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STATE OF ALABAMA

2022 STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS

EMBARGOED UNTIL THE GOVERNOR'S DELIVERY

Lieutenant Governor Ainsworth, President Pro Tempore Reed, Speaker McCutcheon, Speaker Pro Tempore Gaston, members of the Alabama Legislature, Chief Justice Parker, justices of the Alabama Supreme Court, distinguished guests and my fellow Alabamians!

I am a firm believer – that for Alabama – there is no mountain too steep to climb and no dream that is unattainable. Over the last four years, we have proved that to be the gospel truth by coming together to solve some of the state's toughest challenges.

To you, the people of Alabama and the men and women of the Legislature: You are the reason for our progress.

This evening, I renew my commitment to you that we will not only continue tackling old problems. We will work together as Alabamians to find new solutions so that our state is the best place to live, work and raise a family for years to come.

I am pleased to report that the state of our state is strong and that if you join me in my bold vision for the future of Alabama, I am confident that our best days are in front of us!

President Ronald Reagan once said that there are no barriers to our progress except those we erect ourselves. I have found that to be true here in Alabama. It was up to us to decide that it's always time to do what's right, even if it's not the politically popular thing to do.

When our prison system went unaddressed for decades and resulted in serious challenges, we found a way toward a solution.

When our roads and bridges were in need for desperate improvements, we found a way to make significant progress all across the state.

When our federal government overreached, we found a way to fight back.

When all of us in this room come together with the people of our state, Alabama will always find a way.

I promised to address the issues facing our corrections system once and for all, and I have said that to make progress, we must first replace our costly and crumbling facilities.

I commend the men and women of the Legislature for joining me on that mission as we moved the Alabama Prison Program across the finish line this past fall. I am certain this critical step will make a significant difference for decades to come.

I promised that our roads would be the envy of the nation. While our work is far from over, we have made significant progress thanks to the Rebuild Alabama Act.

As promised, every single penny has gone to road and bridge projects, as well as to our Port.

I am proud to report that on top of the local improvements, the state has administered projects in almost all 67 counties already, and like I said, we've only just begun.

We are delivering on decades talked-about projects like The West Alabama Corridor, which will connect Mobile all the way to Tuscaloosa with a four-lane highway.

We are tackling other needed projects to increase capacity like six-laning I-10 in West Mobile from Theodore to Irvington.

And tonight, I am proud to announce that we will be widening I-59 from Chalkville Mountain Road to I-459, in east Jefferson County near Trussville, from four lanes to six lanes.

Thanks to Rebuild Alabama, we are also making improvements to Alabama's Deepwater Port in Mobile. With the current global supply issues, having an international resource in the Port of Mobile is ever more critical. As a matter of fact, our exports are up almost 25%.

And here in Alabama, we aren't having issues like they are in California. To the rest of the nation, I say loud and clear that Alabama's Port of Mobile is open for business!

We are proud to invite the nation and the world to do business with Alabama at our Port.

Let me also add that in Alabama, we actually know what we are talking about when we use the word "infrastructure."

When you compare what we have accomplished by working together with what our national leaders in Washington have been doing, the difference is quite clear.

Speaking of D.C. politics – and I use the word "politics" intentionally here – from the moment the White House rolled out their scare tactic plans to try to force the covid-19 vaccine on Americans, I assured the people of Alabama that we were standing firmly against it. I'll call this nonsense what it is, and that is an un-American, outrageous breach of our federal law.

While the Legislature has stood with me in opposing these federal mandates, we have also been fortunate to have a strong leader in Attorney General Steve Marshall, who hasn't shied away from the fight one bit. Attorney General Marshall, thank you for standing tall for Alabamians.

Momentum is on our side. As I have said all along, the courts are where we will win this battle.

While Washington, D.C. seems to be filled with partisan politics, Alabama is blessed to have strong representation by our congressional delegation led by our senior Senator Richard Shelby. Last year, Senator Shelby announced he would not seek reelection. Beginning with his service in the Alabama State Senate in 1970 and continuing over four terms in the U.S. House and now six terms in the U.S. Senate, Richard Shelby has been instrumental in giving Alabama a seat at the table and has been vital in our state's successes. We are proud of all he has accomplished for us and congratulate him and his wife Annette on their truly impactful contributions to our state and nation, and we thank our entire federal delegation for their service.

When President Trump signed the CARES Act into law, we in Alabama quickly acted to ensure that those funds went directly into the hands of Alabamians. From our small businesses to our churches, non-profits and classrooms, I am proud that working with the men and women in this room, Alabama used every cent and invested it wisely.

But even today as states like Alabama are making record economic comebacks, Congress is wanting our country to spend more and more federal dollars, and now we are tasked with allocating the American Rescue Plan Act funds.

We must be smart with this one-time money and commit to the people of Alabama that we will wisely invest – not just casually spend – these dollars. I'll say again that these federal dollars are just one-time funds. This is not "free money."

I challenge you, members of the Legislature, to make allocating these funds an early priority and to put these monies to meet some of Alabama's biggest challenges like statewide broadband connectivity, water and sewer infrastructure, as well as investing funds in our hospitals, nursing homes and other health care providers.

Folks, no doubt, the last couple of years have been especially trying for our medical professionals. So, to our doctors, nurses and other health care staff, I offer my sincere thanks and appreciation.

In my budget proposals, we will fully fund our rainy-day accounts. We will pay down our debts. We will make robust investments that will pay long-term dividends to the state.

Thanks to the wise approach by the Legislature over the years in saving dollars and putting these funds to good use, during my time as governor, we have not once used the word "proration" or spent beyond our means.

As we prepare our budgets for any possible events in our nation's economy, today, Alabama's economy is rock solid.

Our preliminary numbers for 2021, even despite all of the curveballs we have been thrown, are looking strong.

It is projected that Alabama saw investments totaling \$5.4 billion with some 9,000 new jobs created. I predict to you tonight – in fact, I am confident – that our final numbers will be even bigger.

So often, we hear people – who have likely not even stepped foot in Alabama – give their two cents on us. Well, let me offer mine.

Here in Sweet Home Alabama, we are landing massive investments like Smucker's \$1.1 billion move to McCalla.

While there are global strains, our automakers – supported by Alabama’s hardworking, non-union workforce – are hitting major milestones. Our aerospace and aviation sector remains strong, and we are building rockets and developing technologies to get this country back to the top when it comes to space exploration.

And it doesn’t stop there.

In the current push for electric vehicles, so often, what is left out of the conversation is the fact that we are having to rely on other countries for an important ingredient in producing the EV batteries. Now, our country will turn to Westwater Resources in Coosa County for this critical resource in battery manufacturing.

My fellow Alabamians, Made in Alabama is committed to bringing back Made in America.

Clearly, with one of the nation’s lowest unemployment rates, Alabama is on the fast track.

On top of our second to none workforce, Alabama also has an abundance of natural beauty – from the rolling green mountains to the sparkling waters of our Gulf Coast. It’s no wonder that we saw north of 1.2 million more visitors to our Alabama State Parks or that our state’s tourism industry just had one of the best years on record. I declare to you tonight that by making every effort to expand outdoor recreation and by ensuring continued developments in our hospitality industry, the future of both of these sectors is bright.

I know that every one of us in this room is extremely grateful to call Alabama our home.

We live by our values and faith.

We lend a helping hand to each other.

We support our military and honor our veterans who have served, and we back our men and women in blue.

This past year, we lost 13 of Alabama’s own. We are reminded far too often of the grave sacrifice our officers face every day. We must ask ourselves what more can be done to protect these brave men and women.

Here in Alabama, we are funding our law enforcement officers and looking to make positive changes that benefit both officers and our communities.

Last year, I was proud to announce a partnership between the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency and KultureCity. Thanks to this first-of-its kind partnership, every ALEA trooper is now trained to be sensory-inclusive. Folks, Alabama is the first state in the nation to take this major step forward.

I am proud of the work that our state troopers do, as well as the work of folks like our corrections officers, mental health care workers and others, which is why I am pleased to propose a well-deserved 4% pay raise for our state employees.

All of us stand on the shoulders of others who preceded us. In fact, the hard work of state employees has allowed us to accomplish many of the things we celebrate today. So, as part of my budget proposal, I will include a bonus for all retired state employees.

I am proud that my Administration, with the support of the Legislature, is doing more to make significant improvements in mental health care than any since Governor Lurleen Wallace in the 1960s.

In my commitment to expanding access to quality mental health care, I am proposing a \$12 million investment for two additional mental health crisis centers, as well as other health services.

Tonight, I am speaking to you as your governor, but I also am speaking to you as someone whose career journey began as a high school civics teacher.

And as a former educator, I say that the single most important issue here in Alabama and in our nation is our children's education.

No doubt, the covid-19 pandemic shined a light on our country's education system in many ways.

Let me be crystal clear: it is more critical than ever that every Alabama student is receiving in-person learning.

Despite the fact Alabama led others states in getting kids back in the classroom, last year during this occasion, I called on our local school districts to work with community partners to close the learning gap. That is why tonight, I am proud to propose funding for after school programs I know will go a long way in getting our students on track for success.

In Alabama, our students will be focused on core curriculum.

That means being proficient readers by the end of third grade.

After we collect useful data during this upcoming spring semester, implementing the Alabama Literacy Act will be a must.

We must also ensure our kids are focused on developing their math skills, studying history – not theory – and mastering other classes like science and writing.

Tonight, I am pleased to lend my support to legislation that will create a Math Task Force to provide timely and actionable recommendations for recruiting and retaining math teachers, increasing support for struggling students, as well as for evaluating the quality of our assessments, learning materials and standards.

South Carolina U.S. Senator Tim Scott said last year, “education is the closest thing to magic in America.” I couldn't agree more.

I say that we cannot continue letting our students and teachers struggle and rob them of a chance to achieve their dreams.

This evening, I present a challenge to our schools, our communities, our citizens and our leaders. We should pledge, together, that we will no longer accept the existence of a failing elementary school in our state.

Early learning is the bedrock of a quality education. How can we expect to have successful middle and high schools if we have failing elementary schools?

To that end, I am proposing resources to support grants for failing elementary schools that are not one-size-fits-all, but rather, are customized to the particular needs of each of those struggling schools.

Folks, let me be clear. Money isn't going to fix our problems in education.

We need to work with these schools with an Alabama spirit of cooperation and determination, and we need to find new ways to address old problems. That begins with making sure that every elementary school in Alabama is a successful school.

We will ensure we recruit and retain good teachers.

We are expanding funding to math and science teachers.

We need more highly qualified math and science teachers if we want to improve student achievement and prepare our children for the new economy, and we must continue to work every single day toward this goal.

My fellow Alabamians, teachers along the way have made a difference in each of our lives. The job of teachers is no small task, and during the height of covid, parents witnessed firsthand the adjustments and the obstacles that faced our educators. To that end, tonight, I am proud to once again propose a well-deserved 4% pay increase for our teachers.

We are increasing our investment in our students from our earliest learners in pre-k to those in our higher educational institutions. We are providing needed resources for things like autism therapy and school-based mental health care.

Folks, if we do not give our best to make meaningful changes to our education system, we will hurt the future of this state. And most importantly, we will hurt our most promising and precious resources – our students.

My fellow Alabamians, I believe in the potential of our state like never before, because I believe in each one of you.

We are a state of innovators, thinkers and dreamers. Our state's history is proof of that.

In 1903, before Henry Ford had even invented the Model A, it was a young lady from Greene County, Mary Anderson who came up with the idea of windshield wipers.

Around that time, George Washington Carver accepted a teaching appointment with Booker T. Washington and, together, they put Tuskegee Institute on the map.

A few miles to the west of Tuskegee, the Wright brothers established America's first civilian flying school in an old cotton field on the outskirts of Montgomery. And that old cotton field became known as Maxwell Air Force Base a couple decades later.

Fast forward to the 1960s, and it was a German scientist, Dr. Wernher von Braun, who would lead his team of scientists as the director of the new Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville. He would then go on to become the chief architect of the Saturn V that would take mankind to the moon.

And in 2021, the United States Air Force selected Huntsville – the best choice – as the permanent headquarters for the U.S. Space Command.

Ladies and gentlemen, if innovation and discovery are in our DNA – and they are – just imagine what lies ahead for us if we work together to lay the groundwork for tomorrow.

If we do that, and if we continue to make strategic improvements and investments where they count, then I assure you that decades from now, people from all across the country – and around the world – will be talking about the Alabama transformation we helped lead.

That, my friends, is what's in front of us.

There is great possibility in the future of Alabama.

This is our opportunity. So, let's not waste a moment.

May God continue to bless each of you and the great state of Alabama.