



Missouri Governor — Michael L. Parson
Office of Communications

2021 STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS GOVERNOR MIKE PARSON

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Thank you Lieutenant Governor, Senator Schatz, statewide officials, and state legislators. It is an honor to stand before you today as the 57th Governor of the Great State of Missouri.

At some point in our lives, many of us have probably been reminded of the importance of considering the past when making decisions for the future.

This advice seems especially fitting given the challenges we have faced over the past year.

It also seems fitting that such a historic milestone – Missouri’s Bicentennial celebration – coincides with these challenges.

Missouri has seen some difficult days in the past 200 years, from the Civil War and the Great Depression … women’s suffrage and civil rights … to the COVID-19 crisis and countless other hardships.

But through it all, Missouri has prevailed.

The first time I stood here and addressed the elected leaders of Missouri, we had just experienced a chaotic and unprecedented series of events. Most new administrations have at least 60 days to prepare … ours had 60 hours.

The first six months of our administration were hectic to say the least. We were faced with quick decisions on a \$30 billion dollar state budget and nearly 150 pieces of legislation that had just passed the General Assembly.

That same summer, some regions of our state were facing one of the most severe droughts in Missouri history … and violent crime was escalating.

The following year, Missouri experienced historic flooding that impacted communities across the state for months on end.

Tornadoes left paths of destruction in communities throughout Missouri, and violent crime in our metro areas continued to escalate.

Once again, this past year has brought many challenges with a worldwide pandemic that has stressed our healthcare system like never before … caused many deaths and much sickness … left THOUSANDS of Missourians out of work … devastated small business … and many more impacts we will likely be dealing with for years to come.

When the first COVID-19 case was identified in Missouri in March, our administration was fully engaged and immediately on the ground in St. Louis.



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Since that time, we have worked nonstop to take a balanced approach, fight the virus, and keep Missourians as safe as possible.

We pulled together our entire Cabinet and every state agency to coordinate our statewide response.

We convened weekly calls for 10 straight months with community leaders and medical experts.

We waived nearly 600 statutes and regulations to provide more flexibility and safety for Missourians.

We went from testing only a few thousand people each week to over 100,000 a week.

We were a leading state in developing our dashboard of Missouri-specific data.

We launched the Show Me Strong Recovery Plan to support Missouri citizens, businesses, and communities.

We distributed \$520 million dollars in CARES Act funds to local jurisdictions within 10 days.

We helped secure over \$11 billion in low-interest loans for Missouri small businesses through the SBA.

We mobilized the Missouri National Guard to assist with response efforts and constructed an alternate care site in 11 days in the St. Louis region.

We delivered Remdesivir to hospitals across the state at all hours of the night and brought in additional health care staff to further expand hospital capacity.

We received national recognition for our partnership with Google on the PPE Marketplace, and have continued to expand our own state supply.

We have now shipped over 22 million gowns, 18 million gloves, 8 million surgical masks, 5 million N95 masks, and 1 million face shields to frontline health care providers.

We were one of the first states in the nation to submit our COVID-19 vaccine plan ... and have now administered nearly 400,000 doses to Missourians.

The bottom line is that we have been working day in and day out to fight COVID-19 while also dealing with civil unrest, violent crime, and a difficult budget.

As I look to the next four years, however, I believe it is important to not only remember the challenges, but also the many great accomplishments we've had.



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For instance, we were still able to attract and expand businesses across Missouri, including:

- Accenture Federal Services in St. Louis,
- Chewy, Inc. in Belton,
- Amazon in Republic,
- Kawasaki in Maryville,
- Tyler Pipe Company and Armstrong World Industries in Marshfield,
- Burns & McDonnell in Kansas City,
- Boeing in St. Charles,
- and Ford in Claycomo for a total investment of over one billion dollars and nearly 10,000 new jobs.

All of these announcements highlight Missouri's increasingly competitive business climate. Since 2018, Missouri has jumped from 21st to 11th in the nation among Site Selectors.

This is thanks in large part to the success of our workforce development programs. Through Missouri One Start, for example, nearly 100,000 Missourians have received training through partnerships with over 400 companies.

Since launching the newly revamped program, businesses have invested approximately \$2.5 billion dollars in Missouri.

Our MO Excels grant program has also been a huge success, helping us fund critical projects like the nursing program expansions at Missouri Western and St. Louis Community College.

Ranken Technical College also announced a new \$7.5 million dollar advanced manufacturing training facility in Troy, Missouri, in partnership with the Lincoln County School District – a great example of what we can accomplish when education, government, and the private sector work together.

In addition to workforce development, we also continued to move forward on critical infrastructure projects.

In just over one year, over 100 of Missouri's poorest bridges have been repaired or replaced through our "Focus on Bridges" program.

When the program is complete, it will have accelerated the repair or replacement of 250 bridges across the state at a remarkable value for our citizens.

Construction is now complete on a major levee in Northwest Missouri to help ease future flooding along the Missouri River – another great partnership between local communities, state government, and the United States Army Corps of Engineers.

Construction also continues on the East Locust Creek reservoir ... and we continue to move forward with the Buck O'Neal Bridge in Kansas City, the new Rocheport Bridge along I-70, the I-270 interstate project in North County St. Louis, and a new overpass in West Plains.



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Although COVID-19 has had an overwhelming impact on the economy, Missouri has made outstanding progress in a short amount of time.

In fact, Missouri is among the top tier of states for total economic recovery with 71 percent of jobs recovered.

We are among the lowest unemployment rates in the country and have again reached number two in the United States for apprenticeships.

Time and time again, our administration has addressed the challenges of our communities and our state head on rather than leaving them for another day, another administration, or another generation.

Over the past two and half years, we've offered bold solutions, and we have gotten results ... but results aren't just about numbers on a bottom line. They are also about improving lives, creating opportunities, and keeping families safe.

I sometimes joke about my gray hair, but to be very honest, this gray hair was earned through thick and thin ... ups and downs ... successes and failures.

And the last challenge I have left as Governor of this state is how I can make Missouri a better place.

A better place to raise a family ...

A better place to find a job ...

A better place to open a business ...

And a better place for our children and grandchildren to achieve the American Dream.

It is important that we continue to follow through on key investments in workforce development and infrastructure.

We must also continue finding ways to strengthen public safety, improve health care, and make state government more accountable.

I have said many times that our children are the workforce of tomorrow ... and if we are to truly make a difference in their lives, it starts with early childhood development.

In August, I had the opportunity to visit Unleashing Potential in St. Louis – an early childhood education center for children ages six weeks to five years old.

Joining us today is President and CEO Darlene Sowell and Director of Early Childhood Education Denise Carter.

Throughout COVID-19, these ladies worked extremely hard to adapt to the challenges and stay the course, never losing focus on what matters most – the children of our state.



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They are true champions of early childhood education, and we are proud to recognize them today. Would Miss Sowell and Miss Carter please stand to be recognized?

To help strengthen Missouri's early childhood system, we are excited to propose the consolidation of several different programs and divisions across three state agencies into one new office – the Office of Childhood.

This new office will not only help streamline the operation of several state programs, but also allow us to place a bigger focus on early childhood development – a critical component to the future success of Missourians for generations to come.

In addition to early childhood, we will also continue to invest in K-12 education. It goes without saying that this past year has been especially hard on students, parents, teachers, and administrators.

These challenges were not just social and emotional, but also financial ... which is why we are once again proposing to fully fund the Foundation Formula.

Another key component for schools moving forward will be assessing the impact virtual learning has had on our students.

Though we may not understand these impacts for some time, it is important that we test and adjust education accordingly to help all students succeed.

Speaking of strengthening education, we must also continue to increase opportunities for job training at the high school level.

Career Ready 101 is a program designed to help prepare high school students for the workforce. This year, I am calling for the expansion of Career Ready 101 to all 57 existing career centers around the state.

This program also helps students prepare for the WorkKeys Assessment, a program recognized by hundreds of Missouri employers in over 100 counties.

This credential is an important stepping stone for students who are not immediately college bound but have the knowledge and skills to fill high-demand jobs.

This year, our goal is to offer 12,000 new high school students the opportunity to receive the WorkKeys certification ... and by the end of my term, I want to see all 114 Missouri counties become certified work ready communities.

For our college bound students, the A+ scholarship is a popular and widely used program, and during COVID-19, we saw an even bigger demand. That is why I am calling for an increase of more than \$13 million dollars for A+ scholarships.

Another program that is becoming increasingly popular is the Fast Track program proposed by our administration to help working-age, under-employed adults advance their skills and careers.



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We are very proud that nearly 80 percent of Fast Track scholarship recipients are women, and nearly 50 percent are first-generation college students.

Today, we are happy to have two Fast Track participants here – Mallory Fox and Briana Tyler.

Both Miss Fox and Miss Tyler are pursuing degrees in nursing through the Fast Track program.

We are very proud of these ladies for their commitment to achieving their goals and bettering their futures.

Would Miss Fox and Miss Tyler please stand to be recognized?

These ladies are two of many Missourians whose lives have been changed through Fast Track ... and we are excited to continue the program this year.

In addition to these programs, we have also made great strides in expanding high-demand job training through MO Excels. I applaud the legislature for embracing these much-needed investments across the state.

This year, we will seek to enhance this even further with a \$21 million dollar investment across 15 new programs.

On top of this, we are proposing five grants to start new health care associate programs at community colleges in Missouri.

2020 highlighted the critical need for skilled health care workers, and we want to meet this need by educating and training our Missouri workforce.

Another important group of our future workforce is the men and women who serve Missouri as state employees.

Unfortunately, our state workforce is one of the least competitive in terms of attracting future public servants.

We must make changes ... so once again, I am asking the legislature to fund a pay increase for state employees.

I have always said that you can't emphasize workforce development without infrastructure. They go hand-in-hand, and we must continue to invest in both in order to succeed.

Now more than ever, we must capitalize on Missouri's strategic location in the center of the nation and build on the opportunity to become a powerful logistics hub not only for the Midwest and the United States, but for all of North America.

We are very excited about the new shipping technology that could create a corridor straight through Missouri into the heart of the country.

This is why we are calling for a \$6.3 million dollar investment in shovel-ready projects at Missouri's established ports.



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On top of this, we are also seeking \$25 million dollars to fulfill the transportation cost-share program we established to help communities complete other important infrastructure projects.

When we talk about infrastructure, we most often think about our transportation system ... but equally important is access to high-speed broadband.

We have made great strides in the past few years, and I appreciate the legislature's commitment to broadband expansion.

However, 2020 exposed many digital gaps, highlighting the importance of ensuring high-speed internet in all areas of Missouri ... which is why this year, I am once again asking for a \$5 million dollar investment to expand and improve broadband services across the state.

Over the years, Missouri has also fallen behind in the maintenance of hundreds of millions of dollars in state assets, facilities, and buildings – all critical parts of our infrastructure.

These are all paid with taxpayer dollars ... and neglecting these commitments only increases costs for future generations and legislatures.

This is why I am asking for a one-time expenditure of \$100 million dollars to clear the backlog of maintenance projects from every part of the state.

Also important to Missouri's infrastructure system is our state parks and conservation areas. Unfortunately, this is another area where maintenance and rehabilitation have been neglected for decades.

So this year, we are seeking approval for the Department of Natural Resources to complete infrastructure projects at 22 state parks.

Speaking of infrastructure, we are proud that the Missouri Department of Transportation continued to move critical projects forward despite the challenges of the past year.

All told, nearly 550 projects took place across the state that injected approximately one billion dollars back into Missouri's construction industry and economy.

On top of this, we recently allocated \$83 million dollars for MoDOT through conservative financial management.

These funds will be used for transportation infrastructure needs, including cost-share projects and low-volume roads – the backbone of our agricultural economy.

It is also worth mentioning that when every state in the nation was feeling the financial strain of COVID-19, we went back, sharpened our pencils, and put our AAA bond rating to work for our state.

By refinancing and consolidating existing debt, we saved Missouri taxpayers approximately \$22 million dollars.



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In addition, our responsible planning and management will allow us to supplement the Department of Labor's Unemployment Trust Fund and prevent a tax increase on all employers this year.

And speaking of employers, I hope the first piece of legislation to hit my desk this year is a clean COVID-19 liability protection bill.

Missouri businesses, manufacturers, health care providers, schools, churches, and many other entities across the state did not hesitate to step up and help their communities in the fight against COVID-19.

None of these groups should be penalized for their efforts to help. They must be able to continue serving the public without risk of unnecessary claims ... and I look forward to working with the House and Senate to get this done.

In addition to COVID-19 liability, Wayfair must also be addressed. I hope the House and Senate will consider legislation to address the unfair advantage online retailers have over small businesses in Missouri.

I am a strong supporter of lower taxes – in fact, I have signed several tax cuts into law. However, our small businesses, especially in smaller communities, are getting crushed right now because they cannot compete with huge online retailers.

We must level that playing field and consider ways to responsibly invest those revenues and provide new opportunities for our state.

Another very important step we must take is increasing our financial stability. Given the financial challenges of the past year, I hope the legislature understands how critically important a cash operating expense fund is for the future of our state.

I am proud of the discipline the legislature has shown in protecting the \$100 million dollars we have set aside in all of our proposed budgets ... but we cannot look at this on a year by year basis.

In order to provide greater stability in the long-term, we must allow these dollars to grow into a much bigger fund.

I recognize that this may take some flexibility away from the Governor's Office ... but it is the right thing to do for the future of our state, and I am committed to leaving Missouri in a better financial position than I found it.

While all of this is key to Missouri's success, we must also continue to invest in public safety and building stronger communities.

If we are to make real change, we must get violent crime under control in our communities ... and we cannot do this without our law enforcement officers.

These brave men and women risk their lives each day to keep us safe. We must support them, respect them, and give them the tools they need to do their jobs.



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Seated in the upper gallery is Lincoln University Police Chief and Peace Officer Standards and Training Commissioner Gary Hill.

Chief Hill plays a critical role in the safety of our local community, and we are honored he is here today to represent our men and women in uniform.

In June, I challenged the POST Commission to take a leading role in advancing the training Missouri provides officers and help improve relationships with the public.

The Commission followed through on this challenge, voting in October to require annual training in de-escalation and bias recognition for all Missouri law enforcement officers. We believe this training will lead to better interactions between law enforcement and the communities we serve.

In addition to these changes, we recently granted Lincoln University a basic training license to establish the nation's first law enforcement training academy at a Historically Black College and University.

At a time when law enforcement agencies are struggling to recruit officers, especially minority officers, this new training academy is a major step in the right direction.

We look forward to working with Chief Hill and Lincoln University on this unique effort. Would Chief Hill please stand to be recognized?

Thank you to Chief Hill and all Missouri law enforcement officers for your service.

My administration will also continue to support more coordination among local, state, and federal law enforcement through initiatives like Operation Legend.

And to further support law enforcement, we are proposing \$1.5 million dollars for the witness protection fund passed by the General Assembly during the special session on violent crime ...

And I hope the legislature will continue working with our office and the Attorney General to fight violent crime, support law enforcement officers, and make our communities safer.

In order to build stronger, safer communities, we must also improve the health and well-being of Missourians ... and to do this, we must support our health care workers.

For almost a year now, Missouri's doctors, nurses, and health care workers across the state have been on the frontlines without a break.

They are tired and overwhelmed, but they continue to rise to the challenge and take care of Missourians.



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Here with us today is Cindy Sheets, a Registered Nurse at Truman Medical Center in Kansas City.

During a visit to Truman Medical Center in October, I saw a video of Miss Sheets sharing her experience with COVID-19 ... and her words truly inspired me.

She said that she is not fearful ... because much like a soldier in war, this is what she signed up for. Every day, Miss Sheets has stepped up for fellow Missourians despite the risks and the challenges.

She is a true representation of what health care is all about, and we are honored to have her here today. On behalf of all Missouri health care workers, would Miss Sheets please stand to be recognized?

We cannot thank our health care workers enough, and we will continue to support them.

It goes without saying that COVID-19 has drastically changed the way we deliver health care. The demand for telehealth has increased significantly and will continue to be a major need going forward.

This is why we invested over \$5 million dollars last year to expand broadband for telehealth across the state ... and why we are proposing over \$4 million dollars to support telehealth and telemedicine for individuals with developmental disabilities.

Additionally, we are seeking an investment of over \$20 million dollars for 50 new community mental health and substance use disorder advocates and six new crisis stabilizations centers across the state.

These are important mental health investments for some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Our administration is also committed to ensuring patient protections, improving health care accessibility, and expanding health insurance options for Missourians ... which leads me to another change we must make after the passage of Amendment 2 this past August.

Like I have said many times, I will always uphold the will of the voters, and we will move forward with expanding Medicaid coverage to approximately 275,000 Missourians.

However, it is important to remember that the costs of this expansion will be significant – hundreds of millions of dollars, in fact.

This will have a major impact on other areas of our budget, and we must plan accordingly ... which means staying vigilant in maintaining the program's integrity by protecting against fraud and waste.

Since the beginning of our administration, we have always challenged the status quo.

From workforce development and infrastructure to reorganizing entire departments of state government, we have constantly pushed for greater efficiency, streamlining operations, and saving taxpayer money.



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This year, we will continue these changes with a focus on foster care and adoption.

Our goal is to take a stressful, complex, and often frustrating process and consolidate rulemaking authority into one department.

All of these changes in state government are exciting ... but they are not possible without a talented and dedicated team.

I want to take a moment to recognize my Cabinet not only for the incredible work they do on a daily basis, but also the dedication and professionalism they have shown throughout these trying times.

Would members of my Cabinet please stand to be recognized?

I greatly appreciate all of these individuals. They continue to tell me the work they do would not be possible without their own teams of committed public servants ... and I would have to agree with them completely.

It is also important to me to recognize the many other men and women who have gone above and beyond the call of duty, such as:

- Our doctors, nurses, and health care providers,
- Public health professionals,
- County health departments,
- Law enforcement,
- First responders,
- Teachers,
- Child care providers,
- Farmers,
- Truck drivers,
- Custodians,
- Grocery store workers,
- and all Missourians who have been on the frontlines of the COVID-19 crisis.

2020 was filled with countless struggles ... but each day, these individuals showed up and met these challenges with grit, strength, and determination.

And I promise that for the next four years, you can expect the same determination to confront every challenge, propose bold solutions, and make this state a better place for generations to come.

Today, I would like to conclude by sharing a quote from one of our great American Presidents Teddy Roosevelt, titled *Man in the Arena*, in honor of the selfless men and women who have truly fought this battle for Missouri.



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“It is not the critic who counts; not the one who points out how the strong stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better.

The credit belongs to those who are actually in the arena, whose faces are marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strive valiantly; who errs, who come short again and again ...

Because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends themself in a worthy cause ...

Who, at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement ... and who, at the worst, if they fail, at least fails while daring greatly, so that their place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”

It is an honor to stand shoulder to shoulder with Missourians in the arena ... those who have lifted one another up ... pushed one another to be better ... and who have remained devoted to a cause greater than themselves in the face of critics who will never know the strength it takes to endure these challenging times.

Missouri, it is our time.

It is an honor and privilege to remain the 57th Governor of the State of Missouri. God Bless Missouri, and God Bless the United States of America.