

**Governor Gavin Newsom**

**2021 State of the State Address**

**Remarks as Prepared**

**March 9, 2021**

Thank you, Madame Lt. Governor, for your kind introduction.

And good evening to those joining us virtually tonight – Speaker Rendon, Pro Tem Atkins, members of the California Legislature, and to all of the elected, and state officials.

And to my amazing wife Jennifer, the First Partner of California.

Thank you all for being here in the most 2021 way possible, remotely.

Tonight, we mark an unprecedented moment in California history.

To reflect on where we've been this past year, let's consider where we are.

I'm speaking to you from Dodger Stadium, transformed from the home of last year's World Series champions into a centerpiece of America's mass vaccination campaign.

Instead of fans in stands, we see nurses in PPE, saving lives one injection at a time.

All because, one year ago a once-in-a-century pandemic arrived on our shores.

COVID was no one's fault – but it quickly became everyone's burden.

Forcing hard-working Californians into impossible choices – go to work and risk infection, or stay home and lose your job.

It magnified daily worries about feeding your kids, paying rent, and keeping loved ones safe.

It made the unthinkable, commonplace.

COVID patients cared for by doctors, nurses, and paramedics who, despite the chaos and risks to themselves, paused to hold the hands of strangers in their final moments.

Too many forever goodbyes over FaceTime.

54,395 Californians we now mourn with broken hearts.

That's almost the same number of empty seats behind me, marking a silent tribute to loved ones who live forever in our memories.

54,395 Californians who will never be forgotten by family and friends – nor by the health care workers who bore witness to unimaginable tragedy.

But not every COVID hero wears scrubs.

From the grocery workers to custodians who get a fraction of the gratitude they deserve, to the parents who've juggled and struggled – moms especially – but kept charging ahead.

Your quiet bravery has created light in the darkest of times.

As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Only when it’s dark enough, can you see the stars.”

So tonight, under the lights of this stadium – even as we grieve – let’s allow ourselves to dream of brighter days ahead.

Because we won’t be defined by this moment – we’ll be defined by what we do because of it.

After all, we are California.

We don’t wait for someone else to show us the way forward. We go first, and we go boldly.

We led – on gay rights, gun safety, and criminal justice reform.

And now, we lead on combating COVID.

From the earliest days of the pandemic, California trusted in science and data.

We met the moment.

Last January, we welcomed Americans home, accepting repatriation flights from China.

And one year ago today, we brought to shore the Grand Princess, which was stranded off the coast of California, further opening our eyes to the seriousness of this disease.

We were the first state to issue a stay-at-home order, which helped us avoid early spikes in cases.

The top minds from our nation’s leading research institutions and life science companies immediately jumped into the development of groundbreaking COVID treatments and vaccines.

While others competed to buy personal protective equipment at exorbitant prices—we quickly built our own pipeline, supplying critical gear to millions of essential workers.

We sent ventilators and doctors to New York as well as other states that desperately needed them.

We developed the most comprehensive COVID testing program in the country—including a first-in-the-nation state-run testing lab.

We enlisted additional health care workers to expand capacity. We readied our ICUs.

Our advance planning and curve flattening meant our hospitals were ready for surges.

All of which is why California's death rate has remained one of the lowest per capita in the nation: 134 deaths per 100,000, compared to 158 nationally, 153 in Texas and 247 in New York.

Now, finally, vaccines are here.

We were the first to launch mass-vaccination sites in partnership with FEMA, now a model for other states.

Today, we have the most robust vaccination program in America. California now ranks sixth in the world for vaccine distribution, ahead of countries like Israel, Russia, Germany and France.

I know our progress hasn't always felt fast enough.

And look, we've made mistakes. I've made mistakes. But we own them, learn from them, and never stop trying.

After all, that's the California spirit.

We are bent but not broken. Bloodied but unbowed. Resolved to make it to brighter days ahead – to not let the pain of last year deter the hopefulness of tomorrow.

The state of our state remains determined. I remain determined!

We won't change course just because of a few nay-sayers and dooms-dayers.

So to the California critics, who are promoting partisan power grabs and outdated prejudices, and rejecting everything that makes California great, we say this: we will not be distracted from getting shots in arms and our economy booming again.

This is a fight for California's future.

Since this pandemic started, uncertainty has been the only thing we could be certain of.

But now, we are providing certainty.

Certainty that we are safely vaccinating Californians as quickly as possible.

Certainty that we are safely reopening our economy.

Certainty that we are safely getting our kids back in classrooms.

All of which adds up to a brighter future for our state.

Because California won't come crawling back. We will roar back.

When this pandemic ends – and it will end soon – we're not going back to normal. Normal was never good enough. Normal accepts inequity.

It's why Latinos are dying from COVID at a higher rate than any other racial or ethnic group, why essential workers' wages aren't enough for them to afford the essentials, and why mothers have been leaving the workforce in staggering numbers.

Look, our eyes are wide open to what's wrong.

So, our journey back must also be a path to close inequities. There is no economic recovery without economic justice.

With more compassion, empathy, and connection, we can write the next chapter in the California story.

After all, the answer to "what's right" about our state is also readily available to us, so long as we stay focused on what makes California so damn special.

Throughout this pandemic, we've been forced to find new ways to connect, to collaborate, to serve. New ways to grow, and new ways to innovate. And of course we have.

We have more scientists, engineers, researchers, and Nobel laureates than any other state. To keep this conveyor belt for talent moving, we will keep investing in UC, CSU, and community colleges.

California has the most innovation, venture capital, and small-business investment in this country. We will keep fostering every small entrepreneur—the drivers of our GDP.

Our agricultural industry feeds the nation, and California's entertainment industry shapes global culture.

We build the future the rest of the world dreams of. And I mean that literally.

This year, we will invest \$10 billion in the nuts and bolts of California – infrastructure like roads, rail, bridges and public transit – the biggest infrastructure package since the great recession over a decade ago.

Building toward universal broadband, connecting all Californians equitably and affordably.

And investing in the most important asset we have, our children – we propose to invest a record amount in K-14 education this year.

Because, by planning ahead and through prudent fiscal management, California benefits from surpluses – not deficits. Record reserves, not cuts.

We started the year with a \$15 billion surplus, and since then revenues have been even stronger, allowing us to provide a down payment on building our brighter future.

The building blocks of our recovery are in place. And now we are leading the way out of this pandemic.

Because we listened to the experts—and were guided by evidence.

Today, the light at the end of the tunnel is brighter than ever.

From the peak in early January, we've gone from reporting 53,000 COVID cases per day to 2,600. The positivity rate is down from 14 percent to just 2.1 percent today. Hospitalizations are down more than 80 percent since their peak. ICUs are down 77 percent.

And tonight, I'm proud to report that California has administered nearly 11 million doses. That's three million more than any other state.

So now, we look ahead to better days with the California can-do spirit – with the energy and optimism that defines us – we will beat this virus and realize our dream of a California for All.

How? Equitable and plentiful vaccines, economic support for those who've struggled the most, and getting kids safely back into schools as soon as possible.

First, we will make sure every Californian who needs a vaccine can get one. In our state, your access to the vaccine must not depend on who you know.

We prioritize those who are at the greatest risk and with greatest exposure to the virus. We don't just talk about vaccine equity—we designed our entire system around it.

Setting aside 40 percent of vaccines for the most impacted communities.

Vaccine equity is not just the right thing to do, it is also the fastest way through the pandemic.

Grocery workers prioritized. School staff prioritized. And farmworkers, put to the front of the line.

Like 85-year-old Maria in Reedley, who came to this country from Mexico decades ago to find a job in our fields.

Maria said she was unsure – uncertain – about getting vaccinated, but after she received her shots, she's now educating other farmworkers about the safety and efficacy of the vaccine, helping them overcome similar anxieties.

That's the beauty of California. Leadership like Maria's isn't ordained, it's earned.

We've built a vaccine system where our only constraint now is manufactured supply.

Thanks to the Biden administration, those doses are on their way.

I've traveled the state and seen first-hand the strength of communities banding together in Coachella, Arvin, Camarillo, and Stockton, stepping up to vaccinate the most vulnerable and the too often overlooked.

Every Californian will have convenient access to shots – including those who are home-bound and those who don't have transportation or the internet.

Now with greater supply, emerges a challenge as old as vaccines themselves: hesitancy about whether to get it. Just ask Maria.

To address these concerns, we have a large network of trusted community partners. They are helping us spread the word, in many languages and across many cultures.

Vaccines are safe. Vaccines are effective. Vaccines will save your life.

Allowing you to visit your parents again. Go to your daughter's basketball game. Show up for your shift without fearing infection.

It was a year ago, we made the incredibly difficult decision to issue a stay home order to slow the spread. We agonized about the sacrifices it would require.

But we made sure that science – not politics – drove our decisions.

And as experts like Dr. Fauci said, it was the right thing to do.

People are alive today because of the public health decisions we made – lives saved because of your sacrifice. Even so, I acknowledge it's made life hard and unpredictable, and you're exhausted with all of it.

For the millions of Californians pushed out of the workforce and essential workers with no choice but to keep showing up – this is who we fight for.

We continue to work to safely reopen our economy – guided by equity principles, accounting for vaccines, moving as fast as we can. But we are mindful that we can't let down our guard, particularly with so many new variants.

As of today, 24 of our 58 counties are out of the most restrictive tier, and many more are poised to move next week.

As we safely re-open, we are also providing financial relief. A few weeks ago, we took action to bring immediate stimulus to millions of Californians.

We just directed \$7.6 billion back to hard-working Californians and small businesses hit hardest by COVID. We didn't wait for Washington, we acted with urgency.

That included the Golden State Stimulus, which will put \$600 directly into the pockets of millions of families, no matter their immigration status.

And it included supporting our essential workers, with new child care subsidies, more funding for food banks and diapers, and financial assistance for farmworkers.

We'll keep the dream alive, not only for families but for all the small businesses who've fought to survive over the past year.

The special mix of audacity, human capital, and creativity found only in California means there's literally no better place to do business.

California is where garages are the launch pads for world-changing industries and anyone with the telltale tenacity of a small business owner can create their own California Dream. But only if we nurture them.

That's why we're providing the largest small business grant fund in the nation. \$2.6 billion in grants of up to \$25,000 for small businesses and nonprofits impacted by the pandemic.

Behind these grants are countless stories of entrepreneurs and the dreams they've pursued with every ounce of energy they have.

Like Francisco in Fresno, who received \$5,000 to reopen his pastry business after being closed for nearly six months.

And Catarah, right here in Los Angeles, whose dessert cafe used a \$15,000 grant to make payroll.

And 40,000 other businesses and counting, barbershops, auto repair shops, and clothing shops throughout the state.

Three-quarters of these grants have gone to minority-, women-, and veteran-owned businesses, and those serving rural and low-income communities. We're not just talking about equity, we are building it into the very fabric of all of our programs.

There's nothing more foundational to an equitable society than getting our kids safely back into classrooms. Remote learning has exacerbated the gaps we have worked so hard to close.

Our kids are missing too many rites of passage: field trips, proms, graduation.

Teachers pulling triple duty as counselors, curriculum developers, and tech specialists.

Parents desperate for that reopening date.

Look, Jen and I live this as parents of four young children. Helping them cope with the fatigue of “Zoom school.” The loneliness of missing their friends. Frustrated by emotions they don’t yet fully understand.

In December, as COVID surged, many schools were contemplating an alarming decision – giving up on in-person instruction for the rest of the school year.

In the few short months since – working together with parents, teachers, and school leaders – we have turned the conversation from whether to reopen, to when.

Every day, more schools announce reopening dates. In fact, almost 7,000 schools are open or plan to reopen by mid-April for in-person instruction.

But California has 11,000 schools in 1,000 districts spread across 58 counties – all locally controlled. And we won’t be satisfied until everybody is back in school.

To achieve this, we’ve delivered three months’ worth of PPE to every school. We’ve directly enabled schools to provide routine COVID testing, especially for low-income students.

And starting last week, California promised that at least 10 percent of our vaccine allocation will go to teachers and school staff directly. In the first week alone, we have already administered more than 210,000 doses to educators, a pace more than double our goal.

And last week, we committed \$6.6 billion for learning loss, tutoring, mental health, and the ability to extend school days and the flexibility to extend the school year.

We can do this. The science is sound. We start with early grades and build up from there.

Getting kids back to school, getting shots in arms, and getting the economy back on its feet. These are urgent priorities, but not the totality of our efforts.

We entered this pandemic with a care economy suffering from decades of underinvestment. A societal scourge that the First Partner has shined a light on: working women – particularly women of color – earning only a fraction of their male counterparts. Widening gaps between haves and have-nots.

California’s most acute preexisting condition remains income inequality.

So as we respond to this pandemic, we stay fixated on closing unacceptable disparities. That’s one of the fundamental reasons I ran for governor.

By any measure, we've made great strides.

Rewarding working families by nearly tripling the earned income tax credit and increasing child care subsidies, adding two more weeks of paid family leave, and raising the minimum wage to \$14, on its way to \$15 an hour.

Providing first-ever health care subsidies for middle-class Californians so they can afford coverage. Increasing student financial aid and public assistance. Making community college free for two years.

Creating opportunity for all.

But I'm mindful that we aren't truly addressing the needs of people in poverty unless we account for the biggest pressure most families face: housing and housing stability.

So we crafted the strongest eviction controls in the nation, protecting millions of renters from losing their homes in the midst of this pandemic. And we provided a framework for billions of dollars in rental support for struggling landlords.

All while remaining laser focused on the most severe part of the housing crisis: homelessness, a crisis pre-dating the pandemic.

In response, we developed brand-new solutions – including two programs, promoted by the Biden administration as a model for 49 other states.

Project Roomkey, launched in April, has provided over 35,000 homeless Californians with safe shelter from COVID.

And Homekey, launched in July, created more than 6,000 new permanent housing units during the pandemic, buying hotels and motels and converting them at a third of the cost of traditional supportive housing.

We did this cheaper and faster than homeless housing has ever been built in California history, literally rewriting the book on how to tackle homelessness.

And while we acted swiftly during this pandemic, we are mindful that these tent cities on our sidewalks and the encampments along our freeways simply remain unacceptable.

Our challenge moving forward is clear: to continue our immediate progress while focusing on our longer-term goals, which I laid out in last year's State of the State.

Now, bringing the same spirit of innovation behind Project Roomkey and Homekey, we're committing nearly \$2 billion this year to create more homeless housing, addressing mental health and substance abuse issues, and ending homelessness one person at a time.

No one denies this is a huge challenge, but we know what it means to stare down big challenges.

In 2020, we simultaneously faced two once-in-a-generation crises when we combatted the worst wildfire season in our state's history in the middle of the pandemic.

The fact is, the hots are getting hotter, the dries are getting drier, and not just here in California, but all across the globe.

Let's call it what it is: climate change. Just as we approached COVID, we are guided by science.

Just consider last summer's heat dome on the West Coast of the United States, which led to world-record breaking temperatures here at home.

And in just one 24-hour period last August, 12,000 lightning strikes sparked 560 wildfires, requiring heroic efforts by our firefighters and national guard, who landed helicopters into flames to save fellow Californians.

This year, we are budgeting more than \$1 billion for fire prevention, including fuel breaks, forest health, and home hardening.

We forged a historic partnership with the U.S. Forest Service to radically ramp up forest management efforts.

We are reducing barriers on hundreds of fuel reduction projects and prescribed burns. We added 30 new fire crews and pre-positioning assets, new C-130s, Blackhawk helicopters, and radar technology.

But historic wildfires are the symptom. Greenhouse gases are the cause. And to address them, we must confront the source of more than half the emissions in our state: transportation.

I was proud to sign a groundbreaking executive order last year requiring all new cars and passenger trucks sold in California to be zero-emission by 2035.

And the car companies – Ford, GM, and Volvo – seized the opportunity to innovate, create jobs, and dominate the industry of the future. Proving yet again that protecting our planet and growing our economy aren't conflicting goals – they're one in the same.

There's no doubt California is the pace setter of environmental policy, yet we are mindful of our responsibility to do even more. That restless spirit defines California.

We know there's no advancement without effort, no success without sacrifice.

To paraphrase St. Francis, the patron saint of my hometown, now is the time to tell the world about our brighter future, and only if necessary, will we use words.

We know that our strength comes not from what we preach, but from what we do. From our people who get their hands dirty every day, who come home tired, and do it all to give their kids a better life.

When we set our minds to it, Californians can reach the stars.

Just a few weeks ago, a NASA rover appropriately named Perseverance landed safely on Mars, 293 million miles away. It was a breakthrough achievement made possible by the engineers and scientists at our very own Jet Propulsion Lab in Pasadena.

Led in part by the vision and drive of a Lebanese immigrant who was educated in California schools and rose to become the head of JPL.

By the risk-taking that's in our DNA, by the dream to discover new frontiers, and by sheer force of will.

It was an achievement made possible by California.

And it tells you everything you need to know about who we are and what we can be.

But California isn't the world's best place by birthright – we have to earn it every day.

Our hopeful vision of our brighter future is the basis for the decisions we make today. We place faith over fear – optimism over pessimism. The power is in our hands.

This is our moment – to create the California we all want to live in, to extend the dream of prosperity, equity, and progress to all.

And to continue to lead the world into the future once more.