

2017

LET'S GET THIS JOB DONE



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2017 Inaugural Address Governor Jay Inslee

"Let's get this job done"

As prepared for delivery at 12:00 p.m., January 11, 2017
House Chambers, Washington State Capitol

Thank you, Reverend Braxton, for your inspiring words.

Thank you to my friend, Judy, for that beautiful rendition of our national anthem.

And of course, I'd like to thank all our families, particularly, my wife, Trudi, and my entire family for their love and support.

Before I begin, I'd like to recognize two members of our legislative family whose absence is keenly felt today. Senator Andy Hill and House Page Supervisor Gina Grant Bull were dedicated Washingtonians. They will be greatly missed by their families, colleagues and friends.

Please join me as we pay our respects with a moment of silence.

Thank you.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Madam Chief Justice, distinguished justices of the court, members of the Legislature, tribal leaders, state and local government officials, members of the Consular Corps, and most importantly, my fellow Washingtonians.

As leaders of our state, we are entrusted with the unique opportunity to work together for a strong and secure future for Washington.

And there's nothing more essential to that future than acting to fulfill our top priority — fully funding education this year.

I want to talk today about that challenge which I think about as not just a big challenge but as a historic opportunity.

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I want to talk about why we should be confident that we can do this.

And I want to talk about the common values that will drive us as we confront uncommon times.

We're no strangers to working through hard challenges. We've done some hard things together in the past four years.

... We worked together to give all our aspiring young Washingtonians access to college, regardless of where they may have been born.

... We worked together to pass a historic transportation package that builds, repairs and improves infrastructure in every corner of our state.

... We worked together to make historic investments in early learning. We know there is no better time to set our children up to succeed than when they are most eager to learn.

... And we worked together to give hundreds of thousands of Washingtonians health care. We know a healthier Washington is a more prosperous Washington.

These things didn't happen by accident. They happened because we made them happen.

We all demonstrated a strong commitment to our principles and a recognition that compromise is necessary for our mutual success.

The work we do is important in promoting the attributes that make our state exceptional — a growing economy, smart workers, innovative entrepreneurs, safe communities and beautiful outdoor spaces.

I believe these successes should give us even more confidence, even more commitment and even more willingness to work together.

These bipartisan successes reflect our values as Washingtonians. And now it's time to go even further to secure the prosperous future we want for our kids and for our state.

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I know there are many issues in front of us this session, not just funding for kindergarten-through-12th grade education.

We need to transform our mental health system to one that is patient-centered, community-based and prevention-focused so we can provide people with the right treatment at the right time in the right setting.

We need to continue expanding access to early learning so more kids can get the strongest possible start in school.

We need to restructure our social services to more effectively ensure the well-being of Washington's children and families. We need to prevent harm, not just react to it.

We need to invest in more affordable housing and support services for the chronically homeless. This includes looking at root causes such as opioid addiction and mental illness.

We need to maintain the lower tuition rate we passed for students at our public colleges and universities, expand financial aid for those who need it most and ensure we provide career-connected education opportunities for those who choose another path.

And we need to continue important conversations on issues like the use of deadly force, paid family leave, gun safety, how we serve our veterans, capital punishment, how we promote prosperity for all workers in a changing economy and vital water infrastructure needs on both sides of the Cascades.

Every one of these things is important. But as we enter this new session, I want to say this: None of these issues is more important than fully funding the K-12 education our kids deserve.

One hundred and twenty-eight years ago, the signers of our state constitution declared that making "ample provision for the education of all children" was not merely among our responsibilities. It was "the paramount duty of the state."

At a time when Washington's towns and cities were just specks on a map, our state's founders chose education as our paramount duty. Not roads or railroads. Not jails.

They chose schools. So should we.

We should choose to build on the enduring foundation of Washington — the intellectual light of our children. Our founders understood this, and so do we. As elected officials, we all took an oath to uphold that constitution.

Yet we haven't always fully lived up to the words on that parchment or the values they represent. It has now been 40 years — 40 years! — since the court ordered the state to define and fund basic education in accordance with our constitution.

It has now been five years since our Supreme Court ruled that the state must do more to live up to the paramount duty our founders described.

The journey to fully fund education in our state has been a lot like climbing a mountain. And we've been climbing together for a long, long time.

And now we're almost there.

We've added more than \$4.6 billion for our schools.

We've tackled issues like all-day kindergarten, smaller class sizes in early grades and funding for student transportation and supplies.

And now we're at the final steps. We know what needs to get done and we know 2017 is the year to do it.

I don't say this thinking it will be easy. I say this knowing that Washingtonians can do hard things.

We've climbed high enough to see the summit. We're almost there. And we have a Washingtonian here today who can inspire us — the first American to summit Mount Everest, in 1963.

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This is a guy who knows how to finish the climb, who really inspires me — Jim Whittaker.

Thank you, Jim, for being here today. Let's give him a round of applause.

Jim knows the incredible reward that comes from pushing forward.

We will not arrive on the summit by chance. This is something we must make happen.

Mountain climbers will tell you that every ascent has a crux move, the moment at which they face the hardest, most difficult pitch.

For us, this is that moment.

There are multiple routes we could take. I have proposed one that gets us there this year, a route based on what I've seen work as I've visited schools around the state.

In Spokane, I visited Lincoln Heights Elementary, where I met with a crop of new teachers. They impressed upon me the importance of the district's support for new teachers. One of the things they highlighted was mentoring through the Beginning Educator Support Team. It's a program that works so I put it in my budget.

In Kent, I visited Phoenix Academy. I met with a group of students and parents to learn about the continuum of services provided there to ensure every student has what is needed — whether it's food for lunch or a tutor for math. Together, school counselors, psychologists, nurses and family engagement counselors break down barriers to learning and set up strategies for success.

I've seen this same strategy work in multiple schools. Schools that hire these people are schools that are helping kids succeed. That's why I include funding for these services in my budget.

At the Yakima Valley Technical Skills Center, students told me how their career-connected training helped them see the relevance of their education

and offered them a vision for their future they never saw in a traditional classroom.

Put these students to work while they are in high school and watch graduation rates climb.

We are going to stop telling our kids that a four-year degree is the only path to success. It's time we recognize the dreams of those who want to build beautiful boats as a welder, or assemble aircraft as a machinist, or help cure diseases as a global health specialist.

And that's why I propose more funding for these and other career-connected opportunities from elementary school through high school graduation. It works.

And I have heard loud and clear from across the state, from parents and students and educators, that we simply need more resources in our K-12 system if we want all our children to graduate with a meaningful education.

I've also heard loud and clear that we cannot finance our schools by slashing the services upon which students and their families depend. We are a better state than that and there are better ways to finance our schools.

So here's what I propose: We aren't raising anyone's property taxes. In fact, my budget starts by lowering property taxes for three out of four Washington households and businesses. Let me repeat that: 75 percent of households and businesses will see a property tax cut. In addition, we reduce B&O taxes for 38,000 more small businesses.

In exchange, my budget asks a small percentage of the wealthiest Washingtonians to pay a little more on the gains from their investments. It taxes carbon pollution that harms our kids and imperils the planet. And it asks service providers, such as lawyers and accountants, to pay B&O taxes more comparable to those paid by goods-based businesses.

If we do it this way, we'll accomplish two things: First, we will finally have the resources we need to fulfill our constitutional obligation to fully fund

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K-12 education. Second, working families will pay less in property taxes. I just don't think raising property or sales taxes is the best approach to this challenge.

Imagine what fully funding education will mean.

... Imagine schools that can recruit and keep great teachers, with competitive salaries.

... Imagine closing the opportunity gap in our state by making sure at-risk kids have extra teaching and mentoring time.

... Imagine more students graduating because we have psychologists, nurses and counselors who can help them cross the finish line.

... Imagine mentoring programs that help teachers starting out in their careers. Today, nearly half our teachers leave the profession within just five years. We can change that, and when we do, it will make an incredible difference for our kids.

... Finally, imagine students learning skills that employers tell us they need right now. We want everyone in this state to have the chance to go to college. But for young people who want to join the workforce straight out of high school, there will be a path to a good job.

But we can't make this progress for just some of our children. We must make progress for all our children. It is long past time to do what we know is right.

I'm looking forward to working with the state superintendent's office and appreciate Superintendent Reykdal's support for this approach.

And I'm looking forward to working with all of you. There are many routes to the summit. My plan isn't the only way. I've been meeting with legislators this week and want to hear the ideas you have for getting this done.

It's important to act this year. Kids are only 5 years old once in their lives. If we don't do this for them now, they don't get a redo.

I recognize the Legislature has some hard lifting to do. Nobody should minimize what we're doing here.

It's been 40 years. If it were easy, someone else would have already done this. But you know what? It won't be any easier next year, or the year after that.

Just as we set high expectations for our students, we should set high expectations for ourselves. And know that we are capable of meeting them.

And let me say one more thing about the mountain we're climbing together. After 40 years, it's going to feel great. It feels great when you finish a big job.

I can tell you from my personal experience that people are ready for us to solve this.

When I released my budget last month, I expected criticism because what I proposed includes a lot of hard decisions. And I heard that criticism — some of it from some of you.

But I was encouraged to see a recognition that despite the tough choices my plan requires, people were glad to see a plan that truly finishes the job.

And that's why each of us is here today. Like our founders in 1889, we are setting a vision of opportunity for generations to come. We're here because we believe that when we live up to our expectations — when we adhere to our values — there is no better place on Earth than Washington state.

And that's why I want to close with a few comments about our state's values. Because for all the good we've done in our state, developments taking place in our country have left many of our friends and neighbors scared for what the future might bring.

And that is why today, I say this: No matter what happens in that Washington, here in this Washington, we will not forget who we are.

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We will not turn our back on the progress we have made. Our commitment to equal rights and human dignity will not be diminished.

Washington will remain a place where no one can be discriminated against because of the color of their skin, their country of origin, how they worship or who they love.

Washington will remain a place where women have access to the full range of health care and family planning services they need, a place where we continue to fight for equal pay and equal opportunity.

Washington will stand up proudly for DREAMers and for those who come here in search of safety and refuge. We will stand strong against anyone who would rob hardworking young Washingtonians of the promise of a college degree or a chance at a decent job.

Washington's businesses and government will remain leaders and innovators in combating the devastating threats from carbon pollution, the scourge of climate change and ocean acidification.

We will fight and keep fighting to protect the 750,000 Washingtonians who finally have health insurance, thanks to the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid expansion.

And here, we may vigorously debate about the way forward on funding education.

But when it comes to our kids, let's start this session with a shared commitment to all and excuses to none. A recognition that the best thing we can do in service to our children and our state this year is to fully fund the education system they deserve.

So let's go get this job done.

Thank you.

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