

Governor Carney's 2020 State of the State Address

As prepared for delivery - #DESOTS

Lt. Governor Hall-Long, Mister Speaker, Mister President Pro Tem, Members of the 150th General Assembly, Members of the Cabinet, Distinguished members of the Judiciary, invited guests, and my fellow Delawareans: Thank you for inviting me into the chamber today.

A point of personal privilege before I begin. I'd like to recognize and welcome my mother, Ann Carney. Mom is here with my brothers Mike and Joe, Joe's wife Gail, my brother-in-law Brendan, and my sister Claire. The gang's all here! Well, almost all of them.

I want to start with a special thank you to my wife Tracey for all she's doing for our state.

Finally, I'd like to recognize one of my oldest friends in the legislature, Senator Harris McDowell.

As you all know, he will be retiring at the end of this year. Harris is someone who has left his mark on this state in more ways than can be counted. And his absence will be deeply felt in the Senate chamber and back in our district in Wilmington. Join me in thanking my state Senator Harris McDowell, for his tremendous service to our state.

This is the fourth time I'm addressing this body as your Governor. And as we start the last year of my first term, it feels appropriate to take stock.

Of where we were three years ago.

Of the promises we made.

Of the promises we've made good on.

Of the work we have left to do.

Three years ago, I promised Delawareans that at the end of my term, our economy would be stronger.

That middle- and working-class Delawareans would be better off.

That there would be better paying jobs.

That we would feel safer in our neighborhoods and in our cities and towns.

That more of our children would be graduating ready for what comes next, with a sense of promise about the future.

And that our state's finances would be strong and in order.

Today, I have good news to report.

Compared to when I took office, 20,000 more people go to work every day in Delaware.

In fact, more Delawareans are working than at any point in our state's history.

And with a strong economy, it's the right time for us to invest in our future.

More than half of Delawareans working are employed at small businesses. They're the engine of our economic growth.

Our future success depends on finding ways to grow our small businesses. So last spring we started a new grant program: Encouraging Development, Growth and Expansion, or EDGE for short.

We've awarded nearly \$1.5 million in EDGE Grants to 20 companies.

One of those business owners is Santiago Rojas-Carbonell with W7energy. He and his team are developing battery technology for zero-emissions electric vehicles.

Santiago is here with us today. Let's give him a round of applause.

Gulftainer, the new private operator of the Port of Wilmington, is investing as much as \$600 million in the Port. That includes a new state of the art container terminal at Edgemoor.

The ILA has already signed up 500 new members in anticipation of those opportunities. They've leased Elbert-Palmer Elementary in Southbridge to build a workforce training facility for Port workers. This investment will translate into hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of new jobs.

Thanks to the Delaware Prosperity Partnership, there are over a thousand new jobs in Delaware.

And over a thousand jobs stayed here in Delaware instead of moving out of state.

With your help, we've invested \$10 million in a new Transportation Infrastructure Fund. When companies are deciding where to locate, we'll be able to move quickly and decisively to help them.

Delawareans also expect to be able to get to and from work quickly and safely. That's why we're investing \$4.5 billion over the next six years to modernize our roads, bridges, and public transit.

New investments in our technology infrastructure have already brought high-speed internet to the areas around Laurel, Seaford and Bridgeville – where service was spotty or nonexistent.

This is also helping family-owned businesses like Ellis Farms, a poultry and grain business in Millsboro. They rely on high-speed internet to collect data and drive farming operations.

Projects are scheduled in Kent County in the coming weeks.

Kimberly Hopkins is an educator in Seaford.

Without access to high-speed internet, Kimberly couldn't grade papers online at night. Her son with autism couldn't get his videos to buffer.



Kimberly participated in our broadband pilot and is here with us today. She's representing the thousands of Sussex and Kent Countians who now have access to this crucial, 21st century technology.

Please stand, Kimberly, and let us recognize you.

Our technology investments are having an impact in other ways as well. This past year, we launched Delaware OneStop. It's a convenient, centralized platform that allows small businesses to easily get licensed with the state.

We should also make it easier for everyday Delawareans to interact with their state government.

We need a OneStop for Delaware citizens -- where you can buy your park pass, register to vote, renew your license, or check for snow closures.

I've asked our Chief Information Officer, James Collins, to lead a new effort to connect state government with Delawareans through technology. This will be a game changer for our state.

Together, we've also invested over \$30 million in the Higher Education Economic Development Fund. We want colleges and universities to help drive economic growth in Delaware.

Exciting projects are already underway.

At the University of Delaware's Star Campus, we're helping build a national research center for biopharmaceuticals. It will encourage scientists and entrepreneurs to innovate right here in Delaware.

At Delaware Tech, an automotive center in Georgetown and a training center in Middletown will help meet the workforce needs of our employers.

At Delaware State University, they have the first and only HBCU aviation program in the country. We're replacing and expanding the aircraft fleet used to train students.

I want to give a special welcome to Dr. Tony Allen, who was sworn in this morning as Delaware State's new President.

Our focus through all this has been to make Delaware's economy more agile, more innovative, and more sustainable.

At the end of three years as your Governor, I'm pleased to report that the state of our state is strong, and getting stronger.

But we're not stopping there. In my budget next week, we're proposing \$50 million in capital investments to further strengthen our economic infrastructure.

These investments are all designed to shift our economy into a higher gear.

Many emerging companies have outgrown the Experimental Station or the Star Campus. So we're investing in lab space where they can keep growing here in Delaware.

We'll create a Site Readiness Fund, so we can quickly convert existing properties to meet the needs of prospective employers.

And we'll expand the EDGE grant program, to encourage even more small businesses to grow and innovate.

Our goal is simple: We want companies to start here, to stay here, and to grow here.

While strengthening our economy has been a high priority, that hasn't been our only focus.

Three years ago, we promised to make Delawareans feel safer in their neighborhoods, and in our towns and cities.

Thanks to Representative Bentz and members of the General Assembly in both parties, we passed the Beau Biden Gun Violence Prevention Act and another, similar red flag law.

The idea behind both pieces of legislation was really simple. We should keep firearms out of the hands of those intent on harming themselves or others. Family members and mental health providers can now raise a concern, and a judge decides whether to intervene.

These laws have already been used 35 times to date. And they have helped save lives.

But we know we can do more. I encourage every member in this chamber to support legislation that would ban so-called ghost guns, and high capacity magazines.

These bills are just common sense.

We're also working with you to strengthen our school safety infrastructure.

Over the past two years, we worked with Representative Jaques and Representative Short and others to invest \$10 million in a new School Safety and Security Fund. Districts are training their personnel and using the latest technology to keep our children safe in school.

We shouldn't lose sight of the progress we've made. Over the last decade, violent crime in Delaware has fallen by 27 percent, and property crime is down 25 percent.

But we all know we can do better.

Through the Family Services Cabinet Council, we're partnering with Mayor Purzycki, Wilmington Police Chief Tracy, and Attorney General Jennings. The initiative is called Group Violence Intervention.

We're talking directly to Wilmington's most violent offenders, but with a new and different approach. We're challenging them to put down their guns and offering an alternative to a life of crime and violence. We need a similar approach here in our capital city.

Attorney General Jennings. Mayor Purzycki. Thank you for everything you do to keep our neighborhoods strong and safe.

Join me in giving them a round of applause.

Last year, I signed an Executive Order to help ex-offenders more successfully reenter their communities.

This year, all inmates sentenced to more than a year in custody get individualized plans as soon as they enter prison. The plans focus on drug treatment, education, and job skills.

It's in everyone's interest that these individuals leave prison better off than when they entered.

We've made a lot of investments in our correctional system over the past three years. Commissioner DeMatteis is committed to continuing those improvements, starting with the prison healthcare system.

No one is working harder than Lieutenant Governor Hall-Long to combat our opioid epidemic. Through the Behavioral Health Consortium, the Lieutenant Governor and others have given naloxone to more than 7,000 Delawareans.

She and a committed group of volunteers led by Dr. Sandy Gibney knock on doors and visit homeless encampments in the middle of the night to deliver naloxone. Dr. Gibney is here with us today.

Because of the Lieutenant Governor's leadership on the Behavioral Health Consortium, thousands of Delawareans have gotten a second chance at life.

We've also established the first overdose system of care in the nation, expanding access to treatment for those who are ready to seek help. There is much more work to do. But thanks to our Lieutenant Governor and Dr. Walker, we are becoming a model for the country.

I want to take a moment to highlight the good work of my wife Tracey. Tracey's First Chance Initiative focuses on hunger, trauma and early literacy. She also wanted me to acknowledge everyone, people in this room and outside this room, who is working with her on these issues.

In partnership with the Food Bank, our libraries and other non-profits, Tracey is leading efforts to ensure that our children come to school ready to learn and thrive.

One of the best ways to achieve that is a simple one: Give children books.

I'm proud to announce that with the leadership of State Librarian Annie Norman, we're launching a pilot of the Dolly Parton Imagination Library.

Participating children will receive one book each month from birth to five years old – free of charge. The program will be centered in 13 public libraries covering thousands of children in five targeted school districts. We're also working with Delaware's pediatricians to get books to families right from the start.

These efforts will help families build home libraries that could span generations.

Through Tracey's efforts, we've also received a \$10,000 grant to build on Delaware's success in promoting school breakfast. Every school in Delaware that provides free lunch now offers breakfast. And we're working on making food available for students in after school and summer programs.

There's a lot more to say about Tracey's First Chance Initiative, and Tracey wanted me to tell you that she hopes to have the "chance" to talk to each of you directly about her work.

Thank you, Tracey, for everything you're doing for the children of our state.

I think we can all agree that our children should be our focus. And there are perhaps no children more vulnerable than those in our foster care system.

Mayda Berrios is in the audience today. Mayda spent several years in foster care and graduated from St. George's. Today, she's a sophomore at Delaware State, and president of a campus organization that mentors children in foster care. Mayda has had to pull together the funds to pay for college.

In keeping with Tracey's goal of giving every child a "First Chance" of success, we're working with Representatives Griffith and Longhurst and Senators Poore and Lockman to help students like Mayda. Our proposal will waive tuition and fees at Delaware Tech, Delaware State, or the University of Delaware for students who age out of foster care.

Nothing causes more fear or anxiety than when you or a loved one gets sick. Thanks to legislation sponsored by Representative Siegfried, we reduced rates on the ACA health insurance marketplace by almost 20 percent this year.

Because of that – while ACA enrollment rates have declined nationally – we saw a more than 6 percent increase in Delawareans buying health insurance on the exchange.

We have seen significant progress since the passage of the Affordable Care Act a decade ago. Today, almost 95 percent of Delawareans have health insurance.

That's a big deal.

With the Lieutenant Governor's Challenge 2.0, Lieutenant Governor Hall-Long is making sure children and adults are developing habits that will help both their mental and physical health.

Access to quality healthcare is also about having doctors in your community. In some areas of our state, we simply don't have enough physicians. And so, in partnership with Representative Bentz, we will create a healthcare provider loan repayment program. We want to attract some of the best and brightest young doctors to areas where they're needed the most.

A healthier Delaware starts with our most basic and valuable resource: water.

It's critical that we protect that resource for future generations.

From the Brandywine to Rehoboth Bay to Trapp Pond, we have beautiful natural areas in our state. And we all agree that families in Blades, here in Dover — and across our state — deserve to know that the water coming out of their faucets is clean.

That's why we're partnering with Representative Longhurst and Senator McBride to invest \$50 million in clean water.

Building off the work of Senator Townsend's Clean Water Task Force, we'll create a Clean Water Trust Fund, and we'll have a special focus on low-income communities.

Taking care of our environment is one of the most important obligations we have as elected officials. This is a historic investment that will make a big difference in the lives of Delawareans, in our economy, and in our environment.

I hope you'll join me in making this a priority.

Even when you're Governor, making Delaware better starts with the little things.

It drives my security detail crazy, but if you see me walking down the street, you'll often see me stopping to pick up a Wawa bag or an empty bottle of soda.

We have a litter problem in Delaware. And I'm determined to stop it.

Last year, we launched the Keep DE Litter Free campaign to get cities, towns and community groups on board. Secretary Cohan and her team partnered with Goodwill to start the Work a Day, Earn a Pay program. We hire folks struggling to get back on their feet to pick up litter several days a week in all three counties.

Through DelDOT's leadership last year, we picked up close to 50,000 bags of trash.

Starting next year, thanks to Representative Brady and others, single-use plastic bags will be a thing of the past in Delaware. I think that deserves a round of applause.

This year, we are taking our commitment to the environment a step further. Over the next decade, we will plant 1 million trees across Delaware. That's a tree for every Delawarean.

Delaware has made great strides over the last decade to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, and we should continue to be a leader on this issue. We plan to work with my friend Senator McDowell to set a new Renewable Portfolio Standard. By 2035, we want 40 percent of Delaware's energy to come from renewable sources.

And finally, thanks to all of you, we've preserved 134,000 acres of farmland. 25 percent of Delaware's family farms are now preserved forever.

Delawareans and visitors alike take pride in our natural environment – from our beaches, to our inland bays, to our award-winning park system.

In 2018, we welcomed a record 9.2 million visitors to our state. That translates into \$3.5 billion coming to Delaware, also a record.

You all know one of my favorite parts of being Governor is telling folks about the cool stuff there is to do here.

This year, I took a boat tour on the Nanticoke River with Representative Short and ate oysters at the Leipsic Oyster Festival with Representative Carson.

I toured the Firefly concert grounds and sampled homemade ice cream at Hopkins Farm Creamery.

I played corn hole at Crooked Hammock Brewery in Lewes and played disc golf at Killens Pond State Park.

I went to the first Blue Coats game at the 76ers Field House and watched the Little League Senior Softball World Series in Roxana.

So, let's hear it for a really fun year.

We've got something really cool happening this spring that everyone here will want to be part of.

Warships named after the First State have sailed under a U.S. flag dating back to the Revolutionary War. But it's been over one hundred years since we've had a Navy ship named Delaware. That's going to change this spring, when a USS Delaware, a brand new Virginia class nuclear submarine, is commissioned at the Port of Wilmington.

To help me market the state, I've got some marketing material to hand out here to the Speaker and the Pro Temp. There's one for the rest of the General Assembly waiting for you when you leave the Chamber. These water bottles are reusable!

While I've been having fun touring through Delaware, I've also spent time with state employees.

The fact is, over the next five years, more than 40 percent of pension-eligible state employees will be able to retire.

We need to recruit a new generation of public servants into state government.

For two years in a row, we've funded raises for correctional officers, teachers and social workers who help Delaware families all across our state.

We've funded renovations to the Carvel building that were decades overdue. And we'll be including funding to advance the construction of Family Courthouses in Kent and Sussex Counties.

We passed the nation's best parental leave policy for state workers and educators. More than 200 state employees have been able to spend twelve weeks at home with their newborn babies. Thank you, Representative Heffernan, for leading the way on that.

In addition to helping their fellow citizens, many of our state employees put their lives on the line to protect all of us.

Our National Guardsmen and women set an example of selflessness and sacrifice. Since I took office in January 2017, 1,280 members of the Delaware National Guard have deployed overseas and at home.

With us today is Captain Joel Steinbrunner. During his 23 years of service in the Air National Guard, Captain Steinbrunner has deployed six times in support of the war on terror. He's also deployed to help after Hurricane Katrina, and with disaster relief in Puerto Rico.

Specialist Toussaint is also here with us today. She emigrated from Haiti to Delaware and is now enrolled in college.

Join me in thanking Captain Steinbrunner and Specialist Toussaint for their service to our state and our country.

The promise we made three years ago to our children is probably the most important of all. We promised that at the end of our term, more children would be graduating ready for what comes next. And with a sense of promise about the future.

Today I can report that graduation rates for low-income students and English learners are the highest they've been in 10 years.

Today, for the first time in our state's history, we're targeting resources toward these students who need our help the most. We call it Opportunity Funding.

Districts are already putting the money to good use.

Appoquinimink is expanding pre-K enrollment.

In Red Clay, Dorrell Green and his team are reducing class sizes and providing additional mental health supports.

Laurel educators are placing a specific focus on behavioral health in the classroom.

Laurel is represented today by Jessica Nowacki, their behavioral health coordinator.

Jessica was hired through Opportunity Funding.

Public schools across the state are using this funding to hire more than 200 new educators and professionals focusing on low-income and English learners.

Let's give Jessica and all of our educators a big round of applause.

My budget will continue this investment, not only because it's the right thing to do, but because the future of our state depends on the success of our children.

We know that an early start is key to this success. That's why, over the next three years, we'll increase state-funded ECAP pre-k seats by 50 percent statewide.

While students across our state need our attention, students in the City of Wilmington need our help the most.

That's why, just yesterday, we announced our plan to invest \$50 million to build a new school on the East Side of Wilmington. And to renovate Bayard on the West Side.

All across Delaware, from Dover to Middletown to Rehoboth, we've built or renovated nearly 30 beautiful schools in the last three years.

Our children in Wilmington deserve no less.

Three years ago, we promised Delawareans we'd make investments that move our state forward, while getting our state's finances in order.

After digging out of a \$400 million deficit, we've had two years of stronger revenues.

And we've been disciplined about how we've spent it. Today, we've built a \$200 million surplus, and have \$126 million in additional reserves.

The budget I'll propose later this month will limit spending to sustainable levels and dedicate one-time revenue for one-time infrastructure projects.

I will also propose the largest infrastructure plan in our state's history, for the second year in a row.

We're building state-of-the art schools across our state. We're rebuilding our water infrastructure to make sure every Delawarean has access to clean water.

We're preserving open space and investing in our downtowns.

And we're supporting our small businesses and the working families of this state.

Folks come up to me all the time and ask, "How are things going?" I've taken to borrowing a phrase from our senior senator Tom Carper. "Compared to what?"

As I start my fourth year as your Governor, and compare things now to how they were when I took office, things are really looking up.

All of us in this room are keepers of the public trust.

When we make promises, we have to keep them.

And that is what we've done.

When people have confidence in their government, it helps give them hope for the future.

Inspiring that hope is our job too.

There are some things we can do in government that don't require a new program, or new spending, or even a new idea.

And yet, they can inspire that same hope, and faith in government.



We had just such an opportunity a few months ago, when right across the hall, the Senate confirmed Delaware's first African American Supreme Court justice, who is here with us today.

Justice Montgomery-Reeves' swearing in before a crowd of hundreds at Howard High School was a moment I won't soon forget.

And so let's continue to work together over the next year.

To build on the promises we've made.

To give people faith in their government.

And to give them hope for the future.

Thank you, God bless you, God bless the state of Delaware, and God bless our great United States of America.