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STATE OF ALABAMA

## 2023 INAUGURAL ADDRESS

### **EMBARGOED UNTIL THE GOVERNOR'S DELIVERY**

My fellow Alabamians:

Today, as we mark the start of a new chapter in our state government, we are reminded of how fortunate we are to call Alabama and the United States of America our home.

Four years ago, in this very spot, I said our people are our greatest resource and the fabric that holds our state together during both our best days and the more difficult ones. Folks, standing here four years ago, I could never have imagined what was to come, but I am certain we came out stronger because of you, the good people of Alabama.

Just a few days ago, tornadoes ravaged parts of our state stealing the lives of seven of our fellow Alabamians. The one light in all of this darkness was our people. Folks all over our state are flocking to the aid of their neighbors hardest hit. Alabamians' love for each other prevails all, and I am confident we will come back stronger.

I am truly honored by your overwhelming support. You elected me to serve as your governor for four more years, and that is a responsibility I do not take lightly.

To my fellow constitutional officers, legislators and other public servants, hear me loud and clear: We have a busy, productive and full four years in front of us. Let us work together, and let's not waste a moment.

We will keep Alabama working, and, as a team, we will ensure our best days are yet to come.

Today is a time for us to celebrate all Alabama is, for us to reflect on what we have accomplished and, most importantly, to plan for the future we are working towards. I am truly grateful to this year's Inaugural chairs for making today's historic event possible, as well as the many volunteers, law enforcement officials and others who lent a helping hand.

We don't need to sugar coat it: Right now, with the state of our nation, times are tough. An unprecedented pandemic has led to the federal government spending way above our means. This has resulted in record high inflation, which means higher costs everywhere you turn.

Alabamians in every corner of our state stepped up in a real way when the pandemic halted how we live here in our country. And now, as your governor, I am doing everything in my power to step up for you and your families to provide meaningful and responsible assistance.

Folks, we are living in what – at moments – feels like an unreal time.

When I was a young girl growing up in Camden, I could never have imagined the world we live in today. Never would I have thought that the day we elect a female governor and a female United States senator, we would also have to fight for our girls to have a fair chance when they compete in sports.

Over my lifetime, and especially during my years of public service, I have come to know the people of Alabama will never compromise our values.

I believe our Alabama values make us who we are. And as your governor, I am proud of who we are, and I will always protect what we believe in, never forgetting our roots.

And as we look ahead to a future filled with opportunity and great possibility, I pledge that we will build on our roots by focusing on getting the hard work done today, while never forgetting that our work now matters most to our future generations.

I believe we have more in common, than that which divides us. We all want Alabama to be the best place to live; we want our people working; and we want our children to receive a high-quality education.

To put it simply: We all want to continue seeing more of our Alabama common sense.

No doubt, much of our current success is a direct result of reaching across the aisle and working together for the betterment of our state.

We are making improvements to our roads and bridges in all 67 counties, as well as to the Port of Mobile.

We are moving forward in constructing new prisons, while also having made productive and reasonable reforms to our criminal justice system.

We are making mental health care a priority with the addition of six new crisis centers.

We have put a renewed focus on the fundamentals of education and are beginning to see tangible results.

Speaking of results, over 61,000 more Alabama households and businesses will now have broadband access.

Since I have been governor, thanks to the work of the Alabama Legislature, we have cut well over a half a billion dollars in taxes. That relief helped everyone from our middle class to our farmers to our small businesses to our first-time home buyers and to those looking to adopt.

We have reached the lowest unemployment rate in our state's history, multiple times over.

We have more good paying jobs available today than at any other point before.

I am proud to report today that since I have been governor, we have seen business investments in our state totaling \$40 billion dollars, which has created 73,000 new jobs. And I assure you: We are not done yet. The core issues, the everyday issues are what will continue to be at the top of my agenda for the next four years.

Ensuring every Alabama student receives a high-quality education will be my number one focus.

We will build upon the foundation we have laid so that by the end of my term, Alabama will rank in the top 30 states in reading and math for the first time in our history. In order to be first, we have to continue moving up.

Here in Alabama, we support – in fact, we encourage – our parents to be involved in their children's educational journeys, from birth and on through their pre-K through high school experiences.

Let me be clear: Parents are crucial to a student's success, and we want your input and your involvement in our schools.

We must encourage our children to open books during their earliest developmental stages. That is why we will partner with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library to ensure every Alabamian can receive books directly to their homes each month after they are born until five years of age. As your governor, I also support a parent being able to decide what is best for their own child's education.

We need to have meaningful discussions about school choice in Alabama, and I believe that begins with making needed reforms to our charter school option.

We cannot continue letting our students struggle and rob them of a chance to achieve their dreams. I pledge to you that, together, we will no longer accept the existence of a failing elementary school in our state.

The two major components are ensuring we improve the way we teach and that we ensure our students continue to learn at a high level.

This week, I will sign an executive order to establish the Alabama Commission on Teaching and Learning. This group of folks will have boots on the ground and will help advise us on big changes we can make to recruit, retain and prepare the teacher of tomorrow.

I'm proud to be the second female governor of Alabama, having personally helped Governor Lurleen Wallace get elected in 1967; I am also proud to be the second governor from Wilcox County. In 1931, fellow Wilcox County native Governor Benjamin Miller said in his inaugural address: "No state is great without great men and great women – great in mind, great in heart and great in principles. To secure such men and women, the education of our children is imperative."

That statement is still very true and very relevant ninety-two years later.

In 2017, I promised my Administration would be open, honest and transparent. I recommit to you today: We will continue striving to make good on that promise.

We will make much needed reforms to ensure your state government works more efficiently, is more accountable and works with more transparency.

We will tighten up government.

For example, we will reduce burdens holding back our businesses and will cut regulations by 25 percent over the next two years. The bottom line is that we want to be a government that better serves the people of Alabama.

Both your state and federal government will be responsible as we invest in broadband access, making it this generation's modern-day electricity.

Just recently, I announced the development of one of the most comprehensive, high-speed broadband networks in the country that will result in access in every corner of our state for homes, schools, hospitals, police departments and businesses. Mark my word: Alabama will be a national model when it comes to broadband.

I am committed to working towards our state having full ability to be connected to high-speed internet, no matter where you live in Alabama.

A primary function of all levels of government is to keep our citizens safe. My Administration will always have public safety at the forefront.

We will back the blue, and that also means we will continue standing behind the men and women who serve our state as corrections officers.

We will make reforms to protect those who wear the badge, as well as put a stop to any bad policies that are not in the best interest of public safety.

Just last week, I signed an executive order to ensure violent criminals remain off the streets.

We must do everything we can to ensure we will never again lose Alabamians like Bibb County Deputy Brad Johnson to a man who should never have been out of prison in the first place.

Here in Alabama, we always stand ready to support the defense of our great nation. We salute the many service men and women, as well as the veterans who came before them.

The U.S. military presence in Alabama makes our state vital to our nation's defense. With Space Command coming to Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville and the F35 fighter jets coming to the 187<sup>th</sup> in Montgomery, it's safe to say our military is thriving across the state and making significant impacts far beyond our borders.

In addition to our active military men and women, we have a civilian workforce in our defense industry who are integral, not just to our own country, but also to our allies.

Just look at the missiles Ukraine received from our own Troy, Alabama. I believe this is a prime example of the far reach of the Made in Alabama brand.

When it comes to incentivizing business and industry to grow in Alabama, we will build on the massive success we have experienced by renewing the Jobs Act and Growing Alabama.

We will craft an economic development strategy for the 2030s today.

While there is still uncertainty in today's national economic climate, creating stability in our economy will be key. And I promise you we will have a winning game plan here at home.

We will continue to be a champion for our existing companies, while making sure we secure higher paying jobs and develop and recruit the talent needed to fill current and future jobs in our state.

We will work to be innovative, and my desire is that when someone anywhere in the world is in need, they should look no further than our Sweet Home Alabama.

We will apply our values and talents to solve our nation's challenges through research, development and new business start-ups.

We will make sure that everyone knows that Alabama is not just a great place to visit, but that it is a great place to locate a business and raise a family – a place that is rooted in our values and unlimited in our opportunities.

Folks, we have people from all over flocking to Alabama – where common sense and opportunity abound. People are coming here in record numbers to further their education, to work an in-demand job and even to retire. Truly, Alabama has something to offer everyone, and we will continue pressing on our mission to expand opportunities and make sure our state is the best place to live, work and raise a family.

In just two years, we will have passed the first quarter of this century. And during the next four years, we will also be celebrating the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

Every single day, we are surrounded by our history. In fact, it was in this very place, in the heart of downtown of Montgomery where Dr. Martin Luther King, Junior called for equality for all.

It is my hope we can embrace our history and be able to fully explain to every child how exceptional our country is today, while also embracing what lies ahead throughout the rest of this century.

Like all of you, I am proud to be an Alabamian, and I believe we have a great story to tell.

Let's work together to get things done and focus on the hard work of good government.

Let's be thoughtful, and not brash.

I stated earlier we have a full four years in front of us. Let me offer this reminder to my fellow elected officials: The people of Alabama deserve our very best. Future generations of Alabamians deserve our hardest work today.

So, let us not forget: Our service cannot be about the next election. It is about serving the people of our state, giving them what they need and deserve from their government.

Let's harness our efforts for the good people of our state – the working moms, the 4<sup>th</sup> grader aspiring to be an engineer, our police officers, nurses, small business owners, our farmers, our service men and women, our veterans and every hardworking Alabamian across all corners of our great state.

We will not relent where we have seen success, but instead, we will build upon that foundation.

It is the highest honor of my life to serve as your governor. I commit to you today I will work hard over the next four years to build on our roots, so we can address our longstanding challenges, further our progress and prepare for the future.

Thank you, all, for entrusting us with your state government – and it is indeed your government. I assure you our best days are still ahead.

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