



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
GOVERNOR PAT McCrORY

TRANSCRIPT

2015 State of the State Address

Remarks As Prepared For Delivery

Mr. Speaker, Lt. Governor, Mr. President Pro Tem, Members of the Court, Members of the General Assembly, Members of the Council of State and my Cabinet, and to the people of the great State of North Carolina...

Two years ago, just before arriving to deliver the State of the State address, I received a phone call informing me that Highway Patrol Trooper Michael Potts was fighting for his life. You see, during a routine traffic stop on Highway 70, Trooper Potts was shot four times. He was shot in his hands, shoulder and directly in his face. He was left for dead by the assailant; left for dead on the side of the road. After the State of the State speech I immediately traveled to Duke University Medical Center to visit Trooper Potts, his family and fellow troopers who gathered at his bedside. The terror of that evening was only the first day of suffering Trooper Potts and his family would endure. Since the shooting, there have been surgeries, grueling rehabilitative therapy and personal reassessment.

Some advised Trooper Potts to turn in his badge and to pursue a safer line of work. But Trooper Potts did not walk away. Instead, he overcame his obstacles and today, he is assigned to the North Carolina Highway Patrol Training Academy.

Ladies and Gentlemen, join me in welcoming North Carolina Highway Patrol Trooper Michael Potts and his wife Lauren. I'm honored to call Trooper Potts a friend. We've played catch at the capitol, and that's been a real thrill for me since Trooper Potts was a Major League pitcher for the Milwaukee Brewers before joining the Highway Patrol. You know, Trooper Potts still carries bullet fragments in his skull. But instead of being defined by his injuries, he conquered them and has come back even stronger. Ladies and Gentlemen, like Trooper Potts, I'm proud to report the State of North Carolina has come back even stronger. Its people are resilient, and our future is bright.

Our unemployment rate, which was the fifth highest in the nation just two years ago, has dropped substantially – the second sharpest drop in the United States. Our economy is improving; cranes are returning to our skylines; and real estate is emerging stronger. And yes, the Made in North Carolina brand is returning as our factories are expanding. Along the way our administration took swift action in response to serious crises. From an Ebola scare, to the Dan River spill, to this year's very serious flu virus.

We've also had to respond to extreme weather events throughout North Carolina: Heavy rains and flooding in Western North Carolina. A series of ice storms covering the whole state. Hurricane Arthur hit the Outer Banks, bringing flooding and knocking out the power to thousands. Nine tornadoes devastated parts of eastern North Carolina. In fact, while visiting many areas damaged by these horrific storms, I was moved by the sight of neighbor helping neighbor, and the professionalism of county and state emergency workers.

And at one tornado damaged area I was especially touched by the spirit of Winfall mayor Fred Yates. Many homes in the area were demolished. I saw firsthand the physical and psychological damage of those citizens impacted. It was overwhelming. But Mayor Yates told me his community would rebuild and get through this. Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome a true leader in a crisis, Winfall Mayor Fred Yates.

You know, it's that same spirit of resilience that helped North Carolina recover from our economic crisis. When I took the oath of office in January, 2013, North Carolina taxes were among the highest in the Southeast. But working together, we passed historic tax reform that put more money in people's paycheck. It was the first major overhaul of our tax system in nearly 80 years. And two years ago, because of our badly outdated unemployment insurance system our businesses owed the federal government \$2.5 billion. But drawing upon our resilience we reformed our unemployment program. We not only aligned our benefits with neighboring states, we also devised a plan to pay off our debt this year, a full 3 years ahead of schedule.

Now in North Carolina, not only do we balance our budget, but when we have a debt, we cut up the credit card and we pay it off. That's a lesson those in Washington need to learn. I want to thank our Assistant Secretary of Employment Security Dale Folwell and Secretary John Skvarla's Commerce team for being the driving force behind this effort. Today in North Carolina, we have career centers, not unemployment offices. Because as Dale often says, we want people off unemployment and into new jobs.

As I said, two years ago, our unemployment rate was the fifth highest in the nation. So we all rolled up our sleeves, made the tough decisions, and as of today, the private sector has created nearly 200,000 new jobs. We went from the 5th highest in unemployment to the 23rd lowest, and now we're even beating South Carolina. Despite this tremendous accomplishment there are still a lot of communities, small businesses, and individuals that are hurting, and there is still much work to be done. Therefore, my administration's focus will be on five areas that have the greatest impact on our people.

First, ensuring everyone who wants a job can find a job in a vibrant North Carolina economy. Second, ensuring every child and adult obtains the skills and knowledge needed to become a productive citizen. Third, we will continue to connect North Carolina's small towns with our state's commerce centers through physical and digital highways. Fourth, improving the quality of life and public safety for North Carolina's families. And fifth, finding efficiencies in our budget and improving government services. That's jobs, education, connectivity, healthcare and public safety, as well as efficiency.

Let's talk about jobs. As you know, the fight for jobs is global, played at the highest level, and the competition is on our heels. In California while visiting high-tech companies and venture capital firms, I ran into Governor John Kasich of Ohio. I know he wasn't there to tour the wine country, and neither was I. Just a few weeks ago while on an economic development trip in Europe, other governors preceded me, and I know, followed me after I visited a major company. The governors I'm competing against are good friends, and often neighbors. Like North Carolina, they have cut taxes, invested in education and built good roads. What they have that I don't is a clear and concise job creation toolbox.

Therefore, working with the leadership of the House and Senate, we will submit for your approval, a series of tools which will help us beat the competition. We need these tools passed in a matter of weeks, not months. Our plan, "NC Competes," will promote long-term sustainable job growth and capital investment. It will encourage mid and large scale manufacturing, because manufacturing is part of our DNA. It will leverage our university research advantage to attract venture capital and a new generation of entrepreneurs, as well as help retain North Carolina's home-grown talent. This plan is based on a series of guiding principles – principles designed to grow North Carolina while protecting our taxpayers. NC Competes recognizes the importance of economic strength in all regions but emphasizes support to areas of high unemployment. NC Competes will require strong financial safeguards to provide a positive return to state revenues.

In addition to NC Competes, we need to pass the Historic Preservation Tax Credit to continue to revitalize main streets from Wilkesboro, to Greensboro, to Swansboro. Secretary Susan Kluttz reminds us that the vitality of our state is best reflected by the vibrancy of our town centers. Last week at the Hotel Concord I was joined by Senator Fletcher Hartsell and Representative Linda Johnson, along with 200 citizens, and was reminded of the success and opportunity this initiative provides our state. Now is not the time to pull the plug on a strategy that has created jobs and new investment.

Two years ago when I stood before you, I said North Carolina had to get off the sidelines and into the energy business. Ladies and gentlemen, I'm pleased to report that North Carolina is off the bench and in

the game. And we have a new quarterback, Secretary Don van der Vaart. To keep energy prices low, particularly in Eastern North Carolina, we're supporting the construction of a \$5-billion natural gas pipeline that will run from West Virginia throughout Eastern North Carolina. This year, we will begin to assess North Carolina's energy potential both on land and offshore. We are right now working with our congressional delegation to ensure North Carolina gets energy revenue that will help pay for teachers, roads, beach re-nourishment and the dredging of our ports.

While encouraging these new investments, we must not forget that small business is the largest job creating sector of our economy. We must also remember that agriculture is North Carolina's biggest industry...contributing more than \$78 billion a year to our economy. We must continue to look for new ways to help our farmers who are facing increased competition from around the world and here at home. One area that continues to be a challenge to our growers is the shortage of food processing facilities in North Carolina. Our farmers have to send their products to other states, which substantially increases their costs.

So working with Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler, we will name a task force of farmers, business leaders and venture capitalists to assess the need and develop a strategy for attracting more food processing plants across the state. This group will convene, recommend a plan and disband by March 2016. One key to our economy which affects agriculture and other industries is our State Ports. But as I address you tonight, we have an urgent problem at the Port of Morehead City. The Beaufort Inlet channel has an authorized depth of 45 feet.

But during the past few months, shifting sands have reduced the depth to 34 feet, forcing many ships to enter the port half empty. Or in some cases they split their loads between Morehead City and another port. We have been working closely with our Congressional delegation and the Army Corps of Engineers. And I am pleased to announce that our efforts have paid off. The Corps just added \$4.1 million to this year's dredging budget...bringing the total to \$8.9 million in federal dollars dedicated to this emergency. In addition, my administration stands ready to commit state dollars as needed to keep this crucial commercial artery open for business. I especially want to thank Secretary of Transportation Tony Tata and our entire congressional delegation, led by Senator Richard Burr, who has been working on this problem around the clock.

Let's talk about my second area of focus – education. A key part of any jobs plan is a quality education so students can be competitive in a global economy. Connecting his students to the greater world is the mission of Garinger High School history teacher James Ford. Ford, once an Illinois teacher, chose North Carolina to continue his career and fulfill his teaching potential. Not only did he become North Carolina's Teacher of the Year, but Charlotte Magazine's Person of the Year, beating out business and civic leaders. Now that's the type of respect teachers deserve. Ladies and Gentlemen, help me welcome a member of my Teacher's Advisory Committee, Mr. James Ford.

Because of teachers like James Ford, we have some good news to report. Our most recent graduation rate is the highest in North Carolina's history. With continued investments in Pre-K and continued reforms, such as NCWorks, in job training at our community colleges, we can expect to see even higher graduation rates, and more people filling the skills gap in North Carolina. Still, we have to build an education system that rewards teachers like James Ford for their results-driven leadership. So that North Carolina is a teaching destination, not a layover for our state's best and brightest. Teaching is hard, very hard. I know this firsthand. As a 20 year old student-teacher at North Rowan High School in Spenser, I thought I had the perfect lesson plan for my first day of teaching. I worked for days preparing an hour's worth of teaching material. But I ran out of material after 10 minutes. With my advisor and all 30 students looking to me for direction, the remaining 50 minutes were the longest of my life. Teaching is hard, so to support our teachers, we must: Fulfill our promise to raise teacher base pay to \$35,000 a year.

We also must give our teachers and students the gift of time by testing less and teaching more. My administration is finalizing a plan to reduce tests working with Lieutenant Governor Dan Forest, State Superintendent June Atkinson, State School Board Chair Bill Cobey, as well as our district superintendents, principals and teachers, to distinguish which tests improve a student's performance and

which tests simply waste time. We will eliminate unneeded testing by next year. We are continuing our efforts to bring Wi-Fi to all our classrooms and long distance learning to both our children and adults.

To help our schools hire the teachers they need now, we are moving to expedite teacher certification, recognizing an individual's experience and subject expertise. For example, my education advisor Eric Guckian taught for two years in the South Bronx for Teach For America and has a master's degree in education from Harvard. Yet, he was required to take 18 months of courses to earn his North Carolina teacher certification. This bureaucratic process must change. We want, and should be encouraging, accomplished people who want to join the teaching profession. The bureaucracy should never, never, stand between their talents and our children.

Cost must also not become an obstacle for students at our community colleges and universities. We must look at our community college and university balance sheets to make sure we're making investments in the programs that will prepare our students for the global economy and close North Carolina's skills gap. Now, we in North Carolina are fortunate to enjoy the benefits of the best research universities in the world.

We are leveraging the advantage provided by our public and private research universities through our Innovation to Jobs initiative that we just presented to the UNC Board of Governors. It's designed to convert more of our research dollars into products and services that are patented and introduced into the marketplace. Increasing the commercialization of university research and connecting it to our greater economy will create more high-paying jobs. As governor, my goal is to have North Carolina become the third vertex of the National Innovation Triangle connecting North Carolina to Boston and the Silicon Valley. This effort is a top priority. Therefore I've asked my Chief of Staff Thomas Stiith to lead this Innovation to Jobs initiative.

Let's talk about our third focus: Transportation and Infrastructure. During the past decade or so, as I have driven down the highways of North Carolina, I've noticed it goes from 2 lanes, to 4 lanes, back to 2 lanes, to 8 lanes to 4 lanes and then back to 2 lanes. And everywhere it gets wider it's named for a politician or a DOT board member. And where the congestion choke points still exist...the road is nameless. That's not the way we do things anymore. We've taken the politics out of road-building by putting in place a transportation formula that focuses on relieving congestion, improving safety and growing and connecting the economy in all parts of our state. Those changes allow us to be more efficient with taxpayer dollars. In fact, we've more than doubled the number of transportation projects that will be built. This new approach will create thousands of new jobs during the next 10 years.

Our 25-year transportation vision connects small towns to economic centers. These connections will make it easier for people to travel to jobs, schools, hospitals and parks. Our 25-year plan also recognizes that even with the new formula, we can only build one out of five projects, and counties and cities tell us they need more.

Therefore, I will request a transportation bond of \$1.2 billion that will allow for the quicker construction of projects in the 25-year vision plan. Projects funded through a revenue bond would be the next projects in line, scored under the Mobility Formula, with environmental documents in place so we can begin these projects immediately. Here are a few examples of what we can achieve with the Mobility Formula. This proposed bond as part of our 25-year vision. For our coastal counties we'll make it easier for the military to move troops and equipment during deployments while helping transport goods at our ports. It will relieve congestion during the busy tourist season and improve emergency evacuation routes.

In the east, we'll connect eastern North Carolina to the Hampton Roads region in Virginia. In the central part of the state, we'll focus on relieving interstate congestion bottlenecks and easing the flow of freight. And in the west, we'll connect the mountains to the coast by improving the flow of traffic from Wilmington to Asheville. Additionally, I will support your efforts to protect and stabilize our existing transportation revenue streams while also looking at funding reform and alternatives for our future transportation and infrastructure needs.

We must also turn our attention to the condition and inefficiency of our state buildings. One of my first clues of the disrepair many of our state properties are in occurred when Ann and I walked up to the 1840

State Capitol for my swearing in. We noticed the two fountains in front of the capitol were broken and filled with trash and dirty water. They looked terrible. I asked why they were in such disrepair. I was told, "I don't know, they've been that way for 5 years." We can no longer afford a culture of neglect and apathy. Turns out all the fountains needed was a little routine maintenance to get the water flowing again. Now, on any day, you can see people having lunch, reading a book or simply enjoying the day next to those beautiful, historic fountains. Like those fountains two years ago, many of our state buildings are suffering from the lack of maintenance. Too many of our buildings are obsolete with broken HVAC units, inadequate insulation, which cost taxpayers a fortune to operate.

At Dorothea Dix, for example, North Carolina taxpayers spend approximately \$8.5 million a year to keep the complex operating. It's fantastic that our capitol city is gaining land for a destination park, and the maintenance costs of the Dix complex will finally go off the state's books. Even better news is that we'll get \$52 million directed toward supporting mental health and the well-being of our citizens.

We have structures all across the state that are a blight to North Carolina's main streets. They have asbestos insulation, broken elevators, leaky roofs...We're forced to rent office space in towns where we have buildings that are about half-empty because of the deteriorated shape they're in. And we have many building that taxpayers are paying for that are essentially being used for storage - very expensive storage. Therefore, I will submit to the General Assembly a \$1.2 to \$1.4 billion general bond proposal for Project Phoenix. It will revitalize buildings that can be saved, tear down those that can't and build new, workable and efficient facilities that will be points of pride, and help build economic development opportunities for their communities.

Last session, funds were appropriated to gut the Albemarle Building, which is replete with soiled carpets, broken tables and stained ceiling tiles. And of course, you have done a magnificent job refurbishing this Legislative chamber. Now, let's do the same for other buildings throughout the state. These renovations will boost employee morale, improve safety and increase productivity, while saving the taxpayer's money.

Additionally, this is an excellent time for these bonds. Interest rates are historically low. And we have the financial capacity to invest and maintain our physical infrastructure. Two years ago, I tasked Secretary Tata to make the DMV more customer-friendly. Back then, people waited in line for hours only to learn that they were in the wrong line. Going to the DMV took so long folks had to take time off from work.

Our DOT leadership team immediately went to work transforming the DMV into an example of excellent customer service by: Opening some offices on Saturday and extending hours during the week. Today, 9 million residents are within a 30-minute drive of a DMV office with extended hours. We will soon be installing self-service kiosks for renewal and/or replacement of driver licenses or ID cards. License plate agencies across the state now accept credit and debit cards, and later this year, DMV offices will too. Most importantly, the DMV now has a culture that treats people like customers.

And the fourth focus will be healthcare. Our customer-first philosophy must translate into a "Patients First" philosophy for healthcare, as well. We hear from patients that health care is too hard to navigate. Imagine a hardworking, low-income mother juggling kids, a job, running the household and trying to keep her family healthy. What if that mom could rely on one visit to coordinate the care she needs, whether it's treatment for an ear ache for a child; an orthopedist to set a broken ankle; or a plan to keep her high blood pressure under control.

Our reform plan – under our Healthy NC initiative - was developed in partnership with doctors, patients and healthcare providers across the state. It was formulated under the leadership of Secretary Aldona Wos, who's also a medical doctor. She went out into North Carolina communities large and small talking to the people on the frontlines of our health care system. This is physician-led reform. As part of this plan healthcare providers will share in the responsibility for reducing costs by avoiding unnecessary use of services and working to keep people healthy and out of the emergency room.

Our Healthy NC reform plan puts patients first and controls costs for taxpayers...and incentivizes health care providers to coordinate care. North Carolina's health care community has a long history of solving problems. Let's empower them to keep us healthy, and continue to make North Carolina an excellent place to practice medicine and produce new discoveries in treatment.

Now last session, we came close to passing Medicaid reform, but progress stalled on the 1- yard-line. Let's not take another pass this year. Let's run it up the middle and win a victory for families across North Carolina. As we review continue to review health care options for the uninsured, we are exploring North Carolina-based options that will help those who can't help themselves, and encourage those who can. If we bring a proposal to cover the uninsured, it will protect North Carolina taxpayers. And any plan will require personal and financial responsibility from those who would be covered. I will only recommend a North Carolina - not a Washington - plan, so that we can put patients first!

Now an issue of critical importance to our young people: underage drinking and addiction. That's why we have launched a powerful campaign called "Let's Talk It Out" to start the conversation to stop underage drinking. I hope you've seen those poignant television ads! This campaign is being led by one our state's great leaders, former Lt. Gov. Jim Gardner. Please join me in thanking Jim Gardner.

Providing for the public safety for all of our citizens is our sacred duty. The Department of Public Safety under Secretary Frank Perry and S.B.I Director B.W. Collier are implementing new, intelligence based initiatives designed to prevent crime before it happens. In North Carolina, not only are we fighting drugs and gangs on our streets, we're also fighting gangs in our prisons. Corrections officers are confronting the most violent people in our state every minute of their day. Some live under death threats, not only to them, but to their family. Working in this environment comes at a price.

On average, a North Carolina corrections officer was assaulted every 11 hours during 2014. Some were sexual assaults; nearly 300 involved weapons. Retention is a constant challenge. We will be submitting specific proposals. Not only to fight gangs and drugs, but to help our corrections officers who may have the most difficult job in North Carolina.

We also have an obligation to those who risked their lives defending our freedoms. In just two years, our administration has launched successful veteran initiatives including converting military training into college credit or professional licenses, giving credit for military experience when veterans serve as educators, creating driver's licenses that identify veterans, and working to support a new Veterans Life Center in Butner.

But for some veterans, the transition to civilian life has been difficult. They've had problems with addiction, homelessness, getting a job, and struggling with mental health issues.

In 2013, we established a Veterans Treatment Court to help troubled veterans. The court has been an unqualified success. Therefore, working with our judicial leaders, our goal is to establish two more Veterans Treatment Courts in North Carolina to give our veterans a second chance to come home.

In addition to these issues, we will have budget and legislative recommendations to help support our correctional officers, to provide resources for the western crime lab, to protect our pets from abuse in puppy mills, to fight drugs and gangs, to improve mental health, and to prevent addiction just to name a few.

All of our challenges and opportunities require money and resources. Like last session, money will be tight. Department of Revenue Secretary Lyons Gray is updating me every week on the revenue that's coming in. Every dollar counts because much of our spending is already obligated even before we sit down to write a new budget. State worker pensions and healthcare costs for current and retired state employees alone account for nearly 22 percent of our spending.

So here's what we're going to do to find continued savings in our current operations. Workers compensation claims have cost North Carolina taxpayers \$896 million during the past six years. That's about \$150 million annually, which would have paid for a 2 percent pay raise for state employees...every year.

We all want to pay legitimate claims and give injured employees the best medical care we can. More importantly, under the excellent leadership of Office of State Human Resources Director Neal Alexander,

we are increasing worker safety training – not only to reduce worker accidents—but prevent them in the first place.

Our examination of workers compensation estimates that 40 percent of workers costs are related to abuse or outright fraud.

To take hold of costs and to get people back to work sooner, I am signing and submitting an executive order placing the oversight of workers' compensation under the Office of State Human Resources.

One of our first priorities will be to responsibly settle cases that are over 5 years old, an action that could save taxpayers up to \$17 million over the next two years. And we will launch a major effort to stop fraud and abuse...dead in its tracks.

Many of you are familiar with our NCGEAR efficiency program. And by the way, I want commend our new budget director Lee Roberts for the outstanding job he's doing with NC Gear. Based on some of the NC Gear findings, I will take additional actions to streamline our operations, not only because they save money, but because they make sense.

For instance, the North Carolina Zoo and state aquariums, museums and our state parks will move from the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources to the department that manages attractions as part of its mission, Cultural Resources.

Over the years, the Department of Administration has become a home for various divisions and agencies. We will begin to transfer a number of these agencies from the Department of Administration to areas where they are better aligned.

Now one area where we've found a lot of inefficiency, a lot of inefficiency, is in information technology. What we've found is that the piecemeal approach we've taken during the past decade to information technology has had disastrous results. 74% of the State's IT projects have come in over budget and behind schedule.

Who would hire anyone or a company with that track record?

We found that the state has 40 data centers with over 1,000 different computer systems. That's hardly an example of efficiency. We discovered that obvious opportunities to pool the purchasing power of several agencies are often bypassed.

My administration is going to insert accountability into our IT operations by proposing a new cabinet-level Department of Information Technology. The IT professionals throughout the Cabinet agencies and departments of the Executive Branch will report to the new department. However, they will remain housed with their secretaries to provide in-house expertise and service.

I want to thank my Chief Information Officer Chris Estes for doing the groundbreaking work on getting the new department and efficiencies launched.

At a time when so many servicemen and women are coming home from Afghanistan and Iraq through North Carolina, we must have an efficient and well-coordinated process in place to meet the needs of active duty personnel and veterans. These services are scattered across many areas of state government with no accountability, causing delay, frustration, and poor customer service.

Thanks to the Marine-Corps dedication of my Veterans Affairs Director Ilario Pantano and the leadership of Department of Administration Secretary Bill Daughtridge, we have made tremendous improvements serving our state's veterans.

But we are going to do more to strengthen our Veteran Affairs and the Office of my Military Advisor. I am proposing the creation of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. This department will be responsible for, protecting and fighting our military bases, promoting the health and safety of our veterans and military families, helping our veterans get jobs, and working with the unique needs of base communities. I have asked my military affairs advisor, Gen. Cornell Wilson, to spearhead this new initiative.

The military also has a special place in the heart of my wife Ann McCrory. She has hosted numerous events for military families at the Executive Mansion, outside of the cameras. Her knowledge of the sacrifice made by our military families comes naturally. She was born on a military base, and her father, Colonel William "Flash" Gordon, was a P-47 Army Air Corps pilot in World War II.

This evening, we are very fortunate to have in attendance some of the leaders of the more than 100,000 men and women serving their nation at throughout North Carolina.

However, I want to give a special welcome to Lieutenant General Joseph Anderson, Commander of the XVIII Airborne Corps at Fort Bragg. And until December, he was a deputy commanding general in Afghanistan.

During his deployment, he honored North Carolina by displaying this flag, which has flown over our own state capitol at the Kabul International Airport where it was photographed with diplomats from the 48 countries that comprised the international coalition.

General Anderson brought this flag back home. In fact, he wrote a little note on the back. General Anderson brought our flag home and he brought our troops home. Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome Lieutenant General Joseph Anderson. My vision for North Carolina is to have the best of everything. Think about it, we have beautiful mountains, big city skylines and we have the best beaches in the nation. But it's more than that. We must have both big city opportunities and small town quality of life choices from the mountains to the coast. We have the best of both Mayberry and metropolis. When we unleash our resources in education, transportation, energy and technology, and commit to greater government efficiency and affordability, our state will be second to none. We will be the role model for the nation, not only for today but for future generations.

To continue our momentum of success, we must be innovative while maintaining the basic values that make our state great. We must continue to cultivate a culture that encourages building, growing, producing and inventing things. And we're protecting our environment to preserve the natural beauty that draws visitors from around the world to our attractions and state park system, which this year is celebrating its 100th anniversary.

As my father often said when he was a city councilman in Ohio and later, a civic leader in Greensboro: "We must walk the fine line between our continued economic prosperity while also protecting the quality of life that brought us here." I have no doubt the people of North Carolina can live up to that challenge. We are resilient, strong, diverse, strategic, and we have already proven that we can deal with crises.

As we have grown to become the 9th most populous state in the nation, let's continue together to fulfill our potential, and create opportunity for all of North Carolina. So I ask you to join me and let us together achieve the best for everyone, everywhere. May God continue to bless the people of North Carolina.