

*January 19, 2023*

*As prepared for delivery*

*#DESOTS*

Lt. Governor Hall-Long, Mister President Pro Tem, Mister Speaker, Members of the 152<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly and other elected officials, Members of the Cabinet, Distinguished members of the Judiciary, invited guests, and my fellow Delawareans.

Madam President, Mister President Pro Tem, and Mister Speaker, thank you for inviting me into the chamber today.

Before we get started, I'd like to recognize General Berry and the Army and Air National Guard. This time last year, we had deployed a few hundred Guard members to our hospitals and long-term care facilities.

And just last week, we had a deployment ceremony for more than 150 Army National Guardsmen and women from the 160th Engineer Company. They are assisting with a federal military operation in Southwest Asia.

Never before has our National Guard been called to do as much for our state and our country than they have the last couple years. Please join me in recognizing and thanking our Delaware National Guard.

I also want to take a moment to recognize two Supreme Court Justices who are with us this afternoon – who deserve a special recognition. Justice Jim Vaughn will retire this May after nine years on Delaware's highest court. He has served since 1998 on the Delaware Superior Court and our Supreme Court.

And Justice Tamika Montgomery-Reeves, who I was proud to appoint to our Supreme Court in 2019. Last month, Justice Montgomery-Reeves was confirmed by the U.S. Senate to serve on the Third Circuit Court of Appeals. As Senator Carper said before his vote, Delaware's loss is our country's gain.

Join me in recognizing these two esteemed judges.

After three long years, it's great to be here in person with a full room once again.

Before I start, a moment of personal privilege if I may.

I'd like to recognize my wife, Tracey, for all the hard work she's done on behalf of Delaware children over the past six years. And to thank her for all the support she has given me over the years as an elected official – especially during the past six years as your Governor.

I know it hasn't been easy, Tracey, but thank very much for sticking with me.

First and foremost, I want to thank every member of the General Assembly for stepping up and agreeing to serve.

In 2019, I stood in this Chamber and said that never before has the General Assembly better reflected the people of our great state.

Well that's even more true today.

I'd like to offer a warm welcome to the new-comers - Russ Huxtable, Kyra Hoffner, and Eric Buckson in the Senate.

And to DeShanna Neal, Sophie Phillips, Cyndie Romer, Stell Parker Selby, Kerri Evelyn Harris, and Jeff Hilovsky in the House.

All Delawareans will benefit from your new ideas, and your fresh perspectives.

Welcome to Legislative Hall. We look forward to working with each of you.

It's a special privilege to represent the people of our state. I know you all agree.

Here's something that I've learned in my 20-plus years in public office – and it's been made even clearer over the past two and a half years.

The people of Delaware want us to work together.

They want us to focus on the work – not political infighting or distractions. They want us to put their taxpayer dollars to use in a responsible way.

I know you've all knocked doors and attended events in your districts, and I'm sure you've heard the same thing.

Delawareans want us to focus on the issues that matter in their everyday lives:

- Access to good jobs.
- Excellent public schools.
- A safe and affordable place to live.
- And vibrant communities where they can raise their children.

We have a long tradition in Delaware of setting politics aside and working together on behalf of the people we serve.

It's a tradition we should all embrace.

Standing here today, I've never been more confident about where we're headed as a state. Working together, over the past six years, we have taken steps to lay a strong foundation for the future:

To strengthen our economy and add good-paying jobs.

To make real investments in our public schools.

To protect our natural environment.

To responsibly manage taxpayer dollars.

And to make sure Delaware remains a great place to live and raise a family.

Let's build on that work, together.

Every year, I've come before this body to present my priorities for the year ahead. And I know you've heard me say this before – because I've said it every year. I believe that our success as a state *must* start with building a strong and growing economy.

We know that a good job solves a lot of problems – and that's not just political rhetoric.

Let's consider the story of the City of Seaford.

Years ago, Seaford had a strong local economy driven by industrial manufacturing. It was known as the “Nylon Capital of the World.”

DuPont manufacturing jobs put food on the table for thousands of families. As Representative Short and Senator Richardson know, these were good jobs that helped families afford a home and raise a family.

They funded college tuitions and promised a secure retirement. The plant also brought engineers and skilled tradesmen, and other highly trained workers to western Sussex County. It attracted nurses and doctors to the hospital, and good teachers to the public schools.

By the mid-1980s, though, things started to decline. The workforce of 4,500 began to dwindle. During my first term as Lt. Governor in the early 2000s, there were fewer than 700 jobs at the site. In a town of roughly 8,000 people, that's a heavy blow.

The loss of economic opportunity had ripple effects throughout Sussex County. Fewer good-paying jobs led to a lack of investment in the community and a dormant economy.

For many years now, many of us have looked for ways to turn things around.

Mayor David Genshaw and his team have put a hyper focus on bringing good, new jobs to Seaford. That includes attracting investment to the new Western Sussex Business Campus. And the Seaford Industrial Park.

Together, we've also made real investments in Seaford's Downtown Development District.

And just last month – alongside Representative Short, Mayor Genshaw, and Senator Richardson- we announced a major redevelopment project at the blighted Nylon Capital Shopping Center. The project has been a long time coming – and it will build on the hard work of town officials in recent years.

I want to thank Mayor Genshaw, who is here with us today.

The point is good jobs matter.

For families.

For communities.

And for everything else we do as a State from education to health care.

Six years ago – on my first full day in office – I signed an executive order to change the way we attract new jobs and business investment to Delaware. And to support the businesses that are already here.

Within the Department of State, we created a Division of Small Business to put a hyper focus on smaller, homegrown companies and entrepreneurs.

Companies like HX Innovations.

HX is a movement analytics company that I recently visited at the Chase Fieldhouse in Wilmington. It's run by Nicole and Von Homer. Von is also an assistant professor at Delaware State University. They use software to analyze muscle and joint activity. Their cutting-edge technology allows sports teams to monitor athletes, reduce injuries, and improve performance. Von and Nicole are with us today in the gallery. Please join me in recognizing them for their hard work and their innovative company.

We also partnered with business leaders in our state to create the Delaware Prosperity Partnership – what we call the DPP.

The results are visible in communities across our state.

In Middletown, WuXi STA broke ground on a 190-acre pharmaceutical manufacturing campus. Over the next several years, the company will invest more than a half billion dollars at the site, creating hundreds of good-paying construction jobs along the way. When the plant opens, they expect to create 500 full-time jobs.

It will also anchor industrial re-development in western Middletown, where the town has added hundreds of jobs in the last decade.

This hasn't happened by accident.

My good friend Mayor Kenny Branner, the architect of much of this, is with us today. The Mayor and I have worked together over many years – and I appreciate his friendship. Please join me in recognizing Mayor Branner for his long and successful service to his hometown.

Another \$500 million transformation is underway at the Chestnut Run Innovation & Science Park along Route 141. This will be a science and technology campus anchored by DuPont, Prelude Therapeutics, and Solenis.

Together, we're building Delaware's future economy. And DPP, led by Kurt Foreman and his talented team, is leading the way.

I'd like to thank members of the General Assembly who serve on the board of the DPP:

- Senators Jack Walsh and Brian Pettyjohn
- And Representatives Bill Bush and Lyndon Yearick

Thanks for your good work.

We do have economic challenges ahead, for sure. But they're unlike any I've seen during my time in public service.

The biggest challenge we have is filling the job openings that are out there. For my entire career in public service, we've been focused *first* on creating jobs. There have always been more people looking for work than jobs available. Today, it's just the opposite. We have thousands more job openings than we have people looking for work.

Let me say that again – in a different way.

Employers have 37,000 job openings in the State of Delaware. And there are just 21,000 Delawareans looking for a job.

I've never seen a situation like this before.

Our state government sees those challenges every day. Across the executive branch agencies, we have 2,000 job openings and it's harder than ever to find candidates.

This is not a problem unique to Delaware. In fact, every state in the country is facing similar challenges. And so our ability to compete will depend on our success building and attracting a highly skilled workforce. Our colleges and universities have never been more important in this work.

Consider this:

I'm told there are more people working on the University of Delaware's STAR campus today than when Chrysler closed its manufacturing facility at the site in 2008. It's hard to believe – but it says a heck of a lot about where our economy is headed. More than 3,000 people now work at the STAR campus every day.

That includes more than 300 scientists and researchers at the Chemours Research and Discovery Hub. The university's partnership with Chemours allows students to train right alongside industry researchers and scientists.

It also includes the staff at the National Institute for Innovation in Manufacturing Biopharmaceuticals – or NIIMBL.

The facility builds on our state's strength in biotech.

And it was critical in bringing WuXi STA to Middletown.

Our Lieutenant Governor serves as the State's representative on NIIMBL. And I want to thank her for her work in promoting science and technology in our state.

At Delaware State University, President Allen and his team recently received the largest research grant in the university's history. The \$18.3 million grant from the NIH will fund research into health disparities in minority communities. It will also attract top talent to the Dover campus, expose students to cutting-edge research, and help train our next generation of public health scientists.

Our goal is to keep more and more of those students, graduating from UD and Delaware State, here in Delaware.

At Delaware Technical Community College, President Brainard and his team continue to work on the front lines of job training in our state. Last year, we opened the McDowell Student Success Center. It's named after our good friend and my former Senator, Harris McDowell. Providing resources for students will help keep Delaware Tech the number one institution for job training and workforce development.

I'd like to thank Dr. Assanis, Dr. Allen, and Dr. Brainard for everything that they're doing for our state. Please join me in expressing our appreciation for their leadership.

Thanks to President Biden and our congressional delegation, we've also seen a significant influx of federal dollars that will help us build on this progress.

With the support of the American Rescue Plan, we're building:

- a Clinical Lab at Delaware State University.
- an Allied Health Center at Delaware Tech in Wilmington.
- And a state-of-the-art laboratory on the site of the McKinly Lab at the University of Delaware.

Over the course of the next year, ARPA funding will help rehabilitate blighted homes and properties on the east side of Wilmington.

Working with Mayor Purzycki and his team, we hope to reenergize the community around the new Bancroft school – and to help more families find a safe, affordable place to call home.

We'll make similar investments in Dover, Milford, and communities statewide.

Our Housing Director, Eugene Young, is leading that effort.

My budget next week will build on these investments in affordable housing and community development.

I look forward to working with Senator Lockman, Senator Townsend, and others to make housing issues a priority in this legislative session.

Ultimately, if we want to expand economic opportunity and build a competitive workforce, we need to start in our schools. And we all know that a quality education starts with a committed, experienced teacher.

Right now, the competition for the best teachers in this region is more intense than ever. So we need to pay our teachers more to win the competition with surrounding states. When I introduce my budget next week, we will propose a significant increase in pay for our teachers.

This will be a down-payment on the work of the Public Education Compensation Committee. The committee is studying the issue of educator pay and will present their recommendations this November. I'd like to thank the legislators serving on that committee:

- Senators Sturgeon and Pettyjohn.
- And Representatives Williams and Smith.

I also want to recognize and thank our Education Secretary, Dr. Mark Holodick, who is chairing the committee.

I want the General Assembly to know this: we are committed to working with you on the issue of teacher pay.

All Delaware children will benefit if we can attract the best teachers to our state and keep them working here.

My goals for Delaware's students have been consistent from the start.

All children should be able to:

- Read at grade level by third grade.
- Be proficient in math by middle school.
- And graduate high school ready for college or a career.

If we meet those targets, our students will be better off in the long run. And our state will be stronger.

But here's the uncomfortable truth: too many students are behind. That's especially true among our most vulnerable students. And that's just not acceptable. We need everyone to lean into this issue.

We can agree on this. All our children deserve a high-quality education.

My budget proposal next week will include more than \$50 million for Opportunity Funding. That's on top of more than \$100 million in investments we've already made.

As most people know, Opportunity Funding provides direct support for low-income children and English learners.

I've visited schools across our state and watched this investment in action. And I would encourage all of you to do the same. I know you do it. Visit schools in your districts. These investments are tailored to the needs of each community. Talk to our educators about what's working – and what's not working.

My budget will also increase our investment in the Wilmington Learning Collaborative.

Many of you were with us at the Wilmington Library back in November when we signed the agreement creating the WLC. This model is one we've seen work in other states. It's a voluntary network of schools in the three districts that serve students in the city – Brandywine, Christina, and Red Clay.

Our goal is to empower teachers, school leaders, and parents to improve the outcomes of our children in the city.

We've been debating how to help these children for the past thirty years.

In the months leading up to the votes on the WLC, we knocked doors across the city and talked to parents in every neighborhood. Everyone we talked to had different ideas of what the priorities ought to be. But everyone had the same hopes for our children – to improve outcomes and help them succeed.

So, I'd like to recognize several people in the balcony who helped us create the WLC:

- Richard Smith and Freeman Williams from the NAACP, who were tireless in their support
- And Karen Eller, a dedicated teacher at Bancroft who works with these students every day.

Thank you, and all our partners, for your support.

My wife, Tracey, has been a partner in these efforts. She has shown a tireless dedication to early literacy and the wellbeing of our children.

Over the past year, Tracey has continued her efforts to help give Delaware's children a "First Chance" to succeed. She has worked in lockstep with our Family Services Cabinet Council to address the challenges of these children.

Tracey has also coordinated work around childhood hunger. And she has focused on shining a light on childhood trauma, in Delaware and nationally.

With support from the Casey Family Programs and the American Academy of Pediatrics, Tracey helped organize a fall summit on youth mental health in Washington, DC. Young people from around the country had a chance to speak directly with federal leaders.

And of course...in one of the great highlights of the last year, Tracey and I welcomed Dolly Parton to the Wilmington Public Library in May. I know many of you were there with us. It was a really special day.

If there was ever any doubt, all Delawareans love Dolly.

More than 26,000 Delaware children are currently enrolled in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, receiving free books each month from birth to age five. That's an incredible number that we want to push even higher. Please join me in thanking Tracey and all her partners for their hard work.

Supporting our youngest learners and their families has to be a top priority for all of us.

That's why my budget next week will increase state investments in early childhood education. We will propose an increase in purchase of care, helping low-income families access quality child care.

We will also double funding for the Early Childhood Assistance Program – or ECAP. These programs serve many of the most vulnerable 3- and 4-year-olds in our state.

And with the help of an \$8 million federal grant, we will develop a plan to strengthen the future of child care and early education in Delaware.

I know this is a priority for Lieutenant Governor Hall-Long, Senator Gay, and many others in this chamber.

This is a real opportunity for all of us - to do the hard work and expand and improve child care and early education for Delaware families.

Of course, part of my job is to promote this great state that we all call home. Delaware *is* a special place. We're the First State. The home of the President of the United States of America.

And so this year on Delaware Day, I visited the Nanticoke Indian Museum in Millsboro. I spoke with Chief Carmine, who is here with us today in the balcony, and the museum's coordinator, Sterling Street. The tribe has called the region home for over 10,000 years. The museum houses artifacts from pre-colonial times and pieces made by modern-day artisans. If you haven't been, I encourage you to go.

Then we went to visit the Stayton Farm in Lincoln. The farm has been with the Stayton family for nearly 300 years. Grier Stayton is the current owner. He's the 12<sup>th</sup> generation to operate the farm and he's here with us in the chamber today in the balcony. Please help me welcome Grier.

Grier's family acquired the land through a land grant issued by William Penn in 1728. The farm has been preserved through the Aglands preservation program and, together with neighboring farms, is part of a parcel of 1,000 acres that have been preserved.

The Stayton Farm is a great example of what we're trying to achieve with state investments in Agland Preservation.

We have a proud environmental heritage in Delaware. And protecting that heritage is a priority I know many of us share.

In the Oath of Office, we all take as elected officials, we pledge to "respect the right of future generations to share the rich historic and natural heritage of Delaware."

But, that natural heritage is under threat. We're the lowest-lying state in the nation. And the effects of climate change and sea level rise on Delaware communities are real. We're seeing them every day. That's why we need to take action.

With the help of federal infrastructure funding, we will accelerate our efforts to build out Delaware's electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

And we'll restore investments in the Clean Water Trust – to protect our waterways and drinking water.

Representatives Longhurst and Heffernan and Senator Hansen – I know this is a high priority for you and many others in both chambers. Let's work together to take on this existential threat. Thank you for your leadership on this issue.

We will also continue to ask everyone to pitch in and do their part.

We're determined to plant a tree for every Delawarean. We've already planted 120,000. But we have a long way to go to reach one million. And we need your help to reach our goal. Visit [de.gov/tedi](http://de.gov/tedi) and record your tree plantings.

And by the way, we live in too beautiful a state to put up with this litter problem we have. You know by now how I feel about it. I can't stand it. I'll often stop my car to pick up litter on the side of the road. I know it drives my passengers crazy.

But we shouldn't have to rely on other people to pick up our trash. We should stop throwing it out the window in the first place. That's really the fundamental message.

Please join us in the effort to Keep DE Litter Free.

Protecting our state also means making sure Delaware families feel safe in their homes and communities.

We're working with leaders in Wilmington and Dover to expand our Group Violence Intervention Program – to reduce gun violence. Our collective efforts have shown good results. Statewide, shootings are down nearly 30 percent since last year. There's a lot more work to do, for sure. Gun violence anywhere is unacceptable – and we need everyone to make this a priority.

But I want to thank our Attorney General, and all our law enforcement officers, for their partnership and hard work.

We can't make any of these investments – in education, in our economy, in environmental protection and public safety – if we don't have our fiscal house in order. Over the past six years, we have charted a responsible course, together. We've protected taxpayer dollars and directed investments where they can have the greatest impact.

I've talked to a lot of taxpayers over the years – and that's what they expect of us.

When I took office six years ago, we were facing an almost \$400 million deficit. Now, we have \$400 million more in reserves for when the economy turns down again which we know will happen at some point.

Despite a global pandemic that ravaged our economy – we have turned a significant deficit into a surplus. We have directed one-time revenue into one-time projects and built the largest infrastructure program in Delaware history – two years in a row now. We are repairing our roads and bridges and building new schools in communities across our state.

When we present our budget next week, we will stay the course and stay true to these principles. I look forward to asking for your support

We've been through a lot together over the past six years. It certainly feels like many more than that to me – especially these past three years. And it hasn't always been easy, for sure.

But I stand here today and can confidently say that because of the work we've done together, the state of our state is strong.

And I believe our State will only get stronger in the years ahead.

If we continue working together – as we do in Delaware better than anyone else – we'll build a future worthy of the next generation.

Finally, I want to thank the people of Delaware, for the privilege to serve as your Governor. It's been a challenging six years but we're on a roll now.

May God Bless you and may God bless our wonderful state.