

**ADDRESS OF
GOVERNOR GLENN YOUNGKIN**

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



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**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
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Good afternoon.

Standing here before you, and looking around this room, I'm struck by the history that's been made in this place, the people's house.

As well as the fact that the work you do here has great consequence for the people of Virginia. And so it is as we gather here today.

Mr. Speaker, Madam President, Lt. Governor Earle-Sears, Chief Justice Goodwyn, and Justices of the Supreme Court, members of the General Assembly, my fellow Virginians, today we begin anew, all of us together.

After years of fractured politics, a deadly pandemic, lives and livelihoods lost, soaring mental health incidents and drug overdoses, rising crime rates, ever-increasing costs for housing, food and fuel, Virginians have sent us here to turn the page.

They came out in record numbers to make their voice heard. They chose a new vision for the future.

Today, I want to speak to that vision and begin our partnership to address the priorities of the people.

I've enjoyed getting to know so many of the members of these two legislative bodies both Republicans and Democrats.

You have invited me to your homes. We've shared meals together. We've done community service together. And I thank you for that.

We're all part of Team Virginia.

And as I shared on Saturday, we can take inspiration from Dr. Martin Luther King's life which we celebrate today and his words that "we may have all come on different ships, but we're in the same boat now."

The work we have to do, we must do together.

And there isn't a better example of people coming together on behalf of Virginia than the brave crews, the law enforcement heroes, and the first responders who worked during yesterday's storm in the freezing cold, ice and snow to keep our streets safe, the lights on and our hospitals open.

Before I speak to the work ahead, I want to recognize someone who has traveled with me every step of the way.

She inspired me to live a life of faith as a younger man. She is an example of humility and strength not just to our children but to women across this great commonwealth.

She is the best partner I could ever imagine our First Lady, Suzanne Youngkin.

After a year of campaigning at diners, senior centers, schools, housing projects, courthouses...even pickup basketball games, I've taken the measure of our people.

I've found them to be resilient, optimistic, courageous. I listened to their hopes and concerns their dreams and fears. Their stories of inspiration and stories of tragedy.

Some cried on my shoulders. Some prayed over me. And some spoke bluntly maybe a little too bluntly at times.

Almost all expressed a desire for a Virginia worthy of the ambitions of its people.

I come here today to echo their clarion call for change.

To form a government that works for ordinary citizens. That's a catalyst for opportunity and not an obstacle. And that addresses the kitchen table concerns of working families that are real and mounting.

It's been said that all great change starts at kitchen tables across America.

You see, that's where families talk about what matters to them. It's also where parents discuss their worries stagnant wages in the face of rising expenses caring for an elderly parent and trying to find a way to save for their kids' future.

I want to share with you something that we've all heard from voters.

They're genuinely concerned that the cold halls of government are disconnected from the cold realities families face while sitting at their kitchen tables every day.

In that respect, we shouldn't misconstrue record revenue for government as economic success for Virginians.

The view from the people, whose labor generates those tax receipts is quite different than the talk in Richmond.

They see an economy whose growth has stalled at less than 1% per year for 8 years. With household incomes stagnating over the last year --- as the cost of living has sky-rocketed.

They see declining schools, they see violent crime reports dominating the news, they see record low labor participation, they see small businesses struggling, and they see government failures and encroachments on their liberties.

From the perspective of every day Virginia families times are tough. And the state of our Commonwealth is not what it should be.

Today we're at the proverbial "tipping point" where the cash flow to the government from rising tax burdens is very high.

And yet the impact of high costs and high taxes, and an increased regulatory burden are clearly being felt in the real economy and the real lives of Virginians.

The good news is that we have the ability to course-correct before this poor performance becomes permanent.

With current and projected tax driven surpluses we can lower the tax burdens on Virginia families.

And make crucial investments in those critical pillars to the great Virginia promise of a lower cost-of-living, excellent schools, safe communities, a rip-roaring economy that lifts up all Virginians, and a state government that works for Virginians.

To do that, I'm asking each of us in this body Republican and Democrat alike to come together.

To rise above the Richmond of divisive, special interest politics, the small and the parochial to usher in a sweeping vision of change

And to put this commonwealth on a pathway to prosperity.

On day one, we hit the ground running, signing 11 executive actions, and swearing in a full cabinet, outstanding individuals, who are qualified and share Virginia's values.

As of today, we've worked with legislators to introduce 59 pieces of legislation to tackle our day one agenda.

And we'll be submitting a package of 25 budget amendments to reflect our bipartisan priorities.

We're addressing issues that are critical to the future of this commonwealth. And that every member in this chamber can get behind.

Virginians have given us a license to lead. They have charged us all to deliver on a Day One agenda.

We know on some issues there'll be deep disagreement.

But I believe this chamber is big enough for us to talk through our differences. And there is more that binds us than divides us.

For we all share a common goal to leave a better Virginia for our children.

We're going to start by investing in Virginia classrooms.

Education is the key to opportunity. The means by which all children and their parents can realize their greatest dreams.

Virginia schools have a lofty reputation. But lately we've not lived up to that reputation.

In fact, our education standards for math and reading are now the lowest in the nation.

Unelected political appointees lowered standards which inevitably led to a decline in student performance.

60% of our students don't meet national proficiency standards, including over 70% of Latino students, and over 80% of black students, failing to meet standard on the math NAEP tests. Remarkably, despite these dramatic declines noted by the National Center for Education Statistics only one Virginia school has been deemed failing because accreditation standards were lowered.

Starting now we're ending the accountability shell games intended to make us feel good but amount to the often stated "soft bigotry of low expectations."

Let's stop cheating our kids.

On this we should join arms and purpose together so that when our time here is done we'll collectively have raised education standards from the lowest to the highest in the nation.

I'm also calling for \$150 million to help us meet our goal of starting 20 new charter schools.

Whether they're called charter schools, lab schools, or schools of innovation – it doesn't really matter.

I don't care what we call it I just care that we do it.

We're joined today by the students of Green Run Collegiate Charter School in Virginia Beach. Green Run Collegiate shares a facility with Green Run High School.

They have an innovative curriculum. They provide access to every child in the school district to attend the collegiate program. They're thriving and their parents are thrilled.

Please join me in welcoming these future Virginia leaders to our commonwealth's capitol.

We're going to build partnerships between the commonwealth and our great universities to create lab schools of excellence.

It could be a lab school in Southwest Virginia in partnership with UVA Wise.

It could be an entrepreneurship or entertainment industry-focused school partnering with one of our amazing historically black colleges and universities.

Or a partnership with Old Dominion University for opportunities in offshore wind development or maritime projects.

When it comes to the education budget, I've heard consistent bipartisan agreement from all of you that the budget you'll pass, and that I'll sign will reflect a record investment in education including a significant boost in teacher pay.

With the exception of a parent or guardian no one impacts the future of a young child more than a quality teacher.

We will attract quality professionals to Virginia schools. And we will pay teachers as the professionals they are.

We must also recognize that the people most responsible for a child's education are parents.

My message to parents is this,

You have a fundamental right, enshrined in law by this General Assembly, to make decisions with regard to your child's upbringing, education and care.

And we will protect and reassert that right.

Hear me clearly when parents are empowered and engaged, a child's life is enhanced.

I've heard the concerns of parents about curriculum.

Virginia parents want our history – all of our history, the good and the bad to be taught. And they want their children to be told how to think, not what to think.

That's why we should not use inherently divisive concepts like Critical Race Theory in Virginia. And why we should not be teaching our children to see everything through the lens of race.

That's also why I want to give parents the right to be informed before their child is exposed to sexually explicit materials.

Please, send me the same bill you passed on a bipartisan basis in 2017 and I will sign it.

The classroom environment must be safe, so children can learn.

I'm asking members of this general assembly to prioritize school safety by putting a school resource officer on every campus.

I also ask you to join me in protecting students from sex trafficking organizations that recruit them on and off campus.

Let's train educators to see the signs of trafficking. And to stand in the gap for children at risk of being preyed upon.

Let's also involve local law enforcement agencies in the approval of school safety audits.

And whenever someone preys upon a child in a Virginia school --- we must require it to be reported to local law enforcement for investigation.

No more cover-ups. No more sweeping it under the rug. Parents deserve to know if their child is at risk.

Schools exist for the educational benefit of children, and for that reason they must remain open. I strongly encourage everyone to get vaccinated for Covid-19, and get the booster.

As we battle covid, its parents that should decide the health measures taken for their children.

That is why I signed an executive order that allows parents to opt out of mask mandates in schools. This is a matter of individual liberty.

Again, this body passed a law that protects parent's fundamental right to make decisions concerning the upbringing, education, and care of their children.

And health care workers should get to make those decisions too.

And I will continue to oppose President Biden's COVID vaccine mandate for health workers as we continue to fight a crisis of staffing in Virginia's healthcare system.

Our fight against COVID-19 will move forward based on this simple principle we will protect lives and livelihoods.

That means no more mandates and no more shut downs. As I said on Saturday it means Virginia is open for business.

It also means the science since the beginning of the pandemic has not been static. We now have therapeutics better testing protocols and fortunately a less severe variant.

And of course we have vaccines. It means, educating our friends and neighbors and encouraging them to get the vaccine and the booster.

There are 1.6 million unvaccinated Virginians today.

And speaking to you as your Governor, I'll never tell you what you must do. But speaking to you as a friend and a neighbor I strongly encourage you to get the vaccine.

The data is clear people who do not get the vaccine are four times as likely to be hospitalized.

The vaccine will not only help keep people out of the hospital, it will also keep people working, earning a paycheck and growing our economy, something that has to remain a top priority for us all.

Our Day One Plan will jump-start jobs.

We're going to repeal needless regulations. We're going to invest in job training. We're going to foster innovation. And we're going to win the competition for jobs and corporate re-locations.

I support a significant investment in mega-sites.

To make sure we don't lose the next advanced battery manufacturing plant after seeing several go to Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina and Georgia.

And while we're at it let's broaden the baseball stadium authority to include football. And perhaps we'll get one of those too.

I want our rural Virginians to know we're spreading prosperity far and wide. And rural Virginia won't be left behind.

We're not only bringing jobs, we're bringing high-speed broadband.

Every governor for the last decade has stood in this chamber and told you that rural broadband was a priority. This time we're going to get it done.

We're also going to make certain that key projects at our ports and our highways are completed.

So the message is clear, if your cargo container ships is stuck off the coast of another state come to Virginia.

We're ready for your business. And we won't make supply chain problems worse with regulatory red tape.

And let me be clear, I believe in the fundamental right to work.

If anyone tries to bring me a bill that creates forced unionization it will meet the business end of my veto pen.

The states around us have created more jobs, grown their economies faster, and took steps years ago that we must take now, lower taxes, business-friendly regulations, workforce development and more.

This is a real competition, and to win, we have to “play to win.”

One of the other challenges businesses face especially small businesses is the high cost of providing health care for their employees.

Over the last three years, you sent the governor eight versions of an association health plan bill to make it easier for workers to get health care.

It was vetoed eight times. Pass that bill again and I will sign it.

Virginians are struggling with the high cost of living, in a commonwealth with skyrocketing housing costs, rising fuel prices, and the silent wage theft of inflation.

There are economic fundamentals we don't control in Virginia – that must be dealt with at the federal level.

But Washington continues to fiddle in the face of real supply chain challenges. And allows our nation to be overly-reliant on China for critical goods and services.

But there is one vital thing we can do to help Virginians. And that is remove some of the tax burden --- added on top of rising prices for groceries, gasoline and housing.

That's why I support suspending the recent gas tax increase for a year and fully eliminating the grocery tax immediately.

There's bipartisan support for eliminating the grocery tax. Together, we will give Virginians real relief.

We also need to give Virginians a real break on their personal income tax by doubling the standard deduction. And providing the largest tax rebate in Virginia history.

These tax cuts benefit the people who need it the most.

And represent the largest tax relief ever given to the people of Virginia \$1,500 this year for the typical Virginia family.

But beyond the economic implications of this package, I believe we have a special obligation to a group of individuals that have served our country with distinction our military veterans.

Those who risk life and limb for country and community don't do it for the pay. They do it because service is in their blood.

The care and support of our veterans, have always transcended partisan politics.

That's why I'm asking this General Assembly to act on something long talked about.

Let's eliminate the tax on the first \$40,000 in military retirement pay together.

Anyone who wears the uniform risks their life each day on the job. And this includes police officers, firefighters, EMTs, every first responder that keeps us safe.

We're in a fractious era and no group of individuals is under greater scrutiny today than our law enforcement.

A culture of lawlessness has filled the void in Virginia with violent crime on the rise.

In November, Police Officer Michael Chandler of the Big Stone Gap Police Department was violently gunned down by a vicious criminal.

Incidents like this are all too common today.

We'll never know the depth of his loss to his family but we grieve with them and pray for them.

In Virginia, we must stand with our law enforcement agencies. And therefore, I'm asking you to fund our police to protect our communities.

Officer Michael Chandler's widow --- Natasha Chandler is also a member of law enforcement. She's a Wise County Deputy Sheriff who even after losing her husband, insisted on returning to serve.

She's watching this afternoon.

Please join me in recognizing the sacrifice that her husband, Michael, made on our behalf.

The budget submitted to this General Assembly includes pay raises for troopers, sheriffs' deputies and corrections officers.

Those are strong first steps I know we all support.

But we need to provide more funding for our police departments. And more funding for training and equipment.

Together, we should dedicate \$100 million in ARPA funds to a training and equipment grant program for law enforcement. And provide capital funding for a new state police training facility.

Furthermore, I'm asking you to dedicate \$26 million in state funding for police departments. But only in localities that are increasing funding for their police departments.

We'll also fund community violence intervention by dedicating at least \$5 million to Operation Cease Fire.

It's time to take down the temperature around discussions of policing.

The solution is constructive engagement and dialogue. Not inadequate funding which creates more lawlessness.

And when it comes to lawlessness, I want to be crystal clear.

If we won't tolerate it in communities across the commonwealth then we certainly won't tolerate it within a state agency.

On Saturday, I fired the entire parole board.

And I asked Attorney General Miyares to begin an investigation into what happened there.

The violations of law and the Constitution, the unconscionable refusal to notify families, of victims about pending decisions to release murderers, were simply unacceptable.

We will not accept selective violations of our constitutional rights. We will protect all of them.

We don't get to pick and choose the parts of the Constitution we want to preserve and protect.

In order for our government to work for the people, we must also reform the institutions of government that fail to serve the people.

I'll admit I've never run a government agency. But I know something about running a business.

And we're going to bring business efficiency to government bureaucracy.

That's why I appointed a Commonwealth Chief Transformation Officer --- to oversee government transformation.

We will make government more responsive, more efficient, and more transparent and we'll start by fixing the Department of Motor Vehicles and the Virginia Employment Commission.

Furthermore, we will be innovative in leveraging federal transportation funds to address the challenges of growth and gridlock.

In Virginia, we are going to build roads, bridges, rail lines and utility lines.

We are going to be better prepared for weather events that strain our highways and the electric grid.

And we will marshal our resources to make our infrastructure the most reliable in the nation.

As I travel Virginia, I remain in awe of the raw natural beauty of our Commonwealth.

The mountains, waterways, beaches, parks, farm land, livestock, vineyards, and natural resources testify to our Creator's artistry.

I deeply treasure the natural beauty of Virginia. And my administration will dedicate itself to protecting and promoting it as a core principle of our service.

That's why we will end the dumping of raw sewage in the James River once and for all.

I also support fully funding best management practices on our farms in order to protect our soil and water from the Chesapeake Bay to the Jackson River.

And we are going to see the cleanup of the Chesapeake Bay to the finish line.

Coastal resiliency is critical to me.

And it's critical to our nation because of our Port and military assets in Hampton Roads.

That's why we're going to create the Coastal Virginia Resiliency Authority to battle rising seas and make sure the federal government does its part too.

Let me state our goal.

Let's work together in partnership. To build a government as virtuous as our people. One that serves.

You don't have to look too far to find examples of that spirit among the people of Virginia.

I met a veteran of our military on the campaign trail by the name of Natasha Barijon.

She's an immigrant. And like so many first generation immigrants, she loves this country with a passion few can understand though certainly our lieutenant governor can.

Natasha knows what life is like in other parts of the world.

Which is why tears flowed down her face when she told me about her journey to America her pride in serving in our military and the hopes and dreams she has for her daughter to grow up in a better America.

Natasha represents the best of America.

She may not have been born here but she is every bit American as someone who was. Because she has lived the ideals of this great land.

Natasha is also watching today.

Please join me in recognizing her service to our country and her dreams for her daughter.

Virginia is home to heroes. Many living and many who lie in eternal rest.

I attended the funeral of one such hero last month, in Virginia Beach – the Commanding Officer of SEAL Team 8, Brian Bourgeois.

Brian could light up a room with his laugh and he could put his subordinates at ease during the most tense moments.

He gave his life in service to freedom. And he left behind a wife, Megan, and five children. One of which – Barrett – led us in the pledge of allegiance on Saturday.

What price would we in this room put on freedom?

For some freedom is so precious they would offer everything in its defense.

Those of us who live in the freedom they so valiantly protect must live lives worthy of their sacrifice. Set aside petty divisions. Set aside ego and self-advancement. And join together to make this Virginia we love better, stronger, freer.

My friends in this esteemed legislature, I'm inspired to be with you this afternoon. And to be working with you to build a future of limitless opportunity and strengthen the spirit of Virginia.

Thank you, God bless you, and may God bless the Commonwealth of Virginia.

