

**State of the State Address**  
Governor Brian P. Kemp  
Thursday, January 17, 2019

Lt. Governor Duncan, Speaker Ralston, President Pro Tem Miller, Speaker Pro Tem Jones, members of the General Assembly, constitutional officers, members of the Judiciary, Mayor Bottoms, members of the consular corps, my fellow Georgians:

During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells a parable about two builders. The wise builder built his home on the rock. As the parable goes, “The rain came down, the floods came, but it didn't fall, for it was founded on the rock.”

But the second builder was foolish. He built his house on sand. There was a great storm, and his house washed away.

As a builder, this story always resonated with me. You have to pour concrete before you can frame a house. You must build on solid ground.

Over the last sixteen years, our state has experienced incredible growth and economic opportunity. Wages are rising, and the unemployment rate is the lowest in eighteen years. Thanks to the hard work of the legislature, Georgia is the top state for business – six years in a row. With low taxes, a business-friendly government, and access to logistics hubs like the Port of Savannah and Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, Georgia is the epicenter of job growth, the Hollywood of the South, and soon to be the Cyber Capital of the World.

Through our state’s oldest and largest industry, Georgia farmers are also feeding millions of people in countries across the globe. Thanks to the leadership and wisdom of Governors Sonny Perdue and Nathan Deal, Georgia has a solid foundation. The State of the State is rock solid.

Over the last eight years, we saw 800,000 brand-new private sector jobs created in Georgia. These investments touch every industry imaginable: in agribusiness, with machinery manufacturers like Caterpillar and Kubota and food processing companies like Perdue Farms and Harrison Poultry; in aerospace and aviation with Gulfstream, Pratt & Whitney, and TravelSky; in healthcare with Athena Health, Greenway Medical Technologies, and Kaiser Permanente; in cyber innovation with AirWatch, Honeywell, and Unisys; in manufacturing with Precision Products, Toyo Tire, and SK Innovation; and in transportation and supply chain infrastructure with Hapag-Lloyd, and Norfolk Southern Corporation.

I applaud Governor Deal, Economic Development Commissioner Pat Wilson, and department officials for working to create economic opportunity, not only in Atlanta and the metro area but in every corner of this great state. As governor, I will continue to work with state and local officials to recruit industry leaders to Georgia.

Through the Georgians First Commission, we will review regulations that make it difficult for job creators to hire, expand, and invest. We will work to make government more efficient and put hardworking Georgians first.

I am confident that we can build a stronger, more diverse economy. We can add a new designation to Georgia's resume: #1 for small business. With conservative budgeting, Georgia has maintained a triple-A bond rating.

Our Rainy Day Fund stands at \$2.5 billion. Our fiscal house is in order. Last year, the Legislature lowered state income tax rates and fully funded public school education. I am confident we can do it again.

To enhance educational outcomes and build a 21st century state, we must invest in those who educate, inspire, and lead our students. 44% of Georgia teachers leave the profession in less than five years. To recruit and retain the best and brightest in our schools, we must remove heavy burdens in the classroom and keep teacher pay competitive.

My 2020 budget proposal includes a \$3,000 permanent salary increase for certified Georgia teachers. This is the largest pay increase for teachers in Georgia history and serves as a sizable down payment on my promise to ultimately raise pay by \$5,000. We also include a 2% merit increase for all state employees. These hardworking Georgians play a vital role in serving our families and crafting Georgia's future. We must continue to reward their efforts.

In addition to investments in personnel, we must also prioritize school safety. In the amended budget for 2019, I have included \$69 million in one-time funding for school security grants. All 2,294 public schools in our state will receive \$30,000 to implement school security priorities determined by local school boards, administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

But to keep our classrooms safe, we must also address the mental health issues that often lead to school violence. With \$8.4 million in additional funding through the successful APEX program, we can focus on mental health in Georgia high schools. These professionals will engage with struggling students and provide critical resources to prevent disruptive and aggressive behavior. They will inspire, mentor, and keep our students safe. Together, we will secure our classrooms and protect our state's most treasured asset – our children.

With your help, we will continue to build. While places like Atlanta, Augusta, Savannah, and Columbus continue to grow and thrive, it still feels like the Great Recession in parts of Rural Georgia. Businesses are closing. Opportunities are drying up. People are losing faith.

As governor, I will work to ensure that someone's potential is not determined by their zip code or county. By working with the House Rural Development Council and their colleagues in the Senate, we can expand access to high-speed internet, quality healthcare, and good education.

Through strategic partnerships, we can ensure that every part of our state has access to opportunity – that kids can graduate and raise their families where they were raised, that local companies in

Rural Georgia can thrive, that farmers and agribusiness leaders can get their Georgia Grown products to the marketplace, and that every Georgian is equipped with the right tools to succeed.

By working across party lines, we can – and we will – stand with those impacted by Hurricane Michael. In the aftermath of the storm, I witnessed firsthand the devastation in South Georgia. The storm damaged forests, groves, and fields. It ripped up homes, churches, and livelihoods.

Today, we are joined by a hardworking farmer who runs his family’s cotton, soybean, and timber farm in Donalsonville, Georgia. He represents one of countless Georgians who took a severe hit from Hurricane Michael but is determined to move forward. This farmer and family man, Greg Mims, sits in the gallery today, and it is my honor to recognize him.

I want to thank President Trump, Vice President Mike Pence, Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue, Governor Deal, members of the General Assembly, and Georgia Agriculture Commissioner Gary Black for their solid leadership in the wake of this disaster.

I also applaud the efforts of officials at DNR, GEMA, the Georgia Forestry Commission, Georgia National Guard, Department of Public Safety, Department of Public Health, Department of Corrections, Department of Community Supervision, and all of the first responders who provided necessary aid after the hurricane. We will continue these recovery efforts. Let’s revive, rebuild, and renew hope in Rural Georgia.

There’s no doubt that criminal justice reform will be a lasting legacy of the Deal administration. Without question, the leadership of Governor Deal and the General Assembly has changed our state for the better. I look forward to supporting initiatives that save costs, strengthen communities, and give non-violent offenders a second chance at life. To keep all Georgians safe, we must build on these reform efforts.

Today, I am honored to have one of Georgia’s most distinguished members of our law enforcement family with us. He is a fighter in the strongest sense of the word – a true hero among us. Last year, he was wounded in the line of duty and nearly lost his life. While chasing a criminal, he was shot right between the eyes. After multiple surgeries, I am proud to tell you that he’s in the gallery next to his wife, Kristen. Join me in welcoming - and thanking - Covington Police Officer Matt Cooper. Coop, we continue to pray for you.

As Georgians, we must never forget the sacrifices of our law enforcement community. Last year, six officers paid the ultimate price in protecting and serving Georgia’s communities. To the loved ones of Locust Grove Police Officer Chase Maddox, Savannah Police Officer Anthony Christie, Ludowici Chief of Police Frank McClelland, Jr., Gwinnett County Police Officer Antwan Toney, DeKalb County Police Officer Edgar Flores, and Henry County Police Officer Michael Smith, you remain in our thoughts and prayers. Their service will never be forgotten, and we are forever grateful.

Fellow Georgians, it’s time to build. It’s time to renew our commitment to public safety. It’s time to honor those we lost by taking action. As governor, I am committed to addressing the rise of gang activity in our state – a growing threat requiring our immediate attention.

According to a recent survey conducted by the Georgia Gang Investigators Association, there are over 71,000 validated gang affiliates and 1,500 suspected gang networks in our state. These gangs are pawns for Mexican drug cartels – pushing opioids and drugs, buying and selling children for sex.

My budget proposal includes \$500,000 in initial funds to form a gang taskforce within the GBI. This highly qualified group of experienced law enforcement personnel and prosecutors will work with local district attorneys and law enforcement to stop and dismantle street gangs. By utilizing the Criminal Gang and Criminal Alien Database, which will be funded with existing resources from the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, we can track and deport drug cartel kingpins who are terrorizing our communities. By working with Attorney General Chris Carr, federal, state, and local partners, we can undermine organized crime. Together, we can build a safer future for all Georgia families.

Finally, while different parts of our state have unique challenges and concerns, all Georgians deserve a patient-centered healthcare system that puts families first. The status quo is unacceptable. Seventy-nine counties have no OB/GYN. Sixty-four counties have no pediatrician. Nine counties have no doctor. Insurers are leaving the state, and hardworking Georgians are struggling to pay their premiums.

We have included \$1 million in the Department of Community Health's budget to craft state flexibility options for Georgia's Medicaid program. We will expand access without expanding a broken system that fails to deliver for patients. We will drive competition and improve quality while encouraging innovation. I will work with the legislature to grow the rural hospital tax credit, tackle the doctor shortage, and build a healthier Georgia.

As we envision and plan for Georgia's future, we should not forget how we got here – the road travelled and the people who stood with us. Today, my wife, Marty, and daughters, Jarrett, Lucy, and Amy Porter, are with us. I wouldn't be here without their support. Marty and I built businesses and a family together. She's solid as a rock, and I know she's going to make a fine First Lady. Today, Marty is in the seat where her late father, Representative Bob Argo, once sat.

Thank you, Representative Hugley, for allowing Marty to share your seat today. You are incredibly kind.

Mr. Bob was a good ole Southern Democrat who never met a stranger. He loved the University of Georgia and worked across the aisle to deliver for his district. Representative Argo raised Marty to be a fighter and a public servant. When I was a frustrated business guy who wanted to make a difference, he encouraged me to run for office. He stood with our family through thick and thin. His legacy inspires us daily. Representative Argo was a wise man and knew that building is faster when there's more people involved – that we have more that unites us than divides us.

So join us, and let's put hardworking Georgians first. Pick up a hammer and nails. Together, we can build a safer, stronger Georgia. Thank you, God bless you, and may God continue to bless the great State of Georgia.