

# Summaries of Governors' 2015 State of the State Addresses

February 18, 2015

## Overview

As of February 18th, governors in 41 states have given a State of the State address. Many of the governors began their speeches with similar messages highlighting advancements their state has made since the end of the economic downturn. This progress includes private sector job growth, lower unemployment, tax cuts, continued balanced budgets, higher rainy day fund levels, addressing long-term debt and liabilities such as pensions, and government reforms. However, some governors also discussed the fiscal challenges their state faces caused by such factors as the decline in the price of oil, lower than anticipated revenue growth, overreliance on the federal government, and continued pressures from long-term obligations.

A common theme in many of the governors' State of the State addresses was the need to create jobs, grow the economy, and provide an opportunity for all to succeed. A number of governors suggested that the state needed to prioritize transportation, education, and workforce training in order to achieve these goals. Numerous speeches discussed the poor state of infrastructure including crumbling roads and deficient bridges with several governors noting that increased infrastructure investments were needed in order to attract businesses. Governors also discussed how current transportation funding structures have not kept up with demands, and suggested higher gas taxes, increased vehicle licenses and fees, or an examination of other transportation funding alternatives in order to increase revenue. In addition to linking transportation to economic development, governors also highlighted the link between education and economic growth, with several noting that there needs to be greater collaboration between workforce training programs

and education at all levels. Specifically, governors called for the creation of new career and vocational training programs, as well as increased scholarships and funding for community colleges. Other education policies proposed by governors included a re-examination of K-12 funding systems, increased funding for pre-K and full day kindergarten, greater school choice, tuition freezes, and linking education funding to performance.

Governors also touched on many other areas in their State of the State addresses including corrections, mental health and addiction services, tax reform, and government operations. Regarding corrections, a number of governors discussed the need for criminal justice reforms with a specific focus on juvenile justice. Several governors also talked about the need to increase funding for mental health services and treatment options for people with addictions to drugs such as heroin, opiates, and over-the-counter medicines. Tax reform was once again a major focus in many governors' speeches with many calling for changes such as reduced income tax rates, property tax relief, cutting corporate taxes, and sales tax reforms. Some governors also stated that additional revenue would be needed in order to prioritize transportation and education. Finally, several governors noted the need to reexamine various state operations with an emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness in order to maintain fiscal discipline moving forward.

Below are state-by-state summaries of State of the State addresses with links to the speeches. Additionally, [click here](#) to access governors' proposed budgets for fiscal 2016.

If you would like additional information, please contact Brian Sigriz at 202-624-8439.

[Alaska's](#) governor spoke about the fiscal challenges the state is currently facing due to the decline of oil prices and said that while the current deficit is unsustainable, Alaska will use it as an opportunity to make impactful and constructive changes. The governor also said that the state will continue to prioritize education, although not at the funding levels of before, and called for an expansion of Medicaid.

[Arizona's](#) governor said that now is the time to reexamine state spending, taxes, public education, and the role of government in general; additionally he said that he would cut spending where possible, implement a hiring freeze, and prioritize public safety, justice, classrooms, and aid to the needy. The governor also said he will continue Arizona's tax reforms and will conduct a review of all business regulations.

[California's](#) governor highlighted recent improvements the state has made including a budget that is now balanced, a new constitutionally protected rainy day fund, the repayment of borrowed funds, new investments in water projects, extending healthcare, and reforms in education and corrections; the governor stated that the next step will be making sure the changes work and endure. Additionally, the governor said that the state must continue to focus on infrastructure demands, environmental issues, and long-term liabilities.

[Colorado's](#) governor talked about the current economic strength of the state and said they will remain focused on economic and workforce development; the governor also talked about the need to continue to invest in education at all levels. Furthermore, the governor said that while the state has made progress in healthcare, more must continue to be done in areas like mental health, and the state also needs to make additional investments in infrastructure.

[Connecticut's](#) governor discussed accomplishments over the past four years including adding money to the rainy day fund, cutting long-term debt, reducing the number of uninsured citizens, improving education, raising the minimum wage, and passing sick leave. Looking forward, the governor said the state must make added infrastructure investments to attract businesses and improve the quality of life.

[Delaware's](#) governor noted recent improvements in the state including strong job growth and budget advancements. The governor also discussed his [agenda](#) for 2015 including announcing the Delaware Promise, which would strive for 65 percent of the state workforce to have an advanced degree by 2025 and everyone to have at least a high school diploma, strengthening schools, increasing job opportunities for people with disabilities, spurring business development, investing in infrastructure, treating addictions, and reforming the criminal justice system.

[Georgia's](#) governor spoke about continued improvements in the state including the growing size of the rainy day fund, revenues being above projections, and private sector job growth. The governor also discussed the need to improve the education system, including increasing graduation rates, helping troubled school districts, examining K-12 funding, and creating an education reform commission. Additionally, the governor said that the state needs to continue to make criminal justice reforms and to invest more in infrastructure.

[Hawaii's](#) governor focused on building a strong foundation for the state, and increasing efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity. Specifically, the governor discussed the need to focus on long-term financing, direct resources on investments that grow the economy and improve the social safety net, help provide affordable homes, improve the health exchange, invest in public hospitals, support businesses, and transform the education system to help students succeed.

[Idaho's](#) governor laid out his priorities for fiscal 2016 during his [State of the State](#) and budget address, including increased funding for K-12 for such items as teacher salaries and restored funding to districts. Other priorities he cited included making sustainable investments in higher education, encouraging collaboration on workforce development, making additional infrastructure investments, reducing income tax rates, and asking the legislature to hold hearings on the findings of his Medicaid redesign workgroup.

[Illinois'](#) governor discussed ways to make the state more competitive including an economic growth and jobs package, raising the minimum wage, property tax relief, giving governments the ability to change labor agreements, reducing unfunded mandates, and reforming the state's tax code. The governor also talked about making changes to employee compensation, improving the state's prison system, and increasing educational opportunities and funding.

[Indiana's](#) governor highlighted the strong position of the state mentioning that the state has balanced budgets, funded priorities, maintained strong reserves, and enacted tax cuts. The governor also talked about his priorities including simplifying the tax code, investing more in education, expanding school choice, increasing the number of pre-K scholarships, more performance bonuses for schools, and providing greater career and vocational opportunities.

[Iowa's](#) governor began by highlighting progress the state has made by working together including education reform, tax cuts, private sector job growth, and lower unemployment. The governor discussed his upcoming policy priorities including increased funding for roads and bridges, expanding broadband internet, revitalized parks, increased government transparency, reducing school bullying, greater alignment between education and workforce demands, freezing college tuition, and the creation of a student debt reorganization tax credit.

[Kansas'](#) governor discussed changes the state has implemented over the past four years including reforming state government, privatizing some agencies, reducing the size of the state workforce, lower spending growth levels, strengthening the state's public pension system, overhauling economic development and continuing support of core government functions. The governor also acknowledged recent budgetary challenges and said that he will present a two-year balanced budget that will continue to push towards the elimination of personal income taxes; additionally, the governor called for a new school finance formula.

[Kentucky's](#) governor began his final State of the Commonwealth speech by highlighting improvements the state has made the past seven years including education and health reforms, workforce training and economic improvements. The [governor](#) also laid out several proposals revolving around early childhood education reform, increased public-private partnerships, allowing local governments to vote on a local sales tax for specific infrastructure projects, increased assistance in Appalachia, and changes to Master Settlement Agreement funds.

[Maine's](#) governor called for comprehensive tax reform revolving around the reduction and eventual elimination of personal income taxes, sales tax reform, cutting corporate taxes, eliminating the alternative minimum tax, expanding a property tax fairness credit, and changes to local revenue sharing. The governor also called for welfare reform, increased funding for nursing homes, additional funding for drug enforcement, and lowering energy costs.

[Maryland's](#) governor talked about the challenges the state faces and said he will focus on jobs, struggling families, and restoring the economy. Specifically, the governor discussed proposals to make Maryland more competitive, make state government more efficient and responsive, repealing the rain tax, tax relief for retirees, tax relief for small businesses, repealing automatic gas tax increases, improving transportation and education, protecting the environment, and tackling the state's heroin epidemic.

[Michigan's](#) governor focused on the need to improve infrastructure in the state and noted that roads are crumbling and bridges are deficient; the governor said that he supports the bipartisan tax plan to improve roads and bridges. The [governor](#) also discussed that he wants to make sure that all residents have an opportunity to succeed and highlighted proposals to improve education with a focus on skilled trade, create more jobs, combat prescription drug abuse, establish a new energy policy, and make government more efficient, effective, and accountable.

[Mississippi's](#) governor highlighted recent economic improvements the state has made and noted that the state's revenue continues to grow, its rainy day fund is filled to its statutory limit, and the state has an AA credit rating. Additionally the governor announced the creation of a new workforce development fund, discussed the creation of a scholarship for students in career tech programs, called for increased K-12 funding, proposed a tax cut for working families, and advocated for state contract reforms.

[Missouri's](#) governor talked about the need for continued fiscal discipline and strategic investments in priorities that will create jobs and grow the economy, including increased funding for public education at all levels. Additionally, the governor called for additional preschool investments, strengthening and reforming Medicaid, examining new revenue options for transportation, increased cybersecurity efforts, and the construction of a new veterans' home.

[Montana's](#) governor discussed recent successes in the state including strong job growth, public schools that are helping students succeed, responsible state fiscal management and resource development. Moving forward, the [governor](#) said that he wants to maintain the state's record of fiscal discipline, invest in infrastructure, workforce, and youth, and take on challenges head on. Specifically, the governor called for maintaining a strong rainy day fund, and making investments in job creation, education, and healthcare.

[Nebraska's](#) governor stated that he wants to slow the growth of spending, provide for property tax relief, make improvements in critical areas like corrections and HHS, and fund the essential services of state government. The governor said that his four priorities are strengthening the economy and creating jobs, reducing taxes, easing regulatory burdens, and expanding educational opportunities; the governor noted that the one consistent message he has heard is that property taxes are too high.

[Nevada's](#) governor spoke about progress the state has made including job growth and reducing the number of uninsured and then discussed his plan to modernize Nevada with a focus on the youth. Specifically, the governor called for a comprehensive reform of the education system with \$882 million in new spending including changes in the finance formula, an expansion of full day kindergarten, money for literacy efforts, increased technology, and funds for college preparedness and career training. The governor also called for changes in the state's revenue structure to help pay for education investments including changes in the business license fee.



[New Hampshire's](#) governor said in her address that her priorities include encouraging innovation, expanding opportunities, supporting job-creating businesses and keeping more young people in the state. Additionally, the [governor](#) proposed increased support for the university system and community colleges, funding for an assessment for a commuter rail from Boston to Nashua and Manchester, the reauthorization of the bipartisan health care expansion plan, necessary funds for mental health treatments, the reorganization of certain state functions, increasing the cigarette tax, and raising vehicle registration fees for the highway fund.

[New Jersey's](#) governor began by discussing progress in the state including private sector job growth, holding the line on government spending and government employment, extending a cap on property tax growth, and criminal justice reform. The governor then said that he will continue to balance budgets, will veto any income tax increases, that more school reform is needed, will propose reforms to drug addiction services, and that the state must not ignore its pension problems.

[New Mexico's](#) governor said that the focus this session must be on the children and how to improve their safety and well-being today as well as ensure they have a future without limits; the governor said that the state needs to continue to improve its schools and called for raises for teachers, a new teacher mentorship program, and more funding for pre-K. Additionally, the governor stated that she is proposing tax relief for small businesses, more funds for economic development, and allocating infrastructure money for major highway projects.

[New York's](#) governor discussed his opportunity agenda for the current year with a focus on economic opportunity, education, public safety, government reform and fairness for all. Specifically, the governor wants to cut small business taxes, provide property tax relief, invest in infrastructure, transform failing schools, strengthen teacher evaluations, expand charter schools, invest in pre-K, create an emergency preparedness college, and reform juvenile justice laws.

[North Carolina's](#) governor outlined his priorities for 2015 including jobs, education, transportation, and healthcare. The [governor](#) proposed various job recruitment proposals, a historic preservation tax credit, raising teacher pay, eliminating some school testing, expanding Wi-Fi in schools, focusing on transportation projects that connect the state, a \$1.2 billion transportation bond proposal, renovating aging buildings, passing Medicaid reform to put patients first and control costs, increasing efficiency and improving government operations, and creating a new department for military and veterans affairs.

[North Dakota's](#) governor stated that because of the state's strong economy and sound fiscal management, it is able to provide additional tax relief as well as investments in statewide priorities including infrastructure, education, and meeting the challenges of growth. Specifically, the [governor](#) discussed continued investments in the oil production region, the need for more affordable housing, providing additional funding for schools with rapid growth, property tax reform, and making college more affordable. The governor also noted that the state puts about 96 percent of oil and gas revenue into special reserve funds.

[Oklahoma's](#) governor focused on the need to improve the budgeting process to ensure that the state can adequately fund priorities such as education, public safety, and healthcare; specifically, the governor proposed adopting performance budgeting, evaluating every tax credit and economic incentive, and redirecting some agency revolving funds to the general revenue fund. The [governor](#) also called for increased education funding, a new workforce training program, criminal justice reforms, and several programs to improve health outcomes.

[Oregon's](#) governor noted that the state is doing well in its job growth and the increases in its state GDP but said that the state needs to ensure that all residents can meet their basic needs. The governor said that elected officials should strive to provide an equal opportunity for all individuals to reach their full potential, have their hard work rewarded with a better life, and to leave their children better off than they were economically and environmentally.

[South Carolina's](#) governor proposed a plan that would cut all income taxes by 30 percent over the next 10 years, restructure the transportation department to refocus on maintaining the roads the state currently has, and add 10 cents to the state's gas tax over the next three years. She also discussed investing more in workforce training and technology, as well as plans to provide new opportunities for both teachers and students.

[South Dakota's](#) governor focused on infrastructure stating that road and bridge conditions are poor and the current funding method has not kept up with needs; the governor proposed a plan that increases the vehicle excise tax, motor fuel tax, and vehicle registration fees. The governor also praised past criminal justice reforms and called for additional reforms to juvenile justice, highlighted a new scholarship program and workforce training efforts, and reported on his better government initiatives.

[Tennessee's](#) governor noted several of the state's recent accomplishments including strong private sector job growth, academic achievement gains, and low tax rates and debt per capita. The [governor](#) also discussed the importance of education and proposed increased K-12 funds for teacher raises and fully funding the basic education program, as well as additional funds for higher education capital projects, need-based scholarships, and the Complete College Act formula. Additionally, the governor highlighted several workforce training initiatives, increased salaries for state employees tied to performance, and additional dollars for the rainy day fund.

[Texas'](#) governor began by highlighting the strong state of the Texas economy including leading the nation in job growth and continued increases in sales tax revenue. The governor also announced his five emergency items including early education, higher education research initiatives, transportation funding, border security funding, and ethics reform. The governor said that his budget provides additional funding for schools with high quality pre-K programs, contains a half billion dollars for higher education research, and adds \$4 billion a year for roads. Finally, the governor called for a reduction in the business franchise tax and property taxes.

[Utah's](#) governor called for greater investment in education and infrastructure to help pave the way for the next generation. Specifically, the governor proposed increased K-12 funding while establishing benchmarks, called for continuing the principle of local control of schools, and pointed to his Healthy Utah plan as a responsible healthcare solution that is the best available option. He also said that the time is now to discuss a long-term transportation funding solution, and stated that the legislature should pass meaningful criminal justice reform.

[Vermont's](#) governor said his [agenda](#) will focus on expanding our economy, containing health care costs, reducing education spending while ensuring quality education, expanding the clean energy sector, protecting lakes and waterways, building on the progress made battling opiate addiction, protecting the state's most vulnerable children, and developing a balanced budget that puts the state on a more sustainable long-term fiscal footing. The [governor](#) said all of the [proposals](#) are designed to help grow jobs and economic opportunity.

[Virginia's](#) governor discussed progress over the past year including balancing the budget responsibly, reforming the standards of learning, tackling challenges in the health care system, transportation planning changes, and reforming workforce development. Going forward, the governor wants to make changes to economic development, become less reliant on federal spending, further improve workforce development, increase school support, make infrastructure improvements, and continue to implement his healthcare plan.

[Washington's](#) governor spoke about building an economy that works for everyone, and focused on expanding educational opportunities, launching a transportation construction program, and fighting carbon pollution. Specifically, the governor discussed expanding early education, reducing class sizes, the need for the legislature to take action on his transportation plan, eliminating tax loopholes, instituting a new capital gains tax, fully funding a working families tax rebate, and doing a better job on foster care, mental health, and protecting vulnerable children.

[West Virginia's](#) governor said the state has made tremendous progress including improving the business climate, launching reforms to the education system, addressing long-term liabilities, and cutting taxes for working families and small businesses. Looking forward, the governor said the state must increase infrastructure investments, promote economic development policies, support students at all levels, develop workforce development policies for both current and future workers, continue to take steps to reduce prison overcrowding and drug abuse, and implement juvenile justice reforms.

[Wisconsin's](#) governor said that the state of the state is strong and that more people are working, the state's financial condition has improved, taxes have been reduced, and government is more effective, efficient, and accountable. The governor said that his focus includes a continued emphasis on worker training, ensuring a quality education for all, encouraging school choice, consolidating state agencies, and opposing new federal energy regulations.

[Wyoming's](#) governor discussed progress the state has made over the past four years including in economic growth, diversification, expanding broadband, improving infrastructure, providing additional aid to local governments, making state government more effective and efficient, and increasing education accountability. The governor said that his priorities continue to be improving education at every level, opposing federal actions that harm the state as well as coal initiatives, advancing energy strategies, increasing trade, forest health, implementing a water strategy, and Medicaid expansion.