

Text of Alabama governor's State of the State speech

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MONTGOMERY, ALA. — Gov. Kay Ivey's 2018 State of the State address given Tuesday. Remarks as prepared:

President Marsh, Speaker McCutcheon, members of the Alabama Legislature, Chief Justice Stuart, justices of the Alabama Supreme Court, distinguished guests - and my fellow Alabamians:

As we begin the 2018 legislative session, we recognize Alabama has experienced a significant transformation in government since the first day of the 2017 legislative session.

On this occasion last year, I sat where my friend President Del Marsh sits tonight. And now, due to a successful transition in state government, I humbly stand before you as the 54th Governor of Alabama.

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I've been called upon to report on the state of the state. When I became governor on April 10th, the ship of state government was adrift. We needed thoughtful and straightforward leadership.

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Over the past nine months, together, we have proven Alabamians seek progress, not stagnation. Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to report, we have successfully steadied the ship of state; I declare that the state of the state is strong and our future is as bright as the sun over the Gulf.

Tonight, let's take a brief journey to consider where we've been, where we are, and where we are going.

Most governors have three months to prepare. I had three hours. Yet, after being sworn in as governor on April 10, 2017, in the Old Senate Chamber, just across the hall from where we are gathered this evening, I promised the people of Alabama there would be no disruption in the ongoing functions of the state. That's a promise kept.

I promised the people of Alabama, even though challenges lay ahead, we would seize the opportunity to make Alabama even better and our government more effective. That's a promise kept.

My immediate pledge was to steady the ship of state, navigate Alabama through the storm we found ourselves in, and seek a calmer path for this state we dearly love and proudly call home. That, too, is a promise kept.

When I was sworn in, there were many decisions to be made. I was focused, committed and prepared. My first full day was the 16th legislative day in the 2017 legislative session - exactly half way through a session that I began as president of the Senate. As governor, last session, working closely with the Legislature, I signed 333 bills and resolutions into law.

Together, we've made significant progress with our budgets. We avoided proration and practiced fiscal responsibility. We renewed the Alabama Jobs Act, ensuring economic development continues, and we provided the tools and flexibility needed to attract new investments, creating more jobs for Alabama families.

Many bills I signed as governor also bore my signature from my time as president of the Senate. The smooth transition of government, brought me full circle - from the legislative to the executive - and I am better able to lead and govern because of it.

I support having a lieutenant governor who presides over the Senate. Our current order of succession serves the state well. I know this firsthand, having experienced it. I strongly support our current order of succession.

My first major effort in leading the state was to evaluate the cabinet and staff of the new administration. With this evaluation, I made changes resulting in nearly half of the 22 cabinet members being replaced.

My cabinet and staff are capable, honest and dedicated. They take their charge to serve the people of Alabama seriously. They provide the people of Alabama with the open, honest and transparent government that they deserve. My administration includes public servants who are subject matter experts and who work tirelessly to make Alabama a great place to live, work, and raise a family.

My second major effort was to connect with and hear directly from Alabamians, so that together we would restore confidence in state government.

An effective leader does four things: listen, learn, help, and lead.

To help and lead the people of Alabama, it was essential that I first listen to and learn from the people of Alabama.

Throughout July, August and September, I embarked on my Listen, Learn, Help and Lead tour where I visited communities across the state. I spent an entire day in these communities, meeting with local leaders and visiting their businesses and schools. I wanted to learn about their successes and their challenges. I wanted to hear from everyday people, not just from the politicians and lobbyists in Montgomery.

These meetings were beneficial and well received. People were excited about reconnecting with their governor.

I wanted to restore our state's image. To do this, government must be efficient and transparent. With executive orders, we've streamlined state government, dissolved unneeded task forces, and banned lobbyists from appointments by the executive branch, ensuring more citizens have an opportunity to serve and contribute. I also established the Opioid Overdose & Addiction Council to address the urgent opioid epidemic that is impacting Alabama families.

Administratively, I've appointed more than 350 qualified and diverse individuals to boards and other groups which affect the day-to-day lives of Alabamians.

One of the most important duties of government is providing safety and protection. I have worked closely with the Alabama Emergency Management Agency and local officials across our state during six weather related States of Emergency. Through coordinated efforts, we have improved our communication and our response to natural disasters.

The people of Alabama desire leadership that is willing to get things done. As a result of our team approach, I am proud to report, Alabama's economy is performing well - revenues are up, unemployment is down, economic development is on the rise and improved educational opportunities abound.

Since I became governor, over \$3.5 billion dollars in new direct investments have been committed in the state. These investments will create nearly 8,000 new jobs for Alabama workers. The unemployment rate has fallen every month since I became governor. Our most recent unemployment numbers put the unemployment rate at 3.5 percent - the lowest rate ever recorded in Alabama! My friends, Alabama's economy is supporting more jobs than ever before!

News of our economic successes seem to be a daily occurrence. In fact, I am proud to announce this evening that Kimber Firearms will build a \$38 million dollar production facility in Troy, bringing with it 366 new jobs! These are good, high-paying jobs, and will enable more of our citizens to provide for their families while taking part in the rich history of the Second Amendment. We are proud and honored to welcome Kimber to Alabama!

This announcement and countless others like it make one thing clear: what we are doing is working, and as a result, the people of Alabama are working and providing for their families.

When I meet with global CEOs of companies considering Alabama, or who already have companies here, they tell me their Alabama facility operates at a level that cannot be rivaled. My fellow Alabamians, that is because of you, — the hard-working people of Alabama. Companies choose Alabama because of your dedication and our skilled workforce. When a company invests in Alabama, it is investing not just in our state, but in you, our people.

We should do everything we can to help every Alabamian find work.

One of the most meaningful experiences I have had as governor was to participate in the first ever Governor's Disability Job Fair with Secretary of Labor Fitzgerald Washington, Commissioner of Mental Health Lynn Beshear, Dr. Graham Sisson, Executive Director of the Governor's Office on Disability, and Commissioner Jane Elizabeth Burdeshaw of the Department of Rehabilitation Services. The fair consisted of more than 95 employers looking to fill over 3,100 positions. 1,100 people attended the Disability Job Fair.

One of those job-seekers is with us tonight - Caryn McDade. Caryn walked into the Governor's Disability Job Fair, on Oct. 30th, looking for an opportunity. As a teenager, Caryn's learning disabilities plagued her until she saw no alternative other than dropping out of school. She took GED classes at the Birmingham Career Center and was referred to the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services to work on resumé writing, job development, interviewing and placement. Rehabilitation Services paired her with Harold Reynolds, an employment specialist with Easter Seals of Birmingham, to prepare her for job interviews at the job fair. During the fair, Caryn met and interviewed with staff from Southern Hospitality Home Health Care of Fultondale. Within 48 hours, she had completed a second follow-up interview. By the end of the week, she was employed full-time as a home health care aide.

Caryn, thank you for being with us tonight. You are a perfect example of the intrinsic value we all have, and a reminder that what we do as public officials affects the lives of real Alabamians.

For Alabamians to have career opportunities, they must be prepared when the right job comes along. My education initiative, Strong Start, Strong Finish, does just that. Under Strong Start, Strong Finish, we will coordinate our efforts and bring all stakeholders to the table in order to improve education all the way from Pre-K to the workforce.

I instituted Strong Start, Strong Finish, because we must prepare our people for the jobs of today and for the jobs of tomorrow. By 2020, 62 percent of all jobs available in Alabama will require some form of postsecondary education. However, today, only 37 percent of our workforce has achieved such an education. We must ensure that our students graduate high school and then earn a postsecondary certificate or degree.

Effective education requires a strong foundation in a child's early years. In 2017, under the leadership of Secretary Jeana Ross, Alabama's First Class Pre-K program increased the number of classrooms to 938 statewide. Research shows us that students who participate in Alabama's First Class Pre-K program are more likely, than other students, to be proficient in reading and math at every grade level.

For the 11th year in a row, our First-Class Pre-K program was recognized for being the highest-quality Pre-K in the nation. In fact, Harvard University is currently developing a full-length documentary on Alabama's Pre-K program to share across the country with those interested in following our lead. Our First-Class Pre-K is certainly a bright spot for Alabama.

I'm proud to have quickly become known as a governor focused on education. Over the past nine months, I have devoted a great deal of my time to my role as president of the State Board of Education. In less than two years, Alabama has had four different K-12 superintendents. That is nothing to be proud of. The members of the State Board of Education must ensure continuity to see progress. Board members must set goals and adopt strategies to achieve student learning at high standards. Our central focus must be on our students, not on personal agendas or political maneuvering.

Tomorrow marks nine full months since I unexpectedly became governor. A lot has happened since then. We have lifted the dark cloud, wounds have started healing, and the people's faith in a government "for and by the people" is being restored.

Though it is important to reflect on where we've been and where we are - we must place most of our focus on where we are going. Let me share with you a quote you've probably heard, that is relevant to where we are as a state, "What lies ahead of us, or what lies behind us, is of little importance when compared to what lies within us."

In that spirit, I say to you, instead of dwelling on what adversity we have previously faced or what mountains we may soon climb, we must focus on being who we are - a resilient people, a people dedicated to doing what's right and to making a difference in the world.

Like always, our budgets are at the forefront of state government. However, this year, we find ourselves in an unfamiliar position related to our budgets. We are clearly in the midst of our recovery from the Great Recession. Unemployment is at an all-time low, housing prices have increased for the third consecutive year and Alabama is rated 12th nationwide for financial health.

When I came into office, the relationship between the executive and legislative branches was strained - but that too has been corrected. I have worked closely with legislative leadership, and the Senate and House budget chairs, to draft fiscally responsible budgets. We've righted the ship of state; now, my proposed budgets will move Alabama in the right direction.

Just as Alabama families work on their budgets around their kitchen tables to get them just right, we too must get the state's budgets right. I am proposing strong, manageable budgets that responsibly fund state government without raising taxes on the people of Alabama.

Our improved economy, allows us to not just fund state programs, but to expand the ones making a positive difference. It is tempting, when times aren't as tight as before, to spend generously. We must resist that temptation.

As a lifelong conservative, I believe in being fiscally responsible and in being good stewards of taxpayer dollars. Not a single appropriated dollar belongs to government; rather, it belongs to the hard-working men and women of Alabama who have earned it. In that vein, my General Fund Budget restores fiscal responsibility by paying down Alabama's debt earlier than required. We will fund government appropriately, but with prudence and care.

As a positive sign of progress, there are fewer people eligible for Medicaid today than one year ago. Good news on the jobs front means more Alabamians are working and less dependent on government services. Accordingly, Medicaid will require less General Fund appropriations than expected.

We are proving conservative government creates economic growth, lessens government overreach and moves people toward self-sufficiency. Our strong economy, with ample employment opportunities, positions us not just to cover the basics, as we have in past years, but to ensure we fulfill our duty to the citizens of Alabama. We will pursue efficient government, which makes good use of our resources, while appropriately funding state services.

Government is called on to serve and protect the people. My General Fund Budget does just that. We will put more state troopers on our roads and add more corrections officers, all in an effort to serve and protect Alabama families.

Perhaps our state's biggest challenge is found in our prison system. For far too long we have run our state's prison system in a way that risks a takeover by the federal courts. Now, one federal court has found that our prisons are overcrowded and understaffed, due at least in part to facilities that are worn and old. Correctional professionals work diligently to provide security, medical, mental health and rehabilitative services in a challenging environment. They deserve our attention and support. We must also work diligently to provide appropriate care to those placed in the custody of the Department of Corrections.

Immediately after taking office, I instructed Commissioner Jeff Dunn and his staff, working closely with my staff, to develop a viable plan to address correctional staffing, which will improve the delivery of inmate healthcare and make capital investments in our infrastructure.

We have commissioned comprehensive reviews to determine the compensation levels necessary to recruit and retain corrections staff. We have entered contract negotiations with a new healthcare provider to expand and improve inmate healthcare at a reasonable cost.

I have instructed the Commissioner to hire a project management team to help us develop a master plan, so we will be able to make smart, cost-effective decisions when addressing our outdated prison infrastructure. We will no longer guess about possible fixes. Instead, I will present to the people a workable solution to this generational problem. I am committed to meeting this challenge head-on. Together, with the support of the Legislature, we will solve this problem for generations to come. This is an Alabama problem that must have an Alabama solution. Now is the time to act.

As many of you know, I am from Camden, in rural Wilcox County. Rural communities, like Camden, have a very special place in my heart. I understand the challenges rural areas face, and it is my intention to do all I can to help make a difference in the lives of people in rural areas. Supporting rural Alabama is central to my legislative agenda.

Though we are almost two decades into the 21st Century, many of our rural communities do not have adequate access to broadband. Adequate broadband enhances educational opportunities, increases economic development prospects and develops critical communication systems. I strongly support legislation to encourage new broadband investments, and I ask the Legislature to join me in assessing our state's broadband needs, to ensure resources are placed where they are most needed.

I am also proposing funding for loan repayment programs for dentists and physician's assistants who agree to work in underserved areas of Alabama. Many of Alabama's citizens live in rural areas, and we must be attentive to their needs and ensure they have the same access to quality healthcare as those in urban areas.

Just as we address the needs of our rural citizens, we must also take care of those who have taken care of us: our veterans. My father served in World War II; thus, I understand the sacrifices our military men and women make, and I am proud that more than 1 in 10 Alabamians have worn our nation's uniform. Sometimes, when veterans finish their service, they struggle to find work; that is why I support extending tax credits to small

businesses that hire veterans. For those veterans who own their own businesses, they need our support as well. I am proposing legislation that will give preference to veteran-owned businesses that bid on state contracts. Our veterans have given much to protect our state and nation. As a state, we must step up and repay them for their sacrifice.

Tonight, I am proposing a pay raise for all teachers and state employees. Every day, we depend on state employees. Whether it's a state trooper patrolling our highways, a teacher staying late to help a struggling student, or a social worker rescuing an abused child, quality state employees are essential to good government. It is long-past time for us to honor their service with better pay.

Like the General Fund Budget, my education budget is conservative, practical and wisely funds state services, while guaranteeing every Alabamian an opportunity to achieve a strong start and a strong finish to their educational journey.

Education is the key to a better life for all. I am focused on ensuring all Alabama children get a good start and have the resources they need to complete school, be prepared for the workplace and ultimately succeed.

I am very proud that the education budget I am submitting to the Legislature is the largest investment in education in a decade. In addition to raises for all teachers and support personnel, my proposed budget fully funds the K-12 request of \$144 million dollars, and provides an additional \$50 million dollars for higher education. We will continue to implement Strong Start, Strong Finish, by increasing funding for our First-Class Pre-K program by an additional \$23 million dollars. I am also proposing funding for our Pre-through-3 initiative, the Jobs for Alabama's Graduates Program, and for education scholarships for math and science teachers. These additional dollars are investments in our children and young people, and thus are investments in our future.

Education is especially effective when there is a concentration on particular subjects or skills. The Alabama School of Fine Arts in Birmingham, and the Alabama School of Mathematics and Science in Mobile, are special-focus schools which effectively prepare their students for rewarding careers. As workforce needs evolve, we must create educational opportunities that prepare our people to meet those needs.

Tonight, I am announcing the formation of the Alabama School of Cyber-Technology and Engineering, which will be based in Huntsville. This school will prepare some of our state's highest-achieving students to enter the growing fields of cyber technology and engineering. Just as Huntsville has always been on the leading edge of the rocket and aerospace industries, the Alabama School of Cyber-Technology and Engineering will ensure that Alabama students are at the forefront of today's emerging technologies.

With this budget, we will improve educational opportunities for all Alabamians.

We are now in year two of a three year celebration culminating in Alabama's Bicentennial in 2019. Our 200th anniversary as a state, gives us an opportunity to reflect on who we are as a people.

Our Legislature has adopted an official state creed, which I would like to share with you: I believe in Alabama, a state dedicated to a faith in God and the enlightenment of mankind; to a democracy that safeguards the liberties of each citizen and to the conservation of her youth, her ideals, and her soil. I believe it is my duty to obey her laws, to respect her flag and to be alert to her needs and generous in my efforts to foster her advancement within the statehood of the world.

As we ponder this past year, and indeed the past 200 years, and as we contemplate where we are going, we should embrace this creed. We should look to it as a guiding light for action, in hopes that it may one day be a testament to the courageous leadership which brought this state from some of its toughest times into some of its greatest.

Despite our differences, despite our varying viewpoints, despite party labels, I sincerely believe we all have one common goal - to each play our part in making Alabama a better place to live, raise and educate our children, own a home and create jobs and business opportunities. As I look across this historic chamber filled with men and women who have made a commitment to public service, I propose a question to each of you. Why do we serve - why have we chosen this path of public service? These questions are not new ones. In fact, they have been around for centuries.

Johann Sebastian Bach is one of the world's greatest composers. You probably already know this and likely agree. However, something you may not know about Bach is that he also had 20 children - can you imagine?

To say the least, Bach was a very busy man. He was once asked, "Why do you write music?" He could have said, because he had a large family to provide for, or because music came naturally. He could have said these things, but he didn't. He simply replied that he wrote music "for the Glory of God and the good of mankind." Consider his response. It was concise, honest, and revealed the character of his heart and the driving force behind his actions. He wasn't driven by himself or even his family. His motivation was much deeper, much more significant. How would you respond when asked the same question? Why do you serve? Why did you swear an oath to support this nation and our great state at all costs? You may have been motivated by certain issues, causes, philosophies or individuals to seek office - and those are good reasons to serve.

But when our efforts, actions and accomplishments are evaluated, will we leave a legacy like Bach? Are we motivated by pride, power or greed? Or are we moved by an innate desire to make a difference in our state and world? I say we can make our state better, if our purpose is the same - to serve for the Glory of God and the good of mankind.

I challenge you to reflect on Bach's response as you enter the legislative chamber each day.

From the moment our country declared its independence, we embraced the truth that to be an American is to seek the impossible, to dare to dream despite opposition. Together, let us dream of a brighter Alabama that, in keeping with Bach's example, brings glory to God and brings about a greater good in the lives of our people.

The ship of state has been steadied. Together, let's move it in a new direction toward progress and sustainability.

I am honored to be at the helm of this magnificent ship we call Alabama, which benefits from a strong and committed crew, the good people of Alabama.

May God bless each of you and the great State of Alabama.

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