



Democratic Response to the State of the State

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Speaker, Nevada State Assembly

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Good evening, my name is Barbara Buckley, and I am the Speaker of the Assembly.

I appreciate the opportunity to talk with you tonight in response to the Governor's message.

As Nevadans, we share so much in common - a love of this state and a belief that with hard work and determination, anyone can achieve the American Dream.

We have seen that American dream come true year after year - whether it is a family sending their first child to college - a young couple earning enough to buy their first home - retirees able to spend time with their grandchildren after a lifetime of hard work.

Right now, the American reality feels much different than the American dream.

By now the reasons are all too familiar - the foreclosure crisis, soaring unemployment, business failures and the tumultuous stock market.

None of us feel very secure about our future. It is obvious that our nation and our state are at a crossroad.

I believe we can and we will meet these challenges and that we will keep the American dream alive and well.

As a State, we must address Nevada's high job loss, home foreclosures and the general economic downturn. We must focus on preserving our State's services that are truly necessary.

Tonight, the Governor talked about our State's budget crisis and said we have to make sacrifices. I couldn't agree more. But the Governor didn't tell you about all of the drastic cuts he is proposing. The Governor's proposed cuts include:

- A 7.1% cut in per pupil funding for each child in our schools. This totals \$324 million in cuts to education;

- A 6% pay cut for teachers when we already have difficulty recruiting and keeping our best teachers;
- A 6% pay cut for our state employees such as correctional officers who guard increasing numbers of dangerous inmates even as their workforce has been reduced by 20%;
- A 52% cut for UNLV and 47% for UNR, and cuts for every community college campus which would dismantle our higher education system and drive the best and brightest young people out of Nevada;
- Closure of another prison and conservation camp putting us in jeopardy of having to release prisoners early;
- Serious cuts in payments to doctors and hospitals which may result in three hospital closures;
- Cuts to our fragile mental health system with closures of more than half of our clinics throughout the state;
- Retired teachers and state employees being cut off from their health insurance;
- An elimination of the office designated to fight Yucca Mountain and virtually no funding for our pending lawsuits to stop Yucca Mountain.

The question for us all is this: Is this the direction we want to go as a State?

- Does it really make sense to cut the salaries of our teachers, who dedicate themselves to educating our children, when we need the best and brightest in these jobs?
- Does it make sense to cut education further?
- Does it make sense to close the doors of opportunity for our children to attend our universities?

- Do we want to overcrowd our emergency rooms with the mentally ill again because we shut mental health clinics?
- Does it make sense to give up our legal fight against Yucca Mountain and store nuclear waste in our backyard?

The answer is NO!

“Education First” should not mean cutting education funding first – it should mean preserving education funding first. Attending college should be a reality for our children, not a foreclosed dream. Mental health clinics should not be closed when the number of people needing help is going up, not down. Violent criminals should be in prison, not wandering the streets. Our state should not be a dumping ground for nuclear waste. It’s pretty simple.

We can do better.

For the last four months, I have been holding meetings and town halls across the State, listening to families, teachers, ranchers, business owners, and retirees and their ideas for the future of our State. Skeptics told me I would find a Nevada that was uncaring and apathetic. That’s not what I found.

I found Nevadans who care about the future of our State. Everyone, from business leaders to families, urged no further cuts to education because they know that it will affect the quality of education. I heard virtually universal support for ideas such as creating a forced savings account for State spending so that we have an adequate cushion during harsh economic times. And I heard specific ideas on revenue – everything from innovative ways to streamline agencies to creation of a lottery.

Beginning next Thursday, my colleagues and I will begin a thorough, detailed review of the Governor’s budget. We will determine the real, human impacts of what the Governor proposes.

We will carefully weigh the testimony we receive from economic experts, law enforcement leaders, education leaders, senior advocates, affected Nevadans and concerned citizens.

We will fully disclose in detail all potential ramifications from what medical care may be delayed or denied, how much classroom size may grow, to how many and what types of criminals may be released.

We will then -

- Examine our spending priorities and decide what we cannot cut without devastating impacts on the lives of Nevadans.
- Reevaluate tax incentives that have been given for years to certain businesses and end those that do not make sense.
- Adjust revenue to fund essential services – such as increasing room tax as approved by the voters.
- And finally, overhaul our financial structure so that we are not considering draconian cuts to education and public safety every time the economy tanks.

We will gather all the facts, tap the best minds in the state, hear all points of view and commit ourselves to finding meaningful solutions that, at the very least, do not send our State careening backwards and at best create a road map for future stability and progress. We will move our state in the right direction with a real vision of where we want to be next year, in five years and for many years to come. As we do this, we will keep foremost in our mind the many Nevadans who are reeling in these daunting economic times.

Finally, to all Nevadans, your voices will be heard and your opinions weighed. Working together we can develop solutions that move our state in the right direction.

Thank you.