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FOREWORD

A DYNAMIC, NEW AGE OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

*The Honorable James S. Gilmore, III **

For Virginians, the new millennium marked more than the passage of a symbolic moment in time. We wrote history, dawning a dynamic, new age of political freedom and progress in the Commonwealth.

With the swearing in of a Republican majority in the General Assembly, Virginia shattered the single party system that had ruled state government since 1885. This political sea change brought to the surface important issues that had been cast away for decades.

I was elected on one of those issues—the promise to cut the car tax. This promise emerged from my belief that the people have a greater ability than government to improve their own quality of life. It's simply a matter of protecting the individual liberty endowed to them by God and also providing them with essential tools such as a quality education and good roads.

I am proud that the General Assembly and my administration worked together to keep my promise to cut the car tax. After two and a half years of implementing the No Car Tax plan, we have enabled the working men and women of Virginia to keep more than \$500 million of their own money.

The No Car Tax plan is only one of the sixteen tax cuts currently being implemented by my Administration. When all are fully phased in, we will provide nearly \$1.6 billion of tax relief per

* Governor of Virginia, 1998–present. Attorney General of Virginia, 1994–1998. B.A., 1971, University of Virginia; J.D., 1977, University of Virginia.

year to Virginians and their businesses. This tax relief will not only grow our economy, but our people will be freer to define their own lives and live their own dreams. This principle of empowering the individual is as important as the tax cut itself.

As we have worked to allow people to keep more of their money, we also have set priorities and made investments in those priorities, including increased support for higher education to the tune of over \$470 million since 1998. That's in addition to the \$520 million spent to expand college campuses.

We have also cut the cost of tuition by twenty percent. I am proud to say that a college education is more affordable for families and more accessible for students today than it was just two years ago.

The taxpayers are investing a tremendous amount of their money in higher education and surely will be asked for more in the future. But as a predicate for increased funding, I have asked five institutions to prepare long-term strategic plans called "Institutional Performance Agreements" this fall for submission to the General Assembly in December.

Virginians deserve to measure the quality of the institutions their hard-earned dollars support. Everyone supports academic freedom, but the management of our colleges cannot be beyond the public policy process. Oversight and accountability to the people are parts of our higher education policy.

We also made significant progress in K-12 education during the last General Assembly session. Raising academic achievement is my top priority for children in Virginia's public schools. Setting high academic standards is the surest way to achieve that goal.

That is why we restored and expanded funding for the Early Reading Initiative—so every child will be able to read by the end of the first grade. That is why we launched the Algebra Readiness Initiative—so every child will be skilled in math by the eighth grade. That is why we invested in on-line testing, better remediation, and teacher training.

We cannot afford to leave one, single, solitary child behind in this fast-paced and always-changing world. Every child deserves an opportunity to achieve at greater academic heights and enjoy the blessings of liberty that those heights afford. Our commitment to high academic standards is that opportunity.

I opened my State of the Commonwealth address on January 12, 2000, by saying, "Power is not permanent in a democracy. When the day is done, it matters less whether one party has a majority than whether we have created a better democracy for the people of this great Commonwealth." I believe future generations will look back on this most historic of years and say that we moved ahead; we created the dawn of a dynamic, new age of political freedom and progress for all Virginians.

During the last General Assembly session, we also bolstered our commitment to improving Virginia's transportation system. My administration worked hard to ensure that the critical components of our transportation plan—"Innovative Progress"—became law. Our efforts resulted in the Virginia Transportation Act of 2000.

The Act creates a Priority Transportation Fund and, for the first time in history, dedicates General Fund revenue to transportation. It also enables the state to streamline its fuels tax collections and accelerate the receipt of federal transportation funding. These innovations are accelerating the construction of critical transportation projects and providing a substantial infusion of transportation dollars. Progressive reforms of Virginia Department of Transportation management are underway. Likewise, the six-year planning process is being reformed.

This year alone, my administration will provide \$3.2 billion for transportation projects. That's a twenty-two percent increase over last year. And over the next six years, the state will provide \$3 billion in new money for transportation. The taxpayers are investing more money in transportation than at any time in the history of Virginia, and they are doing so without having to pay more in taxes.

All of these issues and ideas have come to the forefront because Virginia now has a true two-party political system for the first time. It is important to strengthen that system so that our political parties stay in touch with the people and also are accountable to them.

This year, we enacted laws that will begin to dismantle the machinery that had perpetuated the single party system. Those political reforms include: requiring special elections for constitutional officers, instead of judicial appointment; expanding the capacity of voters to make informed decisions at the polls by requiring party identification on the ballot; and ensuring the integrity of Virginia's electoral system by requiring voters to show a form of identification at the polls. We also secured the passage of key amendments to Virginia's existing recount statute to ensure the accuracy of ballots passed in close and challenged elections. These political reforms will help make our democracy stronger than at any time in the last century.