

2025

“Ever Forward, Evergreen”



Jan. 14, 2025

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Invocation | Paul Benz



Paul is an ordained minister of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and served parishes in Kentucky & Washington state from 1986 to 1999. He graduated from Seattle Pacific University in 1979 with a bachelor's degree in religion and political science and from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in 1985 with a master's degree in divinity. He has lobbied for faith groups since the 2000 legislative session, beginning with the Lutheran Public Policy Office. In 2010, he helped form the Faith Action Network, which he lobbied for through the 2020 session. Since then, he's been an independent contractor lobbying for the WA Police Accountability Coalition and various criminal and legal reform bills.

National Anthem | Lena Hou



Lena Hou, a 21-year-old student at Bellevue College studying business management and technology, has been captivating audiences with her voice since the age of 7. Her talent earned her the honor of singing the national anthem at Governor Jay Inslee's 2013 inauguration, a milestone that launched her into performing before headliners like Hall and Oates and Culture Club, as well as at University of Washington sporting events. Lena is excited to bring her passion for music to today's special event.

2025 State of the State Address

Gov. Jay Inslee

“Ever Forward, Evergreen”

As prepared for delivery at 10:30 a.m., Tuesday, Jan. 14, 2025
House Chamber, Washington State Capitol

Good morning.

Thank you to Paul Benz for the invocation, as well as Lena Hou for her wonderful vocal talents. Astute observers may notice that Lena also sang the national anthem at our first inauguration 12 years ago when she was just 9 years old.

Lena, I’ve also aged *just* a little since then.

Mr. President, Madam Speaker, Mr. Chief Justice, distinguished justices of the court, members of the Legislature, Tribal leaders, local electeds, members of the Consular Corps, invited guests, and my fellow Washingtonians...

I come to you with pride and gratitude for our state.

It was my life’s honor to be elected governor three times, to work for the people of Washington these 12 years. This is a place that means everything to me and Trudi.

Speaking of Trudi Inslee, I want to thank her and our family and give a special thanks to our grandchildren: Nolan, Brooks, Annie, Chase, Zoe, and Brody.

I also would like to share my deep appreciation for the 65,000 state employees who have dedicated their work to making life better for all Washingtonians.

We'll miss the work and the relationships. But I'm not here to talk about the *end* of something. A new legislative session means we should talk about beginnings.

It was 35 years ago this week when I took my first oath of office as a legislator from the Yakima Valley. I took that oath in this building alongside many new faces.

My colleagues and I had great conviction, tremendous zeal, and full heads of hair. We were a new generation of legislators who sought to upend the status quo.

Today I notice the new faces around Olympia. I see fresh visions for where we want to take our state, leaders who want to make these dreams for Washington reality as fast as possible.

My freshman class quickly saw that change often takes patience and resilience. We learned the lesson that progress takes time and perseverance.

But think about both the progress we've made and the time and efforts it took to make it.

We used to be a state that didn't fund early childcare until a champion named Representative June Leonard started moving the needle. We didn't have outdoor heat protections for farmworkers. We didn't have paid family leave, a public health option, or a strategy for youth homelessness.

Washingtonians didn't have marriage equality, but brave visionaries like Senator Cal Anderson weren't quiet about this injustice.

Thanks to years of work by undaunted individuals who showed up session after session, it was eventual – and inexorable – that all of those things came to pass.

Since my terms in the Legislature, I've represented congressional districts on both sides of the Cascades. I've held three terms as governor. And in this moment, I see an Evergreen state going ever forward.

To the new leaders here today I say: You will inevitably face frustration. You will struggle with the tyranny of the status quo. Do not lose patience. Do not trade in courage for comfort. Never forget that Martin Luther King Jr. said the moral arc of the universe bends *slowly but steadily* toward justice.

Even as governor, it took years to pass cap-and-invest, a capital gains tax, an assault weapons ban, and the nation's most generous college financial aid program.

We kept working year in, year out. Eventually, we hit tremendous milestones in our state's history.

Together, we complied with the McCleary ruling for funding schools. It took *years*, but with heroic effort we got it done.

Together, we met the rapidly growing behavioral health demands highlighted by the Trueblood ruling.

Together we reduced youth homelessness by 40 percent.

Together we created the nation's best paid family leave, which has received over 1 million applications.

Together we passed the two biggest transportation funding packages in state history, putting thousands of people to work and broadening our focus beyond highways to include things like free transit for all Washingtonians 18 and younger.

There's more work to do, of course, but these accomplishments should give us *confidence* for the next steps. We keep moving forward. We pull together. Because we're the state of Washington.

We came together through setback and calamity. We did it during the Skagit River bridge collapse. We did it through multiple historic wildfire seasons. The people of Oso did it when the nation's worst landslide in history struck.

We rallied to welcome those fleeing war in places like Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine, because Washington's values make us a place of refuge and opportunity in an unstable world.

And we inspired a nation with how we cared for each other during COVID. If the rest of the country had adopted our approach to the pandemic, close to half a million lives would have been saved across America.

The secret to our success is we don't leave anybody behind. We follow the science. And we work together to make extremely difficult decisions.

Protecting that progress will be challenging this session. This budget situation is both one we've seen before and something entirely unique.

The Great Recession triggered major reductions in spending and services – \$11 billion in cuts, about the same amount of the budget gap we face today.

Today, our economy is not in decline. Unlike during the Great Recession, our economy is doing as well as it ever has – but that prosperity hasn't bloomed equally.

While fortunes for some are growing, so are lines at our food banks. Our economy provides more than enough to some, but our regressive tax system is unfair to most working families and jeopardizes our continued progress on the systems that Washingtonians depend upon.

For those who weren't here during the Great Recession, this is what \$11 billion in cuts looked like:

Suspending efforts to reduce class sizes and increase teacher pay.

Taking state health care away from 40,000 low-income Washingtonians.

Cutting higher education funding, causing tuition to soar.

Slashing mental health services at our state hospitals.

And reducing safety net programs for people with disabilities, the elderly and those living with poverty.

It's fitting to look at this budget differently.

Abstract numerical cuts mean concrete personal pain, like the pain of a kid who has to drop out of college because they can't afford a tuition hike. Like the pain of the mother who is told there's no room at the hospital for her child in the midst of a schizophrenic episode.

It took years to build back what we lost in that era. My budget in December proposed \$2 billion in budget cuts, but pruning significantly more than that I would consider a slide back to those dark days.

We have a strong economy, so why would we consider cuts to programs like housing or mental and behavioral health services at a time like this? Not when we're finally seeing progress. Not when the number of people needing these services is increasing. Not when these programs are saving lives and making our communities safer and healthier.

Washington voters just sent a strong message that they want to continue the path we're building.

In 12 years, we have built a strong engine of increasing justice and increasing health for our residents. We can't knock it off the tracks just as we've started rolling forward.

More than 55 percent of voters said they want to keep their long-term care. Washingtonians believe in our work on health care and human services. We should not consider anything that diminishes Washington's ambitions in this arena.

More than 64 percent of our state said we're keeping our capital gains tax on extraordinary profits. My budget honors that by asking those who have benefitted the most from Washington's booming economy to play more of a role protecting behavioral health, early learning and education.

Deep budget cuts *always* fall hardest on the people who can't afford them, like working families, or students trying to manage both their grades and their mental health, or the thousands who have been priced out by a housing market that has not kept pace with demand.

Here's one thing I know: There are influential people and organizations that have your phone numbers, who are going to work those contacts hard this session.

Whether the influential voices have you feted over lunch or cornered out in those halls, before you take that vote, I hope you think about the voiceless – the Washingtonians who don't have your cell numbers – and remember why you're here.

We have to protect what *they* value the most too, especially when it comes to our youth and our families.

We have to go forward on our investments in young people and education, like the work we've done to grow more support resources at our schools with social workers, paraeducators, and counselors.

Robert Daniel is a counselor at Discovery Middle School in Federal Way. He's here today.

They used to have one counselor serving more than 700 students' emotional, academic and social needs. Now places like Discovery Middle School have enough counselors meeting the recommended ratio to provide more robust, one-on-one counseling to the students who need it most.

Counselors like Robert don't just react when students are in crisis, they're proactively involved in bringing out each student's own strengths. They have more capacity do that now thanks to this Legislature, but they still need your continued support.

Thank you, Robert, for being here.

This Legislature has a clear mandate to continue its progress in other areas, including climate. Washingtonians have your back. Sixty-two percent of voters chose to keep slashing pollution and strengthening our communities through cap-and-invest.

On the news the other day in Los Angeles, there was a woman fleeing the fires, who turned around to go save her neighbor's house. They asked her why and she said, "I just could not sit there and do nothing."

And I thought of my state. And how we are doing something. We're building a clean energy economy that's the envy of the nation.

There's a nearly 100 percent consensus in the scientific community that climate change is happening and that it is human-caused. That's why I'm so heartened that we have acted.

Since we passed the Climate Commitment Act, the problem statement has grown, with increasing fires and heat domes; increasing rainstorms and flooding; increasing acidification of Puget Sound, loss of ice caps. The need for the programs funded by CCA will only continue to increase.

It's called the Climate *Commitment* Act for a reason. We ought to honor that commitment.

We shouldn't debilitate or steal from that central premise of why voters supported it.

We're joined today by Vanessa Kowoosh from Queets. Vanessa works at the Quinault Tribe's Generations building supporting the community's culture through history and language programs.

Community resources like these are threatened because the land it's on is at risk to sea level rise caused by climate change.

They're not the only coastal community living with this threat. The Climate Commitment Act is supporting them by charging polluters and investing in these communities' relocation to higher ground.

Thanks to the Climate Commitment Act, and the choice by lawmakers to honor its purpose, the people of Queets are getting a new Generations building on higher ground, safe from flooding, funded by cap-and-invest.

This is just one example of one way the CCA is keeping communities safer and healthier. Vanessa, we wish you well.

We have work ahead with a new federal administration as well.

Look: Our state will work with anyone on policies that are positive for Washington. But we will not bend the knee to a would-be authoritarian's worst impulses.

We will follow the Constitution. And we will be steadfast in our commitment to the progress of our state together.

Bob Ferguson, a guy who knows about defending Washingtonians, will become Washington's 24th governor tomorrow at noon.

In November, Washington voters saw two different visions for the future of our state, and they chose to continue the path of progress.

Congratulations, Bob. Good luck.

I'm leaving state government, but my feet remain planted firmly in the fight for Washington's future.

Although my administration's time is at an end, we've been running full speed "through the tape" and now we are passing the baton. This Legislature knows how to keep going. The challenges ahead will not weaken the momentum of what we are doing here.

Washington state is a light to the world. We're a beacon of progress by so many measures. Because we follow the science. We work together. We refuse to leave our neighbors behind.

When the law said the state could put someone to death, we refused to accept an imperfect system. We ended the death penalty.

When the U.S. Supreme Court stole the right of choice, we stood up for reproductive health everywhere by welcoming patients and doctors to Washington.

When working families needed relief, we passed the Working Families Tax Credit, energy rebates, a public health option, and free transit for everyone 18 and younger.

When we saw LGBTQ youth being abused and manipulated by conversion therapy, we banned it. When we saw our state still had racist housing covenants, we struck those down too.

And as gun deaths rose nationwide, we held the firearms industry accountable and passed some of the strongest reforms in America.

This Legislature has a lot of hard work ahead. You have the grit and the vision to keep the pace of progress. I know this about you. It's why I'm grateful to have worked with all of you.

I woke up every morning these last 12 years asking how I could help Washingtonians realize their dreams. And every morning I was filled with confidence in the genius, the compassion and the grand ambitions of our great state of Washington.

Tomorrow morning, I know you all will wake up with the same sense of confidence, optimism, and hope.

To Washington, I bid you fair winds and following seas.

Thank you.

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