

Lieutenant Governor Kelly; Speaker Arch; Chief Justice Heavican; Members of the 108th Nebraska Legislature; Family, friends, and distinguished guests.

My fellow Nebraskans: We live in a very special place, where the son of a tenant farmer and a seamstress can get a good education, go to college, receive a doctorate in veterinary medicine, raise a family, build a business, and be elected to lead the greatest state in America. I am humbled and honored to stand before you today as the 41st governor of the great State of Nebraska, and I am excited to work with each one of you to serve the people of Nebraska.

We have long attracted the very best: those with a pioneering spirit, drive for innovation, and an appetite for risk-taking and hard work. Our forefathers came from places of fewer opportunities and fewer freedoms to build better lives for themselves and their children right here in Nebraska.

Over the last two years, I've had the privilege of meeting Nebraskans across our great state in their homes, farms, ranches, businesses, churches, and community gatherings in all 93 counties. I can tell you with absolute certainty: Wherever you travel, you won't find more innovative, hardworking, and God-fearing people. I love Nebraska. There truly is no place like it.

Since the beginning, when pioneers settled the territory of Nebraska, our strength has come from our people, not government. Our people bring their best every single day. We work to earn a good living, do our jobs to the best of our ability, raise our families, look after our neighbors, and build something better for our grandkids. We all do the hard work of keeping Nebraska great.

Growing up, our family would come to Lincoln once a year. My brothers and I were always so excited to be the first one to spot the Capitol as we drove into town. As incredible as this building and chamber are, we don't look to this building for prosperity—prosperity comes from private-sector farmers, ranchers, and business leaders who work hard, innovate, and take risks. We don't look to government for our rights and freedoms—those are endowed to us by God Almighty. And we don't want to be handed anything—we want to earn it.

But we do expect government that does well in those limited functions that only it can perform. We expect low taxes, carefully controlled spending, transparency, and accountability. We expect the business of the people to be handled like business. We expect good schools, quality roads, and safe neighborhoods. We expect a government that promotes opportunity instead of limiting it. And we expect the leaders we elect to work together to find real solutions to difficult challenges.

Great people want limited government that respects their freedoms, does its job, and then gets out of their way. Great people want the opportunity to succeed through grit and determination. Great people want to live and work around other great people, and they want their children to do the same. That's why great people want to live in Nebraska.

The demand for the Good Life is as strong as ever, but today, we have real obstacles to overcome. Too much of our talent leaves the state. We have to do a better job of keeping our kids here, equipping them with the skills they'll need, and attracting even more top-tier talent from across the nation.

Our broken tax code is burdensome and uncompetitive. It weighs on all Nebraskans, and it limits our state's economic potential. That's why we have to achieve transformational tax change now.

Our state education funding formula is outdated and unfair to far too many of our students. State aid to education must be modernized so that it is more equitable, meeting the needs of communities across Nebraska. All Nebraskans agree: Our kids are our future. We can never give up on our kids.

These are not easy feats to accomplish, and there will be even more to do this session. The question for us today, in this chamber, is whether we can live up to the example set for us by those we serve—whether we can come together and do the big, difficult things that are required to secure a more prosperous future.

As I look to the members of the 108th Nebraska Legislature, the answer is clear: we can do big things by working together. Together, we can.

Together, we can and must build productive working relationships of trust and good will.

Together, we can and must achieve attitudinal change and put our focus not on what's best just for your community, or for mine, but on what's best for the future of our entire state.

And together, we can and must rise to meet any challenge, overcome any obstacle, and do the hard work of keeping Nebraska great for generations to come.

I'm here to do my part: to bring my knowledge and experience to the table, and to listen to all Nebraskans. To advocate for the values and interests of our citizens, from the Missouri River to Harrison and everywhere in between. To hold our cabinet agencies to the highest standards of performance and continuous improvement. And to treat tax dollars as I treat my own.

My dad taught me that every nickel matters, so we treat nickels like manhole covers, making decisions with fiscal conservatism and the constant drive to do more with less.

I will work hard as a good-faith partner with my fellow constitutional officers, the judiciary, and the Legislature in doing the people's work.

As we embark on a new chapter of Nebraska's history, I want to thank all of you for answering the call to public service. I thank your families, and mine, for providing the support we will all need to do the work that lies ahead this year. I thank our state teammates for all their efforts. I want to thank the brave men and women of our armed forces, law enforcement, and first responders for all they do to keep us safe and free. And, most of all, I want to express my thanks to the people of Nebraska for placing their trust in us. May we always prove worthy of their faith and confidence.

Today, I'm joined in the chamber by my wife, Suzanne, and our incredible family. We're so proud of our children, Sarah, Brock, Polly, and Izic; our son-in-law, Jerod, and daughter-in-law, Sarah; and our seven grandchildren: Will, Halle, Eloise, Henry, Harrison, Ava, and Thomas. They are my inspiration to work every single day to create

a brighter future for all Nebraska's children—one grounded in faith, rooted in the values of family and freedom, and abundant in prosperity.

Together, we can make that vision a reality by putting in the work, day by day.

The great Nebraska statesman and my mentor, Coach Tom Osborne, taught me and my teammates that nobody ever just stays the same. Every day, we either decide to put in the effort to get better or we allow ourselves to get worse. We never stay the same... We never stay the same.

Let's all commit to getting better each day, aspiring to the greatest examples of our forefathers. When we do, we will look back on the first session of the 108th Nebraska Legislature with pride for all we've accomplished together.

May God guide all of us in our work and bless us and our families. And may God continue to bless the great State of Nebraska. Thank you.