

**ADDRESS OF
GOVERNOR GLENN YOUNGKIN**

**The State of the Commonwealth
Address to the Joint Assembly
2023**



SENATE DOCUMENT NO. 1

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
RICHMOND
2023**

Good afternoon. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, Lt. Governor Earle-Sears, Attorney General Miyares, Chief Justice Goodwyn, President Lucas, members of the General Assembly, members of the Cabinet and my fellow Virginians, I'm honored to be with you again in the storied halls of Mr. Jefferson's Capitol.

The first version of Virginia's constitution was written in 1776, in the first Spring of the American Revolution. The second version of our state's chartering document, and every one since, requires – with great wisdom, I believe – the Governor to communicate to the General Assembly the condition of the Commonwealth.

Now the challenges we face today are different from those our founders faced in 1776, but Virginia's spirit of grit, determination, innovation, faith, and hope remain the same. Today it is my honor to be with all of you, to laud the progress we've made, but also to call upon us all to focus on the work to be done.

Fortunately, I'm not alone in this task or on this journey. I'm joined this afternoon by two of my sons, Grant and John, and every day by the love of my life, who stands by me as a devoted partner in marriage, in parenting, and in service to this great Commonwealth; our First Lady, Suzanne Youngkin.

Suzanne, - I love you and thank you.

I know that many in this room understand what the love and devotion of a spouse means during a season of service.

That is especially true for one of our body's newest members, Delegate Ellen Campbell, who carries the torch of service for her late husband, our friend Ronnie Campbell. Ellen, please know we're praying for you and we welcome you in your service to the Commonwealth.

We also have other new members of this esteemed body here this afternoon. We welcome Delegate Holly Seibold and Senator Aaron Rouse.

Thank you both for your willingness to serve the Commonwealth.

Now, consistent with my constitutional responsibilities and my great honor and privilege of serving all Virginians.

I'm here this afternoon to communicate that the State of our Commonwealth is substantially better than it was a year ago and yet we are still a great distance from our destination, a destination where Virginia truly is the best place to live, work and raise a family.

I'm here this afternoon to urge us to accelerate our efforts – to get more done and get it done faster - and make Virginia even stronger. So we can compete to win economically, attract the best jobs, and unlock the dreams and rich talents of all our people.

I'm here today to remind us all that the people sent me here, and you here too, to deliver on a vision to lower costs, empower parents and restore excellence in schools, jumpstart the economy,

make our communities safe again, make government work for the people, and to clear a path to opportunity and prosperity.

I'm here this afternoon to celebrate the unbreakable foundation of the Spirit of Virginia. A spirit that is alive and well, a fire burning deep inside the resourceful and kind-hearted Virginians who make our Commonwealth a better place.

And I'm here this afternoon to challenge us to build the people's confidence in their leaders, to demonstrate to our children the best of representative government, not just by what we accomplish, but even more so by how we conduct ourselves, and to bring us closer together as brothers, sisters, friends, and neighbors.

A year ago, I stood here as a newcomer, energized by the perspective of having spent a year listening every day to Virginians and then able to echo their clarion call for change.

Virginians spoke loudly that they were ready for a new day – a new path forward.

Virginians were tired of the cold halls of government being disconnected from the cold realities that they were facing every day.

They were tired of rising prices at the grocery store and the gas pump.

They were tired of politics as usual.

They wanted their elected leaders to deliver results, not a divided impasse.

They wanted Virginia to soar, not stall.

Today, I still carry with me the stories, concerns and ideas from the millions of Virginians that we all serve – and once again, I'm here to carry not my message, but theirs.

In the year we've worked together, we have made substantial progress. We're on the right path. And Virginians know it; they see the transformation underway, and they want more progress, faster.

We provided historic tax relief on a bipartisan basis, including eliminating the state's grocery tax.

I was so pleased to see my democratic friends join us recently in celebrating the end of this regressive tax, something Virginians came together around during our election.

That's definitely a clear sign that there is bipartisan momentum for more tax relief this session.

I look forward to giving those on both sides of the aisle more opportunities to celebrate tax breaks in the coming weeks.

We raised teacher pay and made record investments in K-12 education. We empowered parents, because they matter, giving them the choice on whether their child wears a mask to school again, on a bipartisan basis.

We finally started being honest about the state of education in the Commonwealth, that Virginia's children were falling further and further behind, and we took necessary steps to get our children back on track.

We embraced through the Virginia Literacy Act – again on a bipartisan basis – the science of reading.

We are launching lab schools and re-establishing Virginia's standards from last to first.

We froze tuition at every public college and university.

We backed the blue with historic investments in salaries, training and equipment.

We reopened the Commonwealth for business recruiting iconic companies like Boeing and Raytheon Technologies, welcoming Lego's first ever American manufacturing facility and we watched companies like Plenty, RocketLabs, and DroneUp launch nextgen ag tech, rockets, and drones right here in Virginia.

We changed the way our government works the Virginia Employment Commission worked through 900,000 backlogged claims, and the DMV made life simpler, not harder and we saved OVER \$1.2 billion dollars in taxpayer money.

Through sheer force of will, we gave the children of our foster care system warm beds to sleep in, instead of cold office floors.

We started the work of modernizing our outdated regulatory process.

Most importantly – we stood together in times of trial and tribulation – devastating floods in Southwest Virginia and terrible acts of violence in Bridgewater, Charlottesville, Chesapeake and most recently in Newport News.

In each case, we've seen the love, the compassion, the fortitude, and the courage of our fellow Virginians on display.

And we began working with cities that were falling further and further behind.

We launched a comprehensive Partnership for Petersburg with state and local government, businesses, non-profit organizations, and faith leaders bringing more than 75 stakeholders together, and we are implementing over 40 initiatives to address – head-on – the challenges in this community by keeping our neighborhoods safe, fostering business and economic growth, improving access to healthcare, preparing Petersburg Students for Life, keeping People Moving with enhanced transportation and bringing together Community and Faith Leaders.

Our "Partnership for Petersburg" is demonstrating what we can accomplish with comprehensive commitment and cooperation.

The goal is to transform Petersburg's future because Petersburg Matters.

This partnership is the catalyst for this city's renewal, and a template for other struggling cities.

Two of the central partners in that effort have been Mayor Sam Parham and Police Chief Travis Christian, who are here today as not only my guests, but also as a guest of Delegate Kim Taylor and Senator Joe Morrissey.

The Mayor and the Chief embody the Spirit of Virginia. They represent the millions of Virginians who desperately want their leaders to set aside politics and focus on delivering results.

Mayor Parham and Chief Christian - please stand and let us recognize you for your commitment and leadership.

Yes, Virginia, we are on the right path. But, this is no time to set the cruise control, because we have a long way to go and a short time to get there. It's time to press the accelerator.

For the Commonwealth, accelerating means getting more done and doing it faster, and Virginians don't have time for political posturing or foot dragging.

They want results now. Not next year, but now.

Throughout my career in business and now as your governor, I've maintained a simple rule that I will apply here, today. Don't sidestep problems, clearly understand them and identify solutions.

As I've traveled the commonwealth and listened closely to the stories of Virginians, we truly are on a path to a better future – but we're nowhere near done.

Virginia's strengths are clear, an unrivaled location, extraordinary workforce, top ranked higher education, a leading port, and our right to work status...to name a few but there are some concerning signs.

Today, we need to be clear about the challenges we face.

At the heart of our economic challenge is growth.

A growing economy, growing jobs, growing population and a growing workforce drive revenue, drive opportunity and drive our quality of life.

And with the silent thief of inflation – let loose by President Biden – inflation that's stealing Virginian's hard earned money growth is more important than ever.

This endeavor is different because our success is not gained in isolation - we face relentless competition from surrounding states.

We have to compete to win.

Despite the progress we have made over the past year, our path forward is directed by an undeniable set of disturbing facts.

Since the start of the pandemic, Virginia has been in the bottom ten for net OUT migration in the country.

The states we compete against for jobs and investment are on the opposite end of that spectrum. North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Florida and Texas are all in the top ten for net IN migration.

These states have grown by more than 1.7 million people while Virginia has lost over 32,000.

Make no mistake, this trend started before the pandemic. Virginia has seen out migration for nine straight years.

2013 was when the states we compete with for people, talent, and jobs started lowering tax rates for businesses or for families, or both and started moving aggressively to make their business climates more competitive.

Virginia fell behind.

When I took office, Virginia was 47th in the nation for job recovery from the pandemic. Since then, more than 85,000 more Virginians are working – placing Virginia now in the top 20 of states for job growth since the turn of the year.

But we still have 125,000 fewer Virginians working than before the pandemic.

And those states that we compete with most directly --- North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Florida and Texas --- have not only recovered all of the jobs lost during the pandemic, but they've actually added a collective 1.3 million jobs.

That data tells an undeniable story.

Virginians are moving to states with lower taxes and lower cost of living and as those Virginians pack up and move away so go the jobs, investments, and tax revenue they drive.

Across the United States in the last fiscal year alone, economic development projects were announced representing over 600,000 jobs and nearly \$400 billion in capital investment.

What was Virginia's share of those projects? Just 3.4%

All of our competitor states did better than Virginia, some more than double.

As I said in December, our competitor states won those projects because we weren't cultivating our talent fast enough, because we weren't building the business-ready sites, and because our tax burden was increasingly uncompetitive.

We were not competing to win. If we are honest, we were not even in the ballgame.

But that can - and must - change.

I know there is bipartisan support in this chamber when it comes to harnessing our talent, and I know there is bipartisan support in this chamber to build shovel-ready sites but for the Commonwealth to become truly competitive with our neighboring states – we are going to have

to systematically move to lower taxes to make Virginia more attractive to young people, families, veterans, and retirees, and more competitive for business.

The budget amendments I have put forward calls for immediate tax cuts for businesses and individuals – key, visible commitments and a modern-day shot heard round the world that says Virginia is here to compete and Virginia is here to win.

We want all of our veterans to stay here. They make our communities better, so I'm asking you to eliminate the tax on military retirement income for veterans regardless of their age.

I'm also asking that you finish the work we started last year, increase again the standard deduction by another 20%, a change that helps all Virginians, but especially the lower and middle income tax-payers.

The plan I have laid out utilizes \$1 billion of the \$3.6 billion projected surplus for tax relief, and is structurally sound.

It is consistent with the Commonwealth's longstanding commitment to conservative budgeting.

Government's tax receipts have grown astronomically in recent years, 50 percent in the last four years alone. Even with the impending recession, they will continue to grow. The writing on the wall couldn't be more simple --- the people of Virginia are overtaxed. It's their money, not the governments, and they are voting with their feet and their wallets.

When combined with last year's tax relief, our plan would save a typical family more than \$1,900. And over 47,000 working Virginians would have their tax liability eliminated entirely.

And before we go too much further, let me say again: cutting taxes doesn't need to be a choice between Republicans and Democrats.

Democratic-led North Carolina recently planned to lower its individual tax rate to 4 percent by 2027, and its business tax to zero by the end of the decade.

"No action" cannot be an option. Or else, we will be moving from the high-speed lane to the breakdown lane --- willfully watching our Commonwealth fall behind.

The revenues are there to lower tax rates, we can keep Virginians here, we can attract people and businesses from other states, and we can fuel the economic engine that will drive growth, fund further tax reduction, and keep Virginia in that high speed lane.

One of the most encouraging moments I've had as Governor was judging Kempsville High School's shark tank contest in Virginia Beach, watching those seeds of entrepreneurialism and innovation just beginning to grow.

One of the student entrepreneurs I met that night is Jada Watts. Jada and her team, Beauty Perfection, are developing a line of specialty hair tools and beauty products.

Jada and her team won my confidence that night, and she joins us here this afternoon.

Jada, please stand.

On behalf of the Commonwealth of Virginia, thank you for using your entrepreneurial spirit to enrich your community. We can't wait to see how your small business flourishes.

Jada, please receive our congratulations.

Jada's story is an inspiring one.

Our collective goal must be for our schools to equip all Virginia students - every "Jada" in the Commonwealth - with the skills and knowledge to thrive, so they can dream big and then confidently pursue those dreams.

When it comes to what's truly at the heart of our Commonwealth's future - our children - we know that we have real work to do.

This year's NAEP scores painted a clear and unmistakable picture of learning loss across the Commonwealth. Virginia's children suffered the largest decline of any state in the country for 4th grade literacy and tied for the largest decline in 4th grade math.

Every parent in Virginia is now acutely aware that years ago the educational standards were systematically lowered, and, sadly, those lowered expectations were met.

Virginia's children bear the brunt of those misguided decisions. It's absolutely unacceptable by any standard and from any perspective...

We must teach our kids to read. I'm asking you to extend reading specialists under the Virginia Literacy Act to the 5th grade. We must teach our kids to do math, I'm asking you to provide math specialists for those poorest performing schools.

We must teach our children all of our history, the good and the bad.

Parents matter and we must protect their fundamental right to make decisions concerning the upbringing, education and care of their children. We must provide choice within the public school system by accelerating our bipartisan efforts to build lab schools.

And we must accelerate dual-enrollment partnerships between our high schools and our community college system, so we WILL realize a day where every child graduates with an industry recognized credential.

These are critical steps that we must take - because in the words of a famous Virginian, George Washington, "the best means of forming a virtuous and happy people will be found in the right education of our youth."

And I would add, in the right support of their parents and in the right support of their teachers.

The right education of our youth is impossible without great teachers.

I am constantly reminded of Mrs. Betty Weaver, my 4th grade teacher at Watkins Elementary School. She challenged me, pushed me, and encouraged me.

That's why I'm asking you to build on the bipartisan 10 percent pay raises, bonuses and record investments in education we made together last year.

Join me in providing an additional retention bonus to our teachers as well as \$50 million in performance-based bonuses for the very best teachers.

Our teachers are so important. And the best teachers should be rewarded for their performance.

Along with our teachers, there are other quiet heroes in our communities, our brave men and women in law enforcement who see the effects of our policy decisions on the front lines each day...

Because of soft on crime policies from previous administrations, the record murder rates of 2020 persist across the commonwealth, virtually every law enforcement agency has 20% or greater staffing vacancies, and the heartbreaking news reports continue.

The extensive work of our Violent Crime Task Force, working with city leaders in our toughest cities, heard clearly – we need more police on the street, more prosecutors to put criminals behind bars, tougher penalties for those who commit crimes with guns and more support for witnesses and community prevention.

Operation Bold Blue Line focuses precisely on those areas, especially more police on the street, more of the quiet heroes who put on a bulletproof vest every day to go to work.

We must recruit 2,000 more badges by focusing on high school programs, college programs, retiring military personnel, and attracting law enforcement officers from out-of-state.

We've created and are supporting an expedited Option 5 out-of-state lateral program so great law enforcement officers can bring their skills and love of service to the Commonwealth.

And I'm pleased today to welcome Marine veteran and Officer Juan Hernandez.

Officer Hernandez please stand.

Officer Hernandez recently joined the Winchester Police department from California. He took advantage of the Option 5 training academy, leaving California with his wife Vanessa and two children Joseph and Milena.

Thank you for choosing to make Virginia home, please accept our gratitude for your service.

Thank you to all of the law enforcement heroes – troopers, sheriff's deputies, police officers – every person behind the badge that keeps our families safe with great skill and courage.

You are also on the front lines of the challenges facing our behavioral health system, and our ongoing fight against fentanyl.

Virginia, like the country, is experiencing a behavioral health crisis. And our behavioral health system is overwhelmed, grappling with a level of mental health and substance use issues never seen before – all too often resulting in violence, suicide and murder.

Last month, I stood at Henrico Doctors Hospital to announce a three-year plan to fundamentally transform our behavioral health system. The “Right Help, Right Now” plan is comprehensive --- and I ask this General Assembly to fully fund the \$230 million bold first step of this plan.

This funding rapidly accelerates the transformation toward a strong and stable behavioral health safety net. It’s part of a bold approach that will substantially expand system capacity --- same day care, relieving the burden on law enforcement, greater pre-crisis service capacity in schools, a focus on substance use disorder, a stronger behavioral health workforce, and service innovations.

The plan includes \$20 million to fully fund the necessary number of mobile crisis units across the Commonwealth, so we can ensure that every Virginian can get the right help, when they need it.

We’re also asking for \$58 million to increase the number of Crisis Receiving Centers. This includes fully funding the number of necessary centers in Southwest Virginia and Hampton Roads – regions that have been too often left behind. And \$20 million to contract with hospitals to increase psychiatric emergency services.

And of course, to support this expanded capacity, we need to make our behavioral health workforce a priority. We are investing in the ways we recruit, train, license and retain behavioral healthcare professionals like psychiatrists, psychiatric nurse practitioners and the valued care and support professionals who work alongside them every day.

On top of this, a key part of the “Right Help, Right Now” plan is ensuring targeted support for Virginians suffering with a substance use disorder.

The painful truth is each of us in this room has a personal story or a moment in our lives where we are faced with a behavioral health challenge or crisis – with family members, loved ones, friends, or neighbors. That is certainly true for Suzanne and me.

Suzanne and I have been blessed in many ways, and blessed with many friends – two of them are with us today --- Tom and Delane Mazich.

The Mazich’s are a beautiful family; three strong and capable young boys raised by loving parents.

In September of 2020, Tom and Delane’s doorbell rang. Three Fairfax County police officers were there to share unthinkable news: their son, Greyson, was dead.

Greyson was in his senior year of college, battling pneumonia from his dorm room. He took a pill to help him go to sleep and never woke up.

The toxicology report was tragic: fentanyl poisoning.

Since Greyson’s death, they have dedicated their life to spreading HOPE, H-O-P-E. An acronym of action to encourage families and communities to Have conversations, Observe their children, Prosecute dealers and End the stigma around opioid abuse.

I pray no one in this room ever feels the pain and grief that I've seen the Mazich family endure, but too many experience the same pain everyday.

Tom and Delane represent so many parents who have suffered that powerful grief. To all of my colleagues here, please stand and show your support for Mazichs' incredible commitment to spread HOPE.

To all the other parents out there, know that you are not alone. And know that we are working together to take action.

Actions like statewide prevention efforts directed and funded by the Opioid Abatement Authority, along with full funding for Narcan supplies and training across the commonwealth – but we must combat the source.

Two years ago, this body passed a bill to make the sale, manufacture, and distribution of drugs killing our children, our friends and our neighbors a felony homicide.

It was vetoed by the last Governor, despite the fact it could have - and would have - saved countless lives. Send me that bill again, and I promise you - I will sign it.

Another group of Virginia's quiet heroes – our nurses – are well aware of the substance abuse crisis.

And everyone should be well aware of the fact that we have a serious shortage of nurses.

Virginia hospitals have identified a shortage of more than 4,000 nurses at their facilities, and vacancy rates are estimated as high as forty percent across all health care. We must accelerate the education and licensing of thousands of nurses.

The budget amendment I introduced in December includes \$35 million for the Earn to Learn Accelerator, a program designed to get more nurses from the classroom to the front line faster.

Kaitlyn Niesente a nurse from Stafford County is with us here in the gallery this afternoon.

Kaitlyn please stand.

Kaitlyn was one of the earliest enrollees in Germana Community College's Earn to Learn Program. Today, she's a Registered Nurse at Mary Washington Hospital's Intensive Care Unit.

Kaitlyn, thank you for being one of Virginia's quiet heroes.

Now, let's get Kaitlyn some reinforcements!

As we embark on the next 46 days...when it comes to unborn children, we can come together.

We can choose life, and choose to support mothers, fathers, and families in difficult decisions.

This session, I have asked the General Assembly to come together to protect life at 15 weeks, the point when a baby can feel pain.

It is clear, Virginians want fewer abortions, not more.

As we shift into high gear, we have some commonsense decisions to make and actions to take.

Commonsense is something that's all too lacking in government and politics these days. Too often, we're bogged down by the mental gymnastics of partisanship, the heavy weight of hands that do too much finger pointing, and a media culture that stokes controversy instead of collaboration.

But in a Commonwealth that was founded for the people, by the people, we must change course. With courage and conviction, we can -- and will -- restore commonsense to governing.

In choosing commonsense --- we can start with Virginia's energy policy.

Energy is the vital commodity that we use to keep a newborn baby warm in the NICU, senior citizens cool in hot summers, and the lights on during dinner rush at the family diner down the street. It should not - and will not - be subject to politics as usual.

So, our new path forward will embrace the "and" and reject the "or" of energy politics. With our All-American, All-of-the-above approach, Virginians will get affordable AND reliable AND increasingly clean energy without being tied to unattainable long-term requirements.

That is why I'm committed to working in partnership with each of you on legislation to end the rapidly rising electricity rates that are hurting families and making businesses less competitive.

Let's fund research to drive innovation in small modular reactors, hydrogen, carbon capture and more effective battery storage.

Let's set realistic carbon reduction goals every five years, as opposed to etching in stone 30 year plans based more on hope than reality.

Friends, that's common - sense.

It defies common sense that in 2021, lawmakers decided that instead of writing our own electric vehicle laws, Virginia would simply do whatever California decided to do.

Because lawmakers outsourced their responsibilities and surrendered our values to California -- - Virginians face a mandate starting in 2024 that limits and eventually bans the buying of gas-powered cars or trucks.

Unless we act, Virginia is hostage to the extreme policies of California.

Commonsense says that the law of Virginia should be written by elected leaders here --- not outsourced to radical bureaucrats in California.

It should also be commonsense to set realistic goals when it comes to preserving and cleaning up the Chesapeake Bay.

And I reaffirm our administration's commitment to working with you to leave the natural wonders of Virginia in a better place than how we found them.

I shared with the money committees in August that we inherited a Virginia woefully behind on its 2025 Chesapeake Bay goals. Now, we're taking a new direction.

The budget I've asked you to adopt includes \$200 million for the Resilient Virginia Revolving Loan Fund, \$237 million for nutrient removal projects, and another \$100 million for Richmond's failing Combined Sewer Overflow system.

We don't need a carbon tax to do what's right for the Chesapeake Bay.

It's common sense that when the Commonwealth sets goals, we actually take the steps needed to achieve them.

We've proven this by making investments in roads, rail and broadband to help Virginians stay connected.

We can also choose commonsense when it comes to social media, and the ever-growing threat that the Chinese Communist Party poses to our national security, our privacy and our way of life in Virginia.

We know that our children use technology at an unthinkable, breakneck pace. But the data of our teenagers should not be used and manipulated by big tech companies.

I'm asking you to pass a bill that prohibits tech companies from selling the data of children under the age of 18.

Last month, I signed an Executive Order banning TikTok and WeChat on state-owned devices.

Everyone knows that TikTok is a tool of the Chinese Communist Party, a dictatorial political party that only has one goal: global dominance at the expense of the United States.

While the national security concerns and personal privacy implications of CCP technology are well-known, I believe Virginians should also be wary of Chinese Communist intrusion into Virginia's economy.

We welcome and encourage economic cooperation with international companies.

I've said before that I want "Made in America" to mean "Made in Virginia." But let me be clear, "Made in Virginia" cannot be a front for the Chinese Communist Party.

In addition, Virginians – not the CCP – should own the rich and vibrant agricultural lands God has blessed us with.

That is why I am asking the General Assembly to send me a bill to prohibit dangerous foreign entities tied to the CCP from purchasing Virginia farmland.

The stakes are too high and the consequences are too great.

Friends, that is just common sense.

I hope throughout our time here, that as we reach moments of impasse... whether on who should own Virginia farmland, how to protect the privacy of our children online, or whether Virginia law should be written in Virginia or California... we will find the courage and the confidence to choose commonsense.

This afternoon, I've been honored to welcome a few of our fellow Virginians to the Capitol.

You met Mayor Parham and Chief Christian. You met Jada Watts. You met Officer Rodriguez. You met Kaitlyn Niesente. And you heard the gut-wrenching story of our friends, Tom and Delane Mazich, and the way they've turned their grief into HOPE for others.

I've shared these stories with you because they embody the Spirit of Virginia. And there are so many more stories behind them.

Suzanne and I were blessed this year with the opportunity to present six Spirit of Virginia awards to deserving individuals and organizations who are Strengthening the Spirit of Virginia.

This award recognizes the unique qualities and standout achievements of incredible men, women and organizations doing great things across the Commonwealth - like our friends Major General Bob Dees and Brigadier General Jeff Horne at the National Center for Healthy Veterans in Altavista at Valor Farm.

The Valor Farm is a shining example of the embodiment of the Spirit of Virginia, an effort maintained by hundreds of volunteers to lift-up those who have sacrificed in the name of freedom and the defense of liberty.

Thank you.

And to all of Virginia's veterans and to those currently serving at home and abroad – I want to say thank you for answering the call to serve, sacrifice and protect.

Few embody the Spirit of Virginia more than our servicemen and women. This past year, the Virginia National Guard, led by Major General Timothy Williams and under the direction of the Secretary of Defense and Veterans Affairs, completed a historic mobilization period surpassed only twice in the last century.

We are thrilled to have welcomed back more than 2,000 troops from overseas.

Here at home, these heroes are always ready to assist their fellow Virginians in times of need. Whether responding to a natural or man-made disaster, our citizen soldiers and their families are highly adaptable and critical to the Commonwealth's security.

We also owe a special debt of gratitude to those families and employers whose support is so critical to the success of the Guard's mission in Virginia and across the globe.

To shine a light on more incredible Virginians, the First Lady has also had the chance to feature women from across the Commonwealth in her Sisterhood Spotlights.

Whether it's the amazing women in Virginia's Cabinet, our Lieutenant Governor Earle-Sears, Carmen Williams and her inspiring work as a Domestic Violence advocate, or Miriam Miyares and her heroic efforts to flee Communist Cuba, each of these women carries the flame that is the Spirit of Virginia.

These individuals give us hope.... and they give us reason to believe that just as it was in 1776, the Spirit of Virginia is alive and well today.

And I hope that Spirit is what motivates us to take on the challenges ahead of us. It's what Virginians deserve.

There are a few who simply and inexplicably will put more value on political stalemate than unified achievement.

Well, today I stand before you to say that Virginians expect more from us.

Because while the people expect us to debate and argue over what divides us --- Virginians demand that we come together on what unites us.

In his letter to the Thesalonians, the Apostle Paul guides us on what exactly that can look like. Paul says we should "admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone."

Now is no time for idleness, no time for faintheartedness. It is a time to seek to do good.

Friends, Virginia is the birthplace of America, the most exceptional nation the world has ever known...and while we have not always lived up to our ideals, through the faith and determination that has been seared in our heart by a loving and almighty Creator, we have always strived to do better.

So, I'm here to ask each of you, as partners with me, to summon the courage and the confidence to set aside acrimony and partisanship to do better.

To press forward always "seeking to do good to one another, and everyone" ... to collaborate for a stronger, better Virginia.

A Virginia where children get the world-class education they deserve.

A Virginia where the next generation can live out their dreams... building ships and submarines in Newport News, becoming an engineer at Lego, and launching rockets to space from Wallops Island.

A Virginia where citizens in crisis can get the "right help, right now."

A Virginia with safe streets and neighborhoods where our law enforcement heroes are lifted up, celebrated and thanked.

A Virginia where energy is reliable, affordable, and increasingly clean, where citizens of the Commonwealth govern and make decisions for themselves.

A Virginia with a vibrant and growing population because our foot is on the economic accelerator, a Virginia where We. Are. Winning.

This is our own moment to eternalize in the books of history how we lived up to the Spirit of Virginia.

How we didn't shy away from challenges, but rose to meet them.

So let's find the courage and confidence to lock arms, and do the work together.

Thank you, God bless you. And God bless the great Commonwealth of Virginia.

