

**Governor Bob Taft  
State of the State Address  
January 25, 2006**

**"Raising the Bar: Nurturing Talent for Success in the Knowledge Economy"**

Speaker Husted, President Harris, Minority Leaders Prentiss and Beatty, Lt. Governor Johnson and statewide elected officials, members of the General Assembly and the Supreme Court, distinguished guests, and my fellow Ohioans.

Serving as Governor is the best job I've ever had. I love what I do because every day I get to go to work on behalf of the finest people anywhere – the inspiring citizens of our diverse and beautiful state.

I am proud of what we've accomplished for Ohio, and invigorated by what we can yet achieve during the course of the coming year.

Just as no man is an island, no Governor stands alone. I am indebted to the many who have supported and worked with me to make Ohio better and stronger.

First and foremost, my wife Hope, and our daughter Anna.

Hope deserves a separate speech for all she does as Ohio's "First Volunteer" – helping families whose loved ones are serving overseas, enabling children to grow up healthy and stay alcohol and drug free. For six years she has led Ohio's Make a Difference Day, and for six years in that program Ohio has led the nation.

Please join me in recognizing a remarkable woman, Ohio's First Lady, Hope Taft.

Last year Hope and I learned the true meaning of "For better or for worse." It was tough going for both of us, and Hope was at my side through it all with her love, her encouragement, and her inspiration.

And we are so proud of our daughter Anna. During my time in office, she has grown from a college freshman to an independent, capable young woman doing her part to make a difference in the world. She's been traveling and teaching and will be leading high school students to Ecuador this summer. Wherever Anna goes, her goal is to leave the place she visits better than she found it. Thank you Anna for all your love and support.

Lt. Gov. Bruce Johnson is a vigorous advocate for our state and its people. He's leading the charge to promote Ohio as a prime business location. Bruce has earned the deep respect of lawmakers, and business and community leaders throughout the state. I am very proud to have him at my side.

Bruce is just one of the remarkable public servants who make up the finest cabinet in the land. Their professionalism is unparalleled. Their accomplishments too numerous to mention. Please join me in recognizing these outstanding men and women.

My cabinet couldn't do their jobs without the state workers who deliver everyday in challenging times. We have 3,600 fewer now than when I took office, and yet they continue to provide the services on which our people depend. And all the while, they've shown their generosity – donating nearly \$35 million to our Combined Charitable Campaign and other worthy causes over the last seven years.

And, of course, nothing could be accomplished without the leadership and vision of all of you, the members of the Ohio General Assembly.

I've been blessed to work with two extraordinary leaders this past year, Senate President Bill Harris and Speaker Jon Husted.

Together, we've done things that pundits and special interests told us were impossible. Every Ohioan should be grateful for their leadership.

And minority leaders Prentiss and Redfern came through for the people of our state with their support of the Jobs for Ohio bond issue.

I want to express my appreciation to them and to all of you who helped put that issue on the ballot.

Finally, join me in saluting the best Guard unit in the nation, the Ohio National Guard.

They have been defending our freedom in foreign lands, helping Gulf states recover from hurricanes, while always standing ready to respond to disaster here at home.

I'm so proud of all the Ohioans serving in the armed forces. Two of the finest are here with us today – Senator Steve Stivers and Representative John Bocchieri.

All of the brave men and women defending our nation, along with their families and loved ones, make daily sacrifices in the name of a safer world. May our thoughts be with the moms and dads, sisters and brothers, husbands and wives, and the children who long for a loved one to come home. And may our prayers go out to all who suffer loss. Please join me in a moment of silence to remember those heroic Ohioans who have given their lives for our freedoms during the past year.

In my first Inaugural address I spoke of Ohio's pioneers and said:

"Two centuries ago, the brave men and women who pioneered the wilderness frontier that would become Ohio were laying the groundwork for statehood. Surely, their foremost goal at the dawning of the 19th century must have been sheer survival. And

their dearest dream? A desire to leave their children a world in which struggle was not a constant companion."

Those who have gone before us built this great state into an economic powerhouse, a center of innovation and invention. With every passing generation our wilderness was tamed, our challenges met, and our struggles diminished.

We've become the seventh largest state in the union and rank third in the nation in manufacturing. Ohio's economy is larger than those of the vast majority of countries in the world.

But even with this rich history and proud standing in the nation and the world, challenges and struggles remain. Economic uncertainty is a fact of life for far too many Ohioans.

Uncertainty is fueled by the realities of global change. Ohio's traditional economy is under attack. Our international competitors grow stronger, seemingly overnight.

When the Lieutenant Governor was in China in December he visited Pudong, a region that has grown to 1.5 million residents and is home to many of the kind of high-tech companies we are trying to attract to Ohio. Twenty years ago, Pudong was farmland.

You can travel to India, Eastern Europe, or South America and witness economic transformation that impacts Ohio every day—sometimes to our advantage, and other times to our detriment.

Just as it was Ohio's destiny to rise from the wilderness, so it is the world's destiny to grow more competitive and interdependent.

As the world is being transformed, so must we transform Ohio.

To keep pace, we must make Ohio a more fertile field for enterprise, and nurture and lift the talents of our people.

We've started by building on our strengths, such as our location in the heartland of North America.

We've continued to expand our highways with major projects to keep people and products moving and connect all parts of our state to the economic mainstream. And thanks to your vision, and the support of the people last fall, our local communities can continue to grow by investing in job-ready sites, roads and bridges.

Our auto industry has been a source of strength, providing 150,000 good jobs for Ohioans. Yet some of these jobs are threatened. Let's work together to pass a bill to help stabilize and strengthen this vital sector of our economy.

Workers' Compensation has been an asset for Ohio in the competition for jobs, and it will be again. We've got a new leader and management team hard at work transforming the Bureau to better serve injured workers and employers. Senate Bill 7 will help in this transformation. I urge you to enact it as soon as possible.

Compared to much of the country, Ohio is blessed with an affordable, family-friendly quality of life and abundant natural resources that we must protect.

So we've made our state an even better place to live and play through Clean Ohio – with more than 600 projects in hundreds of communities. Soon, I'll submit to you a plan to continue investing Clean Ohio dollars for the benefit of our families and future generations.

We're also preserving and protecting Lake Erie and all the Great Lakes.

Just last month, the Great Lakes Governors and Premiers of Ontario and Quebec signed agreements to protect the waters of the lakes against the threat of diversion to more arid regions.

Ohio has led this bi-national effort. So let's be the first state to pass legislation to implement these historic accords.

And we've focused on the most precious natural resource of all – our children.

We're providing health insurance and immunizations for more of Ohio's kids. We're helping more working families access safe child care. And more children than ever get off to a good start in life thanks to a broader array of newborn screening tests.

We can, and we will do more. Today, I propose to expand our school breakfast and lunch program so that 120,000 more kids have healthy meals to help them succeed in school.

Every child needs a home where they can be loved, cared for and kept safe. Events of the past year revealed serious failings in our system of adoption and foster care.

Let's pass the reforms I proposed to ensure the safety of Ohio's adopted and foster children.

We've also focused on helping our seniors live active, healthy and independent lives.

Thanks to your support of PASSPORT, we are caring for more older Ohioans in their own homes.

We've created new alternatives to nursing homes through a long overdue assisted living option, our Home First program and better support for relatives who care for their loved ones.

And over the past two years, our Golden Buckeye program has helped seniors save more than \$36 million in the cost of prescription drugs.

We're also working to support families who are striving to maintain their quality of life.

To help more Ohioans stay warm this winter in the face of escalating energy bills, we expanded the Home Energy Assistance Program.

And we must do more to keep the American dream of home ownership from turning into a nightmare.

We should protect homebuyers by licensing appraisers, enhancing disclosure and prohibiting deceptive sales practices.

We protect Ohioans when they buy a car, or even a toaster – why not when they make the most significant purchase of their lives?

Let's pass a tough law to crack down on predatory lenders!

My friends, we've been able to build on our strengths and invest in our future because we're managing state funds conservatively.

We've reduced our workforce, cut operating budgets, closed state institutions, and cut the state vehicle fleet.

Last year, we passed the slowest-growth budget Ohio has seen in 40 years.

We've preserved our strong credit rating, and worked to replenish our rainy day fund.

We did it together, and we did it without muddling the Constitution with new acronyms and gimmicks.

To transform Ohio's economy, we have fought for reforms that others have only talked about and studied for decades.

At this time last year we had a tax code that was mired in the distant past, punishing investment and ignoring innovation. We worked day and night to bring that code into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We cut the income tax. We junked the corporate franchise tax. We scrapped the inventory and equipment tax.

And today, we have a fair code that encourages innovation and helps small business owners. A code that will help convince employers of all types to locate and expand in Ohio to serve North America and the world. They said it couldn't be done, but together we made it happen.

We also acted to protect Ohio businesses – large and small – from the kind of frivolous lawsuits that undermine their ability to compete.

And through the Third Frontier Project, we continue to transform our economy to make Ohio the best place to innovate and create new high-paying jobs.

With your support, we're building our scientific and research capacity, encouraging new investment in entrepreneurial companies, and forging new partnerships among Ohio businesses, research scientists and inventors.

We're investing in research to help our farmers and manufacturers develop new uses and new markets for their products.

We're attracting more federal research dollars than ever before, leading to more good jobs for our college graduates.

We've seen increases over the last four years in patent applications filed, patents issued, and license income received from new products and inventions.

And we are nationally recognized for our leadership in biotechnology and fuel cells.

We're home to more than 650 bioscience enterprises, including 100 new companies in the last five years alone. Among them, a major pharmaceutical company from California that recently chose to build its first manufacturing facility here in Ohio. And two fuel cell companies are moving their headquarters here as well.

In the coming years, we'll build on this progress. We'll strengthen partnerships between research and business. And we'll launch a new initiative to attract more venture capital and entrepreneurial talent to every region of this state.

But transforming our economy to create new jobs does us no good if our students lack the skills they need to succeed in those careers.

That's why I've focused on education reform since my first day in office. And this year, with your help, we'll finish the job by setting the right course for our students.

To date, we've concentrated on the basics and making sure no child gets left by the wayside.

We started with the Student Success Commission, which led, for the first time, to high, clear, specific standards that spell out what students should know and be able to do. These standards are among the most highly rated in the country.

Next, our Teacher Success Commission called for new educator standards to guide teachers and principals throughout their careers. Soon, I'll sign a bill to require our

colleges of education to incorporate these newly adopted standards into their teacher preparation programs.

Our reforms are working. Ohio elementary students are reading better than ever, thanks to good standards, better teacher training and more than 50,000 OhioReads volunteer tutors. When I took office, less than half of our 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders could read well. Last year more than three quarters met the mark!

In fact, we've made progress across the board. Since 1999, the average of students' scores on all state tests has increased by more than 17 points. And our 10<sup>th</sup> graders exceeded the state standard in four out of five subjects on the Ohio Graduation Test.

We've also worked hard to increase funding for our schools and provide safe, modern buildings.

In the school year starting next fall, state aid to schools will exceed 1999 levels by \$2.2 billion. That's an increase of 56 percent, more than three times the rate of inflation.

And we've just been nationally recognized for closing the gap between poor and wealthy districts. In 1997, funding in poor districts was more than \$600 less per pupil than in wealthier districts. By 2003, the gap had closed, with poor districts receiving more per student on average than their wealthier counterparts.

When I came into office far too many of our school buildings were unsafe, poorly equipped and hard to maintain. Thanks to your strong support, modern buildings are opening all across Ohio. Projects are completed or under way in more than half of Ohio school districts. We're rebuilding schools faster and better than any other state in the country.

I'll soon submit to you a budget to sustain this progress. I ask for your continued support to make sure our children have classrooms that meet the learning needs of the new millennium.

We're on a better path to prepare students for success in college and on the job. More Ohioans are earning the key to unlock their future – a college degree. College enrollment and completion are at all-time highs, both up by 15 percent since I started as Governor.

And with your help, we've been making higher education more accessible for low- and middle-income families. Since 1999, we have increased state funding for student aid programs by almost 50 percent. This year, because of changes you helped make, 11,000 more students will be eligible for greater grant assistance than ever before.

This is progress, but we are still a long way from our goal. We know higher learning leads to higher earning. We know 40 of the top 50 fastest growing occupations require

education beyond high school. We know we're competing with other states, and countries like India, China, and Russia based on the talent and training of our workers.

Unfortunately, we also know that in Ohio too few high school graduates are prepared for college or a well-paying job. The evidence is overwhelming that when it comes to our high school students, it's not just about graduation. It's about preparation.

Only one in three of Ohio's high school graduates have the skills they need to succeed in a good entry-level job, an apprenticeship, the military, or in college.

And our students know it. A survey of recent high school graduates found that 39 percent of those who went to college and 46 percent of those who went straight to work said they were not well prepared. They said that if they'd only known, they would have taken tougher courses in high school.

Although a majority of our high school graduates will enter college, only six out of ten will earn a degree. One in four won't even come back for a second year.

In addition, more than four out of every ten students attending college right out of high school need remedial course work in math or English, or both. And these students are three quarters less likely to graduate. Remedial classes don't count for graduation, but they cost our system \$29 million per year.

Think about it:

One in four freshmen don't come back for a second year.

Forty percent of college freshmen will never earn a degree.

For too many, a high school diploma is not a passport to success, but rather a broken promise.

The world has raised the bar, and we must act to raise the bar for high school graduation. It's time to require all high school students to take a more rigorous core curriculum. We've got to get our kids on the right course!

This isn't just my conclusion. The American Diploma Project surveyed colleges and employers and came to the same conclusion. Our Commission on Higher Education and the Economy proposed more rigorous course work in high school. And our State Board's High School Task Force made a similar recommendation.

We've done the studies. We know that Ohio students who take a rigorous core curriculum are less likely to require remedial course work and are more likely to succeed on the job, or in college.



The Partnership for Continued Learning, which we created last year, stands ready to assist us in meeting the challenge.

My friends, let's work together to enact an education reform bill this session that will set the right course for students, for workers, and for the economic future of Ohio.

Here's the plan:

First, require all students to take rigorous course work that will prepare them for the workforce or college – this means four years of math, including Algebra II; three years of science, including biology, chemistry and physics; four years of English; three years of social studies; and at least two years of a foreign language. To give families and schools time to prepare, the core curriculum should apply to students in the graduating class of 2011.

Second, make completing a rigorous core curriculum a condition of admission to Ohio's state-funded four-year colleges and universities.

Third, move all remedial education to Ohio's two-year campuses, where costs are lower.

Fourth, require all students to take a college and work-ready assessment in their junior year to help them know if they're on the right course to be prepared for life after high school.

Finally, add a measure to the School Report Card to indicate how well high schools are preparing students for college and work.

We must also help students earn a college degree more rapidly at lower cost. We should give every high school student in good standing the opportunity to earn at least one semester of college credit while still in high school.

And I applaud members of the Higher Education Funding Study Council for proposing to tie state funding to course and degree completion. Let's reward institutions for the number of graduates they produce, not just the number of students who simply come to class.

Some will say that to implement this new core curriculum we need more and better-trained math and science teachers. And I agree. I commend the Speaker for proposing tuition incentives to increase the number of science, technology, engineering and math graduates. And I urge that math and science teachers be included in this plan.

The reforms I'm proposing amount to a major change – and change is difficult; but we fail to act at our own peril.

Our neighbors in Michigan and Indiana get it. They see what's happening in China and India. They know our population is growing slowly, and that it's getting harder and harder to attract science, math, and engineering talent from abroad. They've already acted. So for us, complacency is not an option. It's time to act. And we must have the courage to do it now.

My friends, ultimately, we are a great state, not because of our location or our natural resources. We are mighty through the talents of our people who are seizing new opportunities every day.

Entrepreneurs are growing new companies, researchers are finding new cures, skilled workers are building new schools and highways. In school after school, principals and teachers are helping students to develop their talents and elevate their skills.

You in this chamber have acted as well, reforming our tax policy and embracing our Third Frontier project, to transform our economy and prepare a more fertile field for new enterprise.

But there is no time for rest. We must put our state on the right course to prepare all Ohioans to rise every day to meet the challenge of our changing world.

We are blessed to have this moment on earth to make our mark. May God give us the strength and the courage to complete our task.

And may God bless the people of Ohio.

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