

DRAFT 2021 SOTS

Good evening, Minnesota.

Chag Sameach to all Jewish Minnesotans. Blessed Palm Sunday to Christian Minnesotans as you enter Holy Week.

Last year, I gave the State of the State address from the Governor's Residence.

It was a time of deep uncertainty as our state stared down a long, dark winter.

COVID-19 brought society to a halt—shuttering businesses, closing schools, and disrupting our everyday lives.

Half a million Minnesotans have contracted COVID-19. Many of our neighbors experienced flu-like symptoms for only a few days. Others, ravaged by the virus, are still fighting through a fog of fatigue and struggling to breathe months later.

And tragically, many of our neighbors are no longer with us. The virus stole the lives of nearly 7,000 Minnesotans.

Grandmas. Grandpas. Mothers. Fathers. Daughters. Sons. Sisters. Brothers. Friends. Coworkers.

To everyone who has lost someone they care about this year, Minnesota's heart breaks for you.

Your grief is unimaginable. I know words can't ease your pain. Time doesn't erase it—it just changes it.

May you find peace in the memories of the good times with your loved ones lost.

All of Minnesota mourns with you.

##

This year, I am speaking to you from a classroom at Mankato West High School.

There are many reasons I decided to give the State of the State address from this classroom.

I taught social studies in this classroom for nearly a decade. My wife, Gwen, taught English right upstairs.

I've always said teaching isn't just how I paid the bills, it is how I have lived my life.

And for me, being in this classroom today signifies the progress we've made in ending this pandemic.

Throughout this year, when I have been asked what I am most looking forward to when the pandemic is over, I've answered: hearing the laughter of students in a lively school hallway.

That day is here, Minnesota. Brighter days are here, and even more are coming.

We are winning the fight against COVID-19.

More than 1.5 million Minnesotans have received the vaccine.

Over 80 percent of seniors have been vaccinated—outperforming the rest of the nation.

Two-thirds of our educators and child-care workers have received the vaccine.

Starting Tuesday, all Minnesotans 16 years old and over will be eligible to get the shot.

Over 90 percent of our students are back in-person learning in classrooms just like this one.

Minnesotans are gathering again and heading back to their favorite restaurants and bars.

The Twins are preparing to have fans in the stands on opening day.

Normalcy is on the horizon, and Minnesotans are eager to embrace the simple pleasures of life.

Whether it's the morning rush out the door to school, a warm cup of coffee with a friend, or for me, the busy chatter of a high school hallway between classes, we vow never to take them for granted again.

The thaw is here, but in Minnesota we know better than to let our guard down at the first sign of spring.

I was in quarantine last week after being exposed to COVID-19—serving as an important reminder that the virus is still with us.

We're monitoring closely as COVID cases have started rising again, spurred by new variants of the virus.

We must remain vigilant. The only way we will truly beat this virus is by continuing to socially distance, wear a mask, and get tested.

Most importantly, Minnesotans need to get vaccinated.

Getting vaccinated will protect you and your loved ones.

Getting vaccinated will get us back to the places we love and the people we miss.

Getting vaccinated is how we end this pandemic

##

The second reason I chose to speak from this high school is because schools are a reflection of our communities. And here in Minnesota, our communities are strong.

When I was a young teacher at this school in 1997, I witnessed this sense of community firsthand.

Multiple blizzards hit the state that winter and snow was piled high. When spring arrived, the snow melted quickly and the nearby Minnesota River began to swell.

The water rose past the river banks, flooded the nearby highway, and forced families to flee their homes in the nearby town of St. Peter.

Our students were determined to help their neighbors. They asked us if they could go help save the town from the encroaching waters.

They arranged for our school buses to take them to St. Peter. They spent hours side by side filling sandbags and piling them up one by one to create a wall to protect the homes and businesses in the water's path.

They were only teenagers, and they understood our Minnesota value of community. They knew we care for our neighbor when they are in need.

It's the same value that leads us to pull over and help a stranger push his car out of the snow.

And it's the same value that is getting us through this pandemic.

No matter how daunting the challenge or how dark the time, Minnesotans have always risen up by coming together.

This year has demonstrated that like never before. Minnesotans have stepped up to combat the virus and protect their community in whatever way they can.

While many of our sacrifices are solitary in practice, they are communal in nature.

Health care workers isolated from their families and worked around the clock to save lives.

Educators, child-care workers and so many others kept working to teach and care for our children.

From first responders to sanitation workers to personal caregivers to corrections officers to food and manufacturing workers and so many more, frontline workers kept Minnesota safe and moving, even as the virus spread.

Bar, restaurant, and other small business owners weathered unpredictable closures to help stop the spread.

When there was a shortage of hand sanitizer, distilleries across the state switched their production to make it.

When hospitals needed more equipment to protect health care workers, hockey equipment companies made medical face shields instead of helmets.

When we needed masks to distribute to people across the state, Minnesotans sewed and donated more than 130,000 masks.

You took actions, large and small, to protect and support your neighbors.

You canceled travel plans.

You donated to food shelves.

You missed proms, weddings, and graduations.

You juggled your own job with your kids learning from home.

You set smaller tables during the holidays.

You wore a mask.

You social distanced.

You stayed home.

You sacrificed. You endured. And you saved lives.

These selfless acts embody Minnesota's dedication to community—and you proved once again that there's nothing our state can't do when we come together.

This year has been hard. But the worst of times brought out the best in people.

Thank you.

###

I want to take a moment to give a special acknowledgment to our seniors.

COVID-19 had disproportionate and devastating impacts on our older Minnesotans and their caregivers.

Thank you for your resilience and sacrifices during an isolating time.

Communities look to their elders for wisdom and guidance. And whether through window visits with grandchildren or holidays spent alone, you set an example of selflessness and bravery for our entire state.

##

The third reason I am giving my speech from this high school today is a lesson I learned while coaching football here.

In 1999, we were halfway through our season and had lost our first four games. We were playing well. We lost some close ones. We were just right on the edge of winning.

The remainder of the season was challenging. The teams we had left to play were good.

To some, it seemed everything was stacked against us. But our team never lost hope.

And neither did the fans. The stands remained full of our community enthusiastically cheering us on.

Each week we got a little better. We approached each practice, each play, every down with a focus to improve.

And we did. Until one day, we won.

And we kept improving and we kept winning.

To the astonishment of everyone who had watched us at the beginning of the season, we qualified for the state playoffs.

Our first game was against an undefeated team that had racked up state titles over the years.

We were down in a close game with only seconds left in the first half and we needed a goal line stand to keep the game within reach.

Coach Sutton called a timeout and I ran out onto the field.

Our team was huddled up, and I said, you know how to do this. Everything this season has prepared you for this moment. Fellas, it is not often in life that you get a moment like this, one that defines you.

This is your moment. This is *our* moment.

I saw nods all around the huddle. One player yelled, “I’ve got this. *We’ve* got this!”

The whistle blew, and we stopped the play for a loss.

We went on to win the game, and then won two more games to claim the state championship.

I don’t think we would’ve won that state championship if we hadn’t lost at the beginning of the season.

It taught us grit, resilience, and the true meaning of teamwork. Each player stayed in his lane and did his part to bring home that first state title.

That’s what Minnesotans have done this year. It isn’t giant acts of heroism that are defeating this pandemic—it is Minnesotans each doing the right thing to the best of their ability.

In my State of the State speech last year, I said that Minnesota wouldn’t just *survive* this crisis, we would *lead* through it.

And with championship-worthy grit, resilience, and teamwork, that’s exactly what we’ve done.

Our state took care of our own—providing unemployment insurance to more than 850,000 Minnesotans, helping Minnesotans stay in their homes, and providing millions in assistance to small businesses affected by the pandemic.

State employees worked around the clock to protect long-term care residents, keep the child care industry afloat, provide safe spaces for Minnesotans experiencing homelessness, feed Minnesotans, and track down the critical supplies that hospitals needed to care for those falling ill.

Minnesota companies stepped forward to lead in the global response to COVID-19.

With its plants running 24/7, our very own 3M manufactured *2 billion* respirators globally in 2020—tripling its production since 2019.

When the country was facing an increased demand for ventilators to care for people in the ICU, Medtronic set aside competition and publicly shared the design of its ventilator.

Our agricultural sector fed the world.

Our world-class health care systems and research institutions developed cutting-edge tests, treatments, and ways to provide care amid the pandemic.

At a time when Minnesota was barely conducting 2,000 tests a day, we set a moonshot goal of reaching 20,000 tests a day to track the spread of COVID-19.

Joining forces with the University of Minnesota and Mayo Clinic, we surpassed that goal in less than two months.

Now we test 40,000 Minnesotans and more every day, at sites across Minnesota.

With a focus on our kids, we have a nation-leading testing program in our schools and in child care—testing thousands of educators and child-care workers each week.

Now we are bringing that same innovative energy and collaboration to our vaccination effort. From the Vikings training facility to local churches, our vaccine roll-out is leading the nation with more than 40,000 shots administered each day.

Minnesota's hard work is paying off, and has real impacts on our daily lives.

Just this week, Minnesota ranked first in the nation for speed of administering vaccines.

A recently published study from a national children's organization ranked Minnesota first in the nation for protecting children from hunger, learning loss, and financial stress during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Measured by economic, health, and social well-being, Minnesota was also recently named the best state in the country for women during the pandemic.

For overall quality of life? We recently ranked the second-best state in America.

Minnesota was one of the safest states in the nation during the pandemic when comparing cases, hospitalizations, and deaths. And now our economy is booming back faster than we ever imagined.

We haven't just *survived* this crisis—we've centered our values and led through it.

##

The final reason I chose to give this address from Mankato West High School is to lift up and share wisdom spoken here 60 years ago.

In 1961, Martin Luther King Jr gave a 48-minute speech in the high school's auditorium.

His speech came during the peak of the freedom rides when black and white Americans rode buses through the South together to protest segregation.

Dr. King was clear that the scourge of racism wasn't limited to the South. He said clearly that "no section of our country can boast of clean hands."

We know this in Minnesota. Our state was thrust into the international spotlight following the death of George Floyd. Our deep racial inequities were exposed for the world to see.

For many white Minnesotans, it was an awakening to a truth that Minnesotans of color have known all their lives.

While our state ranks as one of the best places in the country for a white child to grow up, it often ranks as one of the worst for a child of color.

As many Minnesotans welcome getting back to normal, we must acknowledge this and recognize that for too many getting back to normal isn't good enough.

It's not good enough for a single mother who is working two jobs to keep food on the table...

It's not good enough for a student in a small town who has to do her homework at a local restaurant because she doesn't have internet...

And it's not good enough for young black men who live in fear of being stopped by police officers who have sworn an oath to protect them.

##

In his speech, Dr. King spoke about how the winds of change were blowing through the world.

Once again, the winds of change are blowing through our world.

The winds of change blew thousands of Minnesotans into the streets last summer and inspired a movement across the world.

The winds of change quietly opened eyes, ears, and minds across our state.

Dr. King said these winds were sweeping away the old order and ushering in a new order of equality and dignity.

So how do we usher in equality and dignity today?

One way, which Dr. King spoke about at length in his speech, is nonviolent protest.

As the trial of Derek Chauvin is underway, tensions and emotions will understandably run high.

Please, Minnesotans, make your voices heard. Practice your First Amendment right—but please heed Dr. King’s advice that nonviolence is the only way to truly move hearts and create change.

##

Another way to usher in equality and dignity is through policy change.

Last summer, I signed bipartisan police accountability legislation into law to address systemic inequities in Minnesota’s criminal justice system.

The law bans neck restraints like the one that was used on George Floyd before his death in Minneapolis. It also imposes a duty to intercede on officers who see a colleague using excessive force and changes rules on the use of force to stress the sanctity of life.

It was an important first step, but it was only a first step. More must be done.

We must recognize that inequality isn’t limited to our criminal justice system.

While the wealthiest Minnesotans did well during the pandemic, our students, small businesses, and working families struggled to get by.

That is why my proposed state budget aims to level the playing field by supporting working families, helping small businesses stay afloat, and ensuring students catch up on learning.

My budget ensures that those who have been hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic have the resources they need to get back on their feet. It gives a tax break to more than 300,000 Minnesota families, makes nearly all Paycheck Protection Program loans tax exempt for small businesses, and provides direct cash payments to over 32,000 Minnesota families.

My budget would invest \$50 million in a new Small Business COVID Support forgivable loan program to help the hardest hit businesses sustain their operations and emerge from the pandemic. The program includes targeted investments in Greater Minnesota businesses and minority owned businesses.

Inequality in our education system long predates the pandemic. For far too long, the quality of a child’s education in Minnesota has been determined by their race or zip code. Children of color and children in Greater Minnesota face barriers to the opportunities they need to reach their full potential.

That is why I unveiled a new education plan this year. Named Due North, the plan serves as a guide toward a future where every child receives a high-quality education, no matter where they live or what they look like.

Due North will help students recover from learning loss this year, starting with additional learning and tutoring this summer, while closing the opportunity gap and transforming our education system for years to come.

This plan would tackle the racial and geographic opportunity gap by dramatically reforming school financing, expanding access to rigorous coursework, and ensuring our curriculum and teacher workforce better reflect our increasingly diverse student body.

Minnesota has come together to lead the way in battling COVID-19, but we can't stop there. We need to lead the way in making this state the best in the country for our kids – every single one of them.

We have one of the most diverse economies in the country. We are the problem-solving headquarters of the country. We have the highest business survivability rate in the country.

We build what matters here—and we have an opportunity to reinvent old ways of doing things and show the nation how to create an economy that works for everyone.

##

Dr. King ended his speech at Mankato West with a call to action. He said that while nonviolent protest and policy change are critical—they won't usher in equality and dignity alone.

It will take the realization that we are all in this together.

He looked out onto his audience at this school in Southern Minnesota and said, "We must all learn to live together as brothers, or we will all perish together as fools."

"We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality," he continued. "Tied in a single garment of destiny."

Minnesota, this has never been more apparent.

The stakes are high, and we have proven that we are up to the challenge.

We've proven that we know our destinies are linked with those of our neighbors. We've proven that we are willing to love and sacrifice for one another--through hardship and heartbreak.

We've shown that a team, weary from loss with the odds stacked against us, can come together, dig deep, and persevere.

This is the spirit that will bring a new day. This is the spirit that will usher in equality and dignity.

Minnesota can and will emerge stronger from this crisis than ever before.

The state of our state is strong, Minnesota. This is our goal line stand. Get vaccinated. We're coming back.

Thank you.