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# STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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### GOVERNOR DAVID M. BEASLEY

### State of the State Address

### January 21, 1998

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## 1998 State of the State Address

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, ladies and gentlemen of the 112th General Assembly, Constitutional Officers, Cabinet appointees, and my fellow South Carolinians.

It is my honor and privilege to report to you for the fourth time on the state of our state.

First, I'd like to recognize two people who have meant much to me and to South Carolina.

One is my wife, Mary Wood. She has been a tireless advocate for children, for the poor and needy, for the health of women all across this state. All the while, she has been the most loving wife and mother anyone could ask for.

Next, I would like to recognize a man who's devoted over 45 years of his life to this state's progress. We retire great leaders every year, but we will especially miss my good friend and yours, Comptroller General Earle Morris.

Even as we bid farewell to old friends, we can't help but be intrigued by the prospects for our future.

In 1998, we stand on the threshold of a great transition. And South Carolina will soon claim her rightful place on the global stage.

Thankfully, brave men and women of this state are standing up for us all around the world - defending the future we will inherit.

Even as we speak, the United States Air Force's 20th Fighter Wing from Shaw Air Force Base is patrolling the no-fly zone over Iraq.

And last spring, South Carolina had more National Guardsmen deployed in worldwide peacekeeping missions than any other state in the nation.

In the deserts of Saudi, the hills of Bosnia and all over the globe, South Carolinians are protecting our world from tyranny.

Please join me in recognizing all our airmen, guardsmen, reservists and their families for their service and sacrifice.

These men and women protect our most precious gift: freedom. And as we look forward to a new century, what a blessing it is to be free to make South Carolina everything we want her to be.

I believe we all want her to be a place where every citizen has the opportunity for a good education and a good job. We want a South Carolina where every child is loved and nurtured. We want safe neighborhoods, a clean environment, responsible government and united families.

Our hopes for tomorrow aren't much different from our forefathers.' But in this age of wealth and progress, unimagined by our ancestors, we must renew our energies and clarify our vision.

One hundred years ago, on the cusp of a new century – the American Century – a great leader defined the challenge of the new era.

“Our country calls not for a life of ease,” he said, “but for the life of strenuous endeavor. The next century looms before us big with the fate of many nations.” So said Theodore Roosevelt, and so must we all say as the year 2000 approaches.

“Strenuous endeavor” is our mandate – as elected officials, as South Carolinians, and as Americans.

It was also the mandate of our forefathers, who poured the very sweat of their brows into tending this soil.

Now the same majestic land that our forefathers discovered, the land God blessed us with at creation, will be preserved in all its glory.

Working with private conservation groups, the state has bought over 140,000 acres of the most beautiful land within our borders, from the mountains to the sea – acreage that will be protected forever.

I’d like to show you some images from three of these crown jewels...all saved by our visionary commitment.

This, my friends, is the legacy we will leave our grandchildren.

Nowhere on earth does a morning break with more spectacular beauty than in the highlands of the Jocassee Gorges – 33,000 acres of breathtaking wilderness in the Carolina Blue Ridge.

This is South Carolina’s Eden – a treasure trove of waterfalls and trails, abundant forests and skies that our children will explore for generations.

All this pristine beauty is just down the road from one of the fastest-growing areas of our state. And its protection is one of the Southeast’s most significant conservation projects of this century.

Traveling to the heart of our state, this is Congaree Creek.

The shores of this riverbed are rich with history, dating back thousands of years to the first South Carolinians who made a home on this land.

The Congaree banks will one day be alive again with exploration of our ancient past. Yet the wilderness of these swamps and wetlands running through our state’s capital will remain unspoiled.

Our journey ends on Sandy Island, a remote paradise just across the Intracoastal Waterway. This is the South Carolina of novels and poetry, with its canopy of moss, its rich kingdom of wildlife and the tidal marshes few hands have touched.

Sandy Island is the first island ecosystem in the Southeast preserved in its entirety as mitigation.

This is your land, South Carolina. This is your heritage. And this is your future.

Ladies and gentlemen, you have just seen magnificent proof that we will protect the beauty that helped make us what we are, and we will do it without sacrificing all we're yet to be.

The bedrock of our economy was forged by the good, God-fearing farmers of this land. From the seeds these faithful stewards planted, we have grown into one of the fastest-growing, most pro-business states on the map.

You see the evidence of that growth in every "Help Wanted" sign, in the downtown shops getting fresh coats of paint, in the bulldozers moving dirt for yet another multi-million dollar project.

Ours is a state reborn, industrialized and modern – a state that captains of industry call one of the best places in the world to do business.

But let's not forget how far we've come. When we first came together, some of our communities were facing severe hardships. Knocking at our door were base closures, Savannah River Site lay-offs, mill closings.

Yet with strenuous endeavor and God's good grace, there's never been a more exciting time to be a South Carolinian.

Our economy is going gangbusters. These three years, we've doubled the accomplishments of the last three. We've recruited a grand total of \$16 billion in investments and 80,000 new jobs.

Just last year, more companies invested than ever before. We attracted the most international businesses, the most new investment and the most expansions of existing industry.

But the rubber meets the road when you talk jobs. Since 1995, job creation has risen 75 percent, and we created more jobs last year than ever before, paying an average of over \$30,000 a year.

The results? Unemployment is at its lowest point in nearly three decades. Our income is among the fastest-growing in the nation. And consumer confidence is the highest on record.

All these victories can be traced back to the very qualities that make us South Carolinians: stubborn determination and fierce integrity.

So when communities stared defeat in the eye, they never blinked.

Down-sizing could have turned Aiken into a ghost town. Instead, Aiken led the state in capital investment, and earned the title of All-American City.

In the Lowcountry, many feared the worst after the naval base closed. But these three years, the Tri-County area has averaged more than a billion dollars each year. That's five times the annual average for the decade before we started working together.

That's what happens when Democrats and Republicans work together to put the interests of the people above the interests of partisan politics.

This General Assembly has promoted triumphs like these with a single-minded purpose to create wealth through the private sector by getting off the backs of business, cutting taxes and reducing regulations.

We set the wheels in motion with pro-business policies, like the Rural Development Act. Now, global powerhouses like Honda and Bridgestone/Firestone light up the sky in every corner of this state.

We created a way to fund our most important road and bridge projects, through the State Infrastructure Bank. Now, decades of wrangling and debate will end in Myrtle Beach, and the paving of the Conway Bypass will finally begin.

Of course, we're still getting shortchanged by the federal gas tax that's sending about 30 cents of every dollar we pay at the pump to other states.

That amounts to about \$100 million a year of our money. Many of us have been working with Congress on a fairer way to distribute those funds.

Well, I'll tell you, we are going to keep fighting Washington until the taxpayers of this state finally get what they pay for.

Keeping our highways in good shape for travelers and commerce is critical if we're going to keep growing our multi-billion dollar tourism industry.

Improved roads will carry those tourists safely to the beach, but once they're there, they need to know our waters are safe, too. That's why I'm asking you to set aside \$2 million to test our coastal waters, so we can give every one of our visitors the absolute assurance that our coasts are clean, safe and ready for business.

Whether we're attracting tourists to the coast or renewing the small town square, the fact is that we're growing the economy like never before.

And cutting back heavy taxation has given South Carolina the freedom to grow. I applaud you, members of the General Assembly, for letting families decide how to spend their own money. Because you understand full well: this money isn't ours to spend. It's the taxpayers'.

If you adopt my budget proposal this session, you will have returned to the taxpayers these four years more than one billion dollars.

That's a billion dollars less in government and a billion dollars more for families.

As you recall, we also made a commitment last year to our senior citizens. Tonight, I ask you to build on what we started by raising the exemption for seniors even higher.

Of course, there's another tax that's heavy on everyone's minds, one that's among the highest in the nation, and one that must be dealt with responsibly this session. And that's the tax on cars and trucks.

This tax is the responsibility of local government. Local governments collect more than three billion dollars a year, and many are running surpluses and growing faster than state government.

So let's form a partnership with local governments so they can experience what you know: that tax cuts work.

I am proposing tonight that we dedicate 20 percent of our state's revenue growth until we eliminate the tax on cars and trucks. State government will pick up 75 percent of the total tab. Local governments will pick up 25 percent. That's a minuscule one-half of one percent of what local government now collects.

My friends, local governments will be able to help cut this tax by using just 10 percent of their growth each year. I don't think that's too much to ask. Schools won't get cut, and no county in the state should have to make a single cut in any necessary service. In fact, counties will benefit, because people will spend that money in the local economy, bringing even more growth to our state.

As some of you have already noted, we need to freeze the tax at its current levels. To get that freeze, we have to go to the people with a constitutional amendment, one that should bind the hands of state and local government on this tax.

Whatever the formula, we must set a goal this session: ~~taxes~~ on cars and trucks are to be declared dead, buried and never to rise again.

Better government, less taxes, more jobs – all these ingredients have helped us grow an environment where families can truly be a part of the American Dream.

Together, we are giving people of poverty the chance to finally walk away from welfare with their heads held high.

Welfare used to entrap families, tear them apart, and drain them of their dignity. It was a disaster that needed to be dismantled, and we responded by passing the Family Independence Act.

The Department of Social Services is no longer an entitlement agency. Now it's an employment office.

Every day, we are training welfare clients for work, teaching them how to fill out a job application and get along with co-workers and a boss. We are helping with child care and transportation. And above all, we expect that everyone who walks through the door has the capacity to achieve.

The caseloads are now the lowest in two decades. About 1,000 welfare clients are moving into jobs every month. And tonight I am pleased to report that South Carolina's welfare rolls have been cut nearly in half.

Elaine King and Angela Dinkins are two examples whose success stories were reported in the *Wall Street Journal*.

After years on welfare, these women recently completed a rigorous program called Bright Futures, which trains welfare clients to be correctional officers. Today,

both women are ready to support their families with demanding, good-paying careers.

The first day she wore her uniform, Ms. King looked in the mirror a few extra minutes, smiled to herself and said these words: "I'm a working mother now...not a welfare mom."

The trap of poverty is not made of steel. It can be broken, and these women have proved it.

Ms. King and Ms. Dinkins are in town tonight for training, and I'd ask them to stand and be recognized.

When people have good jobs, when parents are responsible, when South Carolinians have hope and opportunity, neighborhoods are safer.

And these past three years, overall violent crime has been dropping.

We're helping keep criminals away from our families, because together we have passed some of the toughest crime measures on the books: a two-strikes three-strikes crime bill and truth in sentencing.

Ladies and gentlemen, we've put the hammer down, and finally the law has meaning again.

In the prison system, it used to be that inmates lived better than some of us on the outside. But inmates don't run the show anymore. We do.

Now it's standard: inmates work and work hard. They raise their own food. They make their own uniforms. And for the first time in a long time, they're doing what we have to do: they're learning skills and earning their keep.

Together, we are changing behavior and preparing people to re-enter a free society. But there is more we must do.

We can start by tilting the scales of justice back toward the victims of crime. It seems to me that a system has evolved that offers criminals a full menu of resources and rights. Meanwhile, the survivors beg for scraps.

The good people of this state have given us the chance to right those wrongs by approving a constitutional amendment. Tonight I ask you to fulfill their wishes and make one of your very first courses of action ratifying the Victims' Bill of Rights.

Next, we should take strong action against vicious criminals who have made preying upon women and children a way of life.

We've all heard horror stories of rapists who aren't out of jail a day before they rape again. But now we have the power to keep them from ever walking out that door.

The Supreme Court has ruled that if a sexual predator's sentence is complete - but he's still considered a danger - we can lock him away indefinitely.

Rapists and pedophiles have no place in this society but behind lock and key. I ask you to give me a sexual predators bill, and we will keep these criminals far away from our children.

There is another force that has free rein over our state, and it's not a force for good. I'm talking about video poker.

You and I understand the inherent goodness of our people. It is this goodness that businesses around the world find so compelling. It's a sense of decency and honor that does not descend to the lowest common denominator, but instead attempts to uplift and inspire.

So as we look at the difficult issue of video poker, we are confronted with one simple question: does the face of video poker represent the goodness, decency and honor of a state that all of us know so well? The answer, my friends, is no. I ask you to ban video poker from South Carolina forever.

With their unlimited resources for lobbying and advertising, the video poker industry is mounting an assault on the senses and sensibilities of the people of South Carolina. You've seen the ads with the all-American faces.

No one claims that the day-to-day employees are bad people. But there is another face to video poker which the industry barons with their millions are desperately trying to hide.

It's the face of Joy Baker, the tiny baby who died in a hot car while her mother played a machine. It's the face of Joy's anguished father who begs us to understand what this industry did to his family.

The face of video poker is a 52-year-old woman in Newberry who wrote that she believed suicide was the only escape from her mounting gambling debts. She says she'd be dead today if her husband hadn't saved her from a drug overdose.

She asked me a question that deserves to be asked of us all: "What is more important: revenue or ruined lives?"

The face of video poker is also a little girl from Lancaster who wrote me this letter:

*"Dear Governor Beasley, This is a crying little girl who is crying because her family is being torn apart by something you might not can fix, but you can sure try. My dad is hooked on gambling machines and I am desperately trying to help him."*

Ladies and gentlemen, this little girl needs our help. She is the face of video poker. The face of video poker is troubled children, broken homes, overwhelmed social agencies.

One study estimates that one in five players in South Carolina is already a problem gambler, and it's getting worse. Just four years ago, Gamblers Anonymous had eight chapters in our state. Today it has 27.

Thirty-three percent of the players surveyed admitted to having spent the last dollar in their pocket playing the machines. Five percent said they have considered suicide at least once.

The revenue this industry generates is a drop in the bucket compared to the economic and social calamity that will be visited upon us if we fail to act.

Studies show that every dollar spent on gambling actually costs us another three dollars to pay for its consequences.

Every dollar going into a machine is a dollar less for local retailers and businesses, who are the lifeblood of our economy.

Every dollar going into a machine is a dollar less for family budgets. And that's food off the dinner table and clothes off the backs of children.

The great refrain is that you can't legislate morality. So what do you call the body of law that forbids drug use and prostitution and a variety of human behaviors that you, the elected representatives of the people, do not deem appropriate for our state?

Routinely we are asked to decide to choose between right and wrong. This is such a time.

All of the arguments – moral, economic, social – make a compelling case. Choose one.

But in the end, remember the other faces of video poker they don't want you to see. Don't regulate it. Don't tighten it. Ban it – once and for all

Diligence, honesty, virtue – these are trademarks of our people. But future generations will only learn the value of a hard day's work, the value of healthy lifestyles, if we live them out.

That's why we have created policies that empower parents with resources and knowledge to set their children on the path to self-sufficiency.

Ours has been a full-scale preventive strike for the health of our children. And we're beginning to see rewards from the partnerships we've formed.

Just five years ago, only about 60 percent of our two-year-olds were getting immunized. Now that number is over 90 percent, and South Carolina has the highest immunization rate in the country.

Our infant death rate dropped more last year than it has in two decades. Now infant mortality is at an all-time low.

And to expand Medicaid coverage to more children in need, we formed a visionary coalition, called Partners for Healthy Children.

Now we're able to offer consistent, quality health care to not just a few more children, but to 75,000 more children all across this state.

Hard-working families who once could not afford medical care for their children will now have access to regular checkups from a family doctor.

And these children will now enter their classrooms, minds clear and ready to learn.

It's in those classrooms where we find our next great challenge – the challenge to fill those healthy minds with knowledge.

Historian Will Durant once said that "If in youth we fell in love with beauty, in maturity we can make friends with genius."

Every day, more global headquarters and knowledge-based industries are putting down roots in South Carolina. We want to make friends with that genius.

To do so, we must not only build our new economy with the workings of our hands. We must build it with the workings of our minds.

And these three years, with the help of education-minded legislators, we are re-tooling the way we educate for the 21st century.

Through our SCINET partnership, every school in this state now has access to the Internet. In fact, this State of the State address is being carried live over the Net for the first time.

- Eighty percent of our children tested ready for first grade this year – the highest number since we started testing in 1979.
- We're making students work harder and earn four more credits to graduate.
- We started a fund that helps send our brightest scholars to college...and helps renovate and build schools across the state.
- And to recruit and retain the best teachers, we are finally paying our teachers above the Southeastern average.

All told, we're putting more than \$2 billion a year toward education. Well over half of our budget this year alone goes to education.

But still the simple fact remains: South Carolina needs better results from our education system and our students.

If reform is to last, reform must start at the heart with the strong, steady drumbeat of back to basics learning.

One year ago, I appointed a group of business and education leaders called the PASS Commission. They came back with a comprehensive report that could be the most important education initiative we've ever seen.

The PASS Commission is telling us to raise the bar higher, raise it for every student in every grade in every subject. And they devised a set of academic standards to help us clear that bar – tough, measurable, back-to-basics standards.

These standards finally spell out to students in no uncertain terms, this is what we expect you to learn; to every educator, this is what we expect you to teach; and to every parent, this is how we expect your child's school to perform.

We must teach the basics again, ladies and gentlemen. And it must be one of our highest goals: by the end of the first grade, every child must know how to read

I applaud the State Board of Education for moving quickly to adopt the standards. Now I ask all of you to act decisively on the PASS Commission recommendations, act boldly and act quickly. Our children have waited long enough, and we can't wait one moment longer.

Even as more high school students achieve the excellence we demand, there is more we can do – to inspire good grades and empower more families.

We're calling it the Palmetto LIFE scholarship. And many of you have already pledged your support for our new merit-based scholarship plan.

Any graduate with a B average and a thousand SAT score will earn a scholarship for \$2,000 to any college in the state – public or private. If they choose a technical or two-year college, they'll earn a \$1,000 scholarship.

That's money for any college expense – tuition, books or room and board.

Our program is designed so that families can take full advantage of the federal HOPE tax credit. When you put the two together, tuition for almost any public school in the state would be free.

I'm asking you tonight to make Palmetto LIFE law. Let's keep our best scholars here at home, and we will prepare South Carolina for all the greatness she can achieve.

With high standards and help for scholars, we will live out the motto on our state seal: "Prepared in mind and resources."

We've already prepared our state for greatness these three years by forging a robust economy and cutting taxes, which has revitalized communities and offered opportunity to the least of these. Jobs are plentiful, so welfare families can safely leave the rolls for a better life. Laws and prisons are tougher, so neighborhoods are growing safer. Homes are getting healthier, so young minds are prepared to learn. And they're learning in schools that are soon to be transformed from the inside out.

South Carolina is prepared in mind and resources.

Now we look to the other side of our state seal, to a woman extending the laurel branch of victory. Inscribed below her are these words: "While I breathe, I hope."

Ladies and gentlemen, now is the time for hope. Now is the time, through long days of strenuous endeavor, to claim our rightful place on the world stage.

I am reminded of a story from the waning moments of the Constitutional Convention of 1787. Benjamin Franklin stood waiting his turn to sign the document that would seal the fate of our nation. His gaze fell upon a painting of a sun on the horizon hanging behind George Washington's chair.

Ben Franklin turned to those around him and said:

"I have often looked at that picture behind the President without being able to tell whether it was a rising or setting sun. Now at length I have the happiness to know that it is indeed a rising sun."

The sun is still rising upon this great state, ladies and gentlemen.

It's rising because our people are good. Our challenge is to reflect their goodness and common sense in the laws that we pass.

If we can gather the courage and the unity to live justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God, then my friends, the sun will continue to rise on South Carolina, and we will finally embrace our destiny.

May God bless our efforts and the good people of South Carolina.

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