

Text from Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders' remarks to state lawmakers:

Speaker Shepherd, President Hester, members of the Supreme Court, distinguished Members of the General Assembly, my fellow Arkansans:

It is an honor to stand before you as the 47th Governor, and the first woman governor, of the great state of Arkansas. I was 13 years old when I attended my first joint address back in 1996. Some of you may recall it was a pretty chaotic day. After getting lost in the surging crowd, I missed my dad's first big speech in this chamber. Today, I made sure to get here bright and early, and much to the surprise of those who know me well, I'm on time.

I'm grateful to be joined by my family: my wonderful husband Bryan; our three kids, Scarlett, Huck and George; and members of our extended family. Thank you all for being here.

We are also honored to be joined by former Governor Asa Hutchinson, former Senator David Pryor and his wife, Barbara. I'm thankful for their leadership and shared love of our great state.

As we gather in these storied chambers at the dawn of a new day, a turning point in the history of Arkansas will usher in a new era of good jobs, great schools, safer streets and stronger families.

The people of Arkansas, in their vast wisdom, have entrusted a new generation to lead. This is our moment. This our opportunity. And you and I are the leaders who the people have chosen to get the job done.

Our reasons for such high confidence and boundless optimism are many.

History teaches us that to every generation comes not only great challenges, but great opportunities – often in quick succession. After the upheaval of World War II, there were the decades of unparalleled economic growth. After the turmoil of Vietnam, stagflation and the gas lines of the 1970s, there was the peace and prosperity of the Reagan Era. After the financial crisis of 2008 and years of lingering stagnation, there was an unprecedented economic boom.

Like the rest of our country, Arkansas has weathered its share of storms in recent years: a worldwide pandemic, shuttered schools, crippling inflation and rising crime.

But here in Arkansas, that long night of hardship and heartache is breaking into a brighter tomorrow. If we seize this moment together, if we act on the principles we hold dear, we can make Arkansas stronger than ever.

I couldn't ask for better partners in this endeavor. President Hester, Speaker Shepherd – your partnership is the reason I know we will deliver for the people of Arkansas.

I want this legislature to know that as governor, I will always have an open door and an open mind. And like most of you, I don't care about getting credit – I care about getting results.

So this session, let us think bigger, act bolder, and do better than we ever have before.

With family budgets still battered by inflation, let's deliver another historic tax cut and give the people of Arkansas the pay raise they deserve.

Let's not surrender the competition for jobs to other states – let's cut taxes and bring jobs right here to Arkansas. And let's also cut wasteful spending so we can continue to phase out the income tax altogether.

The challenges we face in education did not appear yesterday. They will not be solved tomorrow. But we WILL get started TODAY.

I ask you to send me legislation that expands pre-K, improves literacy, and gives students real-world skills they need to succeed in the workplace.

Parents cannot be an afterthought in education. Parents are the foundation of a child's success. So let's give parents a greater role in education, including the right to choose the school that's best for their child – whether it is public, private or parochial. When we give parents a choice, we give children a chance.

In these endeavors, I will be guided by clear principles – principles I know you share.

Among these principles is the belief that the first responsibility of government is to secure the lives, liberty and property of its citizens. Any government that tolerates rampant crime has failed in its most important duty. As of today, Arkansas will tolerate crime no longer.

Together, we will build the prison space we need to keep our citizens safe. We will put more of our courageous cops on the street. We will shut down the crime wave that has plagued our cities. And we will teach our children that the badge is a symbol of justice, the police are a force for good, and our officers are heroes who are worthy of our highest respect.

There is so much more we can achieve as partners working together.

If you send me legislation promoting adoption or improving foster care, I will sign it. If you send me a bill defending the right to free speech, or the right to keep and bear arms, I will sign it. If you send me a bill that rewards our teachers with higher pay, I will sign it.

But if you send me legislation that grows government at the expense of freedom, I will veto it without hesitation or remorse. As a mom of three kids, I have no problem saying no.

Today, let us reaffirm our commitment to a timeless American idea: that government exists not to rule the people, but to serve the people.

The special interests may speak loudly, but it is the voice of the people that we must hear and follow. They are the men and women who till the soil, drive the long hauls and run the restaurants. The people who work hard, give back to their communities and help their neighbors in times of need. The people who teach their children to love God, and to be proud of their country. They take responsibility for their actions – and they deserve a government that does the same.

A government that does a few things, and does them exceptionally well – that is the government they voted for, and that is what we must deliver.

Today, let us pledge that we will not rest until we have a government that is as good and decent and hardworking as the people of Arkansas.

I ask you to stand with me as we work for the state we love and the people we serve."