

# The Spirit Of Virginia

An Interview with The Honorable Glenn Youngkin, Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia

**EDITORS' NOTE** Glenn Youngkin is a homegrown Virginian who grew up in Richmond and Virginia Beach. As his father changed jobs, Youngkin learned that moving around didn't equal moving up – nothing was handed to him. From his first job washing dishes and frying eggs at a diner in Virginia Beach, he embraced hard work and responsibility to help his family when his father lost his job. His determination to succeed earned him multiple high school basketball honors in Virginia and an athletic scholarship to college. After earning an engineering degree at Rice University, and his MBA at Harvard Business School, Youngkin and his wife, Suzanne, moved to Northern Virginia. He landed a job at The Carlyle Group, where he spent the next 25 years. Working his way to the top of the company, Youngkin played a key role in building Carlyle into one of the leading investment firms in the world.



The Hon. Glenn Youngkin

Virginians safe through initiatives such as Bold Blue Line. Additionally, we're working on lowering the cost of living. Part of that was delivering \$5 billion in tax relief for Virginia's working families. It's tough to highlight just a few priorities because we've transformed nearly every aspect of the government, from reducing DMV wait times, to transforming behavioral health services with Right Help, Right Now, to record-breaking job growth, and rethinking how Virginians are trained to take these great jobs.

**Will you highlight your administration's efforts to improve education in Virginia and reform K-12 education?**

I believe the key to unlocking opportunity for all Virginians is improving our education system. We need high standards in schools so kids can excel. Unfortunately, expectations were lowered by previous administrations. We've been working to reestablish these high expectations so that our children can be proficient in reading, math, and science. My administration has also ushered in historic investments in education, launched a lab school initiative to inject choice and innovation into our public school system, raised teachers' salaries 12 percent in our first two years and another

3 percent in each of the next two, passed the Virginia Literacy Act to improve literacy among elementary school-age students, renewed Virginia's focus on career and technical education, and implemented the ALL IN Virginia plan to tackle persistent learning loss stemming from forced pandemic school closures through intensive tutoring in math and reading. Virginia's kids should be able to go straight to work if they choose or continue their education through work-study programs, apprenticeships, and attending one of the amazing community colleges or four-year universities. At the heart of this, also, is putting parents back at the head seat of the table in their children's education. Parents deserve transparency into what their kids are learning in the classroom, accountability at school, and control and choice in their children's education journey. My administration has made it a top priority to return that right to Virginia parents.

**How is your administration tackling Virginia's behavioral health crisis and will you discuss your vision for the Right Help, Right Now plan?**

In 2019 and 2020, Virginia was ranked 47th in the country for youth mental health support, and the situation worsened with the pandemic. That's why we needed a plan to address the crisis and offer help before, during, and after a

**What attracted you to public service?**

A lot of prayer and a lot of conversations with my family. I left a job running a company – a job I loved – because I felt called to serve my home state. I saw Virginia getting off track. Liberal policies brought low job growth, high taxes, heavy regulations, and an education system that lost parents' trust, with communities facing record-high murder rates. My goal was to communicate a different path, and to people who had not heard it before or had chosen to vote for the other party. I realized that I had the opportunity to move Virginians of all political persuasions who were not satisfied with the Commonwealth – let's talk about hope of a better Virginia and turn it into the best place to live, work, and raise a family.

**Will you provide an overview of the priorities for your administration?**

In Virginia, governors are limited to a single term. So, I have a clock in my office shelf that is counting down from four years, and I put that up the minute I was sworn in. It's a reminder that we need to run at a sprint all the time on all our priorities. That's exactly what we've done. We've focused on economic opportunity and education, making sure parents trust that their kids are getting a best-in-class education. We're also investing in communities through programs like the Partnership for Petersburg and keeping



Governor Youngkin at the grand opening event for an Amazon facility in Richmond



crisis. The Right Help, Right Now transformation was lauded to bring the best practices from across the country to Virginia. It's been inspiring to work with the General Assembly on a bipartisan basis. We're in the middle of this three-year change effort, and we're seeing very positive results and we've devoted significant funding in each of the budgets I've signed into law toward delivering the Right Help, Right Now.

**How is your administration working to build transparency and integrity in government?**

My belief has always been that greater transparency leads to greater accountability. We saw that when parents stood up and demanded transparency in their children's school curriculum. It's really at the heart of greater parental involvement in our education system. Additionally, my administration has reduced Virginia's regulatory burden, streamlined our permitting processes, and eased licensing restrictions for dozens of occupations in the Commonwealth. Data and transparency lead to results, and we've been delivering real results.

**How critical is a strong public-private partnership in Virginia, and will you highlight your working relationship with the business community?**

Virginia's business community is thriving. Under my administration, Virginia has attracted companies committing nearly \$71 billion in investments, including major corporations like Boeing, Amazon Web Services, Raytheon, and The LEGO Group, as well as expansions from companies like Hilton, Northrop Grumman, and Framatome. When businesses come, jobs are created, our tax base expands, and our economy really takes off. That's what we've achieved in Virginia, and we now have more Virginians working than ever before in the history of the Commonwealth. Coming from the business community, I know many of these CEOs personally, and that has allowed for a better line of communication. We've successfully launched several important projects through public-private partnerships and we're seeing the positive impact.



*Governor Youngkin presenting a check in support of the Elevate Early Education (E3) School in Norfolk*

**As you look to attract new industries and businesses to Virginia, how do you define the Virginia advantage?**

Virginia's biggest strengths are our pro-business environment, including a great workforce, top infrastructure, and business-friendly laws and regulatory system. As governor, I've vetoed legislation that would harm businesses and their workers. I've also sought to reduce overregulation and over-taxation that drove businesses and jobs away from Virginia. I'm proud that Virginia is a right-to-work state, and I'll keep it that way. Our tax rate is also very competitive for the region, but we can do better. That's why I passed \$5 billion in tax relief during my first two years as governor and why I called for additional tax relief this year.

This is why many important companies choose to be here. If we don't keep pace with our neighbors – North Carolina, Tennessee, even Florida and Texas – who have lowered taxes or started the journey to lower taxes, we will lose people and jobs to those states. I won't let that happen.

**With so much gridlock and partisanship in Washington, D.C., what do you see as the key ingredients in getting action and achieving results?**

A critical step in overcoming gridlock is to foster a good working relationship with leaders on both sides of the aisle. I'm proud of the relationships I've made with House and Senate leaders. For example, I'm proud of the budget compromise we were able to sign this year that funded shared, bipartisan priorities while protecting Virginians from harmful tax increases. Sometimes it can be challenging, but the key is to keep any disagreements in the policy arena and not to make things personal. You don't always get what you want – however, that's politics in a purple state like Virginia.

**With the success that your administration has achieved for Virginia, are you able to enjoy the process and take moments to celebrate the wins?**

Each day, I start my morning with quiet prayer time. I do that to first thank God for putting me in this position, and then ask Him for his help. Serving as governor continues to be the greatest honor of my life and not a day goes by that I don't reflect on how lucky I am to be leading our amazing Commonwealth. I tackle this job full of energy and enthusiasm because that's what Virginians deserve from their governor. The big celebrations come from meeting with Virginians on a daily basis and hearing about how our policies are positively affecting them and their families. ●



*Governor Youngkin speaking at a Promises Made, Promises Kept law enforcement event in Richmond*