

Mr. President and my colleagues of the Nevada Senate,

Today marks the beginning of another defining moment in Nevada's history. We are confronted with enormous challenges. 125,000 Nevadans are out of work. Thousands of families are losing their homes. Our education system is at risk of failing our most prized possessions, our children. On these things, there is agreement. But it is not enough to simply recognize the challenges – the people of Nevada are looking to us to solve them as well. They do not want to see their university system dismantled. They do not want us to balance the budget on the backs of teachers. And they do not want children and seniors to pay the price of economic turmoil by having this Legislature and Nevada's Governor tear down everything that has been built up over the years. We cannot allow this defining moment to undo the work many in this chamber have accomplished despite the economic challenges before us.

The people we represent want us to chart a different economic course, one that attracts new industries and lessens our reliance on tourism to sustain ourselves as a state. They want solutions that put Nevadans back to work and provide adequate revenues to support education, health care, and other vital services.

There can be no doubt we face enormous challenges. But those challenges also provide us with an opportunity. An opportunity to choose the kind of future we want for ourselves but, more importantly, for our children. We can, and must, seize the opportunity to Make Nevada Great in this new century.

What we do in the next 120 days can set a new course for Nevada. We can begin to diversify our economy by developing our abundant renewable energy resources - creating jobs and giving consumers an ability to reduce their energy costs over time. We can fight for our educational system by keeping the best and brightest teachers in Nevada – providing for smaller class sizes and demanding better outcomes in student achievement. We can align the resources and infrastructure of our colleges and universities to better meet our state's economic opportunities without forcing students to pay three times as much in tuition. We can make healthcare a priority and ensure programs like Nevada Check-Up and Medicaid services for families and seniors are preserved. And, we can reward the hard working people of Nevada by making government work harder and smarter for them.

Now, the economic stimulus package pending in Congress will help us solve some of our budget problems and lay the groundwork for a new economic future, improving our infrastructure, augmenting our education system and social services, developing our renewable energy resources and creating new industries. And it will be up to us to make sure that money is wisely spent. But we must all remember the federal stimulus will not solve all of our problems. We will still need to make cuts and even eliminate some programs that are ineffective or have simply run their course. Every state agency and every program needs to be on notice that they will be audited for efficiency and that everyone will have to make sacrifices in order to help us get through this critical budget shortfall – and beyond that, to survive in the new economy. But we can and will protect

what matters most—the future of our children and the opportunity to Make Nevada Great.

While the task ahead may seem daunting, we know it can be done. It can be done because we have faced challenges before. It has been people like the Senate Minority Leader who have provided leadership for our state for many years and his experience and judgment will be integral this session as well. And I cannot help but hear the voice of our friend and colleague, Senator Joe Neal, whose passion for this process and compassion for the working people of this state are guideposts by which we should all measure our actions. It can be done because each of you in this chamber brings a set of strengths and talents that will serve the people of Nevada well. Last week, Speaker Buckley and I put forth the initial elements of a legislative agenda, and we will be adding to it in the next few weeks. I hope and trust you will help us.

I am humbled by the position I now hold as the Senate Majority Leader, and mindful of both the responsibility it brings and the change it represents. But I want to say to each of you that I also know I cannot do this alone. I welcome your ideas and proposals, whether you are a Democrat or a Republican. The challenges we face cannot be met by one person or one party alone. The challenges are too great. We come to this Legislature as Democrats and Republicans, but must leave it as Nevadans who have done their job for our fellow citizens. History has shown that Nevada's citizen legislators possess the capacity to do the very best when they are asked. Ladies and gentlemen, I am asking. The people of Nevada are asking: Will we Make Nevada Great Again. I tell you, It Can Be Done.

Thank you, Mr. President.