

Local lawmakers, organizations react to Gov. Sisolak's 'State of the State' address



LAS VEGAS (KLAS) — Local lawmakers and organizations are speaking out after Gov. Steve Sisolak delivered his second “State of the State” address Tuesday evening. He covered a wide variety of subjects, from the state’s COVID-19 response to his 2021-23 budget and financial challenges.

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Over the last year, Nevadans have been asked to make unprecedented sacrifices in the face of a deadly pandemic and a tumultuous economic crisis. But we've also seen communities pulling together, with everyday Nevadans stepping up to support their friends, families, and neighbors during unimaginably difficult times. As Governor Sisolak said tonight, our state is determined, resilient, and strong.

Tonight, the Governor laid out a vision for continuing the fight against COVID-19 and preparing for a brighter future for our state. As we continue to scale up statewide vaccinations, we can quickly boost small businesses with new grant funding and create jobs now with smart investments in critical infrastructure. We can also grow our economy in the long-term by passing legislation to attract billions in new investment, particularly in our clean energy sector.

During the peak of last summer's economic crisis, state revenues dropped dramatically, and we were forced to make difficult cuts to state services. We're pleased that our state's financial situation has improved, and we will be able to begin restoring critical funding in health care and education, while also modernizing key state services. And we join the Governor in his determination to safely re-open schools and get kids in every corner of the state back into their classrooms.

On behalf of Senate Democrats, I want to thank Governor Sisolak for his leadership over these last difficult months. As we begin the 81st Legislative Session, we look forward to working together to bring Nevada out of this crisis stronger than it was before.”

— NICOLE CANNIZZARO, NEVADA SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

Nevada Assembly Speaker Jason Frierson wrote:



Nevada families have suffered in countless ways this past year. We have lost 3,700 Nevadans to this pandemic and thousands more have lost their way of life. Tonight, as he has throughout the pandemic, the Governor spoke to those who have been hit hardest to say that we are working to turn the page together. I am grateful for his compassion and determination to make Nevadans whole.

The budget of a family, of a state, of a nation reflects priorities. I applaud the Governor for prioritizing the needs of Nevadans who have been hardest hit. Those priorities include access to affordable health care, getting our children back to school, and something I will personally advocate for– helping our small business owners with funds to get back on their feet. I also applaud continuing to connect our workforce with a 21st century economy. Lifting up our unique ability in Nevada to harness a clean energy economy and improve our infrastructure will get Nevadans back to work and also help us address climate change.

As legislators, we are all Nevadans first and I echo Governor Sisolak’s call tonight by asking my fellow legislators to work together to ensure that we build a state that can withstand the next crisis. We all have a part to play and we can show that Republicans and Democrats can put people over politics.

Tonight at the forefront of my mind are the everyday heroes of Nevada– those the Governor spotlighted and so many more whose names will never be known but are quietly working to create a community we are all proud to call home. It is their voices that we will carry into the legislature as we get ready to convene in 10 days to do the work we have been elected to do. I look forward to continued partnership with Governor Sisolak, Majority Leader Cannizzaro, Minority Leader Settlemeyer, and Minority Leader Titus to move our great state forward together.”

- JASON FRIERSON, NEVADA ASSEMBLY SPEAKER

The **Clark County School District** issued a statement, which reads:

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The Clark County School District is thankful for Nevada Governor Steve Sisolak’s commitment to making education a priority in his proposed budget during these unprecedented times.

We welcome the Governor’s efforts to continue to support and move the Pupil Centered Funding Plan, known as SB543, forward in the upcoming 2021 Legislative Session. The commitment to this formula will not only support equity and access among our children most in need, but it will also support the education of all of our students in Clark County. We look forward to gathering more information and greater understanding of the recommended implementation and aligning our support and voice to the process moving forward.

Our children must always be our number one priority and we are realistic that difficult decisions will need to be made in order for lawmakers to pass a balanced state budget. We remain steadfast in our commitment to work together with Executive and the Legislative branches to overcome challenges brought on by the current pandemic and ensure that future revenue will be directed toward K-12 education as Nevada’s economy recovers to ensure our students, educators, support professionals, and administrators all have the resources and services to succeed.

- CLARK COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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The **Nevada Association of School Superintendents** chimed in, writing:

The Nevada Association of School Superintendents (NASS) recognize and appreciate the difficult fiscal situation our State is in as reflected in the budget presented by Governor Sisolak tonight. Tough decisions had to be made, and all Nevadans will share in the pain of the budget reductions.

We recognize and support the Governor's priority around public education and workforce development for the benefit of all Nevadans. As the educational leaders in the State, we are committed to using the taxpayer dollars dedicated to public education in the most efficient and effective manner possible with a laser focus on supporting classroom teachers and students as we address the academic and mental health crisis that has taken place over the past year.

We look forward to working with the Nevada Legislature and bringing innovative and strategic ideas forward to ensure increases in student achievement statewide. NASS supports Governor Sisolak's priority for the day when all students have access to in-person learning that is equitable, safe, and welcoming.

- NEVADA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

Brian Rippet, president of the **Nevada State Education Association** (NSEA), said in a news release:

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“While there is some good news reflected in Governor Sisolak’s proposed budget, Nevada is still in desperate need of new revenue. Unfortunately, we did not hear about a plan to get us there in tonight’s State of State address. Like the 31st Special Session, public education is bracing for another painful hit in the 81st Regular Session.”

- BRIAN RIPPET, PRESIDENT, NSEA

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Anette Magnus, executive director of **Battle Born Progress**, issued a statement, which reads:

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2020 was an incredibly challenging year for everyone, and Nevada was no exception. In fact, our state is among those at the top of the list of hardest-hit areas of the country due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic downturn. We credit and thank Governor Sisolak for continuing to do all he can to put Nevadans’ public health and safety first and summoning every state resource available to support testing and contact tracing, keeping families in their homes, and distributing the vaccines to frontline workers and high-risk populations first. While tonight’s State of the State rightfully focused on COVID-19 response, job, and our economy there were also some glaring omissions that must be addressed during the 2021 Legislative Session.

Looking forward to the Legislative Session, we realize the extremely difficult position in which the governor and the legislature find themselves. Due to soon-to-be Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell's refusal to pass aid for state and local governments, Nevada has been forced to make difficult cuts to many critical services like education, health care, and others. Luckily, revenue projections turned out to be better than expected. And, fortunately, new leaders will soon be sworn in at the federal level who understand the need for state government relief. We look forward to working with the governor, Speaker Jason Frierson, and Senate Majority Leader Nicole Cannizzaro, to pass a budget that sustains Nevada and its diverse communities and provides adequately for public education, health care, unemployment, and other essential services.

Raising revenue is an absolute necessity if Nevada is going to be able to recover and build a state that retains and attracts businesses and new residents. The old days of scraping by on fumes need to come to an end, especially as this pandemic has exposed how overly reliant our state revenue is on tourism industries. During the Special Session, several proposals to have the mining industry pay their fair share were passed. We are looking forward to a robust debate in both houses to put a new revenue option on the ballot that will end the mining industry's avoidance of paying their fair share and fund our schools, our healthcare, and our communities. The Governor said that when a crisis hits, it hits our state harder. That's exactly why we need a thorough conversation about diversifying our state's economy and raising revenue so that we do not find ourselves in this situation again like we have over the past decade. It is time to stop kicking the can down the road and have the hard conversation about raising revenue in this state.

We're encouraged to see that student welfare and outcomes continue to be a priority for the governor. However, educators and school support staff are not being listened to when it comes to changes to our state's education policy to cope with the pandemic. We hope that their voice will be incorporated into any discussions about changes or the implementation of the new funding formula and decisions about distance learning. We cannot continue to balance the budget on the backs of Nevada's students and educators as we have done for generations in this state. Now is a time for a real conversation, and action, on diversifying our economy and listening to our educators on what works best for them in the classroom. We applaud Governor Sisolak for keeping climate action at the top of his priorities. Even with so many issues in play, having a state with cleaner air, a more sustainable infrastructure, and new clean energy job opportunities is critical to Nevada's recovery and long-term growth and success. It's important for Nevada to stay on track with the goals set by the 2019 Legislature by working to decarbonize our transportation sector and provide access to renewable energy for consumers.

Protecting Nevadans' access to healthcare is a bigger priority than ever and it is encouraging to hear from Governor Sisolak on his plans to ensure our state system is funded and has what it needs to keep us safe through the pandemic. Restoring the Medicaid reimbursement rates that were cut during the Special Session is a positive step. Thankfully, with more sober leadership at the federal level, we hope that the governor will have the support he needs to ensure Nevadans are getting treated.

While great strides have been made, Nevadans still face significant barriers to the unemployment system with people unable to access the benefits they are entitled to receive. We thank Barbara Buckley and Elisa Cafferata for their tremendous effort to clear out the claim backlog by 95%. We look forward to steps the legislature can take to modernize our system and fix this ongoing problem so that folks in our community can be made whole.

Unfortunately, while the speech covered jobs, the economy, and education, large pieces of the agenda were notably missing from this address.

Violence committed by police against Black Americans and other communities of color has still not been addressed in a substantial way in Nevada. Comparing the law enforcement response to the storming of the U.S. Capitol with Black Lives Matter demonstrations over the summer should be an eye-opener for the degree to which systemic racism in policing exists. We must hold the Nevada Legislature to their promises they made during the Special Sessions this past summer to address criminal justice reform during the 2021 Session in a real way. Systemic racism was deemed as a public health crisis during the last Special Session and now must be treated as such with action.

Governor Sisolak has been consistent about extending the eviction moratorium in order to keep people in their homes during this period in which so many people have lost jobs and income. Nevada's housing crisis is far from over, we must see proposals to build on Sisolak's moratorium, empowering tenants and punishing predatory landlords or weekly motels who seek to exploit their tenants and kick them out on the streets during the 2021 session.

We look forward to working with the governor and our legislators to protect and build upon the voting rights reforms passed during previous sessions. The 2020 election proved that making it easier and more accessible for people to vote leads to more participation, which makes our democratic system healthier.

While mass shootings have lessened since the start of the pandemic, gun violence continues to be an epidemic for Nevada. With a rise in shooting incidents on the Las Vegas Strip, firearms being purchased illegally on the internet that are not traceable, racially motivated hate crimes on the rise due to COVID-19, and the increasingly alarming threat of far-right extremist gun violence, we need to see Governor Sisolak and the Nevada Legislature continue to make gun violence prevention policy a priority during the 2021 session.

- ANNETTE MAGNUS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BATTLE BORN PROGRESS

Mary Beth Sewald, president and CEO of the **Vegas Chamber**, wrote:

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The Governor's address tonight was focused on building a strong future, as well as navigating the current fiscal crisis. The Vegas Chamber applauds Governor Sisolak for recognizing in his state budget that employers and small businesses throughout the state continue to struggle. Presenting a balanced budget that does not add more burdens to employers in the form of more taxes or regulations is great news for all Nevadans. This commitment, along with more funding for small businesses, gives employers and entrepreneurs confidence to move forward and it will help preserve jobs.

We are particularly excited about the Governor's initiative to secure more federal grant dollars. Nevada is ranked at the bottom in the country in accessing federal grants simply because we have not applied for these dollars. By applying for federal grant dollars, we can bring millions in funding to Nevada that can be used to tackle challenges such as public health, education, and human services.

And the Vegas Chamber is pleased that the Governor is investing in workforce training at all levels of higher education, especially restoring UNLV School of Medicine funding. Training our workforce for in-demand jobs such as in health care and innovative industries is key to connecting workers to good paying jobs and sustainable careers, as well as growing our economy. The Governor's support of UNLV, Nevada State College, and College of Southern Nevada is important to our long term economic health.”

— MARY BETH SEWALD, PRESIDENT AND CEO, VEGAS CHAMBER

The **Nevada Health & Bioscience Corporation** (NHBC) thanked Sisolak for the \$25 million in funds that are to go toward the development of UNLV's School of Medicine medical education building:

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We express our sincerest appreciation to Governor Sisolak, who has kept his commitment to support this critically important project for the state. We recognize the significance of the Governor's decision during these unprecedented times and are grateful for his leadership. The combined efforts of private and public funding will ultimately help address our wider community's much needed access to improved health care.

... This model is proving to be an immensely effective case study in how philanthropic investment in collaboration with state investment allows the creation of more sustainable community assets for our citizens. We are excited to partner with the UNLV School of Medicine in the creation of many future doctors, but this model and project also inspires economic development, urban redevelopment and workforce development for Las Vegas in the creation of jobs.

... Every person regardless of socioeconomic status is entitled to access high quality, premier health care in their community. We're certain this project will enable that for our citizens and the future generations to come.”

- MAUREEN SCHAFER, PRESIDENT AND CEO, NHBC