

**ADDRESS OF  
GOVERNOR RALPH S. NORTHAM**

**The State of the Commonwealth  
Address to the Joint Assembly  
2022**



**SENATE DOCUMENT NO. 1A**

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
RICHMOND  
2022**



Good evening.

Mr. Speaker, Madam President Lucas, Lieutenant Governor Fairfax, ladies and gentlemen –thank you for inviting me to speak with you tonight.

To my wife Pam, to Justices of the Supreme Court, members of the State Corporation Commission, and my Cabinet and staff, thank you for your service to our Commonwealth. To Justices Lemons and Mims, congratulations on your retirements, and thank you for your service.

And to everyone in this chamber and watching at home, thank you. And happy New Year.

This is my fourth, and final, address to you, and to the people of Virginia. This speech – an update on the state of our Commonwealth – is a longstanding tradition. And it has value beyond what I say here tonight. This is a time when elected leaders from different branches of government, different political parties, and different parts of the state come together, to talk about the Commonwealth that we all share. No matter our differences, or what we share in common, every year we come together.

Next Monday, Governor-elect Youngkin will speak to you in just the same way. By then, he will be Governor. I wish him the best and I'm confident he will lead this Commonwealth well. When he succeeds, Virginia succeeds.

This is a night when I talk about the state of the Commonwealth. And this time, my last time, I'm going to talk about what we have done over the past four years to improve the state, and what kind of Commonwealth I am leaving in your hands.

We are only here for a short time—especially governors. But every day is an opportunity to help someone, to make their life better.

And that is how we have governed.

If you asked me who we are in Virginia, I would tell you we are people who care about each other. We try to treat each other right. We want our neighbors to succeed, just as much as we want that for ourselves. We know that it's not enough for me to be doing ok—you need to be doing ok, too. And our policy choices are rooted in who we are—people who want the best for others.

My adult life has been about helping people, especially children. Serving in the Army, working as medical director of a pediatric hospice, and caring for thousands of children—all of those roles have allowed me to help people.

I saw the Senate, the lieutenant governor's office, and now the governor's office as a means to help people at a different level—especially those who need it the most. It has been a chance to help people with fewer resources. And I also saw a chance, as the first governor in generations to come from a rural area, to put a greater focus on helping rural Virginia.

Shortly before I ran for Senate, I evaluated an infant in the emergency room. I diagnosed him with cerebral palsy, seizures, and cystic fibrosis. All of those are serious medical conditions, and they require a lot of care. As I walked back to my office, I saw the father on the phone. He was crying, and saying he could never afford the medical care that his child would need. That experience convinced me that healthcare is a right, not a privilege. No father should have to worry that he can't afford to take care of his child. I ran for office to help that man and others like him.

I also remember as a doctor sitting with a family whose child had picked up a loaded gun in the home and shot himself. Dead at age 3. I've been to too many funerals for children who died because of a firearm. Like a loaded gun in the home, or a stray bullet on the playground. I ran for office to help ensure that more families won't have to endure that kind of pain.

Virginians choose leaders who will make our commonwealth work better for them and their families, no matter who they are or where they live.

I can confidently say that we have done that.

We are leaving this Commonwealth better than it was when we came into office. We have built a state that does a better job of treating people right. It's more welcoming, more open, more fair and equitable.

We have built a state that helps people who need it—whether they need health care, or cleaner water, or to keep a roof over their head during a global pandemic.

We have built a state that recognizes the wrongs of the past, and works to reckon with and rectify them.

We have built a state where everyone has greater access to opportunity—the opportunity to get what you need, to build the life you want to live, where you want to live it.

Everything we have built and accomplished over these four years, has been about helping people.

We are leaving in your hands a strong and healthy Commonwealth, one that treats everyone right, takes care of people when they need it, and provides opportunity for everyone to thrive.

We could not have a safe and stable Virginia without the work of my Cabinet, their teams, state agency heads, and the thousands of state employees. They truly provide the service in public service – from law enforcement, to road crews, to social workers. I hope you'll join me in a round of applause for our state workforce.

I am leaving you with the strongest state budget Virginia has ever seen. Thanks to our strong economy, we are at a unique moment, when we have the funding to catch up on long-delayed investments, while also putting money back into the pockets of the hardest working Virginians. Just today, we announced that general fund revenues were up 20 percent in December—making it five straight months of double-digit revenue growth.

We need to be clear, this is because we have consistently taken a prudent, cautious approach to budgeting.

We have strengthened our balance sheet to keep our finances stable. We've made targeted long-term investments to help Virginia grow, helped people get through the pandemic, and put money aside as a buffer for the future.

In fact, I've sent you a budget that brings our reserves to more than \$3.8 billion. That's 16.8 percent, more than double the 8 percent I set as a goal four years ago, and more than any previous governor of either party.

I want to thank Secretary of Finance, Joe Flores, and his team, along with the Department of Planning and Budget. Building Virginia's budget and keeping our finances steady and stable requires people who know state finances in and out, and we've been lucky to have that during this administration. Thanks also to Senator Howell and Delegate Torian, chairs of the money committees, for their leadership over the course of some very complicated state budget cycles.

We've also had record economic success. I've traveled around the world, meeting with companies, and telling them why Virginia is the best place to be. During our four years, we've brought in more than \$81 billion in economic investment, more than four times any previous administration, and creating more than 103,000 jobs.

For most people, the most important thing they need is a job where they can support themselves and their family. From Day One, I wanted Virginia to be the best state for business, because I knew it would mean we were doing the right things to attract jobs and help Virginians.

That's why I am so proud that we've been CNBC's best state for business in back to back years—something no other state has done.

We are also ranked number one for business climate by Business Facilities magazine. We have proven that when you treat people right, it's good for everyone and it's good for business. Businesses are excited to be in Virginia, and to come to Virginia. Being named best state for business is a testament to our workforce, our education system, our commitment to diversity, and our strong business climate.

From Amazon making Virginia home to its second headquarters in 2018, to Micron's \$3 billion investment to build semiconductors, to Blue Star's incredible commitment to make billions of medical gloves in Wytheville, Virginia is the state where companies want to invest, put down roots, and grow.

We've also taken steps to be a better state for workers. I've listened to Virginians who told me they just couldn't support themselves on \$7.25 an hour. They were always one paycheck away from losing the roof over their head. That's why we're raising the minimum wage—an increase to \$11 an hour just kicked in, and we'll get to \$15 by 2026. We've helped working families in a variety of other ways—we've made it easier to adopt through surrogates through Jacob's law, and for our own state workforce we've put in one of the most progressive family leave programs in the country. When you treat workers and their families right, it helps everyone.

We've also made historic investments in affordable housing, and Virginia leads the nation for rent relief during COVID—helping people keep a roof over their heads.

I want to thank Secretary of Commerce and Trade Brian Ball, and everyone on our economic development team. A state that's both good for business and good for workers doesn't happen by accident. It is built with a lot of hard work, and these folks deserve the credit. With everything Virginia has going for us, there's no reason we can't be best state for business for a fourth year. I'll be cheering you on.

Our best in the country success has come in part because we have been deliberate about building a workforce and an education system that are second to none.

These days, if you want to get a good job and get ahead, you need additional skills training or education beyond a high school diploma.

I have sent you a budget that continues the priorities we've pursued all along. We have put half a billion dollars into HBCUs during my term, an increase of 87 percent. And we are making higher education and skills training more affordable, and more accessible to all.

That includes a program I've wanted to implement since I ran for governor. As I campaigned, people told me about dropping out of community college because they couldn't afford it. We came up with the G3 program, making community college tuition free for low and moderate income students, if they are getting training in high-need areas. I appreciate Senator Saslaw and Delegate Filler-Corn for their work to pass this important initiative.

Our higher education system is dependent on our K-12 system. Every child deserves the same opportunity to get the skills and knowledge they'll need to thrive in life. That's why for the past four years, we have increased our investments in K-12 education. We've put historic amounts of support into at-risk students. We've raised teacher salaries more than 10 percent, the largest increase in 15 years. The budget I've sent to you dedicates new funding to help localities build or modernize their schools.

And we have invested in early childhood education. As a pediatrician, I know that brain development starts early—those first years are vital, and a robust early childhood education system means that children with fewer advantages can get the same good start in life. I am grateful to my wife Pam, who made early childhood education her mission, and everyone who has worked on the early childhood team in our administration.

Our teachers, our school staffs, our administrators, are dedicated to one thing: educating children. They are highly trained and skilled, and they do a phenomenal job. They all deserve our thanks and gratitude, especially after the stresses and challenges of the past 22 months.

I want to thank Secretary of Education Fran Bradford, and our incredible education team. I also want to thank Virginia's first Secretary of Labor Megan Healy. Education and workforce go hand in hand, and these teams have done tremendous work over the past four years.

Education does not just happen in a classroom. And it is not only the young who can learn new things. If we are not learning, we are stagnating. And if we cling only to what we think we know—without keeping our minds open to new information—then we cannot move forward.

My administration has made it a priority to ensure that in Virginia, we understand our past—so we can learn from our mistakes. For too long, we've been comfortable telling a story about Virginia's history that left out a lot of people—and a lot of uncomfortable facts.

But we cannot pick and choose history based on how it makes us feel. We need to understand the full and true story—and put a Black child's right to have her history included in our textbooks before our own desire to feel comfortable.

That is the only way we can understand how yesterday affects today—and make changes for tomorrow.

We are a commonwealth of contradictions—the place where the first enslaved African people landed, and the place where representative government was born.

We have worked, hand in hand with many of you, to make Virginia a place that reckons with its past.

We have given greater support to institutions dedicated to telling that full and painful story. We've focused our historical resources on telling stories that have been marginalized. For example, when Senator Richard Stuart found that stones on his property, used on the river bank to control erosion, were actually headstones, he called for help—and we discovered they had been taken from the historically Black Harmony Cemetery in Washington, tossed aside during development with no respect for the people they represented. We were able to get many of those stones back to the graves they belonged to.

We have taken steps in every agency of this Commonwealth to better support and celebrate the diversity of our state. And we have developed government-to-government relationships with the sovereign tribal nations that called Virginia home for thousands of years before Europeans arrived.

With much help I put together the most diverse, talented, and hardworking Cabinet in the history of Virginia. We created the state level Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, led by the country's first cabinet-level Chief Diversity Officer, and I thank Dr. Janice Underwood and her team for all their work.

I know that talking about history—our real, true history—can make some people uncomfortable. Mostly those people look like me. And I have not always understood the ways that the uglier parts of our past affect things and people today.

But I kept my mind open. I listened, and I learned. I used to tell students, the eyes can't see what the brain doesn't know. I know that Virginians want to understand each other.

As someone who works with children, I know that hatred, bigotry, and discrimination are not things we are born with. They are things we learn. And that means inclusion is also something we can learn.

We all work in good faith to try to understand the world we live in together. It's hard, when we don't all hear the same stories, and we don't all understand the same facts. It can feel like we're further apart than ever. But the Virginia I see is full of people who have more in common than their differences. The better we understand our past, the more we broaden that common ground.

As Governor, and as legislators, our job is to be good stewards of this Commonwealth, and to prepare for what will come in the next ten, twenty, fifty years.

When it comes to the environment, we know that the next 50 years – the next five years – will be a time of great change.

We are already seeing that. Christmas Day in Richmond was 70 degrees, and last week we got half a foot of snow. In Colorado recently, wildfires burned a thousand homes, and then the ashes were covered by a blizzard. Western Kentucky towns were devastated by rare December tornadoes.

Our climate is changing, and our weather is changing – faster than ever, and with devastating consequences.

We must do our part to stem the tide, and make sure that the world we leave for our children and grandchildren is safe. I ran for office in part because I was seeing the demise of the Chesapeake Bay—the disappearance of sub-aquatic grasses, crabs, and other living creatures. I ran for office to help save and protect our waters and air for our grandchildren to enjoy.

In the past four years, we have invested strongly in clean energy. I was proud to sign the Virginia Clean Economy Act, and I thank Senator McClellan and Delegate Sullivan for spearheading the work to get that legislation passed.

Clean energy is a job generator. Businesses that are looking to locate in Virginia like our renewable energy initiatives. And Virginia is also at the vanguard of the new offshore wind energy industry in the United States.

We must embrace clean energy, because the cost of not doing so will be devastating. If you want more floods, more fires, more storms, more disaster—and more destroyed property, lost jobs, and devastated communities— then do nothing. But a stable future requires us to act.

That's why I'm leaving a plan for a cleaner energy future.

And it's also why we've spent four years making our waters and our air cleaner and safer for our children, and our children's children—including investing \$1 billion in cleaning up the Chesapeake Bay.

I am confident we are leaving our environment cleaner and better than when we found it—and that we've put in place the right policies to make Virginia a leader in clean energy, and the jobs and economic progress that come with it.

I want to thank Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources Ann Jennings, and her team for their work these past four years to make Virginia's environment a better place.

Leaving a better future for our children also means leaving a system that protects public safety, and ensures that our justice system is as fair as possible.

Our law enforcement do an incredibly difficult, and often dangerous job. That's why this year, I sent you a budget that provides pay raises and bonuses meant to not just reward our officers, deputies, and jail officers for the tough jobs they do, but also to make pay scales more fair.

We also worked closely with you to make sure our criminal justice system reflects the Virginia that we are today.

Too often, our modern-day punishments and practices have their roots in a more discriminatory and unfair past.

That's why we've made marijuana use legal. I want to thank Senator Lucas, Senator Ebbin, and Delegate Herring for their work on this policy, which is complicated, but important.

That's also why we have ended use of the death penalty in Virginia—the first southern state to do so—because it was applied unfairly, and we couldn't rely on the system to get it right. Thanks go to Senator Surovell, Delegate Mullin, and many others who have worked on this for years.



Just look at the Martinsville 7 – Black men who were convicted of rape and sentenced to death by an all-white jury. In Virginia, it was almost entirely Black men who were sentenced to death for rape convictions, and it was clear these seven men were executed because they were Black. I was glad to acknowledge that wrong, in some measure, by granting them a posthumous pardon earlier this year.

In fact, our administration has restored the civil rights and voting rights for nearly 126,000 people, and issued more than 1,100 pardons—more than all past governors combined.

That's because second chances are important. We cannot expect people to fully reenter our society as long as we hold that conviction over their heads, and refuse to treat them like full members of society. If you commit a crime, you should expect punishment—but punishment should fit the crime.

This year Virginians could have a chance to vote to make the restoration of rights automatic, if the work of Senator Mamie Locke and others is successful. There must be a date at which we say, enough. You've paid your debt, and it's time to move forward.

That's who we are in Virginia. We are a state that believes in justice, not just punishment. And we are a state that believes in grace, and in mercy.

The facts demonstrate that what we're doing is working. In the last five years, Virginia has had one of the lowest recidivism rates in the country.

I want to thank Secretary of Public Safety Brian Moran and his team for all their work to make Virginia a state that is safer, and more just, for everyone. And I want to thank Secretary of the Commonwealth Kelly Thomasson, who has now helped two governors restore the rights of thousands of Virginians, and everyone on her team. They have done an incredible job.

I mentioned that we restored voting rights for thousands of Virginians.

Voting is fundamental to our democracy. Many Americans have fought—and some paid the ultimate price—to protect the freedoms we have under our democratic system, including the right to vote.

That's why voting should be as easy as possible, for as many voters as possible. Yet for too many people, barriers still exist. I remember talking to a trucker who told me his schedule was so unpredictable that he often didn't get to vote—because he was on the road on Election Day.

That's why we've worked together to make Virginia a leader in voting access. Now, you can vote early for 45 days before the election—without having to explain your schedule to an election official.

Election Day is a state holiday—because we want people to have the free time to vote, or to volunteer at the polls.

And voter registration is automatic through the DMV.

Virginia has gone from being one of the toughest, most restrictive voting environments, to one of the best and most secure in the country. I want to thank Senator Deeds, Senator Locke, Senator Lucas, Delegate Herring, Delegate Simon, Delegate VanValkenburg and many others.

Because of these changes, we have seen record voter turnout in the past two elections. In fact, the 2021 election—in which all of you in the House were elected—saw a 20 percent increase in voter participation over four years ago. Contrast that with other states that have chosen to make voting harder and more restrictive—with the result that fewer people vote.

This shows us that our current rules work. Our elections are fair and transparent. And it's really important for voters to hear that message—especially from those of you elected to office under these rules. It does tremendous damage when elected officials use false claims to undermine faith in our elections. Voters deserve better, and our elected officials need to do better, and not perpetuate anyone's big lie.

Virginia's elections are always well-run, they're free and fair, and they're transparent. This is a hallmark of our democracy, and I am proud of all Virginians whose efforts help ensure that our elections go smoothly. I want to thank everyone in the Department of Elections, along with Secretary of Administration Grindly Johnson and her teams.

Voting is a right—not something to be held back as a privilege, reserved for a few.

Access to health care is also a right—not a privilege to be reserved for those who can afford it.

Like the father I mentioned earlier, faced with not being able to afford care for his sick child. That shouldn't happen.

That's why I was proud that in the first year of my term, together we agreed to expand Medicaid access to thousands of Virginians.

We couldn't foresee the pandemic, but I am glad that when a global health crisis arrived, more than 600,000 Virginians had access to care that they did not have in 2018. Thanks to the work and cooperative spirit of the Southwest Virginia delegation—and I won't mention you by name—we made that happen. We were able to come together, across party lines, because it was the right thing to do. That is who we are. We don't just want health care for ourselves—we want it for our neighbors.

And never before has our health been so dependent on others, as in the past 22 months of this pandemic.

In the midst of a contagious respiratory virus, where my actions affect you and your actions affect me, we needed Virginia to be a state where people take care of their neighbors.

As the nation's only governor who is also a doctor, I am proud of how Virginia has handled this pandemic. We have followed the science to keep Virginians as safe and healthy as possible. We have seen fewer cases and fewer deaths than many of our neighbors. Nearly 90 percent of our adult population has had at least one shot. We're the 9th state in the nation for having our residents fully vaccinated, and for vaccination rates for teenagers. We're doing better at vaccinations than many other large states and all of our southern neighbors.

That said, none of that matters to the people who have lost a loved one to this terrible virus. Nearly 16,000 Virginians have died of COVID in the past 22 months. And all of them were dear to someone. My deepest sympathy goes to the families and loved ones for their loss. I'd like to take a moment of silence in their memory.

As I leave office, I hope that our Commonwealth will continue doing what we know works: follow the science. Get vaccinated. Wear masks. Take care of other people, not just ourselves. That is who I know Virginians to be.

I want to thank Secretary of Health and Human Resources Dr. Vanessa Walker Harris and her team. I also want to take a moment to thank the thousands of doctors, nurses, teachers, Guard men and women, and public safety officers who have worked tirelessly to keep us safe.

In the balcony this evening I want to introduce a few folks.

We have Major General Timothy Williams, who leads our Virginia National Guard.

Dr. Linsey Marr, the Charles Lunsford professor in civil and environmental engineering at Virginia Tech, whose groundbreaking research has helped guide not only the nation, but the world during this pandemic.

Dr. Norm Oliver who has led our Department of Health with distinction and compassion,

And Dr. Danny Avula, who dropped everything when this pandemic broke out to lead our Covid task force.

These individuals worked day in and day out, facing an unknown virus, trying to give the best health guidance they could to a worried public.

If you look at our COVID data, you can see that we have lost fewer Virginians than many other states. This team has saved thousands of lives, and I am incredibly grateful.

We owe our thanks to our public health workers. They are truly public servants, dedicated to helping their neighbors stay safe and healthy. They deserve our gratitude. It hasn't been easy, and their work is not done.

If you want to thank them—our public health workers, our local health departments, our doctors and nurses in hospitals, our long-term care facilities staff—then you know what to do. Get vaccinated or boosted. Wear a mask. Protect the people around you. That's how to thank a health care worker.

Over the past four years we have done a lot to make Virginia a better place to live and work. We've also made it an easier place to live and work—by investing in the infrastructure that connects us all.

If you commute, or if you travel, you want better roads and rail systems. If you work from home, or you're in school, you need reliable Internet access.

We have laid the groundwork to transform that infrastructure.

In just four years, we've moved broadband investments from \$4 million a year, to \$2 billion. We're on track to have universal broadband on its way to every community by 2024—far faster than expected, and faster than most other states.

This is one of the most important investments we could have made, especially in rural communities. Broadband is to today's economy what electricity was generations ago. It is quite simply a necessary service for students to connect to education, businesses to connect to the wider world, and citizens to connect to work. I want to thank Senator Boysko for her role leading the Broadband Advisory Council, which has played an important part in this progress.

We've also made generational investments in roads and rail--\$3.8 billion to expand the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel, \$2.2 billion to fix I-81, and \$3.7 billion to transform rail across the Commonwealth.

These projects, and many others, will help Virginians in every part of the state get where they want to go faster, and safer.

I want to thank Secretary of Transportation Shannon Valentine and her team for all their work to transform the way we move around Virginia.

Investments like broadband are especially important for rural Virginia.

As you all know, I was born and raised on the Eastern Shore. And one of my goals as governor was to put more focus on the needs of rural Virginia. Too often, rural communities feel left behind.

You often hear people say they grew up in rural Virginia, but they live and work somewhere else.

Rural areas often don't have the same work or educational opportunities as our urban and suburban areas. In other parts of the state, you often hear, "well, why don't they just move?" But that's not the answer. Instead of encouraging people to leave rural areas, we have worked to bring more opportunities to them.

I've made rural Virginia a priority—as my friend Senator Bill Stanley reminded me recently, I promised him I wouldn't forget Southside, and he'll tell you that I lived up to my word.

We've supported rural economic development—such as the biggest new jobs announcement in Southwest Virginia in a decade, 2,500 new jobs making nitrile gloves in Wythe County. My friend Congressman Morgan Griffith called it the largest economic development announcement made in Southwest during his time in Congress.

We created the Office of Outdoor Recreation to promote Virginia as both a great place for outdoor businesses, and for outdoor travelers. This section of the economy is huge and has great potential for growth. Thanks to Senator Hanger and Delegate Bulova for their dedication to these issues through the Virginia Outdoor Recreation Caucus.

We created the ReBuild Virginia program, investing nearly \$400 million in grants to help our small businesses in communities across the Commonwealth stay afloat during the pandemic.

And we've supported agriculture, our largest industry. We've funded 55 Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development projects, more than the past two administrations combined, and we've supported and conserved working lands and forests.

I want to thank Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Bettina Ring, everyone on her team, and everyone who works to support and prioritize rural Virginia. Every community, from the Eastern Shore to Lee County and everywhere in between, deserves attention, and it's been important to me that rural Virginia not be left behind.

I also want to thank our Secretary of Veterans Affairs Carlos Hopkins, who is actively serving with the National Guard in the Middle East right now, and Acting Secretary Kathleen Jabs. They and their teams have done amazing work to support veterans and make sure that we are well-connected with the military operations that call Virginia home.

One in 12 Virginians is a military veteran. In fact, I'm one of them. In the past four years, we've promoted the V3 program to hire more veterans, and taken a number of steps to help ease the transition to civilian life. We are one of the best states for veterans, and I hope we continue to take care of veterans as they deserve.

I also want to thank our National Guard, who have done so much to serve this Commonwealth. We call on them to help in emergencies, from last January's attempted insurrection in Washington, to natural disasters, to our COVID response. They helped with testing in 2020 and vaccinations in 2021. And more National Guard members are deployed now than at any other time since World War II. We are truly grateful to them.

Four years ago, I stood here, in this room, on this dais, in front of many of you. I told you where I wanted to take Virginia. And I asked you to work with me to get us there.

It has been a more tumultuous four years than I think any of us expected. But the challenges have also been opportunities.

More people have health care access. More people have jobs. More people have access to an affordable education. More people have access to broadband—and soon, everyone will have it.

Our rail system is prepared for important upgrades. Our energy sources are becoming cleaner and safer. Our teachers, law enforcement officers, and public servants are paid better. The Chesapeake Bay and its estuaries are healthier.

We are telling a fuller story of our shared history, and inviting more voices to the table.

We are protecting the rights of more people, and making Virginia a more open and welcoming place to live.

Tonight, I can say that together, we have accomplished more than we could have dreamed of that night in 2018.

At every turn, we've looked for ways to help people.

We are leaving you with a Virginia that treats people right, helps neighbors when they need it, rectifies past wrongs, and helps everyone have the opportunity to thrive.

That's who we are as a people—and we are all God's people, created equally. We take care of each other.

Tonight, let's ask ourselves—are we going to keep up this progress? Or will we retreat, become people who are more worried about ourselves than each other?

I hope we will not. I hope the spirit of helping other people continues to prevail. I hope we'll continue to be people who want to serve the world, rather than conquer it. People who sow kindness and hope, rather than anger and fear.

We all are here for a short period of time, and every day is a God-given opportunity to help someone, to make their life better.

I am grateful to all of you in the General Assembly for the work you've done with me and my team, and for your constituents. I have worked with some of you for a number of years, as a colleague in the Senate, then as lieutenant governor, and now as governor. I know that despite our differences, you all care deeply about this Commonwealth, and the people we serve.

And I again want to thank my Cabinet, and my staff. Members of my Cabinet, please stand. They have devoted themselves to doing good for the people of Virginia, and while you don't always see their work or hear their names, everything we have done well has been their work. They deserve our thanks.

Over these four years, I have been welcomed into communities in every corner of this Commonwealth. I have met thousands of my fellow Virginians, and what I have been most struck by is this—Virginians are good people.

You want to help others. You have a deep love of place, and of your community. You want to see your neighbors do well.

You put your trust in me to lead our great Commonwealth as the 73rd Governor. And I promised to make the best decisions I could for you.

Every single day of the past four years, my team and I have tried to live up to that trust. And every day, I have felt so proud, and grateful for you, Virginia. I've seen your strength and resilience, your kindness, your generosity. It is you, more than anything else, that makes Virginia the best state, in the best country in the world.

It has been the highlight of my life to serve you. As a past governor rightly said, there is truly no higher honor, than to serve as Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia. From the bottom of my heart – thank you.



