

223.NV
AN 1997

The State of the State



Governor Bob Miller

to the

69th Session

of the

Nevada Legislature



January 23, 1997

Carson City, Nevada

NEVADA
LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL BUREAU
RESEARCH LIBRARY

Good evening ... Mr. President ... Mr. Speaker ... Chief Justice ... ladies and gentlemen of the 69th Nevada Legislature ... honored guests ... and my fellow Nevadans.

Before I begin laying out my agenda for this legislative session, and for the future of our state, I ask all of you in this chamber, and all Nevadans, to join me in paying special tribute to the rescue workers, the firefighters, policemen, state troopers, the highway crews, and our National Guard troops for their heroic efforts during the recent floods in Northern Nevada.

With us here tonight, are individuals who were on the front lines fighting the Flood of 1997. And I would like them to rise for a moment. Highway Patrol Sergeant Dan Luke, who was out in the field almost non-stop commanding his troopers as they faced raging waters and 100-miles-per-hour winds, no doubt saved motorists from serious accidents.

Staff Sergeant Nanette Heathman, with the Nevada National Guard, who, with other members of her unit, worked beyond the call of duty to keep our community safe. Nevada Department of Transportation crew member Ed Affonso, who operated heavy equipment from Washoe Valley to Gardnerville at the height of the flood, prevented injury and property damage. These individuals typify the heroic efforts of so many people during that first week of the new year. Let's give them a round of applause.

In the days ahead, we will be working on several important bills to meet the needs of those Nevadans who have suffered losses. Our neighbors deserve our quick action.

Let us be inspired by how our communities have come together in a time of crisis. Let us take that same spirit of working together on the issues facing us. A spirit that sets aside partisanship, a spirit that sets aside sectionalism, a spirit that transcends generations. That spirit should be the spirit of our future — a future that puts our children at the very top of our agendas.

In my first State of the State Address, I said, "As a parent, my greatest responsibility is to my children; as Governor my highest priority is to all the children of our state." Today, eight years later — tempered by the competition of the public arena, and further grounded in the values of work and family — I reaffirm, my commitment to Nevada's children and their future.

Of course, I will also address the issues of the day: welfare, campaign reform, and infrastructure improvements. But what I want you, and our entire state, to focus on tonight is a future which provides for the needs of our children — from education, to health, to early childhood development. Specifically, these elements include improving our formal education system, and recognizing the critical stages between a child's birth and the time they graduate from our university system.

We must redefine our obligation to Nevada's children as a commitment which begins from the first days of their lives and extends through their college graduation.

The education program I propose to you tonight, is the most sweeping in our state's history. Its four principle elements are: access to technology ... higher academic standards ... stronger school accountability ... and completion of third-grade class-size reduction.

Any discussion of modern education must begin with a discussion of technology, and what better place to do that than in this new chamber. On your desks are the newest laptop computers, your votes are displayed using the latest video computer technology. And this speech is being beamed throughout Nevada using satellite technology.

This is the world our children are now born into.

Our children must learn to utilize the marvels of this age, and their teachers must have the ability to turn to computers to help them teach.

Make no mistake about it: the race has begun - and we cannot afford to be left behind at the starting block. Other states are already moving ahead. West Virginia has invested heavily in computers in the classroom. Minnesota's Governor just announced a major technology investment program. And as you may be aware, California has launched an ambitious project to interconnect all its classrooms through the Internet, committing \$1 billion to this end.

Nevada's long-term goal is to place five state-of-the-art computers in every single classroom throughout the state. To begin this effort, which totals \$175 million, I am proposing that we allocate \$35 million of Nevada's surplus funds in this biennium. Also, I pledge more than \$8 million from the general fund to train teachers to maximize the benefits of this computerization.

And I call upon every business person in Nevada to invest additional dollars in our education technology fund.

And I can assure you, the private sector understands these critical needs. In fact, Carol Vilardo, the President of the Nevada Taxpayer's Association, brought to our attention an innovative idea. Carol pointed out that the Detweiler Foundation has been taking donations in the form of computers from businesses, and successfully using prison inmates to refurbish and update these computers for use in schools. In fact, through this program, California has already placed 28,000 computers in their classrooms. I believe we can and should bring this program to Nevada.

A small investment now can save millions of dollars in the long run.

We have to stop sending our students to the classroom to learn about computers, and start sending in computers to help our children learn. We must have the will and the vision to make this investment. You should — you must — fund technology in our classroom.

Technology is a tool — an invaluable tool — but it is only a tool. The core of our education improvement program is higher standards. And our academic standards in Nevada are not challenging

enough. They — are — too — low. A recent report by a national teacher's organization concluded that Nevada's standards are not clear, specific, or well grounded in content.

The current edition of Education Week published a study which graded Nevada's education standards as a C.

Average is not good enough for our students.

In Nevada, we don't have a requirement that our children should be able to read comfortably by the third grade. In Nevada, we don't have a requirement that by the fourth grade our students have gained command of multiplication and division.

That is not acceptable to me as a father, or as Governor. It should not be acceptable to you.

Let us declare: Today is the beginning — of the end — of our surrender to mediocrity.

We will establish higher standards in core subjects like math, science, reading, writing, and social studies, within one year.

It is vital that extensive testing will be used to measure the progress our students are making toward meeting the higher standards we have set. In my budget you will find an allocation for the most comprehensive program of testing in our state's history.

These tests will tell us how well our students are learning, what our schools are teaching, how they are doing compared to other students in Nevada and their peers around the country.

These tests are not to criticize, but to correct. They empower us to take the course of action necessary to insure our children are receiving the education we want them to have, they need to have, and they deserve to have.

And if those tests or other indicators show a school is not performing well, not providing a quality education, then we must take action.

I propose an accountability program that builds on the work Senator Bill Raggio has pioneered — work we will take a step further. Today, when a school is not performing, plans are drawn up, but all too often they never leave the drafting table.

Let's send this message loud and clear: we the leaders of this state, will no longer tolerate schools that are not meeting their commitment to Nevada's students.

If a school demonstrates poor performance over time, has been warned, and has not repaired its problems, a state Inquiry Team will be impaneled. This team, including educators from inside and outside the district, teachers, administrators, and parents, will conduct a comprehensive investigation

of that school. They will have the power to ask the questions — the tough questions. They will examine all aspects of that school's procedures, without restrictions or preconditions. This Inquiry Team will be charged with delivering their no-holds-barred report in an open meeting. Participation will be mandatory for teachers, administrators, and local school board members.

But for this accountability program to really make a difference it will be essential that parents are also involved. To you, the parents, I say this — do not leave the education of your children in my hands, the Legislature's hands, or in the hands of educators alone. There is no substitute for your direct and constant involvement in your children's education.

These three principles will become national models — models that will take their place alongside our nationally recognized class-size reduction program begun eight years ago. In fact, just this month, California took its first step toward emulating Nevada's class-size reduction program. They have now realized what we have known for eight years — that nothing can take the place of a teacher who has the extra moments to help a young learner. A teacher who has a manageable class size can focus attention, offer encouragement, and provide for the needs of individual students.

I call on this Legislature to fully fund third grade class-size reduction at a ratio of 16 students per teacher in every class in Nevada.

This is the last time Governor Bob Miller will speak out in this building on the necessity of class-size reduction. But let me assure you, citizen Bob Miller will return in the years ahead to encourage and support your efforts for further class-size reduction.

We here tonight were fortunate because our parents did provide for a world-class education system when we were growing up. But what was good for us then, is not good enough for our kids now. I say to you, the status quo isn't good enough for me, it isn't good enough for our children, and it isn't good enough for the Nevada of the 21st Century. We've seen the past, we're living in the present, let's move to the future. Let's pass this aggressive education package.

However, the ability of a child to learn depends on the overall quality of the child's life.

A child without proper nutrition — a child who is hungry — cannot learn. A child who is ill — who has not been properly immunized — cannot learn. And parents struggling to cope cannot help their child to learn.

We all know in our hearts that the earliest years of life are crucial to a child's future development. And now scientific evidence bears that out. A recent report by the Carnegie Corporation concluded, quote, "... how children function from pre-school years all the way through adolescence, and even adulthood, hinges in large part on their experiences before the age of three."

The world has changed, and those changes have put a burden on the ability of young parents to nurture and develop their young children in those formative years.

Today, two working parent households are not the exception but the rule. Single parent households are now commonplace. These and other pressures have dramatically cut the time parents have to tend to their children's needs.

Let's not lecture these families from above about family values. Let's drop the political slogans. Let's dedicate ourselves to these families. It is our most fundamental obligation.

How we teach our children, how we feed them, how we protect them are the family values we must secure and nurture.

I believe, in these changing times, these values can and must be taught, fostered and developed. Tonight I am putting out a call to all of Nevada. Starting with the executive branch, the Legislature, churches, civic groups, hospitals, and social services, I ask you to join together in this crusade. You, who have already successfully raised your families, and who have a wealth of knowledge to share, can help us.

We will create a comprehensive program to help and support Nevada's families. The cornerstone of this effort is a community based partnership that we are calling Family-to-Family.

From the very young mothers who are overwhelmed with the practical challenges of child-rearing, to a new generation of 40-plus working moms — women who are faced with their own set of challenges — we must be there to advise, to guide, to counsel, to support.

Building on the solid work that hospitals throughout our state have undertaken, we must insure that new parents have access to the vital information they need to raise healthy babies.

So many questions: What about immunization? Can Sudden Infant Death Syndrome be avoided? How do I find child care? How do I cope with stress? How do I find a better job? How do I handle it alone?

These questions must be answered, and they can be answered by us.

This program begins in the maternity wards of our hospitals, where professionals and trained volunteers will offer immediate help to mothers in finding information and services. This program then continues to the home, where we will follow up with families who ask for help. And again, in continuation of our support, these families will be referred, when needed, to programs like our very successful Family Resource Centers.

You have created these centers to bypass the bureaucratic maze which often deters families from getting the help they need and the help we can provide.

Family-to-Family is a network — a network of services aimed at helping children and families — a network we must expand.

Specifically, I urge you to support the Classroom On Wheels Program. These mobile classrooms go into neighborhoods, to help preschoolers with early education and health care, for those families who cannot afford to pay for nursery school or day care.

We must step up, as we are asking the private sector to step up, by helping the Lied Museum in their efforts to establish an Early Learners Exhibit and a Parent Resource Center.

And finally, we must expand the Even Start Program. This home-based approach prepares young children the skills they need to take full advantage of their formal education. Even Start also enables parents to earn high school diplomas.

I say to you with conviction, that these programs will bear the same success that our Baby Your Baby Program has delivered.

The evidence is irrefutable. There are many Nevada children thriving today who would have died at birth had it not been for this program. I must give credit where credit is due — to the hundreds of Nevadans who give their time and energy to this program — and to my wife Sandy who is Nevada's most effective children's lobbyist.

Next week, I will lead our nation's governors in a discussion about these very same issues. I have already communicated with Congress and the White House. In April, there will be a national prime-time television special and numerous articles in major publications on this topic. As the topic of early childhood development explodes on the national scene in the coming months, and as the rest of the country becomes familiar with this program, we here in Nevada will have already begun — tonight.

Now we must complete the cycle of a child's development and education. Our commitment, which begins with prenatal care, continues during the first hours of life, and through the early years of education, must culminate with the final step — a university, community college and vocational system that educates and trains these very same children, so they can secure their own and their children's future.

In my budget, I propose a large portion of the surplus funds be dedicated to our University and Community College System.

Here are the more noteworthy infrastructure investments we intend to make, and I ask you to approve, for our higher education system:

We will invest \$33 million in a new state-of-the-art library to be constructed at UNLV. \$12 million for a long over due Student Center for the University of Nevada, Reno, and \$3 million to build the Truckee Meadows Applied Technology Center, a facility which will provide training for students seeking technical careers.

Clark County Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Brian Cram, and the President of the Community College of Southern Nevada, Dr. Richard Moore, have put forth an exciting proposal, that I strongly endorse. It creates two new computer technology centers each of which will be shared by community college and high school students. This innovative plan will allow high schoolers to use these facilities during the day and community college students to use these same facilities in the evening. We will double our return on this investment and make smarter use of our resources by sharing computers and classrooms.

I am also pleased to say, that something long overdue will now become a reality.

Putting aside Shakespeare's recommendation to kill all the lawyers — which may also be long overdue — the time has come for Nevada to finally have a law school. With strong private sector financial commitments supporting this newest professional school, will have the resources it needs to grow and flourish.

But for all these investments to reach their full potential, access to higher education must be assured for all. As the costs of higher education have risen, middle-class families have found it increasingly difficult to send their kids to college.

State Treasurer Bob Seale and I, are proposing the establishment of a Tuition Trust Fund that will allow all families to invest modest sums today, in order to insure the affordability of their children's tuition in the future.

Ladies and Gentlemen of this Legislature, let us complete the cycle from birth to college. That is the only way I know to truly build our children's future.

We have talked about the Nevada of the future, but the work of this Legislature is also about confronting the challenges Nevada faces today.

I have laid out the blueprint for our children's future. But they must also live in a safer, more secure society, shielded from crime. Nearly two decades of work advocating the rights of victims reached a new plateau for me recently. With both Senator Bob Dole and President Bill Clinton endorsing a Constitutional Amendment to guarantee the rights of victims of crime. But more gratifying to me is the overwhelming support of you, my fellow Nevadans, in the last election for this amendment here at home.

I believe the most basic right we can extend to the victims of crime is the right not to be victimized again by the same criminals that ought to be doing the time for their crime. Two years ago, we passed truth-in-sentencing and other historic and comprehensive reforms of our criminal laws. But like everything else, our commitment must be reflected in the resources we are willing to provide.

My budget includes a continuing prison building program. We will construct a new men's

prison, a juvenile facility, and complete a new women's prison. In all, we will build new cells for 2,100 violent offenders to keep them away from our families.

I look forward to the day when a future Governor stands before a Legislature and proudly proclaims that the investments you and I made during these years for our children have paid off, and that prison construction will no longer be the priority it must be for us here tonight.

Yet another significant issue confronted us two years ago, the overhaul of our welfare system. We met that challenge and it has dramatically paid off. For the first time in generations a Governor can stand before you and report that the welfare rolls are down.

Tonight, as I stand here before you, 9,000 fewer Nevadans are on cash assistance — the welfare caseload has decreased by 28 percent. That is a savings of nearly \$9 million dollars — a savings accomplished and lives improved in only 18 months.

I will be placing before you legislation to build on this success which will include a two-year limit on cash benefits with a safety net for children, an aggressive pursuit of deadbeat dads who neglect their children, and an enhancement of job training and job placement programs.

Never forget, while we are certainly proud of our tax dollar savings, the real goal here is to move people from dependency, and give them the self respect and the self reliance that only a job can bring. I once again call upon the private sector, working hand in hand with government, to provide more jobs to people so we can move them off the welfare rolls.

Welfare reform has been achieved with caring, with compassion and sensitivity. Let us not engage in political rhetoric again. Let's just get to work and finish the job.

But one job that never seems to finish, are the lines at DMV. As Governor, one of my fondest hopes is that a visit to the DMV not be the equivalent of a scientific experiment to test the patience of our citizens. Before I turn the keys over to the next Governor I really want to reduce the lines.

Computerization offers the only hope to our hard-working DMV administrators and employees. Whom I assure you share the same goal we all do. Project Genesis, will revamp the registration and licensing programs, and will streamline this time-consuming process. I believe this \$15 million investment will be worth every dime.

The massive growth that is overwhelming our DMV offices is also straining local government's ability to deliver vital services. The economic miracle that is Nevada is a magnet for thousands of new arrivals each month. This success comes at a price.

That price is seen in overcrowded schools, a strained water delivery system, clogged roads, and a jammed criminal justice system.

I look forward to receiving the report and recommendations of this Legislature on how we can assist local governments to meet their infrastructure demands.

The quality of life we seek to preserve is continually threatened by a Congress influenced by the nuclear waste lobby. They are unrelenting in their efforts to make Nevada the nation's nuclear dumping ground.

I am proud to say at this, my last State of the State, not a single ounce of high-level nuclear waste has been shipped to Nevada. On behalf of our entire state, I thank Senators Harry Reid, and Richard Bryan, Congressman John Ensign and Congresswoman Barbara Vucanovich on their unrelenting fight for Nevada. And I welcome Congressman Jim Gibbons to our team.

And a special thanks must go to President Clinton, the first and only President to ever side with Nevada on a significant battle in this war. His threatened veto beat back the nuclear lobby's attempts to rush high-level nuclear waste to our state.

Once again, in this Congress, a bill has already been introduced to fast track nuclear waste to our state. Now as much as ever, we must be vigilant and determined, and our opposition must be seamless and united.

The influence of this lobbying group is a graphic example of why Nevadans continue to question the integrity of the political process. We now have an opportunity to regain some of that trust. Just as the Open Meeting Law shines the light on the us while we govern, campaign reform will shine on those who seek to govern.

We cannot allow another election to pass, more money to flow into campaigns in secret, beyond the view of public scrutiny. I am asking all of you to join Secretary of State Dean Heller and I and pass strong legislation, this session, to reform our campaign disclosure laws.

As any doctor will tell you, the best disinfectant is the strong light of day. Let us take a major step toward regaining public support and confidence. Let's act swiftly.

There are certainly other issues we will address this session, such as utility restructuring, review of our worker's compensation system, HMO and Medicaid reform. But tonight my focus has been on what we can accomplish today, to meet the longterm needs of our children so they will have the brightest possible tomorrow.

Of course, we never know what our tomorrows will hold in our personal lives. As many of you are aware, this fall, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer.

First, I'd like to take a moment to thank my family — Sandy, Ross, Corrine, and Megan who provided the love, strength and affection I needed to face this head on.

I could never adequately thank you, my friends and colleagues in this chamber, for your very personal expressions of support and best wishes.

And to the foot soldiers of my administration, my staff, who juggled the needs of a governor recovering from surgery and the day to day demands of administering this state, words do not exist to fully express my gratitude.

Of the many Nevadans who wished me well, what stands out vividly are the cards and letters from the children of our state. That, in some, ways provided me with my biggest boost.

Let me share with you a get-well card from Chad Ledbetter, a third grader from Mr. Kehoe's (kee-o) class at Gordon McCaw Elementary School in Henderson,

"Dear Governor Miller. I have not met you. I am sorry you have not met me. I have heard of Miller before. I did not know you were Governor Miller until today. Get well soon."

Again, family and friends, colleagues, and all Nevadans, thank you.

The past eight years have provided me with some wonderful experiences. And one of my mentors, Governor Grant Sawyer, gave me some advice as I embarked on this journey. He told me that my life would go on fast forward, but that I should make sure to capture and enjoy those very special moments. As always, I have tried to heed Grant's advice.

Bill — Joe — and all who have served in this and in past Legislatures, thanks. Through the struggles, and as we grappled with the tough issues, thank you for allowing me to have so many of those special moments Grant talked about.

A much wiser man than I said — "We must always have old memories and young hopes."

While my memories of our work together will take on a glow — especially after you have adjourned before Memorial Day — I can tell you that the focus, the drive, and the desire for our children and their hopes — far from dimming, are burning ever brighter.

To you and all Nevadans, I wish you good night.