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## STATE OF ALABAMA

### 2026 STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS

Lieutenant Governor Ainsworth, President Pro Tem Gudger, Speaker Ledbetter, Speaker Pro Tem Pringle, members of the Alabama Legislature, Chief Justice Stewart, justices of the Alabama Supreme Court, distinguished guests – and my fellow Alabamians!

The momentum is in our sails in Alabama – and we are not done yet!

Today marks my 10<sup>th</sup> Regular Session as governor.

And y'all, I'd say...we haven't aged a day! Right, Jabo?

Our state, however, looks different today than it did when I was sworn in April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

I told the people of Alabama: Despite the challenges we faced, we could view the transition as a positive opportunity.

Being a former economic developer, I knew our first opportunity was to recruit and support businesses.

Since then, we have seen investments totaling \$69 billion which has created 100,000 jobs – and counting!

Alabama consistently ranks among the top 10 states for doing business. We are prioritizing workforce development, guaranteeing site readiness and remaining steady and reliable for economic growth.

Existing businesses are thriving. Legacy sectors are growing. And still...our economic landscape is transforming with new partners like Lilly Medicine.

...And we are aggressively working towards future projects that will benefit our state for generations.

In 2019, we saw another opportunity when President Trump officially formed Space Command.

We immediately got to work promoting Huntsville to become its home. Now, finally, it's official: Space Command Headquarters is coming to Sweet Home Alabama!

But y'all, you can't have Lilly Medicine, Mazda Toyota Manufacturing, First Solar, Meta, Novelis or even Space Command without a strong plan...one that includes reliable infrastructure.

Since 2019, Alabama generated more than \$2 billion dollars, paving the way for 500 vital road and bridge projects in all 67 counties. None of these projects would have happened without the passage of Rebuild Alabama.

Now, for those of you who were here, you remember: It was hard. And yes! I still have my white board!

...But, y'all, in my experience, making the hard decisions often pays off for our state. ...Like when we first decided to invest in high-speed internet.

Alabama ranked near the bottom when it came to broadband connectivity. Today, we are 24<sup>th</sup>. And with our state plan, 100 percent of Alabama will soon have access through an internet service provider.

When we were projected to lose a seat in Congress, I worked to ensure more than 5 million Alabamians successfully completed their 2020 Census to prove our growing population.

In 2017, I told the people of Alabama I would work to make their government more effective.

We consolidated our new Department of Workforce, and in only its first year, we have taken 25,000 workers off the sidelines.

We gave veterans a stronger voice and moved the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs into the Governor's Cabinet.

And yes: Whether it be Pardons and Paroles, Veterans Affairs OR the Department of Transportation, there is effectiveness that comes with being part of the Governor's Cabinet.

We are supporting Alabama families: From our record 6,000 plus foster care adoptions...to our CHOOSE Act education savings accounts...to paid parental leave for teachers.

We are making Alabama the best state to live, work, raise a family AND visit: From our historic investments in outdoor recreation to the millions more tourists we see traveling to our state.

We are solidifying Alabama as the defense capital of the United States: F-35 fighter jets roar through our Montgomery skies. Black Hawk helicopters fly above Fort Rucker. And robust ships are being built at Austal. Y'all, freedom rings all the way from the Rocket City to the Port City.

We are tackling long-neglected challenges head on. We are nearing the completion of construction on the new men's prison in Elmore County and are pressing forward with work on the Escambia facility, all while recruiting a record number of corrections officers.

And with much help from the Legislature, we have conservatively budgeted and avoided proration.

When I took office in 2017, Alabama's education system needed immediate attention.

In 4<sup>th</sup> grade math, we ranked dead last at 52<sup>nd</sup>. In 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading, we were 49<sup>th</sup>.

As a former teacher...I knew there was no greater opportunity than to improve our students' education. I introduced my first policy as governor, an education initiative, Strong Start, Strong Finish. And we got to work.

We are now 32<sup>nd</sup> in math and 34<sup>th</sup> in reading. We ranked first in the nation in math recovery and third in reading. We significantly increased our pre-k classrooms. We are a top five state for computer science. We doubled the specialty schools with the addition of the Cyber Technology and Engineering School and the Alabama School of Healthcare Sciences. We have our highest ever College and Career Readiness rate. We are tied for the lowest percentage of chronic absenteeism. Our teachers are earning high marks. And we added 500,000 more credentialed men and women to our workforce.

Truly, the tides are turning when it comes to education in Alabama.

In these next 12 months, we will also be celebrating our country's 250<sup>th</sup> birthday.

In Alabama, we love America. We respect our military and honor our veterans.

Look no further than Alabama's own Rodney Smith.

In 2015 he was studying computer science at Alabama A&M, when he offered to help an elderly man mow his lawn. That one kind gesture turned into a 50-state mission to mow lawns across our country with a focus on helping the men and women who served our nation...our veterans.

It should come as no surprise that Rodney shares a birthday with America on July 4<sup>th</sup>.

Rodney's movement has inspired some 6,000 kids across the country to serve their own communities through the 50 Yard Challenge. Rodney is teaching our young people valuable lessons while providing free help to our veterans, military families and first responders.

I am excited to share that Rodney will be mowing some of the grass here at the Capitol this spring...but his real dream is to provide his services at the White House. So, here tonight, I am encouraging President Trump to invite Rodney to our nation's capital. Goodness knows, Washington, D.C. could use a little more Alabama!

Rodney, thank you for showing the rest of America that Alabama patriotic spirit. Please stand and let us recognize you.

Ahead of tonight's speech, we also enjoyed a performance by the incredibly talented Montgomery Academy Chamber Chorus led by Dr. Damion Womack. Y'all, please stand and be recognized.

Just as we look forward to celebrating our nation's 250<sup>th</sup>, I am excited Alabama's best days are still ahead of us.

Ladies and gentlemen, the state of our state is strong, and our future is even stronger!

Last year, public safety was my number one priority. Together, we accomplished a great deal through my Safe Alabama package, but our work is never done when it comes to protecting our citizens.

Representative Matt Simpson and Senator April Weaver will carry a bill to impose the death penalty for those who rape or sodomize a child. I was proud to quickly offer my full and total support.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am urging you to pass this legislation so I can sign it into law.

Government at all levels should always prioritize public safety. And we can thank the men and women in blue for enforcing our laws.

Unfortunately, some criminals attempt to elude their authority. There are repeat offenders and in the worst cases, there has even been loss of life.

It is time we crack down on that reckless, criminal behavior and pass a bill led by Representative Reed Ingram and Senator Lance Bell. In Alabama, we enforce the law, and I look forward to this bill reaching my desk.

Y'all, public safety begins and ends with the capital – whether that be Washington, D.C. or Montgomery, Alabama.

We supported President Trump's mission to Make D.C. Safe and Beautiful Again by deploying more than 400 Alabama National Guardsmen.

And here at home in Montgomery, I directed the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency to increase trooper presence. Between our specialized Metro Area Crime Suppression Unit and this larger law enforcement footprint, we are adding to our efforts in Montgomery.

Our state troopers deserve our thanks. That is why I am proud to propose a two percent pay raise for all our state employees like our troopers, mental health workers and those who protect our cybersecurity.

And whether it be our troopers' efforts to make it safe, teachers' steps to improve schools or our attempts to ensure healthcare options in our Capital City, I urge our local leaders to work with us over the next 12 months to put Montgomery on its strongest footing yet.

We recently learned Alabama will receive more than \$203 million dollars in first-year funding from the Rural Health Transformation Program.

Made possible by the One Big Beautiful Bill, this program, over five years, will kickstart efforts to improve health care in rural America. Our plan approved by the Trump Administration lists 11 initiatives to boost rural healthcare delivery.

We have laid the groundwork for success, and I urge you, our legislators, to help develop needed policy and to fully implement this program.

And to our healthcare leaders in the state: I challenge you to work with us in thinking outside-the-box and identifying new partners as we strive to improve health care in Alabama.

As we continue addressing longstanding challenges, we must also prepare for the unknown.

The Alabama Resilience Council evaluates our state's ability to prepare for both natural and manmade disasters. Representative Chip Brown and Senator Steve Livingston will carry legislation to ensure we have a statewide resilience plan. Every Alabamian is worthy of a resilient community when disaster strikes.

Looking only at last year, our country experienced devastating weather events, including the horrific flooding in Texas that claimed the lives of fellow Alabamians, the youngest being Sarah Marsh, who was away at summer camp.

Unfortunately, Alabama is no stranger to the wrath of Mother Nature. We are also home to many of our own camps. And y'all, as a former counselor myself, ensuring safety in these spaces is very personal to me.

For that reason, I am launching a statewide flood notification system that will be in place for this summer. I am also calling on the Legislature to fund this notification system moving forward. We cannot put our young people at risk!

We must also protect our young Alabamians in school. That is why I am proposing an additional \$50 million dollars for K-12 safety efforts.

Y'all, our students are why I chose to run for a second full term. Our efforts are paying off, but as with anything else, our work is not done.

Senator Matt Woods and Representative Rick Rehm are putting forward a bill to create a temporary teaching certificate pathway for qualified veterans. I fully endorse this measure and look forward to this bill reaching my desk.

In Alabama, we are proud to support our veterans. And we are proud to support our families. That includes making Alabama the most school choice friendly state in the nation.

Our education savings account program, the CHOOSE Act, is already supporting more than 23,000 students. That number will only grow as more folks learn about the program, as student athletes feel more confident in the rules and when it becomes fully universal in year three.

For the 27-28 Academic Year, I am proposing we increase funding for the CHOOSE Act to \$250 million dollars. This will help even more families receive the education that best suits their child.

Unfortunately, we have seen circumstances where the Alabama High School Athletic Association tried sidelining our CHOOSE Act recipients. Speaker Ledbetter and I even took them to court.

This session, Representative Danny Garrett and Senator Clyde Chambliss will carry ‘The Let the Kids Play Act’ to make sure no family benefitting from the CHOOSE Act is unfairly benched again.

Y’all, we are ALSO making HISTORIC investments in ALL our public schools.

As I mentioned, from day one, we put a hard focus on education. Now, I could not be prouder that my final Education Trust Fund proposal will be the LARGEST EVER in our state’s history.

Our teachers are certainly key to our success. So, I am excited to announce that budget includes another two percent pay increase for these teachers preparing our next generation.

We are making wise investments in policies that work like the Literacy and Numeracy Acts.

We also have good policies that don’t cost us a dime.

The FOCUS Act, which limits phone use during instructional time, has brought great results in only its first few months. Seems like a no brainer, right? Even a Tuscaloosa teacher went viral for asking: Was it really that easy all along?

And to that I say: Yes, it was just that easy!

Technology has incredible benefits, but too much of anything can be harmful.

My first Early Childhood Education Secretary, now Representative Jeana Ross, is putting forward a bill with Senator Donnie Chesteen to limit screen time for children five and younger in publicly funded early learning centers. House Bill 78 will help our youngest Alabamians in their key developmental days. Let’s get this bill passed so I can sign it into law.

On this occasion a couple years ago, I declared we would have no more failing elementary schools in Alabama. The Turnaround Schools initiative is making that a reality by producing accelerated growth in the state’s most challenged classrooms.

Y'all...these schools are improving at twice the statewide rate. Now, we will work towards graduating these successful schools to make room for a new cohort. We must keep funding this proven initiative.

Here with us this evening are students from one of those successful Turnaround Schools. Washington K-8 School in Birmingham moved from a 'D' on the state's report card all the way to a 'B'. That's because of these students here! Boys and girls, please stand and let us recognize you!

Ladies and gentlemen, these young people...future generations...they are why we serve.

To our legislators: All that we have accomplished and all that we will accomplish would not be possible without your partnership. So, thank you. Thank you.

You started this term strong. Let's finish strong and work together to ensure Alabama's best days are still ahead.

And to our leaders...

Pro Tem Gudger, having you on my team has allowed us to get good work done for the people of Alabama in just a short time. Your support means a lot to me, and I know you will be serving for many more years to come.

Leader Daniels, you have been with me for the long haul. Since you assumed your own leadership role in 2017, we have always agreed to listen to each other and work together to help the people of Alabama.

Bobby Singleton...my brother from another mother! Truly...there is not another like you. It's no secret we don't agree on every issue. But what is aligned are our hearts and passion for this state. You are more than a friend to me...Bobby, you are family.

And Mr. Speaker! Just one month before I was sworn in as governor, you assumed a leadership role and have been a strong, steady and decisive partner. You are very special to me. You are an outstanding Speaker of the House, and no doubt, Alabama is better thanks to your service.

I could single out so many of you – both past and present – who have been a friend to my Administration. Just know how grateful I am to each of you. We have an exciting 12 months ahead and lots more to accomplish.

To members of Team Ivey: As people often tell me what a good job my Administration is doing, I always remind them these positive results are because of your loyalty and the responsible ways you have served on my Cabinet and staff. Alabamians respect you and the manner in which you serve. Your integrity, thoroughness, competency and responsiveness are a model for success.

And to our young people across the state: I encourage you to consider preparing yourself for a career in public service. Attend Boys State or Girls State, if you can. Alabama deserves a generation of young people willing to pick up the mantle and continue our legacy to serve the people of our state responsibly.

Y'all, I am proud of Alabama. I am proud of our citizens. I am proud to continue leading our state forward. And I am humbled to be a governor of ALL THE PEOPLE.

The people of Alabama deserve our very best. Future generations of Alabamians deserve our hardest work today.

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

Thank you, and may God continue to bless each of you and the great state of Alabama!