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Governor Ron DeSantis' State of the State Address

On January 11, 2022, in [News Releases](#), by Staff

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Provided below is the State of the State address as prepared for delivery. The address is embargoed until delivery.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, members of the Legislature and fellow citizens:

Together we have made Florida the freest state in these United States.

While so many around the country have consigned the people's rights to the graveyard, Florida has stood as freedom's vanguard.

In Florida, we have protected the right of our citizens to earn a living, provided our businesses with the ability to prosper, fought back against unconstitutional federal mandates and ensured our kids have the opportunity to thrive.

Florida has become the escape hatch for those chafing under authoritarian, arbitrary and seemingly never-ending mandates and restrictions.

Even today, across the nation we see students denied an education due to reckless, politically-motivated school closures, workers denied employment due to heavy-handed mandates and Americans denied freedoms due to a coercive biomedical apparatus.

These unprecedented policies have been as ineffective as they have been destructive. They are grounded more in blind adherence to Faucian declarations than they are in the constitutional traditions that are the foundation of free nations.

Florida is a free state. We reject the biomedical security state that curtails liberty, ruins livelihoods and divides society. And we will protect the rights of individuals to live their lives free from the yoke of restrictions and mandates.

Florida has stood strong as the rock of freedom. And upon this rock we must build Florida's future.

We will, fortunately, be able to confront our challenges with an incredibly favorable budget outlook and strong economic performance that has withstood unfavorable national headwinds:

My recommended budget of \$99.7 billion has more than \$15 billion in reserve — one of the largest surpluses in state history.

Florida's revenues have exceeded estimates by billions of dollars over the past year. December's revenues came in at more than \$500 million over the latest monthly estimate.

And this is all being done with no income tax and the lowest per capita tax burden in America.

Job creation in Florida is far exceeding the national average. And our labor force has increased six times faster than the nation's.

Florida also leads the nation in business formations, which have increased by 61% since I took office in 2019. In 2021, Florida saw 114,000 more new businesses than second place California — even though California has a population that is 40% larger.

Freedom works. Our economy is the envy of the nation. And the state is well-prepared to withstand future economic turmoil.

Our nation is, though, facing economic problems stemming from reckless federal policies, especially the most sustained Inflation our country has witnessed in decades. The federal government has borrowed and printed unprecedented sums of money, and the bill is coming due.

Inflation is an invisible tax. It represents a pay cut for individuals and families alike. And one of the ways families have felt the pinch has been in significantly higher gas prices.

To help alleviate this burden for Florida families, I am proposing a \$1 billion gas tax holiday to help reduce prices at the pump. If Washington, D.C., won't change course, then we have a responsibility to step up on behalf of Floridians.

Education represents a major pillar of Florida's future. I'm happy to note that Florida is again ranked number three for K-12 achievement in the latest Education Week Quality Counts rankings. We have worked hard to keep schools open, increase teacher compensation, promote workforce education and protect the rights of parents.

In pockets across America, schools are closing once again. These closures are enormously destructive and will not be tolerated in the state of Florida.

Florida has led the way in putting our kids first. In the summer of 2020, when it wasn't fashionable, we made clear that kids needed to be in school. We faced opposition — from hysterical media, from unions and the politicians they control. We even faced lawsuits aiming to close the schools, but we wouldn't allow fear or politics to harm our kids. We were right and they were wrong. And millions of families in Florida are better for it.

While it is important to embrace high academic standards and to measure student achievement, the FSA test is not the best way to do it. I am proposing the elimination of the FSA and replacing it with periodic progress monitoring. This will lead to meaningful feedback for parents and teachers and will reduce the amount of time dedicated to testing, leaving more time for learning. This reform will be better for students, teachers and parents, and it will help Florida remain a leader in education reform.

Over the past two years, we have increased the average minimum salary for teachers by more than \$6,000. And last year, we provided \$1,000 bonuses to every public school teacher and principal in the state.

Brittany Duquaine is a teacher at Lakewood Elementary School in Pinellas County. She has benefitted from the bonuses and salary increases and the experience at Lakewood shows why this is important, as Brittany and her colleagues took the school from an F grade in 2019 to an A grade in 2021.

Let's continue this progress by further increasing teacher pay and by approving \$1,000 bonuses for a second year in a row.

Florida has enacted a Parents' Bill of Rights and we reject the notion that parents shouldn't have a say in what their kids learn in school. Indeed, Florida law should provide parents with the right to review the curriculum used in their children's schools. We should provide parents with recourse so that state standards are enforced, such as Florida's prohibition on infusing subjects with critical race theory in our classrooms.

Quisha King is a mother from Duval County who has joined moms all across Florida and America to speak out against divisive ideologies like CRT.

These moms are standing up for a principle that is the policy of the state of Florida: Our tax dollars should not be used to teach our kids to hate our country or to hate each other.

Florida's public college and university system is ranked number one in the nation yet again. Higher education must remain affordable for Florida families. I will not support any tuition increases at Florida's colleges and universities and I oppose cutting Bright Futures scholarships, which have benefitted many Florida families.

As proud as we are of the quality and affordability of Florida's university system, a four-year education at a traditional brick-and-ivy school isn't the only pathway to success. Over the past three years, Florida has added more than 50 new apprenticeship programs. The credentials earned through our workforce initiatives have paved the way for employment in a variety of fields like aviation, logistics and welding. These are as valuable and as honorable endeavors as attending august universities, and they deserve our support.

Florida's dedicated focus on the skilled trades will help expand the state's manufacturing footprint. We have already seen businesses move here from other states and we should also be actively encouraging businesses to repatriate production back to America from foreign countries. Do we really want our supply chains to be captive to the whims of a country such as Communist China?

Florida's economic security is also linked to the stewardship of our natural resources.

We Floridians are heirs to a unique environment that makes our state the envy of the nation for fishing, boating and other outdoor activities. Three years ago, we promised bold action to safeguard Florida's natural resources, improve water quality and restore the Everglades. With the support of the Legislature, especially Speaker Chris Sprowls and President Wilton Simpson, we have secured historic funding to support these efforts.

Since January 2019, 42 Everglades restoration projects have broken ground, hit a major milestone or finished construction, record funding has gone to conduct research and secure technologies to mitigate blue-green algae and red tide, and the state now has dedicated streams of revenue to promote coastal resiliency and water quality improvements.

We have even made enormous strides in removing invasive Burmese pythons from the Everglades. In the gallery today is the reigning python king, Charlie Dachton, who caught a whopping 41 pythons in our 2021 statewide contest.

We resolved to leave our unique natural inheritance to God better than we found it, and we are fulfilling that pledge.

We also will continue to honor our commitment to safe communities.

Florida is a law and order state.

We will not allow law enforcement to be defunded, bail to be eliminated, criminals to be prematurely released from prison or prosecutors to ignore the law.

These soft-on-crime policies have been tried in communities throughout the country to disastrous results: crime has skyrocketed, morale for police officers has plummeted and quality of life has been destroyed.

We have stood by the men and women of law enforcement. Not only do we reject defunding law enforcement — we enacted \$1,000 bonuses for all police, fire and EMTs in Florida. I'm asking the Legislature to re-up these bonuses for another year. They deserve it.

Serving in law enforcement is a noble calling and we will not allow our officers to be smeared by reckless politicians and corporate media. My proposals to increase pay for state law enforcement by up to 25% and to provide \$5,000 signing bonuses to law enforcement personnel who either transfer to or begin their careers in Florida will spark a tidal wave of qualified professionals seeking employment at agencies throughout the state.

I'm happy to be joined by Officer Yehuda Topper from the North Miami Beach Police Department, who moved from NYC and is the state's first orthodox Jewish police officer.

Let there be no doubt to those who wear the uniform: the state of Florida stands with you!

Law and order requires strong borders. The crisis at the US-Mexico border over the past year has witnessed staggering illegal migration and a massive influx of narcotics like fentanyl. Rather than defend our sovereignty and enforce the border, the federal government has released hundreds of thousands of illegal aliens to communities across the U.S., shipping them to Florida at alarming rates, including by sending clandestine flights in the dark of night.

As a state, we cannot be a party to what is effectively a massive human smuggling operation run by the federal government. Companies who are facilitating the movement of illegal aliens from the southern border to Florida should be held accountable, including by paying restitution to the state for all the costs they are imposing on our communities. I am also requesting funds so that when the feds dump illegal aliens in Florida, the state can re-route them to states that have sanctuary policies.

Florida should not be made to bear the burden of our federal government's lawless open border policies.

The rule of law also means that our citizens have the ability to participate in elections that are secure and transparent.

It is Orwellian doublespeak to invoke the concept of "Voting rights" to mean ballot harvesting, prohibiting voter ID and taxpayer funding of elections. Those are political concepts that erode the integrity of our elections.

Ballot harvesting has no place in Florida and we need to increase the penalties for those who do it. We also need to ensure that supervisors clean the voter rolls, that only citizens are registered to vote and that mail ballots only go to those who actually request them before each individual election.

To ensure that elections are conducted in accordance with the rule of law, I have proposed an election integrity unit whose sole focus will be the enforcement of Florida's election laws. This will facilitate the faithful enforcement of election laws and will provide Floridians with the confidence that their vote will count.

Our constitutional rights have been under assault on a number of fronts and Florida has stood tall in defending the rights of its people.

A free society requires the ability to have robust discussions about issues of public importance, yet today Big Tech companies have used their platforms to elevate preferred narratives and to stifle dissent, serving as a de facto council of censors. Florida was the first state to legislate protections for its citizens and we should build on this success.

These same companies make a fortune by selling user data. Floridians should not have their data utilized by Big Tech without providing affirmative consent and I urge the Legislature to enact protections for the data privacy of all Floridians.

I also recommend that the Legislature strengthen protections for Floridians' 2nd Amendment rights. These important rights should not depend on the whims of politicians who reject the existence of those rights.

Finally, we have an opportunity to strengthen protections for the right to life, without which the other rights mean little.

Protecting life does not end with the unborn. It must also include continued efforts to promote adoption and foster care so that all Floridians have a fair chance in life. Florida has 4,000 more licensed caregivers than in 2019 and I am proposing additional funds for foster parents in next year's budget.

Nobody has done more to support Florida's children than our First Lady, whose Pathway to Prosperity program has served more than 17,000 families in need through a collaboration between DCF and the faith community.

On behalf of our family, I want to personally thank everyone who has sent prayers and well-wishes for her recovery from breast cancer. Casey is strong, resilient, and has a husband and three kids who love her dearly. 2022 is the year she will be cancer free!

Florida has understood how important it is to put our seniors first, and we have done that time and again over the past two years.

Most recently, we led the nation in raising awareness of and expanding access to monoclonal antibody treatments. This effort has kept thousands of seniors out of the hospital and has saved many lives.

Wally and Doris Cortese from Cape Coral are with us today. Wally is a WWII and Korean War veteran who has been married to Doris for 62 years. When they both contracted COVID-19, they utilized monoclonal treatments to make full recoveries. God bless you both.

On June 24, millions of Floridians were shocked to wake up the news of a catastrophic partial collapse at the Champlain Towers South condominium complex.

First responders rescued dozens of people from an adjoining tower and searched a massive pile of rubble for survivors for weeks.

Our first responders poured their heart and soul into the rescue efforts. Ray Jadallah is the assistant chief of Miami-Dade Fire Rescue who helped lead those efforts. We thank Ray and all the members of the Urban Search and Rescue Teams that worked tirelessly during those very difficult days.

The loss of the 98 victims who perished in the collapse has been devastating and incalculable.

One of the victims was 92 year old the Hilda Noriega, whose son, North Bay Village Chief of Police Carlos Noriega, and grandchildren are with us today. Hilda was the matriarch of an amazing family and is dearly missed by those who knew her.

The grief and anguish endured by the Noriega family and the other Surfside families has been overwhelming, and reminds us that:

“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he saves those whose spirits are crushed.”

Our state should provide support for an appropriate memorial so that future generations will never forget the legacies of the victims of that terrible event.

The Surfside tragedy reminds us that you never know what tomorrow will bring. Don't take anything for granted and make the most out of each and every day.

We have sixty days to work together to build upon our rock of freedom. Lost time is never found again. Seize the moment. And be thankful that God has blessed us to live and serve in America's liberty outpost, the free state of Florida!

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Comments are closed.



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