

2022 State of the State



January 11, 2022

Introduction

Lieutenant Governor Rhoden, Mr. Speaker, members of the House and Senate, Chief Justice Jensen, Supreme Court justices, constitutional officers, and my fellow South Dakotans:

I am honored to stand before you today as the Governor of a state that is proudly leading the nation. We are leading with a talented workforce. We are leading by growing our businesses. We are leading with strong schools. We are leading with freedom, limited government, fiscal responsibility, and a commitment to defending the values that have made our country great.

I am proud to report that the state of our state is stronger than it has ever been in our 133-year history.

This did not happen because of what government did. It happened because of what government did NOT do.

And it is because of our people.

Two years ago, we made a decision in the face of a global threat. We chose not to compromise our values. We kept businesses, schools, and churches open. We did not decide who is essential and who is not. We chose freedom and personal responsibility over mandates and lockdowns. We took steps to be safe, to guard public health. But we also trusted people to make decisions that were best for them and their families.

We did what was right — and we were attacked for our decision.

Today we are thriving because we upheld our principles. Our economy is strong. We have one of the lowest unemployment rates in the United States.

South Dakota saw new families and new businesses move here from other states. From July 2020 to July 2021, South Dakota's population grew nine times faster than the national average. While places like California, New York, and Washington, D.C., are LOSING population.

The reason why is no secret. People want to live somewhere that respects them - that respects their freedoms. They want to share in our quality of life. They're coming here because they want to be like us.

Last year, we were ranked the Number 1 state for helping our workforce and small businesses get through the pandemic. We've had record tourism numbers and created opportunities for success for everyone.

No group is succeeding in higher numbers than women in South Dakota. During the pandemic, South Dakota was Top 3 for smallest negative impact on female workers. We also are one of the Top 10 Best States for Women to live and work. I am very proud that South Dakota is one of the Top 5 states for providing career opportunities for working moms.

We are seeing inspirational testimonies from women like our very own State Senator Jessica Castleberry. I am

so grateful she is allowing me to share her story with all of you today.

Fifteen years ago, Jessica suddenly found herself a single mother with three very young mouths to feed and only \$3 in her checking account. She went to visit with a credit counselor to get some advice on what she might do to improve her situation. Jessica shared her dreams of getting a business degree and becoming a business owner someday. The woman responded to Jessica by saying that there was no magic wand that could make her dream come true.

Well, that didn't sit well with Jessica. She went and bought herself a magic wand and kept it close to remind herself that she could make her dreams come true, regardless of what others thought was possible. Through hard work, Senator Castleberry advanced her education and launched her career. This year, she celebrated the 11th anniversary of her business in Rapid City, which has three commercial locations. To this day, that magic wand sits in her office as a reminder of all that is possible.

Sen. Castleberry's story has good company here in the Capitol. In fact, all of the legislators have inspirational stories that led them to where they are today. That is what is so special about South Dakota. The Representatives and Senators in the SD Legislature truly do reflect the people of South Dakota. They understand challenges, hardships, and loss. Today, you will hear more stories about the amazing people in our state who have faced and overcome adversity. I believe you will find inspiration in their stories and gain hope and excitement for the year ahead.

The South Dakota people worked together to navigate the pandemic. Over and over again, we are recognized as one of the best states in the country because of our willingness to trust each other.

Other states took a different course. They locked down. Closed up businesses. Shut schools. Mandated masks. Their economies — their people — are paying the price. They have suffered. And it didn't have to happen. Unfortunately, we're starting to see it happen all over again in some states.

But even here in South Dakota, we have new challenges — new barriers to the American Dream. Inflation is rising. Washington is threatening to raise taxes as it piles on more debt and spending. It's getting harder for families to put food on the table, gas in their car, or keep the lights on.

The world economy is changing, too. We're seeing new technologies, emerging industries, and international competition. We must be ready.

On top of all that, our children, our history, and our values are under attack.

These threats are already here. We're seeing it in our schools and communities. It's happening in the news, on TV, in social media, and with what is taught to our children. It is up to us to defend our values and prepare for the future.

So today, I will talk to you about the state of our great state — how we are succeeding - and the steps we can take together to preserve what we have and grow even stronger.

Life, Liberty, Pursuit of Happiness

We can make that happen by remaining true to the principles that made America so great in the first place — and that make South Dakota the greatest state in the union.

Thomas Jefferson famously outlined our founding ideal in the Declaration of Independence: “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are

Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Jefferson continued by reminding us why government is here in the first place - to secure those rights, not to grant them. Our rights come from God, NOT from government. And GOVERNMENT must remain LIMITED to serve its proper role of securing those rights.

Life

It's no mistake that when Thomas Jefferson wrote those famous words, that LIFE came first. Government's most fundamental role is to defend the lives and safety of the people. That includes the rights and the lives of unborn children.

Over the last decade, abortions have dropped sharply in South Dakota. In 2020, the total number of abortions was **down approximately 80% from a decade before**.

That's something to celebrate, and it's thanks in part to the policies passed by some of the legislators in this room. You have proven that abortion does not need to be a divisive issue. Last year, every single legislator supported my bill to guarantee protections for unborn children with Down syndrome.

I look forward to the day when all unborn lives are protected. The Supreme Court has a historic opportunity to make that a reality. As soon as *Roe v. Wade* is overturned, our state laws are ready to protect every unborn South Dakota child. But until then, we can take steps to protect South Dakota children, today.

Heartbeat

There is more we can do. Every human life is unique in a truly beautiful way from the moment that they are conceived. It isn't long before they have their own unique heartbeat, too. Science tells us that an unborn child's heartbeat starts 6 weeks after conception. And any abortion after that point stops that heartbeat — stops that life — stops that gift from God.

Today, I am asking all of you to protect the heartbeats of these unborn children. I am bringing legislation to ban all abortions once a heartbeat can be detected.

Telemedicine Abortion

Last year, I signed an executive order banning telemedicine abortions in South Dakota. Today, I am asking all of you to ban telemedicine abortions in state law.

Chemical abortions happen when a woman ends an unborn life with a pill. These procedures are **four times as likely** to cause the woman getting the abortion to end up in the Emergency Room. Chemical abortions are dangerous. I am asking all of you to take action to protect South Dakota women from this dangerous procedure.

Adoption and Foster Care

We can also protect lives by expanding access to adoption and foster care. This past year, 262 South Dakota children found their forever families, and 135 children were placed into a legal guardianship.

All children deserve to grow up in a family where they are loved and protected. When I stood at this podium for my first State of the State in 2019, I promised to talk about foster care at every opportunity. Since then, we have made tremendous progress.

We have launched our Stronger Families Together initiative with the Department of Social Services alongside America's Kids Belong and South Dakota Kids Belong. I need faith-based organizations, church leaders, business leaders, and other community organizations to come alongside me in your hometowns and support those who choose to adopt or foster children.

In South Dakota, we support and serve others. My parents instilled that in me from a very young age. We helped struggling families put food on the table or keep the lights on. I also had the opportunity to grow up with a foster brother. I remember my parents telling me years later that they wished they would have had more tools, more information, or more training so that they could have helped him adjust better to becoming a part of our family.

Today, we have people in the room who can provide that kind of help. We have the leadership of South Dakota Kids Belong here with us. Would you please stand, and everyone please join me in thanking them for their efforts to help families going through crisis?

While we're on the subject of Foster Care, today, I want to highlight a family that has been providing foster care for twenty-two years. Rodney and Peggy Anderson have adopted nine children out of the foster care system and have fostered many more. They've dealt with childhood trauma and connected their foster kids with professionals to help them. Rod and Peggy give kids a place to live, but more than that, they give them a home where they are loved and cared for.

One of our Family Services Specialists had this to say about the Andersons: "This family is by far the most resilient, knowledgeable, fantastic, flexible, amazing family I have ever worked with. They go above and beyond - always putting the children in their home first. They have some of the toughest kids I've ever had on my caseload. And they handle them with patience and grace! We are so incredibly lucky to have them as foster parents!"

I would like to have Rod and Peggy please stand. Three years ago, I created the Governor's Heroism Award to honor South Dakotans who went above and beyond. Rod and Peggy Anderson are heroes. They're heroes for how they've changed these kids' lives. And this year, I'd like to recognize Rodney and Peggy Anderson with the 2022 Governor's Heroism Award. Let's thank them and every foster parent in this state for their tremendous, heroic efforts!

With more foster families like Rod and Peggy, we will be able to help even more children and families in the years to come.

Expanding Healthcare Access

Another way that we can advance life in South Dakota is by giving our people healthcare options close to home.

Many South Dakotans live on farms, ranches, and in small towns. No matter where you live in our state, you should have access to the highest quality care available. You should be able to get the medical help you need.

We've increased flexibilities to bring healthcare directly to our patients. I signed legislation to address this, and my budget this year expands telehealth to our emergency responders so that they are available to help in a time of crisis, no matter where you live.

For years, emergency services in small towns across South Dakota have been largely run by volunteers. Today, we have a volunteer ambulance crew with us from Onida. Would you all please stand? The Onida Ambulance Service has been in operation since 1956. In 2000, they were named the South Dakota Emergency Medical Service of the Year. They won that award again in 2020. To win such an honor twice is a testament to their hard work and training.

They complete the hours and hours of training to become Emergency Medical Technicians and ongoing training as well. They answer calls across Sully County. And they do it all as volunteers. Their dedication to saving the lives of their fellow South Dakotans is inspirational. Will you help me thank them for their service to the people here in South Dakota?

Unfortunately, our emergency responders are getting fewer and fewer. Many have gotten older, and less people are stepping up to volunteer. We must reverse this trend. We need to recruit more volunteer firefighters and emergency responders. And we need to support them with modern tools - my budget does that. I look forward to working with all of you to get these wonderful folks the equipment and training that they need.

For over a year, we have offered free at-home COVID tests to the people of South Dakota. Last week, I announced that I had ordered 1 million new tests to be delivered to even more locations in our state. Every citizen in South Dakota will have the access to get a free COVID test in their home community. President Biden had promised this action but has failed to do so. The state will continue to work together to take care of our people.

Our healthcare workers worked hard to keep us within our hospital capacity. Our systems monitored people from home to ensure their safety while keeping beds available.

To our nurses, doctors, and healthcare professionals: we are getting you more help. We've invited more healthcare professionals to come and live in South Dakota. We've made it possible for out-of-state licenses to be recognized so that they can get right to work. And when they come here, they will have the opportunity to work for some of the greatest systems in the country.

Healthcare workers in South Dakota have faced perhaps the greatest challenges of their career over these past two years. I am amazed by their efforts, and I am so grateful for how they have sacrificed to serve others.

Mental Health/Addiction

Another problem we need to address is addiction and mental illness, and we are doing that through our targeted treatment and prevention initiatives. While overdoses have been skyrocketing across the country, in South Dakota, overdose deaths dropped by 19 percent.

There's more work to do. In 2022, we will launch a statewide behavioral health campaign, continue to focus on fighting meth, and raise awareness about available resources. These efforts are saving lives.

Unfortunately, we are seeing that increased drug activity from the border is making its way into our communities. Counterfeit fentanyl is a serious problem. We can thank our law enforcement agencies who are working to keep this poison off our streets.

As for mental health, my budget creates regional behavioral crisis centers. These centers will help us get people appropriate care more quickly and close to home. This will help relieve the pressure on law enforcement and emergency rooms.

I take our citizens' health seriously. I don't make these decisions lightly. And when we create new policy, we're going to do everything we can to get it right from day one. Our state's medical cannabis program is one example. It was launched on schedule according to the timeline passed by South Dakota voters. I know there will be some debate about that program this session. My focus is on making sure South Dakota has the safest, most responsible, and well-run medical cannabis program in the country.

Liberty

Together, we can make protecting lives our priority so that all South Dakotans can enjoy our God-given gift of liberty - the second unalienable right the Declaration upholds.

Prayer in Schools

There is one freedom that is fundamental to our nation's founding. It is the freedom to worship.

In the Preamble to our state's Constitution, we express gratitude "to Almighty God for our civil and religious liberties." Our state's motto is, "Under God the people rule." And we began here today – in this chamber – with a prayer asking for God's grace and guidance. Yet in our public schools, prayer is absent - forbidden.

I am introducing legislation that would allow for a moment of silence at the beginning of each school day. Students can choose to reflect on the upcoming day or have a quiet moment - they can also exercise their First Amendment right to pray. We will protect the freedom to worship and re-install a right that has been absent for far too long in our schools.

Economic Freedom

Another fundamental liberty is the right of individuals to provide for themselves and their families. Government, at times, abuses its power and interferes with that liberty. But never in our history have we seen government shut down liberty as we saw during the pandemic.

State after state imposed mandates and lockdowns. Closed businesses and churches. America is still suffering the consequences.

Small Business Stories

Other states told people that they weren't essential -- picked winners and losers. We kept the doors to businesses open.

Ace Hardware in Sioux Falls is a great example of a thriving business in South Dakota. They weathered the worst days of the pandemic without laying off a single employee. They innovated quickly, protected the health of their staff and customers, and continued their passion for quality service and customer care. Similar success stories can be found time and time again around our great state.

Here with us today is a young woman named Alyssa Nix, a small business owner in Sioux Falls. Alyssa was born and raised in Sioux Falls and started working in retail and fashion when she was 16 years old. In February 2018, she took out a loan to purchase a women's clothing boutique, which fulfilled a life-long dream for her. She is proud to sell clothing and accessories that make women feel confident about themselves at all budget

levels and for all occasions.

Alyssa was nervous when the pandemic hit. She didn't know what the future had in store, and she didn't think she could keep her business going if she had been forced to close.

I heard about Alyssa's store from my daughters, so I decided to stop in one day when Bryon and I were in Sioux Falls running errands. While I was there, Alyssa and I chatted about the weather, horses (which we both love) and 4-H -- we have both been 4-H leaders for years. During our visit, Alyssa told me with tears in her eyes that if our state made different decisions during the pandemic the past 2 years and not trusted her, she didn't know if her store would still be open. Her life-long dream would have come to an end. She was so grateful she was respected by her government and thankful to still be able to serve her customers.

Alyssa's American Dream is alive and well in South Dakota. Because we trusted small business owners, like Alyssa and Ace Hardware, to find ways to adapt, we gave them an opportunity to survive. Every other state in this country ordered some businesses to close. That didn't happen here.

Alyssa, I'd like to ask you to please stand and also thank you -- thank you for your love for people and willingness to share your story. So many little girls dream of growing up and striking out on their own, owning their own business, and they can look up to you. Thank you for your strength and for not giving up on your dream. Would you all join me in giving Alyssa a round of applause?

Cutting Regulations - Department of Labor

One way that we can continue to expand liberty is by remembering that government should not make it harder to have a career.

My Department of Labor is eliminating barriers to employment. And they're partnering with others to promote job training and match students with the best career for them. Here are a few examples:

In 2021, the Department of Labor worked with the Department of Education and schools across the state to promote "South Dakota Week of Work." The week included job fairs, job shadowing opportunities, and visits by professionals to classrooms to share their experiences in communities across the state. For example, Hanson High School hosted 40 guest speakers representing 16 different career areas.

We have partnered with Dakota State University to create a Future Workforce Finder tool. We are expanding the Upskill program to the South Dakota Women's Prison and other career fields to get workers trained for in-demand jobs. We are partnering with adult education providers across the state to offer more options for adults to achieve their GED, to help them in their career.

We are focused on EXPANDING opportunities and liberty, not regulating it away. And South Dakota's jobs market continues to be a national leader as a result.

Revenue Update and Tax Cuts

In order for us to defend liberty, government must remain limited. And part of how we do that is through our budget process -- through our commitment to fiscal responsibility. I want to assure every South Dakotan of this: we will not use one-time money -- whether federal or state dollars -- for ongoing expenses or new programs. It would be irresponsible to create or expand any ongoing programs with one-time dollars.

A month ago, I reported to you the exceptional revenue growth that South Dakota has enjoyed because of the

steps that we took in South Dakota. Since that time, we've received even more great news, which I'm prepared to share with you today.

In addition to the estimates I gave you back in December, our economy is even stronger than expected. Ongoing general fund revenues were \$20.8 million higher than the revised estimates from December. So far this fiscal year, we're \$116 million above ongoing legislative adopted estimates. That's fantastic news, and we should return a portion of these strong revenues to the people of South Dakota.

I am announcing three proposals today to cut taxes and fees for the hard-working men and women in South Dakota.

First of all, let's eliminate fees associated with starting or renewing a business with the Secretary of State in South Dakota. In 2020, the theme of my State of the State was "Open for Business," and we are continuing that commitment today. We are already among the most business-friendly states in America, and with this step, we will make it even easier to do business here.

Let's also eliminate all fees for concealed carry permits in the state. We will pay the costs for federal background checks, as well. It will not cost you a penny to exercise your Second Amendment rights in South Dakota.

Three years ago, Constitutional Carry was the very first bill that I signed as Governor. We guaranteed the right of our people to keep and bear arms. Together, we will continue to defend this key constitutional liberty.

Finally, although we don't have many taxes in South Dakota, I am proposing that we eliminate a ridiculous tax. Did you know that we have a bingo tax? This is largely a tax on our elderly populations and veterans. I'm proposing that we get rid of it, and this is just the beginning.

Vaccine Legislation

Financially, we see the impact of protecting liberty in South Dakota, but unfortunately, personal liberties are under attack. But that attack IS NOT coming from state government. It's coming from the Biden Administration in Washington, D.C.

I always promised you I would protect our state from overbearing federal intrusion into our daily lives. So we took action. South Dakota has joined four lawsuits against the Biden Administration's unconstitutional vaccine mandates, and we are winning in court. The issue has advanced to the United States Supreme Court and oral arguments were heard last week.

The COVID vaccination should be a choice. And we should reject the efforts that we're seeing in other parts of the country to divide us into two classes: vaccinated and unvaccinated. Unvaccinated Americans are still Americans. We live in a free country - free to make our own decisions. The government does not get to make them for us.

I am bringing legislation this session to protect the people's right to a medical or religious exemption from COVID vaccines, just as my executive order did for state employees. We will also recognize natural immunity. I hope you will support the bill.

Game, Fish, and Parks

From day one, it has been my priority to focus on the next generation of South Dakotans. Our way of life here

is special, but so are our natural resources.

Teddy Roosevelt once said, “Of all the questions which can come before this great nation, there is none which compares in importance with the great central task of leaving this land even a better land for our descendants than it is for us.”

We take that message to heart here in South Dakota. We take care of our natural resources because we want them to be available for our kids and grandkids.

U.S. News & World Report ranks South Dakota in the Top 3 for Natural Environment and top 3 for the least pollution. We are nearly four-times higher than the national average for using renewable energy.

Second Century

One of the first priorities I outlined as Governor was the Second Century Initiative. This Initiative raises money to support pheasant habitat, trap predators who threaten our pheasant populations, and educate South Dakotans about our wildlife and land. It helps preserve our state’s status as a top destination for pheasant hunting.

The Second Century Initiative has benefitted hunters, while also supporting our farmers and ranchers. They’re improving water and soil quality and enhancing opportunities for all who enjoy the outdoors.

Last year, we raised \$1.4 million for the Second Century Habitat Fund. These dollars go directly toward expanding habitat acres across South Dakota. We also raised almost five and a half million dollars with the Habitat Stamp. Between these efforts, we have added more than 10,000 acres of habitat for our wildlife, created additional public access for fishing and hunting, and completed hundreds of habitat improvement projects on existing public lands.

Habitat helps our economy, too. Hunting and fishing adds \$1.3 billion to the state economy. As a result, South Dakota is the number one state for licensed hunters per capita. We’ve seen an 8% increase in sales for resident combo hunting and fishing licenses and a 16% increase in out-of-state small game licenses over the 3-year average. We’ve also had big increases in youth hunting, including a record increase in youth participation for the Nest Predator Bounty program. Youth fishing licenses and small game hunting licenses grew by 23% for residents and 83% for nonresidents. More of our kids are becoming interested in the outdoors.

Record Park Visits

Meanwhile, our state parks saw a 10% increase for park entrance licenses over last year’s record, with an estimated 8.5 million visitors. We plan to add more campsites at Custer State Park to expand our ability to host people from in and out of state. Since 2015, we have seen an increase of nearly 100,000 camping nights reserved throughout the state park system. I am hopeful you will support these projects.

We have a fantastic army of volunteers who work at our parks each year. This past year, we had 443 volunteers log a total of 103,000 hours of service. I am so grateful for all those folks who volunteer to welcome people who visit our state parks.

Because we trusted in liberty, people chose to visit our state by the millions. We didn’t just keep the “open” sign on. We rolled out the welcome mat for tourists. We broke records for visitor spending, visits to our state parks, and so much more. More people came to Mount Rushmore last year than ever in our history.

Countless families made South Dakota their travel destination. And because of our world-class hospitality, we can be sure that many of them will be back.

Fairness in Sports

Freedom and Liberty are about self-determination and the right to achieve — to reach our fullest potential. But there is a troubling movement in our society. Our young girls are having their freedom to achieve taken away by schools and organizations that are changing the rules of the game in competition.

When our kids participate in sports and activities, they learn valuable lessons like teamwork, perseverance, and hustle. For many activities, it may not matter whether kids are male or female - they are on an equal playing field: debate, theater, and academic competitions, to name a few. But for other activities, the playing field is not equal.

Allyson Felix is an American track and field star. She's won 25 Olympic and World Championship medals, including 17 gold medals, the most of any track and field athlete ever - male or female. She specialized in the 400-meter race, with a lifetime best of forty-nine-point-two-six seconds. Yet HUNDREDS of high school aged boys have run faster times than that. Common sense tells us why. Boys' and girls' bodies are biologically different.

In South Dakota, only girls can play in girls' sports according to the executive orders I signed almost a year ago. But I am introducing -- and hope you will support -- a bill that will be the strongest law in the nation. Congress passed Title IX years ago to guarantee that girls have a level playing field on which they can succeed — to ensure their liberty to achieve.

They can win high school championships, maybe earn scholarships, maybe even go on to play professional sports. We need to protect the freedom of our young girls to go out there and do it.

Pursuit of Happiness

Success in America is by no means a given. But if you work hard and put your mind to it, you can accomplish anything. That's the American Dream. That's what the pursuit of happiness is all about.

But there's a new ideology taking hold in our country. It redefines our culture. It rejects the American Dream. It tells children that our country is racist. It divides us based on the color of our skin. It teaches a distorted view of our history — and it undermines the foundation of our society.

We must act now to protect the American Dream - to preserve the pursuit of happiness for future generations.

True, Honest History

Over 30 years ago in his farewell address, President Ronald Reagan asked the nation an important question: "Are we doing a good enough job teaching our children what America is and what she represents in the long history of the world?" He reminded us that we need to educate our kids and our grandkids that, quote, "America is freedom - freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of enterprise. And freedom is special and rare. It's fragile. It needs protection."

President Reagan was right. We have to make sure our children know America's promise. We have to teach

them the true, honest history of our country.

In state after state, school after school, children are being exposed to radical political ideologies like Critical Race Theory. We are not going to let that happen in South Dakota.

Our state supports opportunity for all. We don't teach our children to be divisive and organize them into separate groups based on skin color. I am bringing legislation this year to enshrine these values and protect our students from hatred and division.

Schools are where our children learn the consequences of making mistakes and the hard work of success. By the same token, they should learn from both America's triumphs and our mistakes. And then they learn the overwhelming benefits of working together to fix those mistakes so that we all share a brighter future.

As we update our social studies standards, they must reflect America's true and honest history. Native American history will be a part of that. Our tribal culture and heritage are essential to who we are as a state - and it must be balanced and woven into the full context of American history and civics.

Today, I'm proud to be joined by a friend of mine, and a hero in his own right, Dr. Ben Carson and his wife Candy. Despite the challenges of his childhood, Dr. Carson grew up to become one of the most accomplished surgeons in American history. His story is the American Dream, and he followed it up with a career in public service.

Today, Dr. Carson continues to advance the values that make America so special through his work at the American Cornerstone Institute, which just launched an online learning platform called Little Patriots to teach children about our country's founding principles.

Additionally, he has been instrumental in the work of 1776 Action. Last year, they released the "1776 Pledge" as part of a nationwide effort to restore "honest, patriotic education" in our K-12 schools. I was proud to be the first candidate for public office in the nation to sign that Pledge, and Dr. Carson joined me in co-authoring an op-ed outlining that decision. I applaud his efforts to ensure that all of our kids and grandkids understand and love our nation's history and values. Please join me in thanking Dr. Carson for being here today.

Education

The pandemic was very hard on schoolchildren across this country. South Dakota was recently ranked first in the nation for the least amount of learning loss among students during the pandemic.

Because our students were in the classroom for all of last school year, our kids saw positive outcomes in their learning. In 2021, six of our schools were nationally recognized for excelling in the classroom. Arlington and Pinedale Elementary Schools, Gettysburg Middle School, and O'Gorman High School, Bishop O'Gorman Catholic Schools were all named National Blue Ribbon Schools. Explorer and Platte-Geddes Elementary were both named National Distinguished Schools and will be honored next month at the National Elementary and Secondary Education Act Conference.

It is wonderful to see our elementary schools leading the nation in education, but we are also seeing success at middle schools and high schools through our Jobs for America's Graduates programs, more commonly known as JAG. We brought this program to our state with legislation in 2019. This program focuses on helping students who are at high risk not to graduate. It has been tremendously successful at putting students on a path to graduation and future success.

In the last two years, JAG program enrollment has grown by 50 percent, and three new schools have been

added. Today, South Dakota's JAG programs have seen a nearly 100 percent graduation rate for program participants.

This year, the Lyman school board added its first JAG program. Students took advantage of opportunities to work with local and statewide volunteer organizations. Others explored cutting-edge careers in health care and cybersecurity. We have seen students not only make a change in their attitude toward school but also think about their future beyond high school and their place in their communities. JAG is helping these students at risk of dropping out to achieve graduation and be ready for their futures. And more school districts should look at bringing JAG into their communities.

Investing in Skilled Training

As the world economy changes, South Dakotans need new skills and new training to be prepared for the careers of the future. South Dakota is Number 1 in the nation for our graduation rate in 2-year college programs, and we are in the Top 10 for higher education. We are expanding the cybersecurity program at Dakota State University with a \$30 million dollar investment. And the Freedom Scholarship that you supported last year is starting to change the lives of South Dakota students that didn't have an opportunity to further their education before because of economic challenges.

Together, we'll continue setting our students up for a brighter and happier future.

Population Growth and New Businesses Law Enforcement

But we cannot enjoy life, liberty, or the pursuit of happiness if we are not safe on our streets, in our schools, at our businesses, or in our homes. Our way of life — our civil society — depends on the brave men and women of law enforcement. We respect law and order in South Dakota, and we will continue to support those who uphold the law and keep our streets safe.

Today, we have with us some law enforcement officers who have recently moved to South Dakota. Would you please stand?

When the riots and violence started across the country months and months ago, we launched a nationwide campaign to recruit law enforcement officers to move to our state. We wanted every police officer in America to know that if they wanted to live somewhere they were appreciated and respected, then come to South Dakota.

Hundreds of law enforcement officers responded to our invitation. And we are so proud to be known as a state that stands and defends the people who put their lives on the line every day to keep our communities safe.

National Guard and Veterans

We are also free to pursue our American Dream because of the women and men in our armed forces who defend our country at home and abroad. Could we have any members of the South Dakota National Guard please stand and join the officers that are currently standing?

Our South Dakota National Guard continues to demonstrate excellence. The 114th Fighter Wing in Sioux Falls earned the prestigious Spaatz Trophy for Most Outstanding Air Guard unit yet again in 2021, for the fifth time in fifteen years. And the Brookings-based 152nd won the Walter T. Kerwin, Jr. Readiness Award, the fourth straight year that a South Dakota Guard unit has been named the best National Guard unit in the country.

Our Guard has stepped in to help with everything asked of them: storm recovery, firefighting, drug stops , COVID medical support, and of course helping to secure our nation's borders and ensuring our shared defense.

We are also the proud home of many veterans. Could I ask our veterans to stand and join the others?

Our Department of Veterans Affairs has earned a five-star rating from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid - the highest level possible. The Yankton School District won the 2021 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award, one of just 15 nationally given out. The opening of the State Veterans Cemetery in Sioux Falls has given us a dignified final resting spot for eligible veterans and their spouses. Our efforts to pass laws to honor our veterans are being noticed. South Dakota has been named the number one state in the nation for veterans to live and work.

South Dakota honors those who honor the call to serve -- the men and women who put their lives on the line to defend life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Would you all join me in thanking these veterans, national guard members, and law enforcement for their bravery and sacrifice.

Moving to South Dakota

It wasn't just law enforcement that moved to South Dakota. Thousands of new residents made the move. Our state is top-3 in the nation for inbound migration, according to United Van Lines.

Georgi Boorman is a native of Washington State who was fed up with lockdowns. Fed up with not being able to go to church. Fed up with the "ever-changing rules," as she describes it. In Washington, her family had to restrict capacity at their cafe. She had to wear a mask everywhere she went, even when other people weren't around. Georgi had enough. And she was ready to make a change.

She took a road trip to the Black Hills. And as she was driving home to Washington, she said "I don't want to go back." She wanted to move to South Dakota, but she wanted to stay close to her family.

So the family came, too -- her kids' grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Then more family followed. Eventually, South Dakota gained dozens of new residents from a family that loved freedom and was tired of tyranny. More are still planning to come! The only home they had ever known was Washington -- but it didn't feel like home anymore. They fell in love with South Dakota.

Business Success

Many people who moved here brought their businesses with them - big and small. Aesir Technologies chose Rapid City as the location for their new Gigafactory after a nationwide search. They considered what every other state in this country had to offer, and then they chose South Dakota as the best place for them to expand. They'll create 400 new good-paying high-tech jobs in the process.

Albany Farms moved the headquarters of its food manufacturing operations from Los Angeles to Belle Fourche. This new facility will give wheat farmers a new place to sell their product and bring in more than 500 jobs.

Businesses that have always called South Dakota home also expanded. Ten South Dakota businesses were named among the fastest growing in the nation earlier this year. Furniture Mart USA is doubling its campus in Sioux Falls, creating a 650,000 square foot facility. North Sioux City is adding over 300 acres to their industrial park to host many businesses. And they're preparing to build 300 new career homes to support that growth.

Black Hills Harley Davidson led the WORLD in Harley sales. In fact, no Harley Davidson dealership ANYWHERE has ever seen the revenue that Black Hills Harley achieved in 2021. That was driven by our strong economy -- by tourism, particularly visitors to the Sturgis Rally - and it was driven by the work ethic of the men and women who run this dealership.

Black Hills Harley is not just a record-setting motorcycle dealership. In the middle of a dangerous wildfire near Rapid City earlier this year, Black Hills Harley allowed their store to be used as the headquarters for the fire response. They gave our firefighters and first responders free use of their facilities and didn't ask for anything in return.

No matter how these businesses got here or got started, they are thriving because here in South Dakota, the government gets out of the way, allows them to grow and innovate, and helps out where we can.

CLOSING

We are free here in South Dakota, but we cannot take that freedom for-granted. President Reagan reminded us, "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children's children what it was once like in the United States when men were free."

In South Dakota, we will protect freedom. We will pass it on to our children. We will not allow freedom to go extinct.

That's what it means to be South Dakotans. We work together to help our communities grow, thrive, and remain safe, strong, and healthy. We support our local businesses, and they support us in return. We set an example for the nation in how we do business, how we approach public policy, and how we interact with each other every single day.

We are blessed to be living in South Dakota. The state of our state is the strongest it has ever been -- even with so many challenges in the world around us.

But our state isn't measured by one snapshot in time.

It is our duty to ensure that it is strong for generations to come.

Let's work together this session to keep the doors of opportunity open for our people - and to guarantee the promise of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

May God bless you all. And God bless the great state of South Dakota.