.

I am also proposing several pieces of legislation aimed at helping Virginians access student financial aid and pay those loans off as quickly and easily as possible.

Right now, Virginians collectively owe over \$30 billion on student loans. But too often, those loans lack basic consumer protections against predatory loan servicers.

To meet that challenge, I am proposing a Borrowers' Bill of Rights to provide student loan borrowers with basic consumer protections and more information and assistance on repaying debt.

I am also proposing legislation that will give Virginia's institutions of higher education the authority to restructure financial aid to incentivize students to complete degrees within four years. This proposal will help schools minimize the amount of debt students are incurring on the way to a degree. Delegate Kirk Cox and Senator Dick Saslaw have been leaders on this issue and I look forward to working with them in the coming weeks.

As we prepare our students to work and succeed in the new Virginia economy, we have a responsibility to use taxpayer dollars wisely to ensure that there are jobs waiting for them when they graduate.

I know we all agree that we should strengthen how our Commonwealth serves taxpayers with respect to economic development.

I am proud of the record-breaking success we have achieved bringing new jobs and economic activity to Virginia. However, if we are going to build a new Virginia economy, we must use every single dollar to its greatest impact creating jobs and opportunity.

Since it was created nearly 22 years ago, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership has served as our Commonwealth's primary economic development driver. There are many hard-working men and women at VEDP, but, as a recent JLARC report identified, the organization is in need of stronger management and accountability.

Reforming VEDP should not be a partisan issue. Its problems have persisted over the terms of 5 previous Governors and 21 General Assembly sessions. I am ready to work with you to ensure that Virginia's economic development infrastructure is delivering the return on investment that taxpayers have a right to expect.

Making Virginia the best home to veterans and military families is another area of significant bipartisan achievement over the past three years.

The budget I proposed to you will expand the success we have achieved connecting veterans with jobs through the V3 program. I am proposing a two-year pilot to assist veteran entrepreneurs who want to start companies in high-growth sectors.

We can also direct our social service agencies to better coordinate with military authorities in the cases of family abuse and neglect of military children.

These initiatives will strengthen our Commonwealth's position as the best place on Earth for veterans and military families to call home.

Last year we worked together on a historic bipartisan package to keep guns out of the hands of domestic abusers and people who cannot pass background checks. The legislation we passed included the first meaningful restrictions on dangerous gun ownership in a generation, and showed the rest of the world that common sense compromise on this issue is possible.

This year, we have an opportunity to strengthen the domestic violence protection law, which is already the toughest in the nation, by expanding it to include non-family abuse orders as well as permanent protective orders. This change, which is being sponsored by Senator Janet Howell and Delegate Kathleen Murphy, would keep more Virginians safe from gun crime.

Additionally, let's make 2017 the year we make universal background checks for firearm sales the policy of our Commonwealth.

Over the years we have also worked together productively to reform our Commonwealth's ethics system. The reforms we passed, including a cap on gifts that can be accepted from lobbyists, have contributed to a new culture of accountability here in Richmond that reinforces Virginia's worldwide reputation for clean and well-run government.

This year, I propose that we ban the personal use of campaign funds. There is room for honest disagreement on many ethical issues, but we should all be able to agree that political contributions should be spent informing voters, not lining politicians' pockets.

Any effort to build a stronger economy and society must begin with giving as many Virginians as possible a full voice in that society. Unfortunately, here in Virginia and across the nation, too many laws have been passed that are designed to restrict access to democracy rather than expand it.

When it was passed, our photo ID law made it significantly harder for many Virginians to vote, without any evidence that voter fraud is a problem in Virginia. And so this year I hope we will repeal it.

I will also submit legislation this session to allow no-excuse in-person absentee voting, and to add a new excuse for absentee by-mail for child caregivers.

These reforms are based on a simple principle: That Virginia is strongest when we are working together to make it easier to vote, not harder.

For the past three years, our work together has seen far more bipartisan victories than divisive battles. While political fights rage in Washington, we have proven again and again that Virginia is a place where leaders still work together to get things done.

In fact, over the past two sessions, we have worked together to pass 72 percent of the initiatives I have presented to you – and I thank you for that.

We can build on that record this year – but only if we remain focused on the issues that are most important to Virginians.

As we begin our work together this session, our neighbor North Carolina remains mired in a divisive and counterproductive battle over laws its legislature passed that target the rights of LGBT citizens. As we have seen in that state and others, attacks on equality and women's health care rights don't just embarrass the states that engage in them – they kill jobs.

Since North Carolina's legislature passed House Bill 2 and their former Governor signed it, the state has lost out on millions in economic activity and thousands of jobs, as organizations like Deutsche Bank, Paypal, the NBA and the NCAA have withdrawn investments in the state.

At the same time, Virginia has taken a different approach. Over the past three years, we have worked to send a message to families and job creators all over the globe that our Commonwealth will not tolerate discrimination against anyone, including our friends and neighbors in the LGBT community.

And those efforts are paying off. This year, Virginia competed directly with North Carolina for the CoStar Group's new research headquarters. And we started at a disadvantage when North Carolina put an incentive package on the table that was three times the size of our own.

But in the end, Virginia's open and welcoming business climate trumped North Carolina's attacks on equality, and Costar is bringing 732 new high-paying jobs right here to the City of Richmond.

And so tonight I am simply asking for your assistance to help me bring more Costars to Virginia rather than turn them away.

First, I want to make it very clear that I will veto any legislation that discriminates against LGBT Virginians or undermines the constitutional health care rights of Virginia women.

I am 71-0 on veto override votes and I'm ready to keep the streak alive. But I hope you will deny me the opportunity by simply refraining from sending them to me so that we can spend our time on more productive pursuits.

Second, we must protect and enhance our business climate by erasing division and discrimination from our code and our constitution.

After a landmark ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court, in which our Attorney General Mark Herring played a central role, marriage equality is now the law of our land. We should not wait another session to comply with that ruling and take our outdated ban off our books.

In years past, Virginia also created laws that are overt efforts to undermine a woman's access to reproductive health care. Before I took office, I pledged to do everything I could to combat Virginia's law attempting to shutter women's health clinics that offer abortion services.

After working with Lieutenant Governor Northam to overhaul the Virginia Board of Health and following a lengthy regulatory process, I am proud to say we have kept our promise and prevented that law from closing a single clinic.

That law, along with Virginia's law forcing a medically unnecessary ultrasound on a woman, does not keep people safer or healthier.

They do nothing more than inject government into decisions that should be made by a woman in consultation with her doctor -- so let's repeal them both this year.

If we can work together to roll back unwise attacks on equality and constitutional rights, and stand against future proposals, we can send a clear message that Virginia is a Commonwealth of equal opportunity for people and job-creators from every walk of life.

The next 45 days offer us the opportunity to cement the progress we have made together on so many issues, and to address problems that still need to be solved.

If we seize this opportunity, we can continue to build a new Virginia economy that works better for people from every corner of the Commonwealth and every walk of life.

We can bring hope to communities that are ravaged by the opioid epidemic and to families with a loved one battling a mental illness.

We can strengthen our economic development efforts so that every taxpayer dollar goes directly into creating new opportunity and economic activity.

We can expand virtual learning for public school students and offer low-income Virginians a shot at the dream of a college education.

We can make Virginia an even better place to live for military families and for veterans who are eager to start a successful business here in our Commonwealth.

We can make our government even more transparent and accessible to the people who own it.

And we can continue to show the nation and the world that Virginia is a place where leaders come together to get things done, no matter their political points of view.

Three years ago we met on the steps of this building and began what some might have thought to be an unlikely partnership.

After a long and difficult campaign, we had every reason to retreat to our partisan corners.

But we took a different course. We identified the issues where compromise could be reached and we got to work making life better for the people whom we serve.

And so this evening, as we begin our final session of work together, I want to thank you. For your leadership, your partnership, and your dedication to overcoming political obstacles on the way to doing the right thing.

We have real incentive to work together. As the father of five, I share the dream of every Virginia parent – that my children will find opportunities to live, work and raise a family here in our home state. But that will not be possible without the vision and leadership of the people in this room.

And so, as I conclude, I hope you will join with me for one more session to strengthen the foundation we have laid for a new Virginia economy and build upon it.

I am ready to work with you to achieve the goals I have set forth this evening, and I look forward to considering the legislation you will send me over the coming days.

If we take this opportunity to work together, I know we will emerge at the end of this session with a stronger, more resilient economy that works for all Virginians.

May God Bless each of you and may God continue to bless the greatest state, in the greatest nation on Earth.

