

Timothy J. Walz Sworn in as Minnesota's 41st Governor

January 7, 2019

[ST. PAUL, MN] – On January 7, 2019, Timothy J. Walz was sworn in as Minnesota's 41st Governor. Below are his remarks as prepared for delivery.

As a small town boy turned soldier, football coach and high school teacher, never did I envision standing before you today as Minnesota's 41st Governor—and neither, I am sure, did you.

The inaugural ceremony is a public acceptance of our legal—and moral—responsibility to this great state. A clear recognition of the privilege we've been given by the people of Minnesota to do our best to further our state's magnificent legacy.

To those of you who voted for me, thank you for your trust. For Minnesotans who voted for someone else—like the gentleman who came out to a listening session on a Friday night in Fergus Falls to tell me he didn't vote for me, but doesn't want to see me fail—I'll work hard to earn your trust as your governor.

Thank you, Chief Justice Gildea. Thank you and congratulations to our constitutional officers—it's an honor to stand with you.

Lieutenant Governor Flanagan—thank you for your leadership, your vision, and your passion. You make Minnesota proud. Miigwech.

To the leadership of our 11 sovereign nations and First Minnesotans—thank you. You honor me with your presence.

Senator Klobuchar, Congresswomen Craig and McCollum, and Minnesota legislators—thank you for coming today and for your service to the people of Minnesota. As a former legislator, I understand the term “co-equal” branches of government.

Thank you, Governor Dayton. I believe when history tells Mark's story, his lasting legacy will be that he put people first. Above politics. Before himself. And he left us with A Better Minnesota. We are all grateful.

Thank you to my wife, Gwen, Minnesota's First Lady and my best friend. My kids, Hope and Gus. Yes, the puppy is coming.

To the rest of my family, and a special thank you to my father and mother-in-law, Val and Lynn Whipple.

You know what they say, behind every governor is an astonished mother-in-law.

To my mother, Darlene Walz. Thank you. Thank you for everything you have done for me and showing me what strength looks like. I love you, mom.

Finally, to those who walked into this theater with me—teachers of mine, teachers I have worked with, students I have taught, and all other educators in the room—please stand as we thank you.

Thirty-six years ago, Governor Rudy Perpich also asked the teachers in the room to rise during his swearing-in at Hibbing High School. I'm honored to recognize our educators again today.

We find ourselves at a time when economic, social, racial, and geographic division feels rampant. I will not normalize behavior that seeks to deepen and exploit these divides. I will not normalize policies that are not normal—ones that undermine our decency and respect. If Washington won't lead, Minnesota will.

There is a temptation to see these times as unprecedented, to see our current challenges as insurmountable.

As a history teacher, I found it instructive to look back at past inaugural speeches to see how incoming governors portrayed the situations facing them.

In 1955, Governor Orville Freeman painted a picture of a society in intense crisis, besieged by the struggle between freedom and totalitarianism raging around the world.

In 1971, Governor Wendy Anderson spoke about how health care cost too much—or wasn't even available. He described a housing shortage in which the average young couple in Minnesota could not dream of buying a home.

In 1979, Governor Al Quie expressed concern about discrimination in our state. He urged the legislature to take action to eliminate discrimination in all forms, and to open opportunities for women, people of color, the poor, those with disabilities, and the elderly.

In 2011, Governor Mark Dayton described how our education system was failing our students, thus failing our future.

It strengthens my resolve to know those who came before me, on whose shoulders I stand, faced difficult challenges, many similar to those we face today.

My predecessors tackled the problems they faced, and working together with the legislature, they made progress. Because of that progress, our state enjoys one of the best education systems in the country, one of the best health care systems in the country, and perhaps the best quality of life in the country.

But we can and must do better. Old ways of doing things must be updated. New solutions must be found for new problems. We must continue to aim higher, reach further, and build brighter futures for the people of our state.

Foundational to our past, present, and future is the quality of our people.

And that begins with education.

Every student in Minnesota deserves the opportunity to learn in the best schools in the country with caring, qualified teachers.

But as I travel around the state, I see how the quality of a student's education is too often dependent on their race or zip code.

Just a few weeks ago, I met a grandmother who lives with a deep anxiety. Her fear is that her grandchild in Le Crescent won't receive the same opportunities or have as bright of a future as her grandchild in Woodbury.

Disparities in our educational system based on geography, race, or economic status hold back not only our students, but our entire state from reaching its full potential.

We must make Minnesota the “Education State” for all children—black, white, brown, and indigenous.

That starts with our shared values, the values we hold in common for the common good. Our state has a proud tradition of valuing the power of education. We must recommit ourselves to this Minnesota value.

If we are going to foster the best education system in the country, every politician, every community, and every Minnesotan must value our children receiving a high-quality education.

This means valuing our teachers, our principals, our mentors, our paraprofessionals, our bus drivers and, of course, our students. In sum, it means valuing the great American institution of public education.

Minnesotans, let’s recognize some simple truths: Education is the great equalizer of society. Education unleashes untapped potential. Education conjures the magic of promising beginnings and the grace of second chances.

Putting a young child on a yellow bus to pre-kindergarten in St. Cloud can prevent him from riding a prison bus to Stillwater.

Some of these truths are inspiring, others uncomfortable. But all lead us back to one of our core beliefs as Minnesotans—that every child deserves a high-quality education.

We must also reaffirm our Minnesotan value that health care is a basic human right.

What Minnesotans want from their health care is simple. They don’t want to get sick in the first place. But if they do, they want care at a price they can afford and at a location close to home.

For too many, this is not the case.

As Minnesotans, we can figure out how to deliver health care more effectively, more affordably and with better results. We can, and must, ensure that every Minnesotan has access to quality care at a price they can afford.

But we won’t stop there. We will invest in our cutting-edge research institutions and partner with our state’s dynamic health industry to ensure the cure for the world’s most devastating diseases comes right through Minnesota.

This past year, I had the opportunity to crisscross our state, visiting hundreds of communities. What became abundantly clear is that prosperity and opportunity for all people in all parts of our state stems from the well-being of their community.

We must ensure communities across Minnesota aren’t just surviving, they are thriving.

We must ensure equity in everything we do: from addressing the unacceptable racial disparities in our state to ensuring opportunity is not determined by your zip code.

Right now, whether from the urban Eastside of St. Paul or the rural town of Madelia in Southern Minnesota, many young people are leaving their communities because they can't see a bright enough future.

Many times they leave and then feel a tug on their heartstrings to return home. They want to be close to family and contribute to the growth of their community.

These are exactly the people we want back in their communities, yet they must overcome great barriers to do so. A young mother in Hallock told me she almost gave up on her effort to move home after struggling for months to find an affordable apartment for her and her son. That's not acceptable.

Investing in our infrastructure. Increasing access to quality housing. Expanding options for affordable child care. Protecting the right to collectively bargain for a pathway to the middle class. And giving local leaders the tools they need to succeed. It will take meaningful, sustained action to foster vibrant communities across Minnesota where families want to settle down and raise their children.

We will do this work through the lens of One Minnesota, because we know that when Mankato thrives, Moorhead thrives. When Rondo thrives, the Range thrives.

There's no doubt about it: we face some tremendous challenges in the coming years. Our economy is changing. Healthcare costs are soaring. Even the climate is unstable, causing devastating weather events. But we must face these challenges with a quiet confidence that can only be found in Minnesota, with a bipartisan pragmatism, and a humble determination to lead the Bold North.

When our state has faced equally big challenges in the past, we've always met them with a unique, innovative spirit that allowed us to lead the nation in finding solutions.

We must again find the opportunity in our challenges. Instead of burying our head in our hands when it comes to our changing climate or to providing affordable housing, accessible healthcare and good-paying jobs, we must tackle them head on.

But we can only do this if we come together.

We've done it before. One Minnesota is not new.

In 1955, Governor Orville Freeman implored Minnesotans to pray for the courage, energy, and wisdom to meet together the great challenge of our times. He said working together, we cannot fail.

In 1983, Governor Rudy Perpich said, "We are one people in Minnesota, not a people divided by regions and speech patterns."

In 2003, Governor Tim Pawlenty spoke of the "Minnesota Way" defined by our beautiful, bountiful land, our incredible people and a tremendous spirit of innovation.

In 2011, Governor Mark Dayton said "our differences cannot be permitted to blind us to the larger truth that we are One Minnesota."

As you know, I was a high school coach for many years. I have a high regard for competition on the football field. But governing is not a sporting contest with opposing teams each wanting to defeat the other. It's not a horse race nor a poker game to see who can best the other. It's about working together. Working to give everyone a better chance.

Unity is our tradition. Our ancestors - from the original Anishinaabe and Dakota people of this state to the immigrant farmers - carved out a life in the unforgiving cold.

And I've seen our ability to pull together firsthand as a soldier in the National Guard. Time and again, I was deployed to areas where families worked together to rebuild their communities devastated by floods, tornadoes, or fire.

One Minnesota is in our blood. It is born of our shared values. It is sewn into the fabric of our communities. It is driven by the collective good, fueled by our innovation.

No matter how daunting the challenge; no matter how dark the times; Minnesota has always risen up—by coming together. Our blood saved the Union at Gettysburg. Our iron forged the tanks that liberated Europe. Our farmers sparked a green revolution that fed the world. Our imagination transformed medicine.

One Minnesota is who we are. We just need to foster it. Together as One Minnesota, we don't fear the future. We create it.

Let's start creating! Thank you.