

GOVERNOR JOSH SHAPIRO – INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Tuesday, January 17, 2023

I am humbled to stand before you today as Pennsylvania's 48th Governor.

Along the winding road that led to this moment, I've been grounded in my faith and family.

And so I begin by saying to my high school sweetheart and Pennsylvania's First Lady – I love you, babe.

Lori and I are blessed with four amazing children – Sophia, Jonah, Max and Reuben.

They've sacrificed so much so we could serve and I am so grateful to each of them. We will work as hard for your children as we do ours.

I appreciate our history making Chief Justice, Debra Todd, for doing me the honor of administering the oath of office.

May wisdom and the pursuit of justice continue to guide you and your fellow Justices of the Supreme Court, several of whom are with us today.

I'm pleased to be joined by the legislative leaders and legislators of both parties – another history maker, President Pro Tem Ward, Speaker Rozzi, Leader Pittman, Leader Costa, Leader McClinton and Leader Cutler – I look forward to making progress together.

And I'm pleased to be joined by Acting Attorney General Henry, Treasurer Garrity, and Auditor General DeFoor.

I am grateful to have members of our congressional delegation here in Harrisburg, led by Senator Fetterman and Senator Casey.

We say a special prayer today for our senior senator for a full and speedy recovery. There is no doubt that you'll be stronger than ever and continue to do good for the people of Pennsylvania for many years to come.

To our history making Lieutenant Governor, Austin Davis, and his wife, Blayre, thank you for joining Lori and me on this journey, for your partnership and for your commitment to service.

I am particularly touched that several of our former Governors are with us today.

It's an honor to have Governor Ridge, Governor Schweiker and Governor Corbett here – and Governor Rendell watching from home.

Your presence formally celebrates the peaceful transfer of power. It also reminds us that while I am now entrusted with this awesome responsibility – it is just for a moment in the long history of our Commonwealth.

I'll now do my part to build on your work and to leave this place better off – the way that each of you did before me.

And, of course, I want to recognize my dear friends, Governor Tom Wolf and First Lady Frances Wolf.

Lori and I are so grateful for your friendship over nearly two decades and your guidance through this transition.

Governor Wolf has led our Commonwealth and our residents through some of the most challenging times in our history – and he has done so with integrity, acumen, and an unwavering commitment to service.

Governor Wolf expanded health care cover to nearly 1 million Pennsylvanians, invested record amounts in our public schools, and modernized state government.

Thanks to his leadership we now find ourselves in the strongest financial shape in the history of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, allowing us to make critical investments for tomorrow.

Governor, you have exemplified what I spoke of a moment ago. You inherited the work of those who came before you, you served with honor, and you are leaving us in a better place than when you started.

Thank you.

I set out to build a Cabinet and senior team that looks like Pennsylvania, and reflects the people and the communities that I just took an oath to serve and protect.

Led by our Chief of Staff, Dana Fritz, sitting behind me here today, is the most well-qualified and diverse set of public servants in our history.

I look forward to doing this work, with them, for you.

But most of all, I want to thank you, the good people of Pennsylvania.

You inspired me. You taught me important lessons.

You invited me into your homes, your union halls, your places of worship and your community centers.

We walked our main streets together and I listened to you. I heard your stories.

And those stories fuel my drive to serve.

Your struggles give me purpose. Your smiles and your tears have filled my heart.

Your problems have become my priorities. Your causes, my concerns.

And together we've taken on the powerful and empowered the people.

People like Alexis, who was ripped off by a predatory student lender and whose story inspired a fight to take on that powerful entity and bring real relief to thousands of Pennsylvanians.

Like Tim, who did backbreaking work on our roadways for decades, just to have company executives steal his hard-earned benefits but whose courage led to accountability and change.

Like the families I've met who lost loved ones to the opioid crisis.

They've shared their grief with me, but also their resolve to keep up the fight to protect others from the dangers of addiction made worse by corporate greed.

And like the thousands of brave survivors I've met, who come no matter where I am, and in hushed tones tell me their stories of abuse so that the institutions who cover it up can be held accountable.

Your stories and your courage have stayed with me. And, they will motivate me each and every day as your Governor.

Because ultimately, in a functioning democracy, it's your voices that should be heard in the halls of government.

The voices of people like Danielle, who has bravely told us her own story about her decision to have an abortion to save her life and who I'm honored to have on this stage with me today.

The voice of the grandma in Lawrence County who I met over 15 months ago in the first week of our campaign. She came up to me, grabbed me by lapels, pulled me close, and in that stern voice that only comes from a grandma, looked me in the eye and said do not let us go back to what it was like before Roe.

And thanks to so many of you, we won't.

The small business owners like Jarrod Bets who owns a community barber shop in Lancaster and is with us on stage today.

Like so many others, he told me about his dream and built it and now just needs a level playing field to thrive.

I remember the voices of the grieving moms who have lost their children to gun violence.

Your children mattered and so do you. Thank you for being on the stage with me today.

I remember the students, brave enough to speak openly with me about their mental health struggles. They're the strong ones and it's up to us to help them.

The family farmer looking to leave his land to his daughter, but lacking the capital to make the investments to carry on the family legacy long enough to see her take over.

And the voices of those who put on the uniform at home and abroad to keep us safe and those they leave behind in service to all of us.

We are joined today by Stephanie Mack and Brittany Sisca, the wives of Trooper Martin Mack and Trooper Brandon Sisca who were killed in the line of duty a few months ago.

Thank you for being with us today. We continue to honor and respect your husbands. May their memories be a blessing.

You, the good people of Pennsylvania, will always be my north star.

I'm mindful of the fact that you've shared those stories with me because you believe I can make a difference for you.

And that is humbling – humbling that you’ve entrusted me with such a great responsibility.

Not just the honor to serve as your Governor, but the responsibility to stand up for what’s right, to bring people together and to get things done for you.

That is my covenant with you – the people.

That is our deal.

You spoke up loud and clear and gave me direction with your voice and with your vote – a record number of votes in fact.

People from all different walks of life – from rural, urban and suburban communities united to tell me what you think.

You showed the underlying goodness within our Commonwealth – that you want a society that creates opportunity for all people.

From God’s Country to Gettysburg, I heard you when you said you want good schools for our kids, safe communities, and an economy that gives people a shot and lifts them up.

You also sent a clear message – Democrats, Republicans and Independents – when you came together to resoundingly reject extremism.

Together, hope defeated fear.

Unity triumphed over division.

We proved that we value our freedoms, and we’re willing to do the hard work necessary to protect our fundamental rights.

And to those who didn’t cast their vote for me, I heard you too. And I will do my best every day to be a Governor for all Pennsylvanians.

Now is the time to join together behind the unifying strength of three simple truths that have sustained our nation over the past two-and-a-half centuries – that above all else, beyond any momentary political differences – we value our freedom, we cherish our democracy, and we love this country.

Our democracy is indeed now stronger because that historic coalition came together and fought for it, voted for it. But our democracy is not a given.

As our own Pennsylvania history shows, our democracy is a constant work in progress.

Pennsylvania's first Constitution in 1776 was regarded as the most democratic of its time, but it still took another 150 years for women to gain the right to vote.

Pennsylvania was the first state to pass a law abolishing slavery just four years later in 1780 – but it took until 1847 for total abolition.

We worked at it. Together. Because we value our freedom and we, as a people, are committed to progress.

Consider this – our Commonwealth was founded on the promise of religious tolerance.

Pennsylvania, a place where Penn invited all to come and live and worship in peace and security.

And now, in this place of tolerance, I stand before you, a proud American of Jewish faith who just took the oath of office to be the 48th Governor of this great Commonwealth on a bible from the Tree of Life synagogue, the scene just four years ago of the deadliest act of antisemitism in our nation's history.

Pennsylvanians can indeed find light in the midst of darkness and drown out the voices of hate and bigotry.

You see, in every chapter of this Pennsylvania story, we got better. We got stronger. We got more tolerant.

Our story is one of progress and prosperity, and today we come together under the banner of this new Administration to write our next chapter with a keen understanding of our history and the voices that will guide our future.

It will require all of us to build on Penn's promise.

My own faith teaches me that no one is required to complete the task, but neither are we free to refrain from it.

In this Capitol and throughout our Commonwealth, we have a unique responsibility to keep doing the hard and necessary work to strengthen the democracy that was born here 246 years ago.

Each of us can make a contribution. And, in many different ways, we've shown that when it is all on the line, Pennsylvanians step up, and do their part.

We rallied. Like Gen-Z who continue to make progress on climate change and gun violence and reproductive rights.

Like the two women in Montgomery County who bravely walked into a county courthouse and asked for a marriage license before it was legal and sparked a movement.

Like those who marched with Dr. King at Girard College during the Civil Rights movement to demand righteous change.

Like the Pennsylvania service member who carried with him one of the other bible's I was sworn in on, when he fought to save the world from fascism and defeat the Nazis in World War II, and earned himself a Purple Heart in the process.

They stepped up. The Pennsylvania way.

We are all stewards of our democracy, and I'm mindful that as we celebrate the peaceful transition of power, we are proving once again that our democracy endures and the collective work to strengthen it continues.

This work is more important now than ever, because over the last several years, we have been reminded of the fragility of our democracy. How we have to keep working at it, keep fighting to protect it.

Here in Pennsylvania, we didn't allow the extremists who peddle lies drown out the truth. We showed that our system works and that our elections are free and fair, safe and secure.

We assume this obligation to defend democracy not merely to honor the work of our ancestors but rather to build on a foundation so we can make progress for our children.

Only by setting the table of opportunity and inviting all to sit and partake, can we advance the cause of *real freedom*.

The kind of real freedom that comes when we devote real resources to that young child's public school to make sure she has a shot.

The kind of real freedom that comes when we invest in public safety to make sure she lives past her 18th birthday.

The kind of real freedom that comes when we create pathways to new opportunities by investing in vo-tech and job training programs like the ones that prepared IATSE members to construct this very stage and trained apprentice cabinet makers from the Carpenters Union to craft this podium I now speak from.

The kind of real freedom that comes when you live in a Commonwealth that respects you for who you are – no matter what you look like, where you come from, who you love or who you pray to.

Real freedom that makes government a productive force for good. That allows us to tackle big challenges again and dream of brighter, more prosperous tomorrows.

Where our air is clean, our water pure and our communities healthier and our economy stronger.

Where poverty doesn't get ignored and prosperity isn't limited to certain zip codes.

Where political differences cause debate, but do not give rise to demagogues.

The real freedom that leaves its citizens with the confidence of knowing that the doors of opportunity will swing open for them if they push through.

Where everyone gets a shot and no one is left behind.

That is real freedom. That is our challenge. That is our calling. And, that is the next chapter in our Pennsylvania story that we start writing today – together.

I honor the work of those who came before me, I affirm my pact with the people to listen and be your voice, and I accept the responsibility you've bestowed upon me to be the next link in the chain of progress – with humility.

And so, with my faith firmly rooted in *we the people* of Pennsylvania, with my heart open to others and my eyes fixed ahead, I am prepared to do my part to move our Commonwealth forward.

Thank you for this honor. May god bless you and watch over the women and men of the Pennsylvania National Guard.

Thank you.

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