



*Jim Justice*  
*Governor of West Virginia*

January 12, 2022

Dear Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, and distinguished members of the West Virginia Legislature:

In times the likes of which we have never seen before, and with this message being conveyed in a manner it has never been before, I am happy to report to you that the State of our State has never been stronger.

With this message, I am also delivering my FY2023 budget, which I am incredibly proud to say is essentially flat for the fourth year in a row, which includes a third historic pay raise for our state employees.

I sincerely apologize for not being able to be with you in person to deliver these remarks. As we prepare to embark on the third year of the coronavirus pandemic, I regret to inform you that last evening I tested positive for COVID-19. While I was surprised that my test results came back positive, I am thankful to the Lord above that I have been vaccinated, I have been boosted, and that I have an incredible support system, especially my loving family. For this to happen just one night before the State of the State – knowing I am not able to be there – saddens me. There are so many great things happening in West Virginia right now that I am excited to share with you.

We have proved that the rocket ship ride I promised the people of West Virginia is real. We have set records with our revenue growth. Our employment numbers are the best they have been in state history. Tourism in West Virginia is exploding – every travel publication says our state is the place to be. And we have accomplished all this while responding to a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic.

People are more excited than ever to be in West Virginia. From April 2010 to July 2019, more than 43,000 people moved out of the state. But things are changing. People are moving here instead of leaving. Businesses are moving here and expanding operations here. From 2020 through 2021, net migration is up in West Virginia for the first time in decades, with over 2,000

people moving into our state, making West Virginia one of the top states in the entire nation that people are moving into on a percentage basis.

We are shedding our image of being uneducated, dusty, poor, and backward. We are shedding our image of being bankrupt and a place business cannot operate because of our legal system. Together, we will continue to shed the dead weight that has been holding us back for years so we can continue to climb higher and higher on our journey to prosperity in West Virginia.

After concluding FY2021 with a \$413 million revenue surplus despite the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the state's economy, we continue to achieve surplus after surplus. Halfway through FY2022, year-to-date collections of nearly \$2.650 billion are \$475 million above estimate.

Our unemployment rate has dramatically declined from 7.1% in January 2021 to 4.0% today, the lowest rate recorded in all of state history. These figures represent over a 60% improvement in West Virginia's unemployment rate, which is now one of the lowest in the nation.

Last year, you honored me with approving my request to create a separate Department of Economic Development and to elevate this position to that of a Cabinet Secretary. The purpose of this was to provide a laser focus on job recruitment and broadband expansion. The new Department of Economic Development is operating efficiently and achieving incredible success.

In 2021, more than \$1.1 billion was invested in West Virginia by 39 different companies through Economic Development efforts and activities. This led to the creation of more than 1,330 new jobs, while retaining more than 6,400 additional jobs in the state. In the calendar year of 2021 – the first year of the Department of Economic Development – total employment in West Virginia has increased by over 36,000 jobs.

I want to express my support for your plan to get more marketable business-ready sites in West Virginia. Our Department of Economic Development needs the tools and flexibility to get potential industrial and business sites ready for companies looking at our state. Then we can pitch more companies to locate here, knowing the groundwork is already in place.

We are continuing to recruit world-class companies to our state as shown in three major announcements today. Nucor Corporation announced today that they selected Mason County as the location for a state-of-the-art sheet steel mill. This record investment will exceed \$2.7 billion, making it the largest in West Virginia history, as well as the largest single investment Nucor has ever made. Nucor is going to be a key part of West Virginia's DNA long into the future.

Also this morning, GreenPower Motor Company announced an agreement with the state to manufacture zero-emission, all-electric school buses in South Charleston, bringing hundreds of new jobs and millions of dollars in economic impact to West Virginia. Their operation will bring up to 200 new jobs to the state when manufacturing begins later this year, with the potential workforce to eventually reach up to 900 new jobs when full production is reached in 24-months. As we continue to diversify our economy, manufacturing these zero-emission school buses in West Virginia will open up a world of opportunities for our state.

Finally, this afternoon we announced that Owens & Minor, a Fortune 500 company that provides medical supplies, is going to expand on a deal they previously had with WVU Medicine and create over 125 jobs at a healthcare products preparedness and supply center in Morgantown. Together with the state, Owens & Minor will invest an estimated \$50 million in West Virginia. The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us all that preparedness and resiliency are incredibly important, so this partnership is more than just another business deal, it will have real-world positive benefits for all West Virginians.

These announcements are historic, but incredibly, they are just the beginning. West Virginia is finally competing on the world stage and we are all witnessing the results firsthand.

For the fourth year in a row, I am proposing an essentially flat budget, which includes a third historic pay raise and Inflatocine for our state employees. My budget is only 1.4% higher than last year, far below the 7% inflation rate being seen across our country. We are not dipping into the Rainy Day Fund, which I am proud to report now has over \$1 billion in funding! We are blessed as a state with the flexibility to fund projects out of our surplus funds without building the base of our budget into the future.

We are all aware of the effect inflation has had on all West Virginians. Today, it was reported that the consumer price index rose 7% in the month of December, according to the U.S. Labor Department. This is the fastest increase since June 1982, when inflation hit 7.1%.

My proposed Inflatocine will help West Virginians who are hurting when they go to the gas pump or the grocery store. I need your support to pass this one-time pay supplement for our hardworking state employees, teachers, and service personnel.

West Virginia continues to lead the way with our response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the first state in the U.S. to offer the vaccine to every single one of our seniors in nursing homes, I have championed the vaccines from the very beginning. Despite being COVID-positive myself, I believe that my symptoms would have been much worse if I were not fully vaccinated and boosted. I know in my heart that the more we have vaccinated, the less will die.

At the same time, however, we have struck the right balance to make sure our people do not fragment. I stand rock-solid behind our people being able to make that important medical choice for themselves in consultation with their doctor. I do not believe that anyone should be required to get vaccinated to continue collecting a paycheck and put food on the table for their family. Instead of forcing people to get the vaccine, we created incentives to excite people and get them across the finish line. Our Do it for Babydog vaccination sweepstakes was one of the most well-known vaccine incentive programs in the entire country.

Today, we are leading the way for the nation yet again. Last week, I sent a letter to President Joe Biden, asking him to direct the FDA and CDC to authorize West Virginia to begin offering a fourth dose of the vaccine to certain at-risk citizens four months after their first booster. West Virginia was the first state in the nation to make this request. We will continue to be the light in the dark, until this pandemic is behind us once and for all.

We continue to feed investment in our food banks. Fighting food insecurity has always been a big priority of mine. But it has been especially important during the pandemic. That is why I am incredibly proud to report that, in 2021 alone, we provided millions of support to food banks across West Virginia! Thanks to your help in the Legislature, we were able to put \$1 million into last year's budget for our state's two biggest food banks, and I will be respectfully requesting the same amount in my FY2023 budget.

Using the same responsible and conservative approach that we have utilized in recent years, my flat budget proposal will take care of all of our citizens, while allowing us to continue building upon our momentum right now in West Virginia.

We are going to continue to make education our centerpiece by investing in our greatest treasure – our children.

We are going to continue funding Communities In Schools because it's working, and impacting over 70,000 West Virginia students each year.

We are going to continue to pave the Roads to Prosperity by funding much-needed road repairs and infrastructure projects.

We are going to keep supporting our life-changing Jobs & Hope program that continues to rescue West Virginians from the pits of addiction and allows them to re-enter society with a renewed purpose and outlook, and – as always – we are going to continue to invest in economic development all across our state, letting the outside world know that West Virginia is the diamond in the rough that everyone has missed.

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

I hope this provides a picture of all the incredible things we are achieving, and will continue to achieve. But our accomplishments in West Virginia – the rocket ship ride that continues everyday – cannot be captured in a few short pages. That is why I would like to humbly and formally request to you, Mr. President and Mr. Speaker, a joint session of your bodies at a time after I have completed my recovery when I can deliver my full address in person and we can all celebrate the incredible State of our State together.

God bless all of you, and God bless the Great State of West Virginia.



Jim Justice  
Governor, State of West Virginia