



Missouri Governor — Michael L. Parson
Office of Communications

2020 STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS GOVERNOR MIKE PARSON

3:00 PM (CST)

Statewide leaders, legislators, and special guests ...

Thank you for the warm welcome and the honor of being here today to present the State of the State.

It was not long ago that I stood here and laid out a bold plan for the future of Missouri.

Back then, many were worried about the direction of our state. Some of you were probably worried about how your new Governor would lead and address the problems within Missouri.

But, because I love this state and the people of this state, I knew I was ready for that challenge ... and with your help, ready to chart a new path for Missouri.

A path that would push us to the forefront of the nation by providing more opportunities for our citizens ... and make Missouri a destination for others around the country ready to embrace our Show Me way of life.

I also want to thank the many of you in this room and the thousands around the state who had confidence in me, supported my vision, and offered me patience at a trying time for Missouri.

Even though it was a challenging time, it was also an opportunity to do things differently, to tackle tough problems, and propose bold solutions ... and with your help, we have made tremendous progress.

That is why I am confident telling you today that the state of our state is strong ... and by working together, we will be ready for an even better future.

One year ago, I told you my administration would take a very disciplined approach to working for the people of Missouri ... and that workforce development and infrastructure must be our dedicated priorities.

Focusing on these issues would allow us to not only make short-term gains for our state, but also provide long-term stability and a solid foundation for future generations.

They were issues that we worked on together, regardless of party or region of the state.

And, most importantly, after listening to community, civic, and business leaders from across Missouri ... I knew they shared the same belief that these issues would help strengthen every community across our state.

In fact, in just a single year, Missouri's workforce development agenda has caught the attention of the rest of the country.

Other states are now watching us and taking notes, and we are rapidly working towards our goal of becoming the Best in the Midwest ... and frankly, the best in the nation.

For example, through our collaboration with employers, we now have 42,000 Missourians signed up for on-the-job training through the One Start program ... 42,000.

We have reached second in the nation for apprenticeships, and we fully intend to keep that momentum going.



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Our Fast Track scholarship program has reached hundreds of applications ... and I am very proud that these scholarships are primarily used at our community colleges where women make up 61% of the total enrollment.

Another workforce development program I'm very proud of is ASPIRE MO, a 20-week program that helps incarcerated women develop business plans and prepare for successful re-entry into the workforce.

With us today in the upper gallery is Emily Kirchhoff and Nigaila Gibbs.

Both of these ladies served in the Vandalia women's correctional center.

Both of them would tell you they made poor choices in the past, but they stand before us today as graduates of ASPIRE MO.

Through this program, they have shown dedication to learning new skills, taking responsibility, getting back on their feet, and into the workforce.

Ms. Kirchhoff is employed at a call center that connects veterans to healthcare services.

Ms. Gibbs is employed at Americold, a storage and logistics company in St. Louis.

If we are to be a society that believes in forgiveness and second chances, then it is the next chapter in their lives that will matter most.

Please join me in recognizing Ms. Kirchhoff and Ms. Gibbs.

Please know we believe in you, we support you, and we wish you the best in the days to come.

The opportunities we have provided for individuals to better themselves – and in return provide a more stable environment for their families – will truly change lives long after all of us are gone.

When we talk about these successes in workforce development, it is also worth pointing out that real incomes are rising faster than any time in recent history.

More people have more money in their pockets, and the tax cuts at the state and federal level are absolutely having a positive impact here in Missouri.

Missouri now ranks 7th in the nation for small business wage growth.

And at 3.1 percent, our unemployment rate continues to remain at historic lows, and has been below the national unemployment rate for 40 consecutive months ... another example that Missouri's growth is strong, and we are on the right track.

Not to mention that the African American unemployment rate in Missouri has dropped from over 10 percent in 2014 to 5.5 percent today.

Our workforce efforts have created over 40,000 new jobs since I took office ... 40,000 new jobs.

And, more importantly, it is the private sector that is driving these investments, not government.



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And here are just a few examples:

The Fortune 250 Agri-business company Bunge announced the relocation of its global headquarters from New York to St. Louis.

Bayer announced it will add 500 new jobs to the St. Louis region, and Pfizer also invested over \$230 million dollars.

Boeing secured a \$16 billion dollar contract to build the TX trainer, and NGA West just broke ground on their billion dollar campus in St. Louis.

On the other side of the state, companies like Swiss Re, Faurecia, CVS, and Waddell & Reed have made huge investments in the area.

And of course, Kansas City beat more than 130 other cities around the country to land two divisions from the USDA and over 500 new jobs for the first time in our nation's history.

Our big cities aren't the only ones generating new jobs and attracting investment.

Briggs and Stratton is creating 130 new jobs in Poplar Bluff. Dollar Tree invested \$110 million dollars for a new distribution center in Warrensburg, creating 375 new jobs.

Nucor Steel, the largest steel company in the United States, is close to production at its \$250 million dollar steel mill that will create 250 new jobs in Sedalia, Missouri.

Aurora Organic Dairy opened a new processing plant in Columbia, creating over 100 new jobs ... and Purina invested \$115 million dollars to expand in Bloomfield.

And, about one month ago, General Motors announced one of the largest single project investments in our state's history in Wentzville with a \$1.5 billion dollar investment to build midsize trucks for North America ...

And we like our trucks here in Missouri.

This is just the beginning, and these successes will help us build further momentum.

All of these are shared successes ... and show that by working together, our investments in workforce development and infrastructure are succeeding.

I am proud to report we have exceeded even our own estimates, and the result has been better cost savings and more projects for the people of Missouri.

As a matter of fact, Senator Schatz and Representative Ruth ... I want to thank you for your leadership on getting the bridge bonding resolution completed, and let you know that our first round of bonds was achieved at an interest rate of 1.25 percent.

And, what triggered these bonds was an \$81.2 million dollar INFRA grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation to build the Rocheport Bridge.



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Even more to celebrate are the vital grants we have received to complete the MacArthur Bridge in St. Louis ... make significant improvements to the River Port in Cape Girardeau ... solidify the East Locust reservoir project in northern Missouri ... and finally wrap-up funding for the I-49 Bella Vista Bypass in Southwest Missouri.

I appreciate the support and leadership from our federal delegation in securing those funds, especially Congressman Sam Graves and Senator Roy Blunt.

These projects are critically important to their regions, and I am proud of MoDOT's hard work to leverage every tax dollar to the fullest and make our transportation system safer for ALL Missourians.

In addition to these projects, we got an even better return than expected on the infrastructure cost-share program you all passed.

I am excited to tell you that this nearly \$50 million dollar investment will lead to nearly \$150 million dollars in new infrastructure investment, and an economic impact of approximately \$350 million dollars.

The bold infrastructure proposals we all worked on together have netted \$1 billion dollars in new projects for our state.

There is so much excitement and optimism across all parts of the state ... but right here in Jefferson City, we shook things up a little more.

We stopped talking about reform and pushed through real reforms that have changed state government for the better.

Our first reorganization effort of state government took effect this past August, impacting hundreds of state employees.

These changes represent the most significant reorganization of state government in decades.

This was the right thing to do to make government more efficient, more accountable, and more customer oriented to the people we serve.

As part of our efforts to improve state government, we also successfully consolidated a state prison that will save us \$22 million dollars every year.

And, on top of this, through greater efficiency, better management, and more accountability to the Missouri taxpayers, we gave our state employees a much-needed pay raise.

An effort like that does not happen if you don't have bold leaders who are dedicated to making state government better ... so I would like to recognize all of my cabinet members seated in the rear gallery.

Please stand and be recognized.

I am proud of the support and commitment you show this state every day, and it is my honor to serve alongside you.

We have made record improvements in just a short period of time, but I believe there is still more to do and much more we can achieve with hard work.

Of course, it is important to know that these bold ideas are working. But, most importantly, it is about the impact it has on the lives of the everyday people of Missouri.



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That is why my call this legislative session is to propose initiatives aimed at building stronger communities ... improving education and workforce development ... revitalizing our infrastructure ... and making government more accountable.

It is critical to understand that all of these issues provide individuals with more opportunities, strengthen public safety, and create healthier and more stable communities ... and I have learned that no one knows more about their communities than the mayors.

Seated in the upper gallery are the mayors and police chiefs of the four largest metro areas of our state.

Mayor Quinton Lucas of Kansas City ... Mayor Lyda Krewson of St. Louis ... Mayor Ken McClure of Springfield ... and Mayor Brian Treece of Columbia.

All of these mayors care deeply about their cities, just as I care deeply about our entire state ... we all know that Missouri is diverse, and so are the opinions and needs of the people within it.

But, regardless of what part of the state we come from, we all want our communities to be safe ... and we worry when we see violent criminals threaten our neighborhoods.

That concern for our citizens brought the five of us together.

Despite our varied backgrounds and differing opinions, we have stayed focused on what we can accomplish by working together, while also showing respect and willingness to listen to one another.

These mayors understand my commitment to support the second amendment for law abiding citizens.

And let me be clear ...

During my 6 years in the Army, 22 years in law enforcement, and as a lifetime member of the NRA ...

I have never wavered in my support for the Second Amendment.

But, we all have to understand the very real issue of violent crime affecting our neighborhoods and the potential consequence of doing nothing.

By working together, we have come up with solutions to help combat violent crime, such as:

- Providing greater protection for victims and witnesses.
- Providing more mental health resources and services.
- And, finally strengthening our laws to target violent criminals.

We won't always agree, and there will always be issues we each feel passionately about.

But, I am confident that by working together, the potential for our regions and the entire state of Missouri is even greater.

Please join me in recognizing the mayors and police chiefs of Kansas City, St. Louis, Springfield, and Columbia, Missouri.



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We will continue to promote initiatives that incorporate more mental health resources into public safety ... provide more targeted and tactical support for the pursuit of violent criminals ... and encourage more coordination among law enforcement.

We know some of these efforts are already paying off.

Between Operation Triple Beam in Kansas City and our commitment of state personnel in St. Louis, Remarkable results have been achieved ... including:

- The arrest of hundreds of violent criminals,
- Gang members,
- And the seizure of nearly 30 pounds of illegal drugs.

With us here today are members of the Missouri Highway Patrol and the Division of Fire Safety who have been part of these efforts in St. Louis.

Please join me in recognizing their hard work and commitment to protecting the people of Missouri.

These results reflect real progress, and show that by all of us working together – federal, state, and local law enforcement, and community leaders – we can make a difference and keep violent criminals off our streets.

I also want to point out that we included community leaders.

As Governor, I have the greatest honor and privilege of representing all parts of our state ... but I have learned the most powerful voice is often the one in the community.

With us here today are several members of the Missouri Faith Leadership Coalition.

I want to thank them for stepping up ... leading by actions and not just words ... putting their communities and congregations ahead of politics ... and helping me better understand the struggles their communities face.

These leaders are also special to me because I know we all have a special faith ...

And it is that special faith that allowed us to look past whatever differences we may have, and come together for a purpose higher than any one of us.

Would the members of the Missouri Faith Leadership Coalition please stand to be recognized?

There is also another special guest I would like to recognize today - Mrs. Bernice Jones.

By looking at us, you might not think Mrs. Jones and I have much in common.

But one Saturday at a Grill for Glory event, we realized we both have an immense love for children.

Mrs. Jones has 13 grandchildren, and I have six. Being a grandparent is something we both cherish.

I also learned that Mrs. Jones has been involved in her same community in St. Louis for over 50 years, keeping an eye on things, offering assistance to youth, and always serving others.



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Sadly, she and I met because of the tragedy of children being shot in the street ... but this also made me realize something else very important about working together.

We need to take more time to celebrate community leaders like Mrs. Jones who are making a real difference ...

Not those who are trying to tear it apart and relish in the fear they create by headlines in the newspapers.

When it is hard to find the light in a bad situation, sometimes a spark is all you need to get the fire going again ... Mrs. Jones has been that spark in her community.

She had the chance to leave, but she chose not to.

Mrs. Jones stayed to fight the fight ... and has truly changed lives for the better.

Please join me in recognizing Mrs. Jones.

As a former sheriff, it is important to me that we also give special thanks to those who risk their lives to keep ours safe.

Our law enforcement and emergency personnel do a job that most people don't want to do, but others expect them to do it.

We must trust them, and stand up for these brave men and women.

I hope that this legislative session, serious time and consideration will be given to these proposals to strengthen our communities.

While reducing violent crime is our immediate goal, I strongly believe that at the end of the day, it is about better education and skills to get a quality job ... because that is going to be the long-term solution.

Last year, our workforce development efforts focused on new training opportunities for working adults.

However, in some of our most troubled communities, or any community in Missouri for that matter, our children are the true workforce of tomorrow.

The most important and impactful time of a child's development is the early years of his or her life ...

Missouri recently received a \$33.5 million dollar preschool development grant aimed at creating a more effective, high-quality early learning system.

With this funding, we have the opportunity to strengthen our early childhood offerings and better prepare Missouri children for success ... which is crucial to the development of a strong workforce.

In addition to early childhood education, we will also focus on increasing opportunities for high-demand training at the high school level.

We need to ensure our students understand the many opportunities out there, whether it be going into the workforce, the military, a community college, technical school, or a four-year degree.

Currently in Missouri approximately, 30 percent of our population has a four-year degree from a college or university, meaning that 70 percent does not.



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We need to move away from the stigma that not having a college degree is a failure, when in fact there are many other excellent education and job training opportunities.

This is why we are seeking \$750,000 dollars to certify approximately 12,000 new high school students as work-ready through the Work Keys program.

This is a major step that could open doors to students not sure if college is in their immediate plans, but still put them on a path to greater opportunities.

In addition, we are proposing greater access to virtual education for high school students, as well as home school students.

We will also be working to expand opportunities through Jobs for America's Graduates, a program that helps youth graduate from high school and transition to the workforce.

And, for our college-bound students, we have secured a total of \$5.3 million dollars to increase Bright Flight and A+ Scholarship funding.

We are also proposing another \$19 million dollars for the MoExcels Workforce Initiative.

And, we can do all of this while increasing school transportation funding ... and still fully funding our Foundation Formula.

This focus on training our future workforce has been a true collaborative effort, and I greatly appreciate the partnership we've had from the private sector and the education arena.

Many of these changes to our workforce system would not be possible without our teachers ... and that is why I also want to start discussing ways to improve teacher pay.

However, the solution cannot just be asking the state to write a bigger check.

We are going to ask school districts, school boards, and DESE to propose a better plan for our teachers.

Being an educator today is not an easy job.

By supporting them, we also support our children, their futures, and the future of our state.

Here with us today is Missouri Teacher of the Year - Misty Grandel - from Fordland R-III High School.

No person has a greater impact on our children's education than a teacher who helps them flourish and grow ... Ms. Grandel is a shining example of this.

Please join me in recognizing Missouri Teacher of the Year - Ms. Grandel.

And to all of Missouri's outstanding educators, thank you for what you do.

This next phase of our plan will help continue our momentum ... but we can't emphasize workforce development without infrastructure.



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That is a big reason why approximately \$5 billion dollars in new private investment has poured into our state ... why our unemployment remains at record lows ... why we are pulling ahead of our neighboring states ... and we must keep up the hard work.

We will continue to build on critical infrastructure ... and, we will once again propose setting aside \$4 million dollars in disaster recovery funds.

Unfortunately, the flooding we saw last year was some of the worst we have seen in decades and even historically ...

But I want to truly thank the work of Senator Hegeman, Representative Andrews, and other legislators for their leadership in their communities during these trying times.

Despite these challenges, we have still made some major accomplishments worth celebrating.

We have proven that we can get through tough times ... and together, we are creating a new horizon of opportunity for infrastructure in our state.

Some of the most exciting infrastructure investments we will see this year can be tied back to the bold bridge infrastructure plan that you as legislators passed.

More than 250 bridges around the state will be repaired or replaced.

These bridges are not only critically important to their local communities, but also to public safety.

For example, by combining our bridge proposal with federal funding secured by Congressman Graves, Missouri is now on track to significantly reduce the number of deficient bridges in the 6th Congressional District, which encompasses nearly half of our entire state ...

And that is a major milestone.

One of the benefits of the plan we laid out last year was not only the immediate impact, but also the additional resources it would free up for other critical projects.

An example of this is MoDOT's recent announcement of a huge investment to rebuild a substantial portion of I-270 throughout North County.

This renovation has been needed for a long time ... and because of our bold steps and MoDOT's innovation, we have made a real change to this system.

Another very successful part of our transportation plan last year was the cost-share program, and I am excited to announce that we will again be putting another \$50 million dollars toward the cost-share program this year.

And before I move on, there is one more very special project that I am so proud to announce, especially in front of Mayor Lucas and our Kansas City delegation ... and that is we will build the Buck O'Neil Bridge.

These investments are exciting to celebrate, and we have been working hard to make them a reality.

We have also been driving greater efficiency and more accountability for Missourians hard earned tax dollars, so that we can reap these returns without increasing taxes.



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By rolling up our sleeves and doing the hard work, we have generated impressive cost savings.

The single largest area we have been able to find savings is in the Medicaid system, which accounts for over \$10 billion dollars – over one-third – of our state budget.

Under the leadership of Director Todd Richardson, a new level of accountability and enforcement have been put back in place – both common sense things expected by the average Missourian.

The result has been a savings of \$84 million dollars, further protecting citizens who need the services most, and taxpayers who deserve their tax dollars be used wisely.

While some in the press are eager to criticize this improved efficiency – or outright misrepresent it – the truth is that this system has been broken for many years and unproductively serving every Missourian who is paying for it.

At the same time opponents have been criticizing our increased accountability, they have also been promoting expanding this system.

But, the reality is that expanding this system comes at the cost of other vital services such as education, workforce development, and improving our aging infrastructure.

So, make no mistake about it ... the vague proposal they are not explaining or purposely withholding is a massive tax increase that Missourians cannot afford.

The hard work we are doing to drive efficiency isn't just by supporting policy provisions.

It is fundamentally reforming state government and driving accountability across all systems.

This is a major shift from the same old style of government that is often supported, where small changes are made around the edges, but real changes are thought "too big" and too hard to do.

My administration has and will continue to do the hard work, and the benefit will be for Missouri taxpayers.

The progress we are making is real and exciting ... but, there is more we can do to improve government and promote our state.

We must have real tort reform.

And, another simple way we can improve government and promote Missouri is by offering license reciprocity to the spouses of the men and women who proudly serve our country in the United States military.

As a veteran myself, I am proud that Missouri is home to over 480,000 veterans, and I hope that we can bring more to our state.

Allowing license reciprocity would not only help us attract more military families, but also fill critical jobs in our economy.

And Senator Brown and Representative Lynch, I am counting on you to get that legislation on my desk, very soon.



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From the beginning, our state’s economy and future financial health have always been of utmost importance to our administration ... and it is our responsibility to pass this on to the next generation.

So, I have one last proposal I will outline today.

As mentioned before, my administration has been more serious than any other in our financial discipline. We have led by example by again leaving over \$100 million dollars on the bottom line.

However, we can do more ...

Which is why I am supporting that we put a cash operating expense fund in place to give our state greater flexibility and stronger finances than ever before.

Since the beginning of our administration, our State Treasurer, Budget Director, and my Chief of Staff have been discussing this opportunity ... and I am proud that we can finally make this vision a reality.

To initiate this fund, I am proposing setting aside \$100 million dollars this year ...

And, to ensure this savings remains stable, we will direct Wayfair collections into this fund until it establishes solvency.

And, we will use the remaining portion to pay off debt obligations, as well as provide another funding mechanism for infrastructure programs done on a cost-share basis.

This final allocation would both increase the long-term financial strength of our state, and create another consistent funding source to further update our aging infrastructure.

Our pro-growth policies and conservative budgeting are working ...

And together, we can set the stage for greatness for Missouri and our future generations.

It is no secret there are elections in the coming months. Everyone here is well aware of this.

But, I’m sure there are some of you here at the end of your term that feel a little differently about the coming months.

When returning home to the people you serve, at the forefront of your mind will be what you accomplished to help improve your communities.

If we thought more about what we accomplished at the end of our time, we would likely spend our days a little differently.

My guess is that we would spend less time fighting each other over the few differences we have and more time working on the things that we agree on.

We have all seen what the outcome of this behavior is when we watch what is going on in Washington, D.C.

Surely we can do better.

Surely as the Show Me State, where our namesake inherently promotes action and results over words, we have a higher sense of obligation to work together.



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Some may argue that all these victories are just coincidental ... but I firmly believe they are not.

I believe is it about a commitment to finding a solution while still standing up for your values.

For me, these are values like my faith ... my family ... and our nation's flag.

And, another value I will always stand up for is protecting those who cannot protect themselves. All life has value, including the unborn!

Perhaps it is my gray hair, but I am at the time in my career when what I leave behind and how I leave it is more important than impressing people and worrying about who I am not.

Make no mistake, in this arena you will be attacked.

You will have to endure reading nothing but speculation about your motives, your commitment, and your beliefs.

But, you also have to choose to stand against these attempts to divide one another, and instead be a leader.

As long as I am allowed to serve the people, I will work hard to make Missouri better and hand it off to whomever follows me in better shape than I received it.

So, my final call is to challenge each of you to know one another better.

This also means that we have to be willing to trust one another more.

And my hope in the near future is that all of us will be able to celebrate more successes with one another ... but the real benefits will be for the people of Missouri and our future generations.

It is an honor and privilege to be the 57th Governor of the State of Missouri.

God bless you, God bless the great State of Missouri, and God bless the United States of America.