



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
CHRIS SUNUNU

Good afternoon --

Please see below Governor Chris Sununu's 2019 Inaugural Address as prepared:

Governor Chris Sununu
2019 Inaugural Address
January 3, 2019

Good Morning —

Mr. Speaker, Madame President, honorable members of the House and Senate. Chief Justice Lynn and honorable members of the Judiciary. Members of the Executive Council, Commissioners, and of course, my fellow Granite Staters that are joining us today, Happy New Year and Welcome.

It's an honor to be before you today and I want to begin by thanking you for placing your trust in me to serve as your Governor.

I want to acknowledge a few people, without whom, none of this would be possible.

My family: my kids, my parents and the one person who has sacrificed more than you can possibly imagine, but she does it because she really believes in the differences we are making, Valerie.

And we can't discuss sacrifice without taking a moment to remember all those who are right now standing post, away from their families, whether in country or abroad serving in our military. And their families and our Veterans who have given so much.

It is THEIR sacrifices that allow us to enjoy the freedom to be here today.

In November, the voters of our state set us on a path that requires that we, as state leaders, come together, embrace a spirit of cooperation, and work together to get things done for the people of New Hampshire. They deserve nothing less.

We were sent to Concord to fix the problems, create opportunities, and to embrace the power of the individual. Make no mistake — we've made great progress these past two years but there's a lot to be done to build on those successes.

In just the last two years, we established full-day kindergarten, signed the most comprehensive child protection and welfare bills this state has ever seen, provided tax relief for small businesses, and with the implementation of the Hub and Spoke Model this very week, we have begun to lead and serve as a model for the nation in creating long term solutions for the Substance Use Disorder crisis.

We worked together to keep the health care of 50,000 low income Granite Staters while instilling the dignity of employment and saving taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. That's the New Hampshire Way — designing innovative systems that put individuals first, giving them a chance to thrive.

But when we look back on what we have accomplished, we cannot lose sight why we're here.

In Public Service, How you get there is just as important as the goals you achieve.

New Hampshire is best when we work together, and that's what we must do.

Whether you are a Republican or Democrat, Independent or Libertarian — we all share a passion for making our communities the strongest they can be. A commitment to making sure that New Hampshire remains the best place to live, work, and raise a family.

I have often said that we don't let the dysfunction of Washington define our success here — and It's true — politics does not dictate policy. We treat each other with respect and civility, not with the circus-like theatrics and zero-sum games that have taken over Washington.

I traveled down to Washington a few weeks ago to spend some moments

honoring and remembering one of America's true heroes and public servants.

President Bush's passing was a reminder of the celebration of good public service. He was remembered for not just what he accomplished but how he did it. He treated people, as we say, the New Hampshire way — with respect, dignity, and compassion, even when disagreeing on policy. We must continue to uphold that tradition and rise above negativity and partisanship.

Public Service isn't about going after funding. And it's not about picketing and protests. It's about bringing people together. Getting out of your comfort zone to do the right thing. A very smart man once said "It is our choices that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities". And yes, that brilliant individual was Dumbledore from the Harry Potter books that actually said that, but it's true. It's all about choices.

I recently saw an interview with Adam Sandler. A great NH native who when talking about his childhood said "I wasn't a kid growing up thinking 'One day I'll get an Oscar and make a speech. That wasn't on my mind.'"

[EXTEMPORANEOUS STORY]

And I believe service to our citizens begins with management and customer service. The goal should be to create an all-inclusive welcoming environment where people can serve NH's citizens. To be able to say "This is who we are and how can we help."

Therefore the obligation is on us to push the limits, think outside of the box, get out of our comfort zones and simply to do more. It's one of the reasons I have been known to partake in a variety of "experiences". Whether it is jumping into the Atlantic Ocean in the middle of winter to bring awareness to the Opioid crisis, or repelling down the side of a 24 story building to raise money for the Granite United Way, or sleeping out on the streets of Manchester to raise money for the homeless. It's all part of highlighting the opportunities out there to be involved and help our communities.

Now there is one moment I'd like to share from one of those adventures. As many people know Valerie and I are involved with Best Buddies, a great organization that creates social opportunities and friendships for kids with disabilities.

Last year I put together a team to do a 50-mile bike ride for Best Buddies and two of those team mates that stepped up to join me were Christine Tappan, our new Assistant Commissioner of Human Services at DHHS, and Christine Brennan, the Deputy Commissioner of Education.

[EXTEMPORANEOUS STORY]

Opening doors and being able to work with anyone that can help us should be a primary axiom that we all carry as public servants. Whether it be a qualified nominee brought before the Executive Council, or a new hire to assist the state with the Opioid crisis, or our willingness to work with political friends or opponents, it shouldn't matter as long as the public is being served. I travel to Washington a lot to advocate for our state. Many states pay to have their own lobbyists in DC. I don't. I believe that no one can advocate for a state like the personal relationships a governor can bring to the table. So I fly down from time to time and sit with Secretary's, or the Administration or the President himself when necessary. And I'm always baffled at those who would criticize for that but look at the results. Those personal relationship that we worked to develop ensured that

When the Manchester VA was in crisis, Secretary Shulkin was on the phone with me and responding within hours to send a team in to help.

When there was a threat of drilling for oil off of our coastline, Secretary Zinke sat with me to give assurances it wouldn't happen.

When we discovered the Vocational Rehab funds were mismanaged and the program was going to have to close for those kids with disabilities, it was Betsy DeVos that sat with me and agreed to provide gap funding to keep the programs alive across the state.

And when we had a new idea that needed significant funding for the Opioid crisis, I was able to hand a detailed plan to the President and his team and advocate for what would become the single biggest increase in Opioid funding in the country right here in NH. The list goes on, but I share these examples with you as a reminder that relationships matter and in public service Don't burn bridges. You'll be surprised how many times you have to cross the same river.

There is no doubt New Hampshire is better off today than it was two years ago.

We have the lowest poverty rate in the nation, business taxes are at their lowest in decades, and more people are working than ever before.

But do not make the mistake of taking our successes for granted. It wasn't luck or happenstance that got us here. It was hard work, instilling sound economic principles, focusing on creating economic opportunities for individuals by providing employers across the state flexibility and financial opportunity that flows to the employees and their families. In New Hampshire we have made a choice. We don't want businesses making more investment into Government.

We ask businesses to invest in their employees. And they do. Our neighbors in New England can't make the same claim, which is one of the reasons they are losing younger workers and businesses are flocking to New Hampshire. It is why we already have some of the highest household income on the country.

Our model is a success and we cannot afford to go backwards. Tax relief is working.

Lowering the cost of doing business through tax relief has allowed businesses to reinvest in their workforce. That is a key factor in New Hampshire seeing significant wage growth because when a business can retain more of its revenue, it is able to increase pay for employees. Tax relief is a reason why more people are working in New Hampshire than ever before.

Look at the data. Revenues are rising. Costly regulations have been eliminated, and we are investing surplus funds into smart one-time investments.

I implore this legislature to learn from the mistakes of the past. The last thing we should be doing is raising taxes or pushing a budget that does not live within our means. And it should go without saying -There will be no sales or income tax of any kind on my watch.

And the state budget cannot and should not become a vehicle for political victories or policy-driven battles. The budget is a roadmap for responsible spending, not some partisan-driven political agenda.

Economically we sit as the envy of New England. We must continue to build on that success. The Budget cannot turn into an ideological battle of wills that would end up hurting the citizens we are sworn to serve.

And I want to revisit the concept of surplus funds, because it is a key area. Those are one-time funds that cannot and should not be spent on bigger

government. That would only lead to long term liabilities we won't be able to pay for down the road.

Instead, look to the examples of last session:

We did a one-time \$30 Million investment into safe schools – the first of its kind in state history - over 500 schools received grants to make their schools safer. That is a big win for New Hampshire, especially our property taxpayers.

We also returned over \$35 million to cities and towns last year for critical infrastructure improvements. Every single town in the State of New Hampshire received a check for road repairs, bridge improvements, projects that otherwise would have been borne by property taxes.

So stayed tuned. Next month, on Valentine's Day, I will submit a state budget that keeps our commitment to protecting our thriving economy. It will continue the current schedule of business tax reductions. It will use practical revenue estimates and ensure that we continue to make investments that will improve the lives of our citizens without jeopardizing our fiscal solvency.

[EXTEMPORANEOUS STORY]

Now one of the priorities of the state I think we can all agree on is our workforce needs. And while New Hampshire is clearly becoming a destination for young workers, one of our immediate challenges will be how to retain and grow a thriving workforce.

Many of you have heard me say this before, but there is a saying that goes “those of us born in New Hampshire are lucky, and those of us who move here are smart.”

Recently, a new study from the Carsey School at the University of New Hampshire was released that showed an increase in young families moving to New Hampshire.

Again, this isn't some kind of fluke, but by creating economic opportunity for families we've become a destination of success in the northeast. And whether it's the story of Hitchiner in Milford, or

Lonza in Portsmouth, or

BAE in Merrimack, or
Madeira in Gilford, or
Allegro in Manchester, or
Oxynova in Colebrook, or
Hubbard Farms in Walpole.

The list goes on and the word is out about the environment we've created to move or grow your company in New Hampshire.

And that environment begins with workforce driven investments in education. Starting with early childhood education, full-day kindergarten and continuing through undergraduate education and workforce training — and next month, I will be proposing the state's single largest ever investment into workforce training — a \$24 million one-time investment — to grow our states nursing and health care workforce and double the number of those graduates in New Hampshire schools.

Another key component of growing our workforce is New Hampshire's work requirement for able bodied individuals, who are part of our Medicaid Expansion program. These provisions of Medicaid help lift people out of poverty by empowering them with the dignity of work and self-reliability. They help people gain the skills necessary for long-term independence, success and entrance into the workforce.

We have designed a New Hampshire solution that was the result of a bi-partisan agreement - this legislature should not obstruct its implementation. I know that leaders of both parties stand united and committed to the compromise reached last year helping to ensure healthcare for 50,000 of our citizens.

In approving the work requirement, it was actually the Administration in Washington that insisted on MORE flexibility for our citizens. Volunteering, job training, part-time work, going to School, ALL count towards the work requirement, and it's even MORE flexible now than what we passed last year. That a win for New Hampshire's citizens.

I also believe it is time to reform many of our public assistance programs to ensure they are a ladder out of poverty and not a road block to those who want to work hard and get out of the system. A common hurdle for both businesses and workers is the "cliff effect."

Last year I had the opportunity to spend a bit of time in many of our state's shelters visiting with individuals that needed a safe place to live to get their feet under them. They were looking to find independence for themselves and their families. You hear a lot of amazing stories in those situations.

And about a month ago Valerie had invited a group of shelter managers from across the state to come and visit at the Bridges House. This was an opportunity to bring the group together and talk about real they were being challenged with. I went over to visit with them as well and the single biggest issue they told us about was the fiscal cliff.

That these individuals, very often young single moms and some in terrible domestic violence situations, who rely on government assistance in times of real need, want to work their way off of those programs, they want independence, they want an escape but find themselves trapped and discouraged from job opportunities because their increased incomes will cut them off completely from assistance, in a moments notice. The results are that individuals decline promotions or better jobs, work fewer hours, remain in abusive relationships or hide their incomes to maintain their eligibility for these programs.

Instead of encouraging employment advancement, the current system incentivizes people to remain on state support. This might make some sense in the short term, but in the long term, we end up harming the people who often need the most help. This dynamic makes no sense.

Working together, I believe we can create revenue neutral reforms to end the Cliff Effect in our state. We can provide more reasonable "off-ramps" that encourages the dignity of work in a way that saves, rather than costs, our taxpayers. And gives those receiving benefits the greatest gift of economic stability – a good job that allows them independence and the ability to support their family. It won't be easy but I believe the pathway is there, and I'm calling on the Legislature to join me in tackling the issue head-on.

I want to take a moment to discuss a specific and serious public health issue here in New Hampshire- Pediatric Cancer.

According to the Center of Disease Control – New Hampshire had the highest rate of pediatric cancer in the U.S. between 2003 and 2014.

That is unacceptable, and we cannot allow this alarming trend to continue. We

must work together to find answers, create solutions, and lead the way out of this crisis.

So in my budget next month, I will use our surplus funds to commission a study to once and for all determine the extent of the crisis and provide solutions for our citizens. This study will not have a partisan agenda or pre-conceived notions. The mission is simple: figure out the truth and use data to develop sound policies that will help the children of our state. Answers will not come overnight, but starting today this crisis is a top priority of my administration and the state of New Hampshire.

Another significant public health issue we are battling is of course the Opioid Crisis.

Last year, as overdoses went up nationwide, New Hampshire bucked the national trend — and for the first time in years, our overdose rate is going down. A good sign but we know there's a lot more work to do.

This week New Hampshire's Hub and Spoke Model opened its doors for the first time across the state, now known as 'The Doorway'. This model will begin to take root and combined with our Recovery Friendly Workplace initiative and the newly fully funded Alcohol Fund, I have no doubt that we will continue to see our successes grow. We have created more tools to use at our disposal than ever before.

I want to take a moment and talk about Recovery Friendly Workplaces which hit a milestone last month. Through this program, we utilize the support of the business community to create workplaces that become part of an individual's recovery. As of today 63 businesses, with over 40,000 employees, have signed up to join the initiative.

We are taking whole new approaches to fighting addiction. Public sector, private sector, you name it. We have innovative solutions and the country is taking notice. There's still a lot of work to do but let's stay focused and keep building a system that wins this war.

Just two short years ago, the Division for Children, Youth, and Families – DCYF – was in crisis. We needed new management. We needed more caseworkers. We needed funding. Children were at risk.

So what did we do? Turning around any operation begins with leadership. So first we brought in a world-class team, including the architect of New Jersey's dramatic and successful turnaround of its child protection system. It's not often that New Hampshire looks to New Jersey for best practices but they are the gold standard and our system should be nothing less.

Then we put politics aside and brought everyone to the table so the best ideas could be implemented. And as a result, huge strides were made in reforming DCYF, and we passed the single most comprehensive child protection bill this state had ever seen.

We restored critical voluntary prevention programs, so the families in trouble today do not turn into families in crisis tomorrow.

We added over 30 new caseworkers and got funding where it needed to be.

Bipartisan work is possible, and it can be done. But again, let's not rest on those successes, there's more work to do. This year, let's fill those open positions at the agency, work to attract more the best advocates for these kids and ensure our system never goes down that difficult path again.

Along those same lines, I also believe we must reform our foster care system. We must ensure that the welfare and safety of children is preeminent. We must be their advocates and we will continue to stand up for them. This is who we were sent here to fight for: the vulnerable, the forgotten, the kids who through tragic circumstances and no fault of their own need us to help give them a fighting chance, an opportunity.

Good families are the foundation of a healthy communities. And therefore, we must ensure that our system is one that attracts and retains those caring families who extend their homes and hearts to foster children. And once we retain them, let's get governmental bureaucracy out of their way so they can focus their attention on the children and not waste their time dealing with paperwork. We must do more to support them. And we will.

These past two years we have made meaningful, sustained progress in addressing is our state's mental health crisis. For too long, it was the unspoken crisis of this state.

When something is clearly not working, you don't just keep pushing harder in

the same direction, you don't just keep pouring taxpayer dollars into a broken system— you must have the courage to change direction. And that is what we did.

We started by engaging those on the front lines, the stakeholders and providers. And today in New Hampshire, -- as a result of their feedback – we are rebuilding and re-engineering the entire mental health system, and now are in greater compliance with the Community Mental Health Agreement than ever before.

We added mobile crisis teams — which help divert individuals away from hospital emergency departments, and allow them to be stabilized in their own communities.

We added 40 additional community residential beds with wrap-around services which will support individuals leaving New Hampshire Hospital.

But while we have made great strides the past two years to rebuild that system there is more work to do. In the coming weeks we will be releasing a new 10 Year Mental Health Plan. A practical roadmap to quality mental health care.

And this year, we will accomplish something frankly it has taken far too long to achieve - We WILL move the State Psychiatric Unit out of the State Prison and treat our patients with the dignity they deserve.

You cannot discuss reforms within our mental health system without acknowledging the issue of suicide in our state. We know that suicide affects far too many of our communities. Too many lives are taken from us far too soon.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for young people in New Hampshire. And while there is no single answer, there is more we can do.

Talking about suicide is difficult — It's heartbreaking. But sometimes, all it takes is one conversation to save a life.

A family from Boscawen, the Dickey's, know the pain of suicide more than anyone every should have to. Just over a year ago, Paul and Martha Dickey's son, Jason Dickey, took his own life.

I met the Dickey's at a FIRST Robotics competition over at UNH. And the story

they told me was one where they are channeling their pain into hope, for all of us.

Today, I am proud to announce my support for legislation that Martha and Paul brought to me — it's called the Jason Flatt Act — named after yet another victim of suicide, who took his own life in 1997.

Under the Jason Flatt Act teachers in New Hampshire will complete 2 hours of youth suicide awareness and prevention training each year. Through the support of the Jason Foundation, this training can be provided at no cost to the state or local school districts.

We must understand that suicide is preventable, and it starts with us.

Today, 20 states have passed this law, and it is time New Hampshire join that list.

It goes without saying that students are experiencing new and more intense kinds of stress both inside and outside of the classroom. Helping students with the skills needed to successfully manage that stress, how to understand and manage their emotions, cultivate empathy and develop positive relationships is critical to keeping that student out of crisis or a mental health challenge. Scarlett Lewis works nationally to promote social and emotional learning (SEL) in schools through her Choose Love Enrichment Program. It provides educators with free learning tools through the 12th grade. Scarlett is the mother of Jesse, who was killed in his classroom during the tragedy at Sandy Hook in 2012. She is another wonderful example of someone using the power of the individual to make positive change.

We put an emphasis on SEL learning last year. My administration has been going to schools all around our state, explaining why this programming is so important. Several schools have stepped up to be leaders by example. One such school district is Inter-Lakes. Not only have they stepped up to be a leader for their schools, but they also want to be among the first to implement the program in an amazing community-wide model. Parents, teachers, counselors, resource officers, and school administrators have all welcomed this program with excitement and as a result, I am so proud to report that as of today, the Choose Love program is in over 200 schools in New Hampshire and I want to personally thank Scarlett who is joining us today for making this a reality in New Hampshire. Thank you!

There is so much possibility when it comes to untapped potential in our classrooms. New Hampshire's exceptional public education system can proudly boast to have some of the best teachers, administrators and schools in the nation.

Getting education right will go a long way to maintaining our state's prosperity. It means more jobs for more Granite Stater's, less reliance on federal and state services, higher incomes and healthier citizens. There is no reason New Hampshire should not be the model for the rest of the nation when it comes to education.

Over the past biennium, we have increased education grant programs to New Hampshire public schools by almost \$50 million.

I fully expect this legislature will have a rigorous and thorough discussion regarding funding for education. And I will be there with you in that important conversation. But it would be shortsighted to think that funding is the only discussion needed regarding education.

We have big opportunities to expand a student's access to educational choices. We must provide additional pathways for students to harness their ability to learn.

Last year, I advocated for and signed legislation to expand the number of outside the classroom experiences and activities that can satisfy a graduation requirement. The "Learn Everywhere" initiative is a recognition that a 21 Century education system is not found only within the four walls of a classroom.

Consider a student who loves performing arts and participates in a local Boys and Girls Club performing arts program. That the Boys and Girls Club can now enroll its theater arts program as an approved 'Learn Everywhere' program. Once approved, that student now can receive high school credit for that program. This frees up the student's time to pursue other academic interests or free up time to take advantage of a dual or concurrent enrollment program. This is a huge win for students.

In keeping with that principle, I am proud to announce today the creation of 'New Hampshire Career Academies'. Working with our community college system existing funds, our students can take advantage of an optional fifth year of high school that will be enable them to receive a high school diploma, a certificate and a College Associates Degree free of cost to the student. It also

comes with something else, a guaranteed interview with a New Hampshire company for a job right here in the Granite State.

This revolutionary idea for the New Hampshire Career Academy is the result of the good work of Dean Graziano, of the Rochester School District. Dean put together the program with the Great Bay Community College for Rochester high school seniors. It has put interested students on a career pathway with one of Rochester's premiere employers, Albany/Saffron.

It also has to possibility of achieving what so far has eluded so many – a model that does not cost the taxpayers or the education system ANY additional money but makes a free college degree available to New Hampshire students.

This innovative initiative is a win for students, parents and taxpayers. I want to thank Commissioner Edelblut for his hard work in helping to develop this exciting opportunity for New Hampshire's students.

Both initiatives I've just discussed underscore an important principle, government is not the solution to every problem, but government can help ensure that the doors of opportunity are open at every level.

When I took office, it was my firm belief that the Government should be about empowering individuals, not just institutions. Just two years ago, I stood before you, and proposed the Governors Scholarship Program. The Governors Scholarship did exactly that. We invested in students directly so they could choose the path best suited for them, Community College, University System, Public, Private whatever the best path was, it was their choice.

In its first year close to 600 students from across New Hampshire received Governor's scholarships to attend NH schools with the program anticipated to expand 20% next year, it's simply more opportunity for our kids.

I want to take a moment a brag a bit about my amazing wife. One of the many brilliant ideas that Valerie has had to help bring people together was to really open up the Bridges House to make it a gathering place of ideas. She calls it "Building Bridges at the Bridges". It's been wonderful to be able to bring in non-profits, organizations and just regular citizens to be integrated in what's happening in the state. And as many of you know as a former school teacher she's been very passionate about bring students and initiatives together. One of those is Project Green Schools. It's a national program that awards grants to

student-driven environmental projects.

And on one afternoon, student groups from across the state came to the Bridges house and did a sort of “shark-tank” style presentation for a panel of us that judged the projects and awarded grants supported by corporate partners of the project. We had a project presented from a young girl to help reduce the amount of paper used in the classroom, a team from Portsmouth high school that was building their own outdoor learning space, there were a few others and it was great. It was great to see the innovation and initiative these students took. Not just for the sake of doing a project, but with real thought of the costs, outcomes and benefits. The How’s and Why’s of each project and I thought it was a wonderful testament to our schools.

You all know how passionate I am about energy policy in our state and how intertwined energy policy is with environmental policy. When you have some of the highest rates of electricity in the country, this issue must be at the forefront as it effects every citizen stuck paying a bill. It’s why we need to continue supporting an ‘All of the Above’ energy portfolio, as outlined in the state’s 10 year energy strategy.

I have always said we should view energy policy through the lens of the ratepayer. And I hear a lot of talk from legislators that say YES, they will fight for lower electric rates, but then vote for legislation that raises rates and burden our citizens. You can’t have it both ways. If you want to talk about lowering rates than support legislation that does just that.

It is the most vulnerable among us, seniors and individuals on fixed incomes, that are at the greatest risk of high electric rates.

I think it is time that we refocus our efforts on them, and I am advocating today that renewable energy initiatives should benefit low income ratepayers first and foremost. Whether it’s solar, or wind, or battery storage, we need to ensure that the benefits of these well-intentioned programs deliver results to the people who are struggling to pay the bill each month. While other states have unfortunately decided to put developers’ interests ahead of ratepayers, in New Hampshire we must put the people first.

We don’t need to further raise electricity rates and tax our citizens to be good environmental stewards, we just need to be smarter about how we spend the money we have. When talking about climate policy, we must take a three-

pronged-approach. We must look at the environmental, economic, and social aspect of any policy. We must be smart and responsible, and we must be willing to look at new ideas.

The Office of Strategic Initiatives and Public Utility Commission are currently working out a plan for the multi-million-dollar Clean Energy Fund which is being made available this year. I want to see renewable energy projects for low income families and communities to be a priority for those investment dollars. Let's make sure those that bear the brunt of the costs of renewable energy are the first in line to receive the economic benefits.

New Hampshire has sent us here to Concord to deliver results. There will be times when we will disagree, without a doubt, but let's do so in a way that is free from and personal attacks and unnecessary political rhetoric. We are here for a greater purpose, to represent the needs of our constituents, disagree respectfully, focus on moving forward in areas where we can find common ground.

And it isn't always easy, it takes constant vigilance to see some of these tougher issues to the end, but we all have to be up to the task.

[EXTEMPORANEOUS STORY]

Thank you so very much for allowing me the honor to serve as your Governor. Let's keep up the momentum we've built over the past two years. Let's keep serving as an example of bipartisan cooperation for the entire country, and Let's get to work.

God bless you, and God bless the great State of New Hampshire.

Thank you.

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