

**Governor Gretchen Whitmer  
2020 State of the State Address**

**I. Introduction**

Thank you.

Lieutenant Governor Gilchrist; Speaker Chatfield; Leader Greig; Majority Leader Shirkey; Leader Ananich; members of my cabinet; members of the bench; and all those who serve our state: thank you.

I must say, everyone is looking fantastic tonight. But, this year, I want to get one thing straight: This is NOT the red carpet.

Please, I urge you, focus on the substance of my speech. It's about issues, not appearances. I don't care how distracting Senator Shirkey's outfit is—cut him a break.

Tonight, I have the honor of speaking both on behalf of the people of Michigan—and directly to the people of Michigan. So, whether you are watching from home or you are in this room: welcome. I'm glad you're here.

I'm especially pleased my family is here, Marc, Sherry and Sydney.

I also want to acknowledge the dedicated Michigan Army and Air National Guard members who are serving overseas. As they represent our state and defend our country, we owe them our deepest gratitude.

Two of our brave servicemembers are here tonight – Colonel Alice Clark and Chief Warrant Officer Amber Burgess, thank you for your service.

And there is another person who isn't with us but who is here in spirit.

Governor Bill Milliken. He didn't just leave a legacy. He lived a legacy.

The reason is simple: Governor Milliken brought people together. He was a “passionate moderate”—back when that wasn't an oxymoron. He knew the real enemy wasn't on the other side of the aisle. The real enemy was doing nothing.

In the governor's memory and overlooking the waters he fought so hard to protect, we will break ground on the Milliken visitors center at arch rock on Mackinac island this year. His son Bill Milliken Jr. is with us tonight.

## II. A generation of doers

Governor Milliken's commitment to action is still relevant today. Especially today.

If you don't believe me, ask our kids. Ask [13]-year-old Monte Scott, [who is sitting right up there with his mom, Trinell].

Monte lives in Muskegon Heights, and his neighborhood was plagued by potholes.

The potholes were almost ankle-deep. And after some expensive repair bills on his mom's car, he got tired of waiting for the adults in charge to fix them.

So Monte took action. To the delight of his neighbors, and his mom, he grabbed dirt and a shovel from his backyard and filled them himself.

When I met Monte, he told me his dream is to go to college and to run for mayor. I wouldn't be surprised if he's giving the State of the State one day.

Monte's generation is a generation of doers. And they want to do good.

They inspire me. And we, the adults in charge, should do everything we can to build a better future for them.

Over the past year, we've made some good progress.

After 6 straight years of the highest auto insurance rates in the nation, we passed historic legislation... *bipartisan* legislation that puts money back in people's pockets and brings down the cost of car insurance. We preserved quality-coverage options, strengthened consumer protections, and most importantly, ensured an average rate reduction for the next eight years.

This has already resulted in the Michigan Catastrophic Claims Association lowering its fees – which will save drivers at least \$120 per car this year.

That's progress.

Also last year, with Secretary of State Benson, we launched redistricting efforts to strengthen our democracy, and make our elections more fair. And with Attorney General Nessel's leadership, we're holding drug companies that profited from peddling opioids, and corporate polluters that put harmful PFAS into our water, accountable.

We've made meaningful criminal justice reforms, too. We have a new law that will raise the age for juvenile offenders from 17 to 18. And last year, Lieutenant Governor Gilchrist and Chief Justice McCormack co-chaired a bipartisan task force focused on county jails that will help us

make real reforms in our criminal justice system. And by the way, last year, Garlin became the first African American lieutenant governor in our state's history to sign a bill into law.

It's been a year of firsts.

We created and named the first Clean Water Public Advocate and created the Environmental Justice Advisory Council.

The first pride flag flew over the governor's residence and the Romney building. I also hosted the first Diwali celebration and Ramadan dinner at the residence.

These firsts honor the beautiful diversity that is Michigan.

Unfortunately, we've also seen an uptick in hateful, harmful language in Michigan and across the country.

A lot of it starts in Washington, D.C., and now it feels like it's working its way to Lansing.

Whether it's misogyny in the workplace or threats of violence online, this is unacceptable.

Let's debate. Let's disagree. But then let's all live up to our responsibility to stand up to hate and harassment.

Remember, our children are watching.

In Michigan, *diversity* is our strength. *Doing* is our strength.

### **III. Do something**

So, my friends, what are we going to *do* in 2020?

Well, I say let's take our cue from Monte... and dig right in.

Anyone watching the national political debate has heard a lot of talk about plans.

Well, when it comes to tackling Michigan's challenges, I've got a Plan A and a Plan B.

Plan A was simple—it was in my budget last year.

When I spoke to you then, I told you that I was rolling up my sleeves and ready to work with anyone who's interested in solving problems.

I still am. But we can't afford to wait.

Over this last year, I made tough decisions that didn't make some of my friends happy. It was not easy. But leadership requires tough choices. Leadership means coming together around a significant problem, and working together. And sometimes we don't make our friends happy. I had hoped that legislative Republicans would follow suit on other tough issues in order to move Michigan forward together. They haven't.... But I'm still hopeful.

Michiganders are hardworking people. They expect results. They deserve leaders who will work hard... and get things done. They won't accept excuses, and neither will I.

I am not here to play games.

That's why it's time for Plan B.

For those of you who want to keep playing games, I'm going to press on without you. I'm going to use the power of my office to do what I said I was going to do.

Because for me... for Michigan... IMpatience is a virtue.

No more waiting around to fix our roads. Or improve our schools. Or strengthen our families.

The people of Michigan are counting on us.

It's time to act.

And it starts here. In this room.

Tonight's speech will be shorter than usual.

Believe me, the people of Michigan don't want more ceremony, they want con-crete action. And sometimes, they just want concrete.

I'll follow up with more on a variety of topics, including critical issues like drinking water and climate change, throughout the year.

Water is one of Michigan's greatest and most urgent challenges because it touches nearly every aspect of our lives. Recent headlines about PFAS and record Great Lakes water levels and their impact on tourism, agriculture and infrastructure speak to the magnitude and the urgency of the challenge ahead.

You'll hear a lot more about this in the coming weeks.

Tonight, I'm going to focus on roads, education, jobs, and health care.

#### **IV. Do something on our infrastructure**

I've spoken about building metaphorical bridges between our two political parties. But, disappointingly, political gridlock prevailed. And we've had to literally close bridges.

Last year, I proposed a real solution that would have fixed our roads by 2030 *and* freed up funds for education spending. That was Plan A.

It was a serious solution. It was a real solution. An honest solution to problems we inherited.

But some thought otherwise. Let's just say it wasn't warmly embraced.

But I'm not giving up.

Because the problem remains. In fact, it's worse because another year has passed. Michigan roads are among the most beat up and dangerous in the country.

Michigan families pay more than \$600 a year in car repairs. Cracked windshields, blown tires, busted rims.

That's money that could go into to your child care budget. Or your retirement fund. Or rent.

And it's also bad for business.

We can't ask businesses to invest in Michigan if we refuse to invest in ourselves.

And we can't protect public safety if our roads put our people in danger.

INaction is not an option.

When I introduced my proposal, I said I was happy to consider alternative solutions. But no one came up with any—at least not serious ones.

Diverting money from the teacher pension system to fill some potholes... come on.

Selling bridges... not serious.

And letting roads turn back into gravel... I don't think so.

Any proposal that creates more problems than it solves is NOT a serious solution.

So, it's time for Plan B: executive action.

Tomorrow, I will ask the State Transportation Commission to issue state road bonds, so we can start fixing the roads now.

My Rebuilding Michigan plan is financed without an increase at the gas pump, and it will do three things: save time, save money, and save lives.

Since it doesn't require the legislature to act, we can get started right away. That's important. Cutting down on the time we take to repair Michigan's most frequently traveled trunklines and state roads is fiscally responsible.

We can add and expand 122 major new projects and nearly double the amount available to fix roads over the next 5 years than if we wait. We can get to work on these state trunkline roads and freeways and take advantage of today's low interest rates.

Over the long haul, we'll actually SAVE money. It just makes sense.

So, from now on, when you see orange barrels on a STATE ROAD: slow down, and know that it's this Administration, fixing the damn roads.

But let me be clear: these new projects will only address the worst of our most highly traveled state roads. We still need the legislature to come up with a real, long-term solution to fix the roads.

So next time you're driving down your local street and hit a pothole or see a bridge closed—call up the Republican leaders in the legislature and encourage THEM to act.

## **V. Do something on our economy**

A long-term infrastructure fix isn't the only solution the hardworking people of Michigan need.

Michigan has boasted 10 straight years of economic growth. But Michiganders aren't all sharing in it. And at a time of historically low unemployment, many people are struggling to get ahead. Some are underskilled. Some are overworked. Some are underpaid.

We're doing something about that.

Since I took office, we announced nearly 11,000 new auto jobs—that's 5 times more than the previous year and it's the most ever announced in a single year in the history of the MEDC.

Our deal with Fiat Chrysler is one of the nation's largest automotive assembly plant deals of the last decade. Adding over 6,000 jobs and generating \$4.5 billion of investment. And for the first time in 30 years, the opening of a new assembly plant in Detroit.

Our deal with Ford Motor Company will create 3,000 jobs, producing the first-ever fully electric F150, securing Michigan's pole position in mobility innovation.

And just this week, we worked with GM to announce a more than \$2.2 billion investment in their Detroit-Hamtramck Facility. This plant, previously on the closure list, will now add more than 2,000 new jobs for Michiganders.

We're growing jobs outside of the auto industry, too.

My administration has continued work with the Canadian government on plans to construct the Gordie Howe International Bridge—a project that will create thousands of good-paying Michigan jobs, and spur economic growth in our state for years to come.

The Canadian Consul General Joe Comartin is here tonight. Please, join me in applauding our Canadian neighbors for financing this project and remaining a steadfast partner.

The truth is, plenty of Michiganders have a job. Many have to have more than one.

And 43 percent of our neighbors cannot afford basic expenses, like food and housing. That means on a block with 5 families, at least 2 of those families are barely getting by.

Michiganders need stability. And better pay so we can save more. We should be able to take time off when our kids are born and afford childcare when we're ready to go back to work. We need employers who will invest in a strong workforce.

Take overtime protections.

When I was growing up, if you worked more than 40 hours a week, you were paid overtime. It was that simple. It should still be that simple.

If you're working extra hours—sacrificing time with your loved ones on behalf of your employer—you deserve to get paid for that.

Right now, only workers making \$35,000 or less have overtime rights. That threshold is too low. As it stands, only 1 in 6 salaried workers in Michigan benefits.

So, I've directed the Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity to expand the right to overtime pay to tens of thousands of Michigan workers.

If you're on the clock, you deserve to get paid.

We're also cracking down on companies that misclassify their employees to shortchange them on payday—that's called payroll fraud. And it's illegal.

While most of our employers do right by their employees—there are some that don't. I am determined to make sure the hardworking people of Michigan are respected.

## **VI. Do something on our education**

Protecting our workforce is one step, preparing our workforce is another.

And that starts with our kids.

Michigan ranks in the bottom 10 states for overall literacy. We're doing something about that, too.

This year, we're doubling down on the commitment to invest in early literacy. We're working to make pre-k universal for kids living in districts where test scores are low or poverty is high. And we're providing better access to child care for parents who are in school or working full-time.

Then, once kids reach school age, we're making sure they can get the reading help they need. We've already tripled the number of literacy coaches in the state. The next step is to have literacy coaches train educators to better identify and support struggling readers. You'll hear more about this in the budget next week.

We're also partnering with the Community Foundation of Greater Flint, the Skillman Foundation, the Battle Creek Community Foundation, and others to help families navigate the Third Grade Reading Laws signed by my predecessor. This punitive law could be a nightmare for families, and this initiative will give parents and students the resources and support they need to get through it.

We can get ahead of this problem if we start early.

But our work cannot stop with early literacy. All Michigan students should have the opportunity to go to properly funded schools.

The one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work. Any teacher can tell you, every student has potential, but their needs are often different.

This year, together we moved toward an equitable funding formula.

Equitable funding is essential to meeting the needs of our at-risk students and students with special needs. Ensuring that every child gets the skills to graduate and succeed in our workforce.

While we're talking about skills...



In 2019, I set an ambitious goal to increase the number of Michiganders with a post-secondary credential to 60% by 2030.

To get there, there's bipartisan legislation called Michigan Reconnect, that will provide tuition-free skills training and degree programs for adults.

To the champions of these bills, Senators Horn and Ananich, Representatives Frederick, Kennedy, and Anthony: thank you.

Now, let's get this proposal passed.

Our business community supports Michigan Reconnect. And here's why: We have over one hundred thousand in-demand jobs to fill. These are good paying jobs—jobs in construction, IT, and advanced manufacturing. But they demand specialized skills training.

Meeting our goal and filling these jobs depends on more than just passing a bill. It depends on our young people.

So, to Michigan's high school seniors, including my own kids—I have two words: Keep going. Make a plan for after high school. Find a program that's a good fit for you—whether it's a union apprenticeship, a community college, or a university.

And please, Class of 2020, fill out your FAF-SA financial aid form.

It unlocks the Pell Grant and additional federal and state financial aid.

Last year, Michigan students left \$100 million in federal financial aid on the table.

We can't make that mistake again. So I've launched the "Governor's FAFSA Challenge." The high schools in Michigan with the highest completion rates can earn prizes, and the top school will take home \$10,000.

So parents and counselors, tell your students. Students, tell your friends. Filling out this form is important for your future. Everyone deserves a path to postsecondary success.

## **VII. Do something on our healthcare**

And everyone deserves access to quality, affordable health care.

In 2014, we expanded Medicaid to cover more than 600,000 Michiganders.

But more must be done. Many residents lack access to affordable healthcare. Either they don't have insurance at all... or the costs are so high, they can't get the care they need.

You would think that Washington would be trying to figure out how to improve the Affordable Care Act, instead of using our court system to kill it.

Dismantling the ACA would be disastrous for our state and devastating for our people.

One of the most important ACA provisions prohibits an insurance company from denying coverage to people with pre-existing conditions. Without that provision, the coverage of millions in our state could be at risk.

We need to enshrine these protections for Michiganders. Some Democrats in the legislature, including Representatives Kuppa, Hoadley, and Koleszar have come up with a proposal. And it's a good one.

Like protecting people with pre-existing conditions, and preventing insurance companies from discrimination.

But we need the support of lawmakers on both sides of the aisle. I urge the lawmakers here tonight to think about your constituents. Think about any woman who has given birth, any child with asthma, or anyone with a chronic condition like diabetes or high blood pressure.

Pass these protections. It's the right thing to do.

We need to prevent health crises, too.

And on that front, we've made a lot of progress.

We've helped more people struggling with substance use disorders and mental health issues get the support they need. I signed bipartisan legislation that protects more than 83,000 Michigan residents' access to mental health services.

And we're helping Michiganders struggling with opioid use disorder. Opioid deaths in our state have nearly tripled in the last decade. I set a goal and harnessed resources to cut the number of opioid deaths in half over the next five years.

In the coming months, I will create a task force that will focus on prescription drug transparency and lowering costs. Because if you can't afford to fill a prescription, you could wind up in the ER... or worse.

And my administration is working to ensure a safe, healthy environment for all new moms, especially moms of color.

This year, my budget proposal will extend health coverage for low-income women who have had babies.

We will extend postpartum care from 60 days to one full year after giving birth, and move up a woman's first postpartum visit to within three weeks, with a comprehensive visit within 12 weeks. This will help new moms heal, and work through postpartum depression and anxiety after giving birth.

We'll let a woman choose birth control that works for her. A novel idea, I know – we're going to ask a woman what she wants, ensure she can get it in one visit, and provide coverage for it.

We'll increase access to treatment for substance addiction and mental health services that work for moms.

And expand access to home visiting programs.

This will make a crucial difference for new moms. And we'll make an intensive effort to eliminate the disparities in care - for new moms of color especially. Because right now, black women are 3 times more likely than white women to die of pregnancy-related causes.

This is a staggering disparity. So I'm working with Michigan's medical community to address it. I've enlisted the help of the CEO of the Detroit Medical Center, Dr. Audrey Gregory, and I've asked our medical partners and universities to incorporate implicit bias training into their curriculum. So that as people of color seek health care, they'll be treated with equal dignity and respect, which will yield better outcomes. Dr. Randolph Rasch, Dean of the Michigan State University College of Nursing, who is here tonight, will head up this effort.

We need our medical professionals, and our future doctors and nurses, to be aware of bias and root it out. So we can promote equity in outcomes for every mom and every baby.

So here's the bottom line: the health of our state is only as good as the health of our residents.

## **VIII. Conclusion**

I want to end where I began...

IMpatience is a virtue.

Sure, it's good to be patient when you're waiting in line at the grocery store... or on the phone with customer service... or... when you're a Lions fan.

But not now. Not when people's lives and livelihoods are at stake.

Not here, in a state that faces challenges from pocketbooks to potholes... where our road conditions prove that WAITING to act ... only makes things worse.

In 2020... in Michigan... we can afford to be a little impatient. We need to be a little impatient.

In the blink of an eye, my daughters will be off to college and then joining the workforce. Same goes for Monte. For ALL our kids.

Let's fight for them, not with each other.

Let's show them what's possible.

The people of Michigan are on the move. And it's time for Lansing to catch up.

It's time for action.

Let's get to work.

Let's move some dirt.

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