

State of the State

Inaugural Address

January 15, 2025

Mr. President

Madam Speaker

Distinguished guests

And my fellow Washingtonians,

Please join me in thanking the Steilacoom High School Chamber Choir for their beautiful rendition of the national anthem.

My mother, Betty Ferguson, passed away last year. Before she died, she asked Father Paul Magnano to perform her funeral mass and Eulogy. He is, as you might imagine, very close to the Ferguson family. Please join me in thanking him for his invocation.

And while my mom and dad are not here, my family is very well represented.

In fact, most of the gallery on my left is family.

Including five of my six siblings. I'm number 6 in the order.

Given that history, this is a strange experience — I've never spoken this long, uninterrupted, with my siblings in the room. Thank you in advance, Tom, Ann, Peter, Bill and John, for your restraint this afternoon.

And now for my favorite sentence in this speech — I am excited to introduce you to my wife of 20 years, an educator in our outstanding community college system, the new First Lady of Washington State, Colleen Ferguson.

Colleen and I are parents to teenage twins who are pleased to have an excused absence from school so they can join us today.

Jack and Katie — here is the one thing I most want you to remember from this day — being your dad is not only my most important job, but it's also the job that brings me the most joy. Your mom and I are very proud of you.

I'm here today because I believe in the urgency and importance of making Washington a better place for young people like Katie and Jack.

If you talk to anyone in my family — they will tell you that I've always been goal oriented, whether it's working on climbing Washington's 100 highest peaks with Jack, or securing wins for Washingtonians as Attorney General.

As your Governor, I will continue this focus on measurable, and ambitious, goals.

I will have a bias for action.

To that end, let's get straight to the point.

We face real challenges as a state and as a people.

Our state is unaffordable for many Washingtonians.

We rank 50th — last — per capita, in number of law enforcement officers.

Our ferry system is broken.

We are confronted with a behavioral health crisis.

Too many of our residents are unsheltered.

Housing is too expensive and there's not enough of it.

Our state government is bogged down by too much bureaucracy.

And core freedoms, like reproductive freedom, are threatened.

Despite these, and other challenges, I'm optimistic. I know that together we can make real progress and increase opportunities for Washingtonians.

Now I admit to being a glass half full kind of guy. But my optimism is warranted for three reasons.

First, Washingtonians are among the most resilient, dynamic and innovative people in the world.

Second, they are represented by dedicated legislators from diverse backgrounds united by a common commitment to help improve our state.

On that note, please join me in welcoming the 20 new members of the state Legislature.

Thanks to all of you for the sacrifices each of you make to serve your constituents.

And third, Washington's history demonstrates, over and over again, that we rise to the challenges placed in our path.

And we emerge stronger each time.

That legacy is personal for me. Because this is my first time speaking in this chamber, and with so many family members here today, I want to share some of our history.

Both sides of my family were here before we were a State. Back in those territorial days, my great grandparents on my mom's side homesteaded along the Skagit River where they carved out a life from the land.

They ventured West with little more than determination and a desire to forge their future here.

Their comforts must have been few indeed.

Meanwhile, on my dad's side, our ancestors made their way to a different part of our Territory – Vancouver. The Territorial Legislature created a School for the Deaf and the school hired my great-great-great uncle, James Watson, to lead it in those early years. His wife, Cecilia, joined him in this important work to which they both dedicated their professional lives.

A few years after these, and other, family members arrived, Governor Elisha Ferry delivered the very first inaugural address in 1889.

Some of you know I collect political memorabilia from our state's history.

I recently purchased an original copy of Governor's Ferry's inaugural address — and it's actually signed by him.

Amazing what one can find on eBay!

As you can certainly appreciate, both Governor Ferry and the Legislature faced significant obstacles as they confronted the daunting prospect of literally creating a State government.

Ferry understood that. Yet he struck an optimistic tone and declared that: “with resources superior to those of any other equal area, with a population as enterprising as it is courageous... there is no reason why the state of Washington should not in the near future rank amongst the most prominent states in the union, nor why the people should not enjoy the priceless blessings of prosperity, health and happiness.”

More than a century later, Governor Ferry's family is still here in our state.

Please join me in welcoming the great-grand-nephew of Elisha Ferry, Tom Kellogg of Sequim, and his wife Kathie.

History surely vindicated Governor Ferry's optimism.

Washington is indeed among the most prominent and prosperous states in our Union, even if that prosperity is not equally shared by all.

But the path to our current status as a world leader in so many economic sectors has not been a smooth, straight line since Governor Ferry's 1889 address.

The Great Depression hit Washingtonians hard. But in his inaugural address in 1933, Governor Clarence Martin also found reason for hope. He said: "We are confronted by a great responsibility. But it is reassuring and inspiring to realize that the responsibility is not greater than the opportunity."

Clarence Martin led our state well during those challenging years.

Joining us today is Governor Martin's granddaughter, Janet Martin, and his great-granddaughter, Jennifer Hutchings, both of Spokane. Please join me in thanking them for their family's service to this State.

When Governor Martin delivered that 1933 inaugural address, my family was still reeling from a tragedy. My grandfather, Francis Hausmann, had just died very unexpectedly while still a young man. His wife, my grandmother Edith Hausmann, was widowed with five young children between the ages of 4, my mom, and 12.

Edith and Francis owned a meat market in Everett — which my grandfather operated. The day after his funeral, Edith went to that meat market and took over the business.

I don't know how many single moms with five kids were business owners in Washington state in 1932, but Edith Hausmann was one of them. I continue to be inspired by Edith, and the Bible I took the oath on a few minutes ago belonged to her.

She never remarried.

Edith focused on that small business and her five children.

Her four sons all served during World War II.

She ran that business for twenty years before passing it down to one of her sons.

And her one daughter, my mom, became a special education teacher in our public school system after marrying her high school sweetheart from Everett High School.

My parents worked hard and raised seven kids. Their lives were undoubtedly busy, but they still found time to be involved politically, and in 1963 they were amongst the first volunteers and supporters of a young state representative who launched a longshot campaign for Governor. Dad helped organize the 36th District for that candidate — Dan Evans.

My siblings still remember driving around with Dad in an old Volkswagen putting up yard signs. Mom and Dad hosted one of the very first coffees for Dan Evans at our home. We still have my dad's handwritten notes with the guest list. They were the type of grass roots supporters who help send people like us into public office.

Mom and Dad saw something in a very young Dan Evans that generations of Washingtonians came to admire.

The Sixties were certainly a challenging time for our state and country. Here's what Governor Evans had to say 60 years ago at his first inaugural address:

"We are at this moment experiencing great challenges—challenges which test an administration, a legislature and a people. To meet these challenges, we cannot be leisurely when the times call for action."

A few months ago, Dan Evans passed away after a life of service. He was one of the greatest Washingtonians who ever lived.

We are honored, today, to be joined by one of his children.

Please join me in thanking Dan Evans, Jr. and the entire Evans family for sharing Governor and Nancy Evans with the people of our state.

By the way, I met with Dan Jr. recently and told him about one of my favorite possessions — it's a photo of my parents with Dan Evans shortly after his 1964 election.

Mom is 8 months pregnant in the photo with her sixth child — me.

That photo will be in my office as a reminder that "To meet these challenges we cannot be leisurely when the times call for action."

Let us embrace those words during this Session.

Let us have a bias toward action.

Let us listen to one another, without consideration for party, so that the strongest argument prevails.

That is how we do our best work.

Let me be specific with examples of how we can work in a bipartisan way.

Representative Connors — I am excited to work with you to get your Homes for Heroes legislation to my desk. Let's recognize the contributions of police officers, firefighters, behavioral health professionals and other critical public servants and ensure they can access low-interest loans to purchase their first homes.

Representative Davis — You've developed a robust and balanced package to improve public safety. I look forward to assisting you in this important work.

Representative Dent — Thank you for joining me for lunch at the Palace Cafe in Ellensburg. I share your commitment to supporting Washington farmers. By the way, that includes ensuring they receive the rebates they were promised under the Climate Commitment Act.

Representatives Santos and Callan — Thank you for stepping up to work on addressing the youth mental health crisis.

Senator Braun — I hope to work with you to adopt reasonable limits on the Governor's emergency powers. We can do that together.

Representative Reed — Your proposal to ensure that every Washingtonian with a 3.0 GPA receives automatic acceptance into many of our exceptional state institutions of higher education should be adopted by this Legislature. And I look forward to signing it.

Senator Holy — Thank you for your legislation proposing a \$100 million grant program to help local law enforcement agencies hire more well-trained officers to improve public safety. That idea was a cornerstone of my campaign for Governor. Any budget I sign must include this funding.

Representative Mena — I support your legislation prohibiting the National Guard from other states from coming into Washington to advance any president's agenda without our permission. Texas and Montana have adopted similar policies. Washington must join them.

And speaking of Presidents, let me be very clear — my administration will work with President Trump where we can. We will stand up to him when we must. That most certainly includes protecting Washingtonians' reproductive freedom.

That's why I'm taking action today to protect those freedoms. The times call for action. Immediately following this speech, I will sign an Executive Order directing the Department of Health to convene a roundtable of medical providers, reproductive health experts and policy makers to recommend strategies for protecting reproductive freedom. I'm proud of the robust legal protections we have in Washington, including the nation's strongest health data privacy law — but I am confident there is even more we can do.

During my campaign for Governor, I had the honor of meeting Washingtonians in all 39 counties, from all walks of life. And the single biggest concern I heard was affordability.

Washingtonians need more housing — lots more housing. We must make it easier, faster and less expensive to build housing of all kinds.

The times call for action.

That is why I am signing an Executive Order, immediately following this speech, directing state agencies to review all regulations that impact housing, permitting and construction and identify any provision that can be streamlined, deferred or eliminated.

This issue is critical. And that's precisely why I turned to one of our state's most trusted leaders to lead the Housing task force of my Transition team — Lt. Governor Denny Heck.

Last week, Lt Governor Heck presented me with a 42-page report containing 20 recommendations to address this crisis — including many that reflect ongoing legislative efforts to expand transit-oriented development, protect vulnerable renters and small landlords, and give local governments tools and incentives to improve housing supply and affordability.

Adopting these recommendations is one of my top priorities.

We also must make Washington State more affordable in other ways.

As Attorney General, my team and I stopped an illegal grocery merger that would have increased the price of groceries for families.

We also stopped illegal price fixing schemes that increased the price of chicken, tuna, and household items like computers and televisions.

What did I do with the hundred million dollars my team made those corporations pay? I sent those dollars directly to Washington families.

Trust me on this — I am taking that same laser focus on affordability to the Governor's office.

To that end, I am excited to work with Senator Riccelli and Representative Berg on legislation to ensure that every student attending K-12 public schools receives free breakfast and lunch as part of their basic education. Right now, if you're a single parent working 40 hours a week making 19 bucks an hour, your child doesn't qualify for free meals. That's unacceptable. That needs to change.

This will improve learning for kids, and save time and money for working parents.

Another challenge we face is the multi-billion-dollar budget shortfall.

We should have an open and honest dialogue about how we arrived at this shortfall and what lessons we must learn.

Let us work together to ensure that we correct some of the actions that brought us here.

But let me start by stating that the era of assuming unrealistic growth in revenue is over. To be specific, I will not sign a budget that requires unrealistic revenue growth to balance.

Moreover, I will veto policy bills that defer major spending obligations more than 4 years after the legislation is adopted. These bills violate the spirit of Washington's requirement that state budgets be balanced over a 4-year period.

Now let's talk about the challenge immediately before us — addressing our current shortfall.

Here's my approach.

First, we must prioritize.

We cannot simply assume that government's role is to do everything it has always done, while continuing to add new programs and responsibilities every year.

That's not smart. And that's not sustainable.

Rather, like any family budget, we must be vigilant in assessing existing investments to determine whether they still make sense and whether they meet our priorities during a budget crisis.

And I will start.

Last week, I proposed \$4 billion in budget savings.

These savings are in addition to those proposed in Governor Inslee's budget.

Finding savings and efficiencies is a shared responsibility. I am committed to that principle. In my proposal, I included a \$35 million sweep of the Attorney General's Office, an agency that I care deeply about.

"To meet these challenges we cannot be leisurely when the times call for action."

These times also call for action to improve the way state government serves the people.

Few things frustrate me more than bureaucracy that creates delays, confusion, or extra hurdles when people and businesses need questions answered and results delivered. Our state employees work hard and we are thankful for their public service. We must do a better job listening to them and to the public to find ways to improve customer service and save money while we are doing it.

I'm in politics because I believe in the power of government to improve people's lives. At the same time, we must recognize government does not always meet that promise.

So let me be clear: I'm not here to defend government. I'm here to reform it.

Over the past eight weeks, I have hired and retained talented cabinet secretaries who share my frustration with bureaucracy that interferes with serving the people and my passion for making government work better.

Senator Pedersen and Speaker Jenkins, this is probably a good time to apologize for stealing two of your committee chairs, Representative Senn and Senator Nguyen. I know they will be missed in this building, but their new roles as leaders of two of our biggest and most important state agencies are critical for our success.

Our mission must be to speed up government, improve customer service and center the people in every decision we make.

Let me give you an example. If a Washingtonian applies for a permit, they need that permit delivered on time. Time is money for that Washingtonian and their business.

And if the permit is late, why should that Washingtonian still pay for it?

That changes now.

Immediately after this speech, I am signing an Executive Order directing all state agencies to cut down their permit and license processing times. We'll establish quick and transparent deadlines for all agencies to meet — and if an agency doesn't meet its deadline, they'll refund your application fee.

I'll have more reforms and improvements to announce in the coming weeks. This is just a start to our important work — recognizing the urgency of making government more efficient, responsive, and centered on the people.

That is the commitment I am bringing to this office, rooted in my values — and the lessons from our shared history.

I've mentioned the names of several leaders today who gave voice and vision to the people of Washington in challenging times, and the members of my family who inspire me to action every day. Like all parents, when Colleen was pregnant with our twins we gave a lot of thought to their names.

Names matter. Names have meaning. Names symbolize things we care about.

I'm proud that my middle name is Watson. That name connects me in a very personal way to James Watson and his unique service to the people of Washington Territory and Washington State.

My son Jack's full name is Jackson Murray Ferguson — named after two Everett men of real integrity — Scoop Jackson and my late father, Murray Ferguson.

I tried to convince Colleen to name our daughter Edith.

Colleen quite reasonably pointed out that Edith is, in the 21st century, a rather old-fashioned name.

She was right, as she usually is, so we agreed on Katie.

But I still sometimes call Katie "Edith" anyway — and probably always will — because I like to remind her about someone very important in our family history.

And because I want her to know that while the name Edith may be old fashioned, qualities like

- resilience,
- hard work,
- common sense,
- patriotism,
- practicality,
- faith,
- frugality,
- service, and
- sacrifice —

qualities her great-grandmother Edith Hausmann had in abundance — will never be out of style.

Indeed, those are the qualities possessed by generations of Washingtonians that have always made our State — and Territory — great.

Elisha Ferry, Clarence Martin and Dan Evans — they all understood this.

In his 1965 inaugural address, Governor Evans provided us a roadmap to solving our challenges. He said:

“This administration is not frightened by the word liberal, nor is it ashamed of the word conservative. It does not believe that the words ‘fiscal responsibility’ are old fashioned nor will it ever fear to spend money if money needs to be spent.”

That’s common sense. That’s practical.

May those qualities guide us in our work, together, this session.

And, above all else, let us not be leisurely when the times call for action.

Thank you for joining me in serving the people of Washington state.

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