

Lieutenant Governor Fetterman, Speaker Turzai, President Scarnati. . .

Leader Corman, Leader Costa, Leader Cutler, Leader Dermody. . .

Members of the General Assembly, invited guests, friends and family, especially my wife Frances... and my fellow Pennsylvanians,

A couple hours' drive east of here, near the corner of Crown and Highland streets in Morrisville, Pennsylvania, there's a plaque marking the spot where, more than 300 years ago, William Penn finalized his first purchase under the charter he'd been granted by King Charles II. And, today, you can stand there and marvel at what William Penn must have been envisioning on that pivotal day.

After all, he wasn't just there to buy some land. He had something bigger in mind. A "Holy Experiment" in self-government. A place where Penn's deeply held values of individual freedom, social justice, and boundless opportunity could form, in his words, "the seed of a Nation."

When we talk about William Penn, we talk about his faith. We talk about his wisdom. We talk about his selflessness. We talk about his humility. But I think he also deserves some credit for his imagination.

After all, here we are, still striving towards that same vision of a Commonwealth where anyone can come and anyone can build a better life.

This year, I believe we have an opportunity to make enormous progress towards delivering on that promise. After five years of tough decisions and necessary investments, we have guided our Commonwealth out of crisis and put Pennsylvania back on a path to prosperity. But we have a long way to travel.

The work ahead will call upon our determination, our creativity, and our courage. But because we cannot build what we cannot envision, today we can begin by imagining the Pennsylvania we can create together – not for some far-off future generation, but for the people we came here to serve – right now.

Imagine a Pennsylvania where no one is denied the chance to work because they can't find child care or they can't find transportation.

Imagine a Pennsylvania where, when we send our children out the door in the morning, we don't have to worry about whether they'll come home safe – and when we send our kids off to college, we know they can focus on finishing their degree instead of worrying about how they'll pay for it.

Imagine a Pennsylvania where our air and water are cleaner, the cost of prescription drugs is lower, the most vulnerable among us are protected, and everybody – everybody – has the right, and the opportunity, to participate fully in our economy and in our democracy.

These are not pipe dreams. This is our playbook. And if anyone here is having trouble imagining that we can build that Pennsylvania, just look at what we have already done together.

We've rescued our public school system by investing more than \$1 billion in pre-K to 12th grade education. We've banded together to fight the opioid crisis and, last year, for the first time, we saw a reduction in the number of overdose deaths. We've reformed our pension system, our electoral system, our criminal justice system – and we did it all on a bipartisan basis. We have done that together. We've found new ways to empower our manufacturers, our farmers, our military families, our small businesses, and, most of all, our workforce. And, today, there are more Pennsylvanians working than ever before.

And just look around this chamber right now! Five years ago, this budget process was an exercise in masochism. We all came here bracing ourselves for the painful choices we knew we'd have to make in order to play the hand we were dealt. Today, I present to you a budget that reflects a renewed sense of confidence in Pennsylvania's future.

This budget is a blueprint for unleashing a new wave of prosperity for our Commonwealth. It will make a tangible difference in the lives of millions of people. And, folks, we can actually do this – together.

Because this budget does not ask any of you to vote for any new taxes. It does not ask any of you to join me on some wild-eyed ideological crusade. It merely asks that you join me in imagining what this Commonwealth can offer to each of its people.

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I've asked a few of those Pennsylvanians to let me share their stories with you today. And I'd like to start by telling you about Neishmairy Ruiz.

Neishmairy has overcome a lot in her life. She has experienced homelessness, domestic violence, incarceration. But she never lost her commitment to building a better life for herself and her two children. And upon visiting a CareerLink in Bucks County, she enrolled in the EARN program. And there she got the one thing she needed most: an opportunity.

After just two months as a machine operator – she was one of the only women on the floor – Neishmairy was promoted to supervisor. And now, she's been able to move her family into an apartment. She doesn't just have a job — she has a career.

This is the kind of success story that should be possible for every Pennsylvanian, no matter how old you are or where you're starting.

But Neishmairy's story isn't unique. Last year, we brought labor, business, and government to the table as part of a public-private partnership called the Keystone Economic Development and Workforce Command Center. Their mission was to answer one simple question. What is standing in the way of Pennsylvanians who want to find good jobs?

The answer had nothing to do with the opportunities being offered by our businesses. It had nothing to do with the work ethic of our people. Instead, they heard a lot of stories like Neishmairy's. In fact, the Command Center highlighted five specific areas where we can take action: the availability of reliable transportation, the affordability of child care, the challenges of re-entry, our outdated licensure requirements, and gaps in workforce training.

It's frustrating to imagine that someone might lose out on their opportunity to get ahead because of something as ordinary as bureaucratic red tape or a simple lack of bus routes. Frustrating – and also stupid if we care about our economy.

But the good news is that these are solvable problems. In fact, this budget contains a blueprint for making progress towards overcoming each of these five obstacles.

To address the lack of access to transportation that makes so many Pennsylvanians' commutes difficult or even impossible, we can work with employers to help them be more flexible in meeting the needs of their workers. And by joining the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, we can raise hundreds of millions of dollars in auction proceeds to make our air cleaner and our transit systems stronger so that Pennsylvanians can get to the jobs businesses are creating.

When it comes to child care, we need to start with cost. Balancing career and family is already hard – we should not allow it to be prohibitively expensive, as well. So, my budget includes additional funding for child care that will stabilize rates all across the Commonwealth. And that’s just the start. We need more employers to offer family-friendly workplace policies like on-site child care, and we need more child care providers to offer their services to the growing number of parents working non-traditional schedules – evenings, weekends, and overnights. This budget contains financial incentives for both.

Meanwhile, we can continue to cut the red tape that prevents people from starting businesses, and reverse outdated policies that stand in the way of people re-starting their lives after serving time in prison. We can invest in workforce training programs like WEDnetPA, which has helped more than 20,000 companies train more than a million Pennsylvania workers over the last 20 years.

We should protect all workers and finally erase the stain of legal discrimination against LGBTQ workers in Pennsylvania. No one should have to hide who they love to keep a job they love. Let’s make this the year that we finally – finally – pass these protections.

The goal of all this is not just to get more Pennsylvanians into jobs. It’s to give more Pennsylvanians the opportunity to work towards the brighter future they imagine for themselves. And so, while we’re going to continue to foster an environment that encourages entrepreneurs to start and grow their businesses right here in Pennsylvania, we also need to face the fact that minimum wage workers in this Commonwealth haven’t had a raise in more than a decade.

That isn’t fair. And, what’s more, it isn’t smart. Forcing people who work full-time to get by on \$15,000 a year doesn’t just limit what they can build for themselves and their families. It limits what they can contribute to our shared prosperity. That’s why 21 states have already increased their minimum wage this year alone. Nobody out-works the people of Pennsylvania – they deserve the same fair wage. Let’s make 2020 the year they’re going to get that raise.

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I believe in the potential of our people – and if you ever find yourself doubting that potential, just talk with students at one of our colleges and universities. Like Jacob Foil-Charles here, a senior at Mansfield University.

Jacob is a double major in biology and music. He’s also an orientation leader. And an accomplished singer and performer. I get the sense that Jacob doesn’t sleep much.

Growing up in Tioga County in a middle-class family, Jacob always knew he wanted to go to college – and that he would have to hustle to pay for it. He’s applied for a variety of grants and scholarships to help with tuition, but he also has to pay for room and board and textbooks. So he’s working multiple jobs, adding another 20 to 25 hours a week to his schedule.

Recently, things got even harder. Jacob’s Federal Student Aid ran out because he reached what’s called the “maximum timeframe” for the program. And while he’s appealing that decision, he’s had to dip into his family’s savings – at a time when his mother is struggling.

Jacob is going places. But imagine how much further he could go – how much further so many students in our Commonwealth could go – if the cost of higher education weren’t such an incredible burden. Imagine what it would mean for our Commonwealth, our economy and our communities.

We need to act.

We're going to start with a \$60 million investment so that we can increase the size of our state tuition grants that serve more than 130,000 students.

But we cannot stop there.

I'm proposing a historic \$200 million investment in scholarships for the young Pennsylvanians attending our state system universities.

That will mean 25,000 PASSHE students like Jacob can get a degree without crushing debt. And we'll do that by repurposing existing tax dollars that are right now flowing into the Horse Racing Development Fund. Let's bet on our kids instead of bankrolling race horse owners and ensure the viability of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education.

This new scholarship program is inspired by a young woman, a Pennsylvanian of modest means, who had to drop out of what we now know as Indiana University of Pennsylvania after her father passed away and she could no longer afford it. She never got her degree, and she wound up having to move out of state to start her career.

Her name was Nellie Bly.

Nellie didn't let that stop her. She went on to become a pioneering journalist responsible for bringing reforms to our mental health care system in the early 20th century. But more than 100 years later, we still see too many of our young people forced to drop out of college, or forced to move away from Pennsylvania, or forced to begin their lives buried under a mountain of debt.

That's why the Nellie Bly Scholarship will pay for what other financial aid does not cover so that they can spend more time contributing to our Commonwealth and less time paying off their debts. And by incentivizing them to stay in Pennsylvania after graduation, we can all reap the benefits of their intellect and their creativity.

We all have a stake in the success of young Pennsylvanians like Jacob. Let's give them every opportunity to fulfill that potential.

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And let's not wait until college to start.

In fact, let's not even wait until they get their first loose teeth. This year, I'm calling for the expansion of universal, no-cost, full-day kindergarten so that it's available for every child in our Commonwealth. I'm asking all of you to work together to make universal full-day kindergarten a reality.

The joy of raising children comes from imagining who they'll become, what they'll achieve, where they'll make their mark. There is not a parent in this chamber who doesn't want every opportunity – every opportunity – for their children. And there isn't a parent in this Commonwealth who should have to settle for anything less.

That's where people like Thomas Parker come in. As the superintendent of the Allentown School District, Thomas knows first-hand just how much potential there is in our children. But he also knows the obstacles that stand in the way of unleashing that potential.

For a long time, the number one obstacle was simply that Harrisburg didn't share the same commitment to our kids that parents and teachers do. That's why, over the past five years, we have fought together to restore more than a billion dollars in cuts to our public school system.

But we must do more. This year, I'm calling for \$435 million in new investments – starting with a \$100 million increase in the fair funding formula, an additional \$25 million increase in funding for special education, and a \$30 million increase for high-quality early childhood education.

We expect results on these investments. And there's an important role for charter schools to play in offering parents choice and providing a source of competition and innovation that can benefit all students, no matter what school they attend.

But, as you know, too many charter schools here in the Commonwealth have strayed from that purpose. Some are little more than fronts for private management companies, and the only innovations they're coming up with involve finding new ways to take money out of the pockets of property taxpayers – like setting up sham online schools or exploiting a loophole in special education funding.

In Thomas's district in Allentown, they're projected to pay more than \$60 million in charter school tuition fees this year – that's nearly 20 percent of their budget. And because many of these charter schools fail to deliver on their promise of a better education, many of the students who attend them wind up returning to the public school system – except, now, they're behind their peers.

Our charter school system is in desperate need of reform. It's time to close the loopholes, it's time to establish real standards, and it's time to level the playing field. By doing so, we can continue to provide parents with real choices, we can empower charter schools to focus on their mission of innovation, and we can save \$280 million a year that we can put right back into improving our public school system.

How? Well, for one thing: We haven't updated teacher pay since the 1980s – let's finally give them a raise. We've got women and men working for a wage set back when I actually had hair. And, by the way, many of them are working in buildings that were built before I was even born.

Indeed, just as there's no excuse for failing to support the women and men in our classrooms, there's no excuse for the condition of some of those classrooms themselves.

Thomas's district has 19 school buildings that pre-date 1950. And all across our Commonwealth, children will, tomorrow morning, walk into school buildings loaded with lead paint, asbestos, and other dangers.

We know that environmental factors directly affect student performance. And we know how to fix this problem.

But we also know how things tend to work around here. For the past two years, my administration scraped together what funding we could, and we did what we could to help address these problems. But if we keep doing what we're doing, that means many schools won't make the cut, and those students will just keep on being exposed to dangerous contaminants. And we say to school leaders like Thomas, "maybe next year."

No business would choose to address such a pressing crisis in such a cavalier fashion. And no parent wants to hear that there just wasn't room in the budget to make sure her child is breathing clean air or drinking clean water.

That's why it's time to stop playing numbers games with our children. Instead of chipping away at this problem bit by bit, let's make 2020 the year we act decisively to repair our school infrastructure. My budget calls for a \$1 billion investment in fixing toxic school buildings, and streamlining the process to allow school districts to apply for this funding.

Let's give leaders like Thomas the resources they need to succeed. And let's make sure that every parent who sends their kid off on the bus this September can spend less time worrying about mold, lead, and asbestos and more time looking forward to finding out what their kids have learned when they get home.

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There's more in this budget:

Adding staff capacity at our Department of Environmental Protection  
Calling for legislative action to address gaps in pipeline safety  
Ensuring communities are protected when a state facility closes  
Investments in advanced manufacturing and in the arts.

Meanwhile, the work continues on longstanding priorities like fighting the opioid epidemic and reforming the criminal justice system, like changing our probation process.

And in the coming weeks, I'll bring to you a health care reform plan that will address the high cost of prescription drugs, protect consumers, and empower more families to make decisions about their futures without being held captive by their health insurance.

I have ambitious plans for this year. And I know that the politics of the moment dictate that some of you go out into the hall after this and talk about the parts you think may be too ambitious.

But none of us came to public service to prove that better things are not possible. We are here because we believe that we can envision, and achieve, a brighter future for the people we serve.

I look at Neishmary, at Jacob, at Thomas, and I'm reminded of the potential of our people, and the brilliant future that awaits us if we can continue building towards William Penn's vision of a Commonwealth that offers opportunity to all.

But there's an empty seat here in the chamber. Right over there.

I'd like you to imagine Erie's Elijah Jackson sitting in that seat. He'd be 21 years old now, perhaps training to serve our country in the Air Force like he always imagined.

His mother, Vanessa, who's here today, told me that Elijah loved to dance. He loved to play basketball. And he loved to make his brothers and sisters laugh. He wasn't just the life of every party – he was the life of his family. Vanessa remembered one day in particular, his junior year of high school, when he sat on her lap and promised that, once he graduated and joined the military, he would take care of her. That was Elijah.

Unfortunately, a few weeks later, on a hot July night, Elijah went out to meet his younger cousin and some friends after a game. Someone driving down the street in an SUV had a gun and started shooting. Someone else had a gun and started shooting back. Elijah and his friends were caught in the crossfire.

Turns out, it was a turf war that Elijah had nothing to do with. Turns out, the gun that killed him didn't belong to the person who pulled the trigger, but rather to a veteran suffering from addiction. Turns out, there were so many weapons involved and so many shell casings found that it was hard to prove exactly who had fired the shot that happened to hit Elijah Jackson, and the case against some of the defendants fell apart.

But what it all adds up to is the same story we've seen repeated over and over again. An innocent Pennsylvanian is robbed of a future that should have been their birthright. A family is robbed of a loved one. And all of us are robbed of the contributions someone like Elijah Jackson would have made to our Commonwealth.

We have no way of quantifying what we lost when Cecil and David Rosenthal were killed at the Tree of Life synagogue or when Gerard Kozic died while sheltering his wife from a hail of bullets at a municipal meeting.

And our losses aren't limited to the horrific acts of mass violence that make the news. They happen every day. A trans woman like Tamika Michelle Washington is murdered in the kind of attack far too common in the trans community. A decorated veteran like Sergeant Russel Crupe takes his own life — a tragedy far too common among his fellow service members.

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There is an empty chair in this chamber. And there is an empty chair at the dinner table of too many of the people here – not just these families, but many of you elected to serve in this chamber whether a family member was shot in their neighborhood, or someone you love used a firearm to take their own life.

I understand that unimaginable tragedy is part of life. But when it comes to gun violence, we have gotten to a point where these kinds of tragedies are no longer unimaginable at all.

We have gotten used to seeing bulletproof backpacks advertised during back-to-school sales. We have gotten used to hearing our young children talk about the traumatic lockdown drills they had to endure between science class and recess. We have gotten used to that little worry that creeps into the backs of our minds whenever we enter a shopping mall, or a sports stadium, or even a house of worship.

And, unfortunately, we have also gotten used to hearing politicians offer their thoughts and prayers and little else. It's part of the ritual now, right alongside the somber press conferences where law enforcement officials detail the carnage and the tearful testimonies from friends and family grieving their loved ones.

So the question is: Why can't we act? Why haven't we tackled this like other states have?

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I know that, across this Commonwealth, there are law-abiding, responsible gun owners. There are those deeply concerned about the Second Amendment. And I support their right to be heard when it comes to gun safety reform.

And if you're one of those law-abiding, responsible gun owners, all I ask of you is this: Imagine it's your gun that is stolen from your house by someone who is neither responsible nor law-abiding. Imagine it's your gun that, through no fault of your own, gets re-sold to someone who couldn't pass a background check. Imagine it's your gun that winds up in the hands of someone who intends to use it to harm himself or others.

Can you honestly say that you don't care just as much as anyone else about making sure that doesn't happen?

All I ask of you is this: Imagine that it's your municipal building, it's your synagogue, it's your neighborhood pool that suddenly becomes the next symbol of this crisis. Imagine that it's your child who doesn't come home from a party, from a concert, from school.

Can you honestly say that you don't believe there's any way to protect both your family and the Constitution?

And when it comes to the people here in this chamber who have no intention of coming to the table on this issue, whether out of ideological conviction or political calculation, well, you have a right to your opinion, too.

But let me ask you something: Can you look at your family and honestly say that you wouldn't do anything, pay any price, to protect them?

Can you look at Vanessa Belen, or any of these families, in the eye, and tell them that their families weren't worthy of the same?

Can you look at the empty chair in this chamber and say you've done enough to stop this epidemic?

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We know that gun violence has become a public health crisis – and we know what the solutions are.

We know that universal background checks work.

We know that stronger reporting requirements for lost and stolen firearms keep guns off the streets.

We know that red flag laws keep guns out of the hands of people who are a danger to themselves or to others.

We know that making our schools safer isn't just about metal detectors and armed guards at the door, but about counselors and social workers inside the building to help kids who are struggling.

No law can eliminate every act of gun violence. But the steps I'm proposing are supported by the evidence – and supported by the vast majority of Pennsylvanians. We can pass them tomorrow, and, by doing so, we could make our Commonwealth safer.

I hope the legislature joins me at the table on this. To let another session go by without action would be a failure of imagination that will cost lives.

Let's make 2020 the year we choose to stop being cynical about the politics of gun violence. Let's start to address the reality of gun violence. Let's make 2020 the year we act.

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My fellow Pennsylvanians, this year's budget offers us a chance to make our workforce stronger, to make our schools better, and to make our communities safer. But more broadly, it gives us an opportunity to do what William Penn did under that oak tree all those years ago.

We have the chance to look around this beautiful piece of the world and imagine what it could become in our lifetimes, and in the lifetimes of our children and grandchildren.

William Penn imagined a Holy Experiment in self-government. Benjamin Franklin imagined a constitutional republic and a free press. Frances Harper imagined an America free from slavery.

Rachel Carson and Gifford Pinchot imagined the potential of our environment. William Wilson and Mother Jones imagined and won rights for workers. Andrew Carnegie imagined new ways to build prosperity.

Bayard Rustin and Edie Windsor imagined people free of discrimination. Fred Rogers imagined all of us caring for our neighbors.

Today, we can take our place on that honor roll by imagining a Pennsylvania that works for all of her citizens. A Pennsylvania where no problem – not the cost of health care, not the challenge of rebuilding our schools, not the scourge of gun violence – no problem is too big for us to come together and solve. A Pennsylvania where the old failures and the old divides give way to new potential and new opportunity.

Let's imagine that bright future on the horizon – and let's walk towards it together. Thank you.