

**ADDRESS OF
GOVERNOR GLENN YOUNGKIN**

**The State of the Commonwealth
Address to the Joint Assembly
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Mr. Speaker, Madame President, Lieutenant Governor Earle-Sears, Attorney General Miyares, members of our General Assembly, Chief Justice Goodwyn and Justices of our Supreme Court, members of my Cabinet, and fellow Virginians: what an honor to be with you this afternoon.

Today, we gather in our Commonwealth's Capitol, not as Republicans or Democrats, but as Virginians.

What an honor it is to welcome 54 members of the General Assembly that are new to their seats.

And as we open this next chapter, we mark yet another trail-blazing moment in the history of our Commonwealth in welcoming the new Speaker of the House: Speaker Don Scott.

Notwithstanding this esteemed body being described as a Citizen's Legislature, we all know it is a full-time job. And to serve is both a privilege and a responsibility. I want to thank you and your families for the sacrifices that you make.

I particularly want to thank our First Lady, Suzanne Youngkin. Her love for Virginia and more so the people across this great Commonwealth inspires me and so many every day. Thank you for your service – and thank you for your grace.

Two years ago, we began a journey – we began a journey to ignite hope, to inspire faith in our future, and make Virginia the best place to live, work, and raise a family.

Our meeting today in this great chamber is both an acknowledgement of our progress made and a charge to press ahead for even greater strides. And also to acknowledge that our journey together is only at half-time.

The state of our Commonwealth is strong...stronger than she has been in a very long time, and we, all of us, should feel a great sense of accomplishment.

The Spirit of Opportunity has expanded, the Spirit of Service...of helping those in need... has spread. The Spirit of Hope has been unleashed all because the collective Spirit of Virginia has strengthened.

233,000 more Virginians are working today than 2 years ago, Virginia has risen from bottom third in job growth to number 3 in the nation during the past 24 months...more Virginians are working today than ever before.

We provided a record \$5 billion in tax relief, particularly benefitting lower income Virginians who need it most.

We funded record amounts in education...

We re-established expectations of excellence with intensive tutoring, adopting the science of reading....launching lab schools and renewing the focus on career and technical education...

We rebuilt the ranks of law enforcement with record investment and an unwavering commitment that we back the blue.

We launched historic efforts to transform our overwhelmed behavioral health system, our childcare system – critical for working families, a foster care system that was failing too many, and a developmental disability waiver system that left so many unserved. We fostered an even more business-friendly ecosystem, with investments in sites... streamlining permitting and reducing regulations.

We embraced innovation and commonsense for our All-American, All-of-the-Above energy future that will deliver reliable, affordable, and yes, increasingly clean power.

We regained our commitment to conserve God's great natural resources, with significant progress to meet our Chesapeake Bay 2025 goals.

And we went to work to make government run more efficiently and more effectively.

All of these accomplishments work together for a better day in Virginia.

Yet, while Virginia is stronger than ever, she – and we – have major challenges.

Virginia has a population migration problem. The data is irrefutable.

Even though the rate has declined this past year, for 10 years now, more people moved away, rather than to Virginia, from the other 49 states.

We have fewer children in our K-12 public schools than five years ago, fewer than 10 years ago.

3 out of 4 people leaving Virginia make \$100,000 dollars or more. And the taxes they pay, are leaving with them.

Among the states, there are winners, and there are losers...jobs and opportunity winners and losers...taxes and talent winners and losers, transportation, quality education, behavioral health and public safety winners and losers.

Virginia must be a winner – and it's up to us to make sure that she is.

As we are nearing the 250th anniversary of this great country, we are reminded of our nation's foundational pillars of inalienable rights including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, paired with our collective pursuit of a more perfect union. And that pursuit is built upon protecting freedom and enshrined principles of equality and opportunity so that all Virginians and all Americans can pursue their dreams.

You see, I think we can agree that Virginia's story is America's story. It is our shared past and it will be our shared future. And in this next chapter, to unleash true opportunity for all Virginians we must embrace the call to lead.

Let's lead because Virginians deserve it. From the single mom in Petersburg, working two jobs, so that there will be more opportunity for her child, to the farmer in Shenandoah, who struggled through this year's drought, but never gave up, to the first-generation technology graduate forging new opportunities in a new country, to the nurse in Washington County who just finished the night shift, to the grandmother who moved here all the way from Ohio to take care of her grandkids while her daughter is serving overseas to protect our freedom...

I've met them all – and so have you. We work for them. Every one of these Virginians, in addition to the 8.7 million I didn't mention, deserve not only God's blessing, but also our leadership through service.

If we lead together, opportunity will abound.

We know that a future filled with opportunity begins in the classroom.

Coming out of the pandemic, it was clear: after prolonged and unnecessary school closures, our students experienced catastrophic learning loss, and we risked losing an entire generation.

Together, we responded. I would particularly like to thank Senators Lucas and Locke and Delegate Knight. We introduced the “ALL-IN Virginia Plan,” providing intensive math and reading tutoring in the foundational years of 3rd-8th grade.

Let me tell you a story of a mother and her daughter from Gloucester. This mother received a letter in the mail saying her 8-year-old daughter was way behind and could benefit from All-In tutoring. Chloe, like so many 3rd graders, said, “who needs math?”

But they made a deal, as moms and daughters often do. So Chloe went to early morning math tutoring and was greeted by a smiling teacher with a hug and a snack.

Here are the results. In September, Chloe scored in the 2nd percentile in math. In November, she scored in 50th percentile. And in December, she scored in the 80th percentile.

And they’re both here with us. Mrs. Nicole McPherson and Chloe – thank you for your hard work and thank you for blazing a trail in Virginia.

As of last month, I’m proud to announce that every single school division is ALL IN. So many more will benefit, and Virginia is leading.

I have proposed – again - the largest Education Budget in the Virginia’s history. \$20.2 billion dollars over the biennium.

Heading into this next fiscal year, annual state funding will have increased \$2.1 billion over 2021 levels, a 27% increase, including 17% increase for teacher raises, record funding for facilities and even more support for student services.

This has been a tremendous effort on all of our behalf to fund our schools at unprecedented levels. And I would caution us from drawing strong opinions from out of date facts that precede this great work.

Even as we’ve made great progress, I know we all agree we can do better than the current SOQ funding formula. My administration is committed to working with you between now and the November 1, 2024 deadline we set to deliver a plan to replace the byzantine SOQ system with a system that puts students first.

While we know that our youngest generation fell behind during the pandemic, much of the strain was placed on parents. Especially Virginia’s moms who struggled to return to the workforce after the pandemic.

I was proud to announce Building Blocks for Virginia Families last month which will ensure that working families—especially those with limited means—have the opportunity to choose quality care that meets the needs of their families.

By innovating with a digital wallet, ensuring no working family loses access, prioritizing parent choice and cutting red tape for families and providers, we are delivering a best-in-class model for early learning and childcare. These are the building blocks that are at the center of the future of the Commonwealth.

Critically, we must always support mothers...including at the very beginning so they will choose to bring life into this world.

Let me tell you about someone who has committed her life to maternal health and helping mothers succeed. She is the founder of Urban Baby Beginnings and I was proud to stand beside her early last year to celebrate our first maternal health hub opening in Petersburg.

As part of our strong partnership with the great city of Petersburg, Urban Baby Beginnings helps more women access prenatal health resources...whether that is finding a doctor or a doula...later providing the support that new mothers often need... and all the while navigating a complex system.

You see, there are many moms who face this challenge. In 2021, 283 expecting mothers signed up for Medicaid coverage in Petersburg, but less than 20% accessed prenatal care.

This is why Urban Baby Beginnings is so important.

Stephanie Spencer is here with us today. Stephanie, thank you for your heart for healthy women and babies in the Commonwealth.

Virginia leading also means we tackle the cost of living to create opportunity so that Virginians can keep more of their hard-earned money, have great jobs, and stop moving away.

Let me just remind you, Virginians are moving away. Families, small businesses, entrepreneurs, job creators, and young professionals, and the taxes they pay that fund our schools, our behavioral health care and other essential services, are moving away too.

In order to address these issues over the past two years, Virginians have received \$5 billion in tax relief, which equates to \$2,200 for the typical Virginia family and \$4,500 for our veterans....

In the second half, we need to structurally reform our tax code. We can do this by cutting taxes across the board 12% and paying for almost 80% of this by modernizing our tax code, which includes closing the tech tax loophole and increasing the sales and use tax by 0.9 percent.

For low-income Virginians, we are including an expansion of the earned income tax credit.

There is one topic not included in my budget submission, but that I challenge all of us to take up and resolve – and that is to eliminate the single most hated tax in Virginia -- the locally-imposed personal car tax.

We can eliminate the car tax, provide real relief, and keep our localities whole.

To be clear, this is a package deal, and I'm only interested in a plan that reduces taxes for Virginians.

Our neighbors in North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, and Florida have lower taxes – or started their journey to lower taxes, and they are winning the opportunity sweepstakes.

Our neighbors to the North are losing the population, fiscal growth, and opportunity contest.

Our message must be clear: we are going to compete and win and ensure Virginians keep more of their hard-earned money – and to do this we must lead.

As I stated in my first hours as Governor, at the heart of opportunity and jobs is the fundamental right to work.

Please don't bring me a bill that impacts Virginians' Right to Work, as it will be met with the business end of my veto pen.

Let's spend our time on advancing our great workforce, building on our new Workforce Development and Advancement Agency and making it easier for people to get licensed or certified to start their career by expanding universal licensing, making it easier for people moving to Virginia to get to work, and

making sure every high school student has the opportunity to graduate with a diploma PLUS credential that will launch them into a high-paying job.

Key to economic growth is the fact that Virginia's power demand is growing at a rate five times that of our neighbors. The simple fact is that if we don't build capacity right now, Virginia will not grow.

Innovation and base load power are key – and our “All of the Above All American Energy” plan embraces everything – America's largest offshore wind development project...solar...hydrogen...nuclear...carbon capture....and natural gas.

This is an issue we cannot turn away from. So let's work together to keep costs down and keep the lights on.

Virginians are in charge of our destiny – no one else. That means we also put power where it belongs – with the people. We must reject the current misguided law that allows California to dictate our vehicle laws.

Not only does it defy common sense - Virginians should decide for Virginians.

With this misguided law in place, the regulatory process is starting this year, meaning more and more Virginians will see higher costs and fewer choices.

The fastest way to fix this is for Virginia's General Assembly to pass a bill allowing Virginians to decide what car they drive.

Our economic development activity has set a record pace. Amazon Web Services, LEGO, Boeing, Raytheon, Hilton, Framatome, and the list goes on and on.

Over two years, we've welcomed companies committing nearly \$71 billion in capital investments - more than 2.5 times any other two-year period.

Just this month, we announced a sports and entertainment vision unlike any in history. In partnership with the General Assembly, we can bring this opportunity to fruition.

Together, we can welcome both a new NBA team and a new NHL team, \$12 billion in new economic activity and 30,000 new jobs.

To be clear – all of this is accomplished with no upfront cash commitment from the Commonwealth, no new taxes, and a one-of-a-kind public-private partnership where Virginia shares in the project’s success.

To those on the MEI Commission—thank you for your unanimous and bipartisan support. An opportunity of this magnitude is both rare and complex, and I’m committed to working together to deliver this win for the Commonwealth.

It will be a huge win – not just for the Commonwealth, but for the region, and for the City of Alexandria. Small businesses will win too.

One of those small businesses is Pork Barrell BBQ in the Del Ray Neighborhood. Where for over a decade, you’d find its owner Bill Blackburn behind the counter.

He is a father of two, and his roots in Alexandria run deep. And he knows that when opportunity knocks, you should open the door.

He knows having a world-class sports and entertainment venue that’s unlike anything on the east coast, right around the corner is good for business.

Bill - thank you for showing us, when opportunity presents itself, Virginia should seize it. And thank you for being one of the many thousands of small business owners that are the lifeblood of Virginia’s economy.

The Road to Opportunity for many Virginians will be cleared by accelerating the transformation of our behavioral health system -- a transformation desperately needed given the clear behavioral health crisis that we face.

And while this is a three year journey, we just celebrated the one-year anniversary of our “Right Help, Right Now” transformation. This time last year, we’d hoped to have 2 new emergency room alternatives, and today we have 8, and there’s more to come.

In the month of November alone, we received over 8,300 calls on the 988 line. And Virginia is among the top in the nation in answering those calls quickly.

We started this journey with 36 mobile crisis units, with a goal of doubling them. And I can tell you, today we are at 97 mobile crisis units in the Commonwealth, and still going strong.

The transformation is working, but we need to do more.

I'm committed to concluding the settlement agreement that Virginia entered with the Department of Justice 12 years ago, and I've requested in my budget funds to completely eliminate the current backlog of 3,544 Virginians on the Priority One Waiting list. We must ensure that these Virginians have meaningful living and care options, as well as other elements that meet the goals of the settlement.

We must ensure Virginia delivers for our youngest generation, including the most vulnerable. And for too long, our foster care system has failed our young Virginians, so we started the Safe and Sound Task Force to address this head-on.

One of those Safe and Sound volunteers is here -- Angie, joined by her husband Stan, and their adopted son Micah. Stan and Angie have been pastoring in their church for 26 years, and when they welcomed their first foster child, it opened their eyes to the need. Ultimately, they used their ministry and time to work towards bettering the entire system.

And in Angie's words: "Not everyone is called to foster, but everyone can play a part."

Friends, children deserve families. They deserve support. They deserve love. Angie, Stan, and Micah - thank you for reminding us of that.

So let's all do our part to make Virginia home to every child by working together to expand kinship care.

Let's lead to support Virginia's families.

Just as I did last year, I'm asking you to send me a bill that empowers parents to protect their children and prohibits tech companies from selling the data of children under the age of 18.

Virginians suffer when we miss the opportunity to lead. There is no greater reminder of this than the stark fact that on average 5 Virginians die from fentanyl poisoning every single day. And because of weak drug laws, too many drug dealers are not prosecuted.

Send me a bill that will raise the penalty to felony homicide when the manufacturer or distributor of illicit drugs or fentanyl causes a death.

There is no doubt that the ramifications of addictive drugs and the infiltration of violent gangs is at an unprecedented level in our communities and it has resulted in devastating violence. We know a majority of violence is related to drug and gang activity.

We should also know that Virginia's gun laws are already among the toughest in the nation. Therefore, I'm asking you: allow us to hold accountable those criminals that commit crimes with guns by lengthening and making more severe the penalties in order to keep them off the streets.

Our brave men and women in law enforcement face danger on a daily basis. And over these past two years, 14 law enforcement officers and first responders have fallen in the line of duty. I've attended too many funerals.

Heroes in law enforcement are all around us.

One of those heroes is here with us today. On a day like any other, he was on his shift, committed to his job and he heard a woman in need. And in the moments that followed, he was shot and tragically paralyzed from the waist down.

--Officer Bruce Foster. I'd ask that we stand to honor you.

When I visited Officer Foster in the hospital, I was moved by your unwavering desire to continue serving. Bruce said, "God has a plan and I want to continue to serve."

And I'm proud today to offer Officer Bruce Foster a chance to continue his career and his service with the Virginia State Police when he is ready to return to work.

I know Virginia State University President Abdullah and I just might be in a bidding war for your services.

Just as the law enforcement community has come around supporting Bruce, we should come around that community that protects us.

In our next budget, let's double down on Operation Bold Blue Line and campus-based security....and let's continue to build trust between law enforcement and the communities they represent with increased funding for bipartisan programs like Operation Ceasefire, the Firearm Violence Prevention Fund, and Safer Communities.

We must never stand and watch when evil shows itself. We must always be called to action. One step we took last year was to champion a bill on a bipartisan basis to define antisemitism so clearly that no one can argue that it doesn't still exist.

On that day we signed the bill, I remember it was cloudy, but the sun burst through, and the quiet words of one woman reverberate today.

"Hate is wrong, love is right." "Hate is wrong, love is right." Those were the words of Halina (Huh-Lee-Na) Zimm, a 96-year-old Holocaust survivor, here with us today, and joined by her family.

Halina, thank you reminding us to define the good. I want to thank the entire General Assembly for taking a stand. And I want to challenge us...I want to challenge all of us ... Pass a bill which says the Commonwealth of Virginia won't do business with companies that boycott Israel.

Pass a hate crime bill which ensures all forms of antisemitism, not just religious bigotry, are treated as hate crimes under the law.

When parents send their children to college, when a young family goes to the grocery store, when someone goes to Friday prayer at a Mosque, or Saturday services at temple, or Sunday morning worship at church, Virginians should not worry about being the victim of a crime simply because of their religion, their race, or creed.

We're better than this. We're Virginia, the first state to forge religious freedom into the fabric of our nation, with the Statute for Religious Freedom, with those timeless words that God created the "mind free." We should lead and do the right thing.

For generations these ideals have been protected by our brave men and women in uniform.

Right now, I want to take a moment and recognize Virginia-based military servicemembers, both reserve and active duty, and our amazing Virginia national guard, and their families who serve with them, here and across the globe in defense of freedom. Among them are the Norfolk-based USS Eisenhower and USS Gerald Ford supporting the defense of our allies in the Middle East.

We say, "May God bless you, and keep you, and watch over you and protect you." And we collectively say thank you.

We're at halftime and we've accomplished a lot on a bipartisan basis, together. But we're just getting started.

Our Founders inscribed in the Constitution a form of government that requires legislation to not only be passed by the General Assembly but to be signed by the Governor. We must work together.

There is a road, a road less traveled, that we can choose to take together.

A road where we stop accepting mediocrity and start winning comprehensively.

A road where we put down petty politics and pick up the collective good of the Commonwealth.

A road where we work together collaboratively, solving problems rather than ignoring them.

A road where opportunity is unleashed across the Commonwealth.

A road where Virginia leads.

If we want to be on this road...where more people call Virginia home...then we can come around the table to lower the cost of living for all Virginians...we can raise the ceiling and the floor in education, foster safe communities, and protect our constitutional freedoms...we can empower people to not just choose life, but to choose to build their life - their future - here in Virginia.

If we want Virginia to unleash opportunity, the second half starts now.

It's time to lead. It's time to lead together. To build a Virginia that is overflowing with opportunity and arrive at our ultimate destination - which is that proverbial shining city on the hill. And in order to get there, we do it together.

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

