

REPUBLICAN RESPONSE TO GOVERNOR
SISOLAK'S STATE OF THE STATE MESSAGE

January 16, 2019

Good evening.

I'm State Senator Heidi Gansert representing Senate District 15 in Reno. I have the privilege of delivering the response to Governor Sisolak's State of the State message tonight on behalf of the Republican members of the state Senate and state Assembly.

Before I begin, I wish to congratulate Governor Sisolak on his first state of the state speech and I offer sincere best wishes to him and his new administration as they lead our state forward for the next four years.

I am addressing you this evening from the floor of the Nevada State Senate – an institution where Nevada representatives come together every two years to decide the policies that affect all Nevadans. It is a chamber where respect and decorum dictate the process and it is where we often agree -- and at times disagree -- but we always remember to conduct ourselves with civility and courtesy.

Like my colleagues, I take this responsibility seriously and never for one moment do we allow ourselves to forget

who we are accountable to or how you expect us to work together.

As one of 32 female legislators in Nevada, I am proud to stand among other elected women of both parties who made history this year – Nevada is the first state in the nation to have elected a legislature with a majority of women and I believe all Nevadans take deep pride in this remarkable Nevada first.

What makes this moment so exceptional is that in two weeks Nevada will convene the only female majority Legislature in the country – and we will do it on the 100th anniversary of Congress granting women the right to vote.

I can assure you that the men and women who serve you in the 2019 Nevada Legislature will not let allow this historic occasion pass us by.

During the upcoming 120 day session, you can count on Republicans to stand our ground on the unshakable beliefs of personal responsibility, limited government spending, and individual freedom over government infringement.

Yet at the same time, we know, too, that Nevada families expect us to find common ground and to join together for a common purpose to address their immediate and long-term concerns.... for the common good.

We will resolve to do both.

Nowhere is that more important than in the education of Nevada school children.

Last month, the Nevada Department of Education announced the state had set a new record for its graduation rate. Eighty-three percent of students in the class of 2018 had graduated — a 2 percentage-point increase over the prior year.

Also, last year was the first year that we saw gains in every grade and subject except one.

While these scores are very encouraging, we have much more work to do. And it begins with school safety. We must, make school safety a top priority. We will support funding of nearly \$100 million focused on preventing school tragedies.

While we all want our public schools to be safe and strong, public education isn't always the best option for every student. That's why, in 2015, Governor Sandoval created the Opportunity Scholarship program. Using business donations that offset taxes, scholarships are offered to Nevada students to attend private schools. This is a targeted program: Opportunity Scholarships are

available specifically for families who are unable to afford private schools on their own. For context, the \$20m added last session is less than ½ of 1% of the k-12 education budget. While the dollars are small, it can be life-changing for students and their families.

I'd like to share with you the story of the Balsamo family. Their son, John, is autistic. The Balsamo's exhausted every option open to them in the public schools, trying five different schools by the time John turned 10, and were so excited to be able to rely on the Opportunity Scholarship. Now, John is in a private school that meets his needs and he is excelling.

All parents deserve the chance to decide the school that is best for their child, regardless of income or their child's needs.

You can see it everywhere: The Nevada economy is strong.

The Index of State Economic Momentum ranks states based on performance in three economic areas: personal income growth, employment growth, and population growth. In the final quarter of 2018, Nevada claimed the top spot.

Nevada was also reported to have the highest employment growth in 12 years in 2018.

Given this momentum, we must make certain that job creation remains a top policy priority next session.

However, despite the plentiful good economic news, some challenges persist.

While Nevada's economy has offered growth and opportunity for many citizens, we should not overlook the fact that too many Nevadans feel like this recovery has not lifted them up.

Those who feel caught in low-wage jobs and squeezed by increasing housing costs confront uncomfortable uncertainty and we must address it.

The solution, though, is not more government intervention in the housing and labor markets, but rather opening up opportunity to everyone to increase their skills and productivity so that they can leave low-wage jobs behind.

We stand ready to invest in our citizens and empower them to take greater advantage of Nevada's new economy.

This will require additional investment in dual credit programs that allow high school students to take courses where they receive both high school and college credit, investment in our community colleges to build out their career and technical programs, and funds for our community colleges, state college and four-year institutions to support summer enrollment.

Finally, as a fresh new example of collaboration in the new Nevada economy, I'm proud to recognize that the Nevada Legislature has formed a bi-partisan tech caucus that will help Nevadans stay ahead of the rapidly changing technology environment and enable us to lead the country on technology expansion.

This is an excellent public policy model for the future.

As I mentioned before, workforce training is essential to keeping our economy humming and our system of higher education is central to that goal.

I want to single out a model program in place between Panasonic and Truckee Meadows Community College in Reno which allows applicants with no experience in manufacturing to obtain necessary credentials to go to work.

This is a strong example of higher education responding to meet the demands of today's tech-based workforce. We need to support more partnerships like this to help Nevadans get the training they need to secure the good paying jobs they want.

The opioid crisis remains a significant public health challenge. Nevada has made great strides to combat this epidemic. During the 2017 session, the Legislature championed a comprehensive new law that included continuing education for prescribers, better reporting of suspected overdoses, and more effective intelligence-sharing relating to opioid abuse.

The battle against this scourge is nowhere close to being over. We must continue to press ahead as a leader in this fight, and we look forward to working across the aisle to continue efforts to help Nevadans break the cycle of addiction.

In addition, we must continue to address the supply side of health care to ensure better access for all Nevadans. We look forward to welcoming the first graduating class from UNLV's new medical school this biennium and are excited about the expansion of graduate medical education "residency" programs in Nevada to keep our

medical school graduates in-state. We also support the ongoing efforts to increase mid-level providers such nurse practitioners and physician assistants. We are enthusiastic about the prospect of a new health and science building to be shared by the College of Southern Nevada and Nevada State College to expand health care training programs vital to our state.

In early 2011, when I was Governor Sandoval's first chief of staff, the state's Rainy Day Fund balance was zero. Eight years later, the fund has reached its highest ever balance of more than \$290 million.

In two years, the balance will be over \$400 million.

Many national economists are predicting an economic slowdown throughout the country, it's possible we may see one here in the Silver State, too.

With this warning, it's critical we stay on course to limit government growth, budget responsibly and continue to fill our Rainy Day Fund.

We'll be thankful later that we did.

Another important issue awaiting action is renewable energy. Question 6 was approved by Nevada voters last year and, beginning next month, we will work together – on a bi-partisan basis - to support continued development of renewable energy resources for our state.

My fellow Nevadans, as we embark on the 80th Nevada Legislature, we welcome the opportunity to work with Governor Sisolak in the same way we worked so successfully with Governor Sandoval.

As Republican members of the Legislature, and more importantly, as Nevadans, we begin with great hope and expectations that the work we undertake will help families from Winnemucca to Henderson to Carson City meet their futures with ample opportunity for success and advancement and that the three million people who choose to call Nevada home will feel we represented them with civility, integrity and honor.

May God bless you, God bless this nation, and God bless the great state of Nevada.

Thank you and goodnight.