



As Prepared for Delivery

Lt. Governor Hall-Long, Mister Speaker, Mister President Pro Temp, Members of the 151st General Assembly, Members of the Cabinet, Distinguished members of the Judiciary, and my fellow Delawareans:

Thank you for inviting me into the chamber today. I wish we could have more people with us.

And thank you to those tuning in virtually.

On January 23, 2020, I stood in this same spot to deliver the State of the State address. The chamber was packed. The word “coronavirus” meant nothing to most of us. We were looking forward to a bright year ahead.

Our plans did not include a global pandemic, I can tell you.

So while we canceled our plans and turned our attention to beating this pandemic, so too did the people of Delaware.

These last two years have brought unprecedented challenges for every Delaware family.

Many have lost loved ones. Others lost their business. Our children missed important time in classrooms. We missed sports games, graduations, weddings, and funerals. Every one of us has experienced some type of loss during this pandemic.

If nothing else, we all have that in common.

And as we’ve learned the hard way over the past few weeks, we aren’t through it yet.

More than 300 members of the Delaware National Guard are at work right now helping take pressure off our hospitals. And getting Delawareans tested and vaccinated.

I want to thank General Berry, our Guardsmen and women, and all our healthcare workers, for your incredible efforts.

Please help me thank these public servants.

I also want to thank Dr. Karyl Rattay and her entire public health team for their hard work and resilience.

And I want to recognize DEMA Director AJ Schall, his team and all our emergency personnel across our state for their great work.

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Over the last year, Director Schall, Dr. Rattay and their teams helped deliver more than 1.6 million vaccines to Delawareans.

Our Lieutenant Governor was instrumental in those efforts. She rallied communities, worked vaccine sites, and went out into neighborhoods, making sure people in every corner of our state had access to the vaccines.

And community leaders stepped up big – people like Reverend Rita Paige, Bernice Edwards, Darryl Chambers and his team, and Maria Matos.

Because of the efforts of so many, we were one of only 20 states to meet President Biden’s goal – 70 percent of adults vaccinated by July 4.

This work saved lives.

We provided more than \$400 million in support to small businesses. We supported child care providers, who stayed on the job throughout this crisis.

And thanks to the hard work of educators, we got our children back in classrooms.

That’s why, despite the trying times – and because of the ongoing sacrifice of so many Delawareans – I’m optimistic today.

Over the past two years, we’ve seen clearly that the people of our state are resilient. They’re innovative. They’re kind. They never give up. They’re focused on the present – but hopeful for the future.

Because of the incredible strength of the people of our state. And because of their resilience. I can tell you confidently today that the state of our state is strong.

And we are eager for what lies ahead.

As we recover from this pandemic, it’s clear that expanding economic opportunity for all Delaware families must be job number one.

We can all agree on this: a good job solves a lot of problems.

So let’s start there.

On my first day in office in 2017, we partnered with the private sector to strengthen our economic development efforts.

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Working with all of you, we created the Delaware Prosperity Partnership.

And that idea has paid off.

Despite the pandemic, Delaware employers have added nearly 20,000 new jobs. The DPP helped them retain thousands more.

Delaware's economy has rebounded from the worst effects of COVID-19 more quickly than we could've imagined.

Our unemployment rate is now just above 5 percent, down from a high of 13.4 percent in April 2020.

Just last month, financial technology startup Investor Cash Management – or ICM – announced that it would move its headquarters from Chicago to downtown Wilmington.

ICM plans to invest \$15 million in its new headquarters and create almost 400 new jobs.

Prelude Therapeutics – an innovative company focused on new and effective cancer treatments - has just signed a 13-year lease for a new headquarters at DuPont's old Chestnut Run campus.

The company grew out of the Delaware Innovation Space – our partnership with the University of Delaware and DuPont at the Experimental Station to support startup tech companies.

Incyte is another growing company with roots in the Delaware Innovation Space. Their new building in Wilmington, which is almost complete, will accommodate 500 employees.

We're building Delaware's economy for the future.

I especially want to thank members of the General Assembly who sit on the board of the DPP:

- Senator Jack Walsh
- Senator Brian Pettyjohn
- Representative Bill Bush
- And Representative Lyndon Yearick

We appreciate their participation and feedback.

As they can tell you, these new jobs are not just confined to the northern part of our state.

Baltimore-based textile manufacturer Avalon Industries is relocating and expanding in Dover.



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Miller Metal, a longtime leader in Delaware manufacturing, is adding jobs in Bridgeville.

And WuXi STA Pharmaceuticals is preparing to add 500 jobs and a half a billion dollars in capital investment at a massive new manufacturing facility in Middletown.

We also have some fun news on the tourism front.

In March, the Atlantic 10 Conference will bring its women's basketball Championship to the Chase Fieldhouse in Wilmington.

And in August, Wilmington Country Club will host the PGA and thousands of fans for the BMW Championship.

Delaware is on the map – and the future is bright.

And in terms of national and international attention, it certainly doesn't hurt to be home of the President of the United States.

Support from the federal government – and our President Joe Biden – will help us build on this economic work in communities up and down our state.

Using federal stimulus dollars, we'll build and upgrade libraries in every county.

We'll help nonprofits modernize their buildings so they can better serve the people of our state.

We'll significantly increase resources for our gun violence prevention program in Wilmington and Dover.

Working with many of you and House Majority Leader Longhurst in particular, we'll use federal money to improve our state's mental health services.

We'll supercharge our state's largest infrastructure plan.

We'll repair roads and bridges, invest even more in public transit, and build out electric vehicle infrastructure. So important for the future.

That will make commutes shorter, improve safety on our roads, and prepare Delaware for the future.

We're also investing in our environment, and we have a new Climate Action Plan to address the effects of climate change. Not just because it's the right thing to do.

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But because we know that vibrant outdoor spaces help attract new workers and families. I especially want to thank Senator Hansen for her work to protect our natural environment.

Delaware State Parks continue to be among the best in the country.

And you don't have to take my word for it.

In November, our Parks again received the National Gold Medal for Excellence.

Delaware is one of only two states to win this award twice.

Everyone should get out and enjoy our parks.

When I release my budget next week, we'll set aside another \$30 million for open space and farmland preservation. And Delaware has one of the most robust programs in the country.

Through a years-long partnership with Majority Leaders Longhurst and Townsend and your good work, we created the Clean Water Trust Fund.

With federal support, we'll be investing more than \$400 million in Delaware's clean water infrastructure. And we're focused on underserved communities. This is an unprecedented opportunity to fix longstanding problems.

We all need to do our part to keep our natural areas clean, and free of trash. Just look around. It's a mess.

That's why we're continuing our efforts to Keep DE Litter Free. That's our slogan. I am determined to help clean up our highways and byways.

All these investments will strengthen our economy for the future.

We know that nationally, and in Delaware, small businesses drive job creation.

That's why, for the first time ever, we put a hyper focus on small business inside state government.

That includes supporting innovative new tech companies and mom-and-pop mainstream businesses.

Since 2019, our EDGE Grants program has supported more than 35 small businesses. These businesses are creating jobs and poised for growth.

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At the same time, we invested more than \$400 million in pandemic relief dollars to shore up businesses hardest hit by the pandemic – like bars and restaurants, museums, child care centers, and hotels.

Business owners tell me this helped them keep their doors open.

Supporting businesses also means supporting the employees who work there.

We know workers are not just looking for a job. They're looking for a way of life, especially as they start a young family.

They believe that good jobs should also support their families when they need that support the most.

And I agree.

Senator McBride has introduced legislation that would build on the work we've done for state employees and extend paid leave into the private sector.

It's the right thing to do - and it will make Delaware more attractive for younger workers.

I'd like to thank Senator McBride and Representative Heffernan for their leadership on this important issue.

With the leadership of Senator Walsh, we also set Delaware on course to a \$15 minimum wage.

We are taking the lead in state government. Two years ago, we made a commitment to make sure every state employee makes at least \$15 an hour.

Next week, when I release my budget, we'll talk more about how we're supporting state employees on the lower end of the wage scale.

Going forward, building a workforce ready for jobs of the future may be our biggest challenge – here in Delaware and across the nation.

Delaware employers have more than 33,000 open positions right now. But only 26,000 Delawareans are actively looking for work.

Across the country, there are 10.5 million open positions, but only 6.8 million applicants.

That's why we're investing more than \$50 million in federal stimulus funds to strengthen our workforce training programs.

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We're also expanding Pathways programs in public middle schools and high schools.

By next year, these public-private investments will expand the Pathways program to reach more than 6,000 middle school students and 80 percent of high school students.

That will help students like Imani Wulff-Cochrane, whom I met recently. Imani is a senior at St. George's Tech. She spends a third of her day in an early childhood center, learning on the job.

Imani's focus on work-based learning will prepare her to enter the workforce as soon as she graduates from high school.

Ultimately, I believe that expanding economic opportunity for everyone must start in the classroom. Over the past five years – working with all of you – we have made significant new investments in public education.

From Wilmington to Dover to Georgetown, we're investing more than \$300 million in the next two years for new school construction.

I want to thank members of the Bond Bill committee – and your chairs, Senator Poore and Representative Heffernan – for your support and leadership.

We know the pandemic put a strain on every part of our education system – from school bus drivers to classroom teachers to school nurses. Please join me in thanking our educators, and everyone who works in our schools for their incredible efforts.

Amidst all these challenges, last year, the General Assembly made permanent new resources to support low-income students and English learners in public schools.

Thanks to Representative Williams and Senator Poore, we finally invested in K-3 basic special education.

And it's making a real difference in classrooms.

One thing that the past two years have taught me is that there is value in acknowledging, and celebrating, the complexity of our state. And our complex and often difficult history. That's why I was proud to sign Representative Dorsey Walker's bill into law, ensuring that a robust, accurate, Black history curriculum is taught in Delaware public schools.

I was also fortunate to join Black clergy and community leaders in visiting the newly discovered African Burial Ground at the John Dickinson Plantation. And to partner with the Department of



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State, the Office of Statewide Equity Initiatives, the Delaware Heritage Commission, and Delaware State University to tell the public the real history of that site.

Over the past few months, I've been focused on making sure we finally deliver for the children of the City of Wilmington.

Despite the best efforts of teachers and administrators, children in our largest city are not getting the education they need to be successful in life.

We can do better – and we must. These children and their families deserve our best efforts.

Over the last month, I've knocked doors and talked directly to parents and students.

I know they're eager for change. They want better.

I've talked to, and heard from, educators in our City schools.

The idea of the Wilmington Learning Collaborative is based on models we've seen be successful in other parts of the country.

We're asking districts that serve our students in the city – Red Clay, Brandywine, and Christina – to work together on behalf of these children.

This model will place more decision-making in the hands of educators and local communities. And it'll offer more support for students, families, and importantly the teachers in the classroom.

It will place a hyper focus on these students and the challenges they face.

It doesn't solve every problem, to be sure.

We will continue to work with Senator Lockman and the Redding Consortium to focus on issues around redistricting and the high school challenge for city students. These are certainly important issues.

But we can't let those issues hold us up.

We can't afford to wait. And we can't afford to keep doing the same thing and expecting a different result.

Please join me in finally doing right by these children.

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We know that a good education is not the only thing children and families need in order to be successful.

State Housing Director Eugene Young and his team have been working hard to address a housing crisis that has been made worse by the pandemic.

Using federal funds, the State Housing Authority is partnering with the private sector to rebuild the Riverside community in northeast Wilmington. It's a very exciting project.

The Housing Authority has made available \$50 million in rental and mortgage assistance to Delawareans struggling to get by across our state.

And over the next three years, we will invest federal dollars to revitalize and develop more than 1,200 affordable housing units in Kent and Sussex counties. That's in addition to expanding down payment and settlement assistance for homebuyers.

These investments will go a long way to support Delawareans who need it most – and strengthen our economy at the same time.

It's also way past time to make sure every home and business is connected to the internet.

Currently, close to 11,600 Delaware homes and businesses lack access to high-speed broadband.

Delawareans rely on stable internet connections to apply for jobs, help their children do homework, work from home, or continue their education online.

We're investing over \$100 million in federal money to make sure everyone has access to a hardwired connection. Mostly in Kent and Sussex counties.

We also continue to tackle the epidemic of substance abuse statewide. Our Lieutenant Governor's leadership of the Behavioral Health Consortium is having a real impact.

Despite the national rise in overdose rates during COVID, Delaware was one of only four states to see a decrease in the rate of overdose deaths.

The Lieutenant Governor will continue to be a driving force to ensure access to treatment and prevention.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank my wife, Tracey, for her support during this challenging time. And for her relentless advocacy on behalf of children across our state.

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She always reminds me how much children have sacrificed through this pandemic to keep their families and communities safe.

Through her First Chance Delaware initiative, Tracey has put a spotlight on issues facing children and has shown the value of working together.

Through Trauma Matters Delaware – and in partnership with Casey Family Programs – Tracey is tackling the effects of trauma on Delaware children and families.

Tracey has also partnered with the Food Bank of Delaware, which has stepped up time and again during this pandemic. I'd like to thank the Food Bank, its workers, and volunteers for their incredible work.

Probably our most popular statewide initiative this year has been Tracey's work with the Dolly Parton Imagination Library. Everybody loves Dolly.

This program provides free books to children – enrolling newborns before they leave the hospital – and helps families build libraries that can last generations.

Please join me in thanking Tracey for her work.

Let me be clear about this point – and you won't be surprised to hear it.

We can't make investments in public education – or infrastructure, or public safety - without a long-term, sustainable financial plan.

Responsibly managing our state budget is more important than ever.

And it's what every taxpayer I've ever talked to expects.

Over the past five years, we have worked hard – and worked together – to get our state budget in order. I'd like to thank members of the JFC – and your chairs, Senator Paradee and Representative Carson – for your work.

We have built significant new reserves and directed one-time revenue into one-time infrastructure projects.

We made it through the worst of the pandemic better than most states:

- WITHOUT painful budget cuts,
- WITHOUT tax increases,
- and WITHOUT layoffs of state employees.

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Next week, I will present a budget that stays true to these principles.

We will again invest in our classrooms with the expansion of Opportunity Funding.

We will use one-time revenue to continue the largest infrastructure program in Delaware history.

We have a unique opportunity to make real progress on these issues not just because of our work here in Delaware.

But also because of the passage of President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure bill.

With these investments, we'll strengthen our economy, expand opportunity, and support families as we finally emerge from this pandemic.

And we'll do it responsibly.

As most of you know, I've served in government now in some capacity for nearly three decades.

I've never seen a more challenging time.

As I think about the past two years, and how it fits into the long history of our great state, I can't help but think about the recent passing of Governor Ruth Ann Minner.

Governor Minner did not have an easy time leading up to being governor. Or during her two terms wrestling with your predecessors over a laundry list of sticky issues.

One thing you could count on with Ruth Ann, though, was when she faced a political issue or policy choice, she always approached it through the lens of: how it will affect people's everyday lives.

And another thing you could count on, was that when she made a tough call – and she had to make many – she would stand by it.

Please join me in a round of applause to pay tribute to this remarkable leader – the first woman governor of Delaware

Throughout this pandemic, I've had to make a lot of tough calls.

I know we've not always agreed on every decision. And I respect those differences.

But I hope you know this. I have always put Delawareans first.



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Since the early days of March 2020, when I wake up each morning and when I go to sleep each night, I'm thinking about the health of our people. And about the businesses that employ them.

I know this has been a difficult time.

But Delawareans have proven their resilience.

Every time they've been knocked down, they get back up.

As a result, unemployment is down. Children are back in school. Small businesses survived. And we are supercharging our economy with federal resources.

So my message today is this: We **will come** through this crisis. And when we do, we'll be ready as a state to move forward – together.

It is my sincere hope that when I stand before you next year, the pandemic will be firmly in the rearview mirror. But the last two years have taught me that whatever happens, our state will rise to the occasion.

Thank you very much.

God Bless you, and God Bless our great State.