

**ADDRESS OF
GOVERNOR GLENN YOUNGKIN**

**The State of the Commonwealth
Address to the Joint Assembly
2025**



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Mr. Speaker, Madame President, Lieutenant Governor Earle-Sears, Attorney General Miyares, Members of the General Assembly, Justices of the Virginia Supreme Court and judges of the State Corporation Commission, Members of my Cabinet, Fellow Virginians: what an honor to join you once again in Mr. Jefferson's capitol.

Thank you all for coming together to receive my annual assessment of the State of our beloved Commonwealth.

We are gathering here a few days later than normal after the difficult and frustrating water crisis in Richmond last week. Thank you to everyone who stepped-up to serve neighbors, communities, and our capital city.

That includes the House and Senate Clerks. And I especially want to salute Madame Clerk for 50 years of service to our Commonwealth.

And let me welcome two new citizen-legislators, Senator Cifers and Delegate Singh, and now Senator Srinivasan.

We are also reminded that last year, we lost an incredible Virginian, legislator and friend – Senator Frank Ruff.

We all admired his selfless service to the Commonwealth.

As we remember Frank, let us reflect on the opportunity with which we have all been blessed, the opportunity to serve.

In that same spirit, I especially want to thank our gracious First Lady, Suzanne Youngkin. Thank you for loving me and for your steadfast commitment and service to all Virginians.

As we gather here in Virginia, I'd ask all of us to lift-up in prayer the Los Angeles residents who have lost everything to the savage fires, the firefighters and first responders, and those that have tragically lost their lives.

Thank you.

Three years ago we began a journey together... not as Republicans or Democrats, but Virginians--a journey to make Virginia the very best place to live, work and raise a family, a journey for Virginia to compete to win, a journey to strengthen the Spirit of Virginia, together.

As we begin the year 2025, I'm proud to report to you that Virginia's economy is strong....stronger than it has been in a long time; our student scores are up; violent crime is down; people are moving to Virginia; we've seen record job growth, record new business investment, and our State budget is projected to run a large surplus again. Our AAA bond-rating is one of the strongest in the nation.

Virginia is growing. Virginia is competing. Virginia is winning.

The State of our Commonwealth is Strong, very strong.

Let me be clear... this strength is because of the work that we have all done together.

And not just those gathered here today – Virginians, across this great Commonwealth, whether having just moved here or having been here for a lifetime, from all walks of life, are contributing to our success.

On behalf of our now 8.8 million bosses, I urge us to stay the course, and to press forward boldly- so Virginia keeps winning and Virginia keeps soaring.

In our three years together, we have built strong pillars that support a winning Virginia.

We passed record funding for our students and teachers, and returned expectations of excellence to our classrooms...we passed the Virginia Literacy Act and ALL In Virginia to improve early literacy outcomes and reverse learning loss; we launched lab schools and reignited career and technical education to increase multiple pathways for students.

We passed \$5 billion in tax relief so Virginians can keep more of their hard-earned money – because that money belongs to them, not the government.

We made it easier to do business in Virginia – streamlining 50,000 regulations. We invested in sites, transformed workforce development, and protected the fundamental right to work.

Businesses are investing and expanding, and just in case you hadn't seen, CNBC named Virginia the top state in America for business.

We've backed our law enforcement, delivered record funding and pay raises...took-on drugs and gangs, battled the fentanyl crisis, and, this past year, we have reduced murders in 13 of our most violent cities by 38%.

We're transforming our behavioral health system with *Right Help, Right Now*, meeting the needs of Virginians pre-crisis, in-crisis and post-crisis.

We're standing strong for our military, our veterans and their families. Last August we were ranked #1 in America for caring most about our Veterans.

We're preserving Virginia's God-given natural resources - making huge strides towards our 2025 Chesapeake Bay goals, delivering the healthiest Bay in over two decades.

Virginia has returned to a place rich with opportunity, while constantly striving to serve our citizens more effectively and more efficiently—truly making government work for Virginians.

Today, the Virginia Employment Commission backlog is cleared, your wait time is down substantially at the DMV, and because of our efforts to streamline and reduce regulations, we're saving Virginians \$1.2 billion annually.

When these pillars stand together, as they are now, Virginia is stronger than ever.

What we are doing is working. But, we cannot let Virginia stall, we must push Virginia to soar to even greater heights.

As you have heard me say before, our neighbors in North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, and Florida have been growing rapidly. They are going to keep pushing forward, just as we must...in quality education and healthcare, lowering the cost of living by providing tax relief, building strong economies, and providing safe communities.

Because there are winning states and losing states.

When we started all of this, Virginia was 41st in the nation in net population movement- we are now 9th. For the first time in over a decade, more people are moving to Virginia from the other 49 states than moving away.

Virginia was bottom 3rd in job growth, now we have more Virginians working than ever before.

Certain states consistently attract people and jobs, and other states consistently lose people and lose jobs. The reality is that Virginia must compete harder than ever.

If we do not continue to build the pillars – to keep doing what is working - Virginia will again fall behind.

To keep soaring in education, with our historic investments over the past three years, we must continue to expand and create new pathways, drive innovation, and propel the quality of education and accountability.

I want to pause here to emphasize... our investments in education have been transformational.

18 percent raises for Virginia's teachers...an over 50 percent increase in overall funding for public education... that's \$7 billion.

We have increased investment in K-12 public education more than any other General Assembly or Governor has ever.

The budget amendments I recently submitted continue that shared effort, with an incremental \$517 million in direct aid bringing us to \$22.1 billion for the biennium, and

an additional \$290 million for school construction, for a total investment of nearly \$2 billion over the last three years.

Last year, I challenged us all to not just increase our investment in education, but to also bring our funding formula into the 21st century, a funding formula that would meet the needs of every student.

While a concerted effort was made this past year, there is much work still to do. Therefore, I urge us to not piecemeal this effort during this session, but rather finalize the foundational and comprehensive re-design of our funding formula, and start drafting legislation later this year.

I have directed \$1 million of already appropriated Office of Transformation money to support this work; to deliver a comprehensive modeling tool by this summer. In addition, we must engage with stakeholders to help leaders in this chamber and across the Commonwealth understand the impact of a new funding formula on students and school divisions.

We can both invest record amounts to support an extraordinary public school system and provide students and parents pathways that work best for their families.

That pathway is unique for each family. That is why I am proposing \$50 million for Virginia Opportunity Scholarships for low-income families.

Look again to the states around us. Maryland, North Carolina, and even Washington DC, all have opportunity scholarships.

Virginia Opportunity Scholarships will provide \$5,000 scholarships for 10,000 low-income families and do not take a single penny from existing education funding.

In addition, I'm proposing that we build on the success we've seen with lab schools by expanding partnerships with our HBCUs. We have 15 lab schools in motion - which will serve 5,000 public school students across all 8 Superintendents Regions, and we have new applications waiting to be funded. Lab schools specializing in healthcare, coding, space, maritime and, of course teaching.

With us today is Riley Edwards, a student at the Future Educators' Academy Lab School, a partnership between Culpeper, Orange, Madison and Rappahannock Counties, Germanna Community College and the University of Mary Washington. After she graduates from the Future Educators Academy next year, Riley will have her Associate's degree in early education at no cost to her. She wants to become an elementary school teacher and then guidance counselor in Culpeper.

Riley, we look forward to you teaching and inspiring our next generation.

Let's work together to provide Opportunity Scholarships, expand lab schools, and further career and technical education so parents and students have multiple pathways to a great education.

Even with our historic investments in education, there has been an existential crisis inside our classrooms – the use of cell phones and social media in schools.

While these are remarkable innovations, the cold hard truth is, cell phones are damaging the developing minds of our young people.

The data is clear:

Teens spend on average 7 hours on their phones per day.

Suicide rates have increased 167% for our young girls.

Rates of depression are up 145% for our young boys.

Last year, I issued Executive Order 33, calling for cell phone-free education in our K-12 schools. This year, every school division will have cell phone-free environments in their classrooms, with 100 school divisions, bell to bell. In fact, many divisions across the state that attempted half-measures found they didn't work and have now gone bell-to-bell.

We know local leadership is critical. At Middlesex High School, the principal is tracking a dramatic decrease in disciplinary referrals... and reports that lunch in the cafeteria is loud once again... because students are talking to each other instead of buried in their phones.

Please welcome Principal Susan Fleet who is working so hard to help our students succeed.

With clear data and transparency, we can track what matters most: student performance.

That is at the core of the new School Performance and Support Framework - which just received federal approval from the Biden Administration.

Now we can identify the schools performing at high levels that can serve as models for others.

And we can – with candor and no judgement – identify the schools that need additional support.

We have a Roadmap to Readiness to support the schools that need intensive help and get them back on track. With the data from our performance and support framework, we

can now direct over \$50 million in new funding to support specific schools and students that need it the most.

We must focus on what's best for our students today – not years down the road.

The combination of education, career pathways, great jobs, and our thriving economy creates opportunity.

When we started our journey together three years ago, Virginia had lost 140,000 people from the workforce.

Today, jobs are growing like never before, with 257,000 more Virginians working versus January 2022.

And there are more than 65,000 future jobs coming, tied to company announced investments and expansions.

Today, in addition to being the top state in the nation for business, we surged through our 4-year goal of adding 10,000 high-wage, high-growth startups, in 2 years.

We have welcomed \$90 billion in new investment commitments from companies like LEGO, LS Cable, Micron and Microporous, a battery supplier investing \$1.35 billion at the Southern Virginia Megasite – proving that we can attract huge investment without giving Virginia tax dollars to companies controlled by the Chinese Communist Party.

And these are great jobs - jobs that are rocket fuel for our economy, lifting up all Virginians.

Virginians like Antonio Lomba. In high school, he chose the career and technical education pathway, completed the HVAC youth apprenticeship program, and began working at Comfort Systems. He'll complete his journeyman's certification in May.

At 19, Antonio has found not just a job, but a career to support his young daughter and growing family. He's not done yet. Antonio plans to launch his own business and fulfill his lifelong dream of becoming an entrepreneur.

Antonio, keep working, and keep winning.

To keep Virginia booming with more jobs, and more opportunity, we must continue to lower the cost of living with tax relief.

The states that are gathering the most people and the most jobs also continue to reduce tax burdens.

Together, we've provided Virginians with \$5 billion in tax relief.

We eliminated the state grocery tax, made the first \$40,000 of veteran retirement income tax free, nearly doubled the standard deduction and provided significant tax rebates.

Leadership from both sides has said in recent weeks that we need to provide more tax relief to lower the cost of living.

No surprise but I agree – and that starts with the most hated tax in America – Virginia’s car tax.

The Car Tax Credit for Working Class Families – will provide a permanent, refundable, income tax credit up to \$150 for individuals earning under \$50,000 a year and up to \$300 for joint filers earning under \$100,000 a year.

We can fund the first three years with \$1.1 billion of the state’s projected surplus.

And with the average car tax for a typical family of four being \$290, it would fully cover their car tax while keeping localities whole.

We also can reduce tax burdens on hardworking hospitality and restaurant staff. Kim Jordan works at Mary’s Kitchen in Virginia Beach. She loves her work, her coworkers, and her customers.

But there’s not much left after she pays taxes on her tips.

Right now, she is helping pay her daughter’s student loans. And like many Virginians, there are car payments, rent, and electric bills.

Together, we can put real money back into the pockets of hardworking people like Kim, who joins us this morning after working the lunch shift just yesterday.

Please welcome Kim – and let’s make sure that there are no taxes on Kim’s tips!

Let’s stand together on the steps of this capitol to celebrate bills and a budget that allow hard-working Virginians to keep more of their hard-earned money by extending the standard deduction, removing taxes on tips, and providing relief on the most hated tax in America, the car tax.

To keep soaring, we must address one of the most pressing issues facing Virginia: power.

The Virginia Clean Economy Act, passed in 2020, simply is not working.

It is driving up rates, driving down reliability, and constricting our economic growth. 2020 forecasts assumed very little power demand growth because leadership planned for very little economic growth and very little job growth.

Today, Virginia's demand for power is growing because Virginia is now growing rapidly. We now import roughly 40% of our power needs versus 18% in 2020.

Worse yet, the cost of that imported power is almost higher than it was just 1 year ago.

To fix this, we need to nearly double our power generation in the next 10 years, and wind and solar aren't going to get it done.

We must stop decommissioning our baseload generation, build more natural gas generation, lots of it, build small modular reactors and, yes, finish the projects currently underway.

We must aggressively pursue innovative technologies...carbon capture, SMRs, fusion and hydrogen.

This is All-American and All-of-the-Above. This is embracing innovation over regulation. This is delivering affordable, reliable, and yes, increasingly clean energy that will power Virginia's future.

Let's work together this session to unlock All-of-the-Above and unravel the quagmire that is the Virginia Clean Economy Act (VCEA).

We also must not use our growing economy and growing need for power as an excuse to end local control of solar project siting.

Local communities must be able to exercise their rights with regards to land use.

The same goes for industrial development, including data centers.

Data centers alone support 74,000 jobs, bringing in \$9.1 billion in Virginia GDP, and generate billions of dollars in local revenue, supporting education, public safety, and critical local services. We should continue to be the data center capitol of the world and make sure Richmond is doing what is necessary to support that goal.

Different communities will make different decisions on data centers but these must be their decisions.

And Richmond should not stop them from capitalizing on these incredible economic opportunities.

To keep Virginia soaring we need to keep Virginia Healthy. We must continue to support the health and wellbeing of all Virginians. Critically, that includes moms and babies.

We need to support every mother and work collectively to provide the care she needs to deliver a healthy baby.

80 percent of pregnancy-related deaths are medically preventable.

We know that cardiac conditions, mental health challenges, and substance use are among the leading causes of death.

We also know that disparities do exist within black, Hispanic, and tribal communities, along with rural Virginians.

With much better data, as a result of my executive orders last year, and budget and legislative actions I am proposing, we can embrace interventions to ensure healthy babies, healthy mothers, and healthy communities.

I'd like to thank Lt. Gov Earle-Sears for her partnership on this most important effort.

An integral part of supporting those families is child care.

The work that we did last year to support working mothers and fathers...to transform child care in Virginia was nation-leading. I urge you to support the efforts to maximize this historic investment with commonsense reforms that will take 7,000 birth-to-five year old children off the waitlist, and tackle child care deserts with funding to renovate existing facilities with local partners.

Strong communities also work to prevent harmful drug use. The dangers of marijuana use, particularly among our young people, continue to grow.

We know that states with retail markets have seen significant negative impacts on children and adolescent health and safety, increased gang activity and violent crime, significant deterioration in mental health, decreased road safety, and significant costs associated with a marijuana retail market that far exceed the perverse benefit of "tax revenue.

Everyone knows where I stand on establishing a retail marijuana market. Let's work together on other issues where we can find common ground.

One of those issues is gaming...we must take action to enable the creation of the Virginia Gaming Commission to consolidate the regulatory oversight of our vast gaming ecosystem under one entity.

Let's focus our efforts this session on building a world-class regulatory body, and not on one-off bills pushed by special interest groups.

To keep Virginia winning, Virginians need safe communities and must support our law enforcement heroes.

Thanks to Operation Ceasefire, led by our Attorney General, Jason Miyares, and Operation Bold Blue Line, we are seeing a serious decline in violent crime.

We unleashed the most aggressive drug interdiction campaign in the history of the Commonwealth, seized 16,000 pounds of illicit opioids, 550 of which was fentanyl—enough to kill every Virginian 8 times over. We arrested over 1000 people, seized 275 guns – all in 45 days.

We are fighting back against the gangs and cartels.

And we are starting to see a decline in overdose deaths from illicit drugs, declining 23% in Virginia, 9 percentage points more than the 14% decline across the nation.

With us is Jennifer Johnson, whose precious son PJ was sold a percocet laced with fentanyl. And PJ died. He was just 19 years old, with his whole life ahead of him. And the drug dealer is still on the street.

In Jennifer's words, she wants us to remember that PJ shouldn't be defined by one bad decision.

Jennifer, please know we are committed to do the work so no mother should suffer what you and your family have.

We have collectively made an impact on the evil of fentanyl, but to truly impact the drug dealing, we must raise the penalty to felony homicide, when the manufacturer or distributor of illicit drugs or fentanyl causes a death.

There are quiet heroes in our communities who are engaging to build trust and have life-saving conversations.

Joining us is Loudoun County School Resource Officer, Ramon Rivera, who has pioneered one of the first comprehensive fentanyl awareness programs. Deputy Rivera impacts over 2,000 students and parents, warning of the dangers of fentanyl through initiatives, including the First Lady's It Only Takes One and the Attorney General's One Pill Can Kill.

We started down a journey three years ago to have an SRO in every school across the Commonwealth – we have nearly 80% coverage now.

Please welcome Deputy Rivera, and let's finish the job and put an SRO in every school.

And even with heroes like Deputy Rivera, parents need the information about what is going on in their child's school to keep kids safe.

I issued Executive Order 28 last year in response to student overdoses at one Loudoun County high school that shockingly went unreported to parents. Our Executive Order established a 24-hour notice requirement.

According to media reports, Northern Virginia localities have seen as much as a 70-80 percent drop in juvenile drug overdoses in school.

I hope that this year you send a bill to my desk that codifies this executive order

Let's keep Virginia safe....

If someone is in this country illegally, and they commit a violent crime, they should get a one-way ticket back to where they came from.

This should not be controversial.

Virginia is not a sanctuary state. If localities have "sanctuary city" policies and refuse to cooperate with ICE, they should lose state funding – full stop.

We are also seeing increased threats to our national security, with increased drone incursions over sensitive and critical infrastructure sites.

We've come together before to prevent the sale of Virginia farmland and real estate to entities controlled by foreign adversaries.

I'd ask us again: Send me the bill to make flying a drone over critical infrastructure a class felony.

Safe communities also require protecting our houses of worship, college campuses, and the fundamental right to religious liberty enshrined in Mr. Jefferson's statute for religious freedom engraved in marble on the wall of this very chamber.

I want to thank everyone for your bipartisan collaboration in passing the international definition of antisemitism, protecting civil liberties, and providing law enforcement the tools to combat anti-semitism and other forms of religious bigotry.

We want Virginia to be a place where every Virginian is free from hate.

We are stronger, together.

At the end of September, Southwest Virginia was hit by one of the most significant disasters in its history. State and local resources from all over Virginia came together to prepare and respond to Hurricane Helene.

There were unbelievable stories of heroism – from rescuing patients off a hospital roof to repelling into rushing water to save people in their cars.

I was struck by the story of an amazing couple I met– a couple married for 57 years- Carl and Linda McMurray.

They lived in Linda's childhood home in Taylor's Valley, just off the Creeper Trail in Washington County, when the floodwaters split their house in two.

Carl was swept away, while Linda was left in what remained of a second-floor bedroom.

Carl used his belt to fasten himself to a bush in the middle of the rushing water for hours, until the rescue team in a Blackhawk helicopter spotted and saved him.

For 16 long hours, Linda clung to hope, reciting the Lord's Prayer and the 23rd Psalm as she awaited rescue.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me.

Neither knew if the other had survived, but when Linda finally walked into Carl's hospital room, their prayers were answered.

Can we all rise and express our support for Carl and Linda -- and all Americans who were struck by this disaster.

In December, I proposed creating a permanent Disaster Assistance Fund to support life, safety, and housing-related recovery efforts for costs not covered by federal assistance, private donations, or insurance.

There is still so much work ahead to rebuild in Southwest Virginia. Let's establish the Disaster Assistance Fund and support Virginians in their most vulnerable time of need.

Joining Carl and Linda in the gallery this morning are two of the heroes who were part of the crew that rescued Carl that day – let's thank National Guard Chief Charles Jackson and Chesterfield Fire Fighter James Bourdon.

These heroes remind us that we are blessed to be the home to one of the largest military and veteran populations in the nation, and we must continue to remind ourselves of the sacrifices that our military heroes and their families make.

In a world where freedom is not free, we must say thank you. Our military heroes make us all so much better.

Just returning from deployment in Poland as a member of the Virginia National Guard is one of those heroes, Lieutenant Colonel Carlos Maldonado.

He has served our country nobly for over 21 years, alongside his wife Christine, and three children.

And therefore, Col. Maldonado, on behalf of 8.8 million Virginians and a grateful nation, thank you.

My friends, the Spirit of Virginia is soaring, and she can soar to even greater heights.

Our twelfth Governor, James Monroe, noted, “a free, virtuous and enlightened people must know full well, the great principles and causes upon which their happiness depends.

That is our opportunity now...to work together this session, not as Democrats, not as Republicans, but as Virginians, to further strengthen those pillars, those great principles, upon which the strong and heroic people of this Commonwealth build their futures and pursue their dreams.

God has and is truly blessing Virginia.

What an honor and privilege it is to serve this great Commonwealth, to see her win, to see her soar.

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

