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Lieutenant Governor Mark Robinson's State of the State Response

Raleigh, NC

Hello, I'm your Lt. Governor Mark Robinson and it's my honor to address you tonight.

I was born and raised in Greensboro North Carolina as the 9th of 10 children. Our home was filled with alcoholism and violence. My father routinely abused my mother. When I was in the fifth grade, my father died, and I was terrified. He had been the sole provider for our family. I thought that we were going to be homeless. I wasn't sure that my mom would be able to provide for the five of us that were still living at home.

A few days after my father died, a friend of my mother came by and told her that she could kick her feet up and relax, because now she could get welfare and be taken care of by the state. But my mom decided to take a different path. She walked across the street from our home and got a job as a custodian at the local university. There she cleaned up for other people's children to provide for her own. I remember the first paycheck she got. She picked up McDonalds for dinner. You would have thought we were eating a five-star meal; that was the best food I've ever had.

I was so proud of my mom.

She was my hero.

She encouraged me to dream, and told me that with faith, hard work, and perseverance I could achieve anything.

My mom passed away in 2016, I know she would be proud to see her son serving as the first black Lieutenant Governor of North Carolina. The journey to where I am today was long and difficult. Like so many other North Carolinians, I faced my share of adversity. I lost not one but two jobs to NAFTA. I've laid awake at night wondering how I was going to pay my bills. I've lost my house, my car, and decades ago was forced to declare bankruptcy. (But) like my mother taught me, I leaned on my faith, continued to work hard, and persevered.

I've now been married to my wife for over 30 years, have two wonderful children, and two incredible grand kids. I have served in the military, worked in manufacturing, been a GM at a restaurant, and owned a small business with my wife. You see, I am not a politician who talks about the issues facing our state as someone who doesn't understand them; in fact, I don't consider myself a politician at all. What I am, is a public servant who knows what the people of North Carolina are going through, wants to serve them, and will fight for them. (And) like my own personal journey, our state has experienced both hardship and victory.

Since Republicans were elected to the majority in the General Assembly, they have implemented commonsense economic policies to ensure that you can keep more of your hard-earned money. (And) They've been good stewards of your money. Like your family, they had to set a budget and stick to it.

That fiscal responsibility resulted in historic economic growth. The Republican-led General Assembly turned a state that was billions of dollars in debt and struggling financially into an economic powerhouse. North Carolina is the number one state in the nation to do business.

(But) while we've seen tremendous growth across the state, many families are still struggling. If the Democrats have their way, they'll pull us back into an era of government overreach, high taxes, and attacks on our personal freedoms.

During the pandemic, we saw just how far they would go to control your lives. They shut down your businesses. They kept your children out of school. They told you, you couldn't go to church.

The Biden Administration's tax-and-spend philosophy is hurting North Carolinians at every turn. Prices of essentials like gas and groceries are skyrocketing. (And) we're still facing shortages of everyday goods like baby formula.

Here in North Carolina, Democrats would follow the lead of President Biden and their counterparts in Congress and go on a spending spree with your money.

We can't afford that.

We have the opportunity to provide relief to our fellow citizens by further cutting personal income taxes for all hard-working North Carolinians. We can do this thanks to the fiscal responsibility of our Republican-led legislature that transformed deficits into surpluses.

One way to continue growing our economy is supporting quality education. I'm passionate about making sure North Carolinians are maximizing their potential and can follow their dreams.

Teachers have one of the most important jobs in our society.

We must hold them to professional standards, and we must pay them as the professionals they are.

We need to quit asking them to be police officers, social workers, and parents.

Their job is to teach, plain and simple. And what should they be teaching our students? They should be teaching our students how to think – not what to think – ensuring that personal or political ideologies stay out of the classroom and that we get back to the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic.

It's a parent's responsibility to teach their children about right and wrong. It's a teacher's responsibility to impart knowledge to them. Over the last few years, it's been harder than ever for our teachers to do that. COVID lockdowns significantly impacted our children's learning, and data now shows our kids can't read on grade level - that's unacceptable. I'll tell you something else that's unacceptable: the VIOLENCE in our schools. After 9/11 airport and airline security was fundamentally transformed. In the wake of the many tragedies we have seen on school campuses, not nearly enough has been done to expand security at our schools. The safety of our students shouldn't be a Republican or Democrat issue - it's about protecting our sons and daughters.

As you can tell, I'm very passionate about education – it's the reason that I ran for Lieutenant Governor. During my first few months in office, as a member of the state board of education I evaluated the state's proposed K-12 Social Studies standards and opposed the ideologically driven materials. Because of this, I – the first black Lieutenant Governor of North Carolina - was called a white supremacist and depicted as a Ku-Klux-Klan member by one of the largest media outlets in the state. That did not deter me – instead it fueled me to fight harder for our students.

We've accomplished a lot during my time in office, but I'm most proud of working with the legislature to secure 11.6 million dollars in funding for apprenticeship programs for the rural parts of our state.

Programs like this are going to be vital as we look to the future.

Like many North Carolinians, my path to a degree was not straight or easy. For nearly my entire education I was a full-time student and a full-time worker. Often, I could only take a few classes while working to support my family. It was just months ago as the Lieutenant Governor that I finally walked across the stage at the University of North Carolina Greensboro and earned my

degree – thirty years after I started my journey. I am proud of the university system that we have in North Carolina; it is among the best in the country, and it is crucial to the economic growth of our state. Many companies relocate to North Carolina because of the quality workforce created by our universities.

However, we must denounce the misconception that the only way to success is through a four-year degree. Thanks to investments by our Republican legislature, we also have an incredible community college system where trade and technical programs provide fast – tracked, well-paying careers in fields that are vital to our state’s economy and communities. Electricians, plumbers, masons, welders, mechanics, and other skilled trade workers earn incredible starting salaries. Many in those professions are aging out, leaving crucial shortages across our state. As our state grows and industries move here, those skilled labor and high-tech manufacturing jobs will continue be in demand.

As we look to the future, we must ensure that our state is equipped to deal with the growth that we are experiencing. That means that we need to have adequate infrastructure, and I don’t just mean widening roads and fixing bridges around the metropolitan areas. We need to ensure that the entire state, from Murphy to Manteo have what they need. A key component of this is ensuring that everyone in our state no matter where you live has access to high-speed internet. It’s a fact of life that high-speed internet connections are essential in both business and education. It’s going to take a lot of people to tackle this issue, and I would be remiss if I didn’t acknowledge the ongoing work by the governor, our legislature, and even our federal delegation.

This issue, like so many others we face, shouldn’t be a partisan one. All of us as public servants should be able to come together and get this job done for the people that we serve.

The reality is that most people just want to their elected officials to do their jobs – to make sure that our education system is strong, that our economy is healthy, and that our communities are safe - which brings me to the next item I want to talk to you about this evening, public safety.

I am highly dismayed when I see elected officials abandon the men and women of law enforcement at the first sign of trouble, and I am furious when they follow narratives instead of facts. The men and women who protect our communities and our state deserve respect. Elected officials should make sure they have what they need, and encourage them to do their jobs, and to be proactive in fighting crime. That’s not the case today. We see our law enforcement officers demonized and vilified, and our communities are paying the price. Police Departments are struggling to fill positions. Soft-on-crime policies release dangerous criminals back onto our streets, and this isn’t just in places like San Francisco or Chicago, it’s happening right here in North Carolina in places like Asheville. Countless officers across this state just want to do their jobs and serve their communities. We must restore public trust in law enforcement and return an air of respect to the men and women in blue. This means empowering them to engage with the community they serve, properly training and equipping them to de-escalate dangerous situations, and, of course, that elected officials stand with our law enforcement officers, not use them as political pawns.

Here in North Carolina, we – and that includes me - have an opportunity to go beyond politics as normal. In our society today we are so divided, and thoughtful discussion is often replaced with tweets, sound bites, and heated rhetoric. When you're sworn in - they don't give you a manual, or a "guide for dummies" so to speak on how to serve or face the challenges of public pressure. They don't teach you how to handle a media that's more interested in the "gotcha game" instead of fairly reporting the news.

So, what do you do? – You try your best. You stay true to who you are. If you make a mistake, which you will -and I have- – you learn from it – and work hard to do even better.

That is what citizens of North Carolina expect their elected officials to do – whether it be on the city council or on the Council of State. We must drop our weapons of political war. We must work hard on behalf of all North Carolinians. We must come together to work on real solutions to the real problems that we face, to overcome the challenges as we always have, and to celebrate our victories.

I've shared with you tonight a little about my personal story, and the journey that our state has been on. I want to leave you with this. Never could I have imagined as a poor black kid growing up on Logan Street in Greensboro that I would be where I am today. In the same way that I overcame challenges in my own life, we have an opportunity as a state to confront the challenges that we face head-on today, and to work for a better future. Not just for our own tomorrows, but for the tomorrows of our future generations. We all have a duty to make sure those children have hope. That they know they live in a state where anything is possible, and that with hard work they can achieve their dreams.

I am honored to serve you as your Lieutenant Governor, and to live in the greatest state in the greatest nation on earth. May God bless America, North Carolina, and may God Bless you.

Thank you.

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