

## REMARKS: Governor Shapiro Delivers Remarks at the Pennsylvania Press Club's November 2023 Luncheon



**Harrisburg, PA** – Today, **Governor Josh Shapiro** delivered remarks at the Pennsylvania Press Club's November 2023 luncheon in Harrisburg.

See here for the Governor's remarks and below for the full remarks as prepared for delivery:

*I am mindful that by accepting your invitation to speak with you today, I'm continuing a tradition that is now over 20 years old...*

*A tradition of Governors speaking to the Pennsylvania Press Club at the end of their first year to assess the progress we've made and look ahead at the work still left to do.*

*From day one, I've been laser-focused on bringing people together around commonsense solutions to the challenges we face.*

*Rejecting extremism.*

*Defending real freedom.*

*Building strong foundations for progress.*

*Delivering meaningful results for the people of Pennsylvania.*

*And through it all, we've been accessible to you, the members of the press, every step of the way.*

*Will and Manuel tell me that I've held nearly 100 open press events just to take questions from many of the folks in this room. Sometimes the same question over and over and over again.*

*Jokes aside, I know I have a responsibility to answer your questions because I respect the essential role a free and independent press plays in our democracy.*

*You hold elected officials accountable to the people who elect us.*

*You seek the truth in a time when misinformation is just a click away.*

*Even in a time of media consolidation and limited resources, you take on the solemn responsibility of keeping Pennsylvanians informed about what is happening in their government and in their communities.*

*Folks outside the Capitol get it.*

*When I leave this building and travel to communities across our Commonwealth, which I do several times every single week, I listen to what they have to say...*

*And based on those conversations, I know they're paying attention and appreciate the progress we are making.*

*Just two weeks ago in Bucks County, an elementary school aged boy came up to me to thank me for helping ensure he and his classmates don't have to go to class hungry anymore.*

*That same week, a union apprentice expressed appreciation for showing him respect for the work he does, even though he didn't go to college.*

*Everywhere I go, I hear from hardworking Pennsylvanians like that apprentice, who just want the opportunity to succeed and the freedom to chart their own course.*

*As I said at my inauguration, the people of Pennsylvania spoke loud and clear and gave me clear direction with their voices and their votes.*

*They said they wanted good schools for our kids, safe communities, and an economy that gives people a shot and lifts them up. They rejected extremism and told me to protect real freedom.*

*That's exactly what we are doing.*

*I think it's important that those of us who work here in our Capitol – who have the responsibility of leading this state, of holding our government officials accountable, of writing the first draft of history – take time to step back and make sure we aren't missing the forest for the trees.*

*To focus on the big picture – not chase clicks with the small ball stuff or some ideological purity test.*

*The start of a new Administration can be a whirlwind – new appointments, new priorities, new faces, new executive orders. And through all that action, my team and I have been focused on delivering real results for Pennsylvania from Day One – and I want to take some time to walk you through what we've accomplished.*

*Because here's the plain truth:*

*My Administration came in with a GSD attitude.*

*And we have gotten a lot of shit done.*

*Let me give you an example.*

*At 7am on a Sunday morning in June, I got a call from my chief of staff that a tanker truck had crashed under I-95 in Philadelphia.*

*The crash started a fire so intense that it melted the steel and concrete supporting the highway, causing a 150-foot-long section to literally collapse.*

*That section of I-95 carries 175,000 cars and trucks every single day.*

*When it's closed, it takes longer to get to school and work, shipments get delayed, and the economy suffers.*

*You know, the experts told us it would take months to rebuild and reopen.*

*But by empowering strong leadership on the ground, speeding up bureaucracy, encouraging creativity, and working together – especially with the Philadelphia Building Trades*

*We got I-95 open in just 12 days.*

*When the nation's eyes were on Pennsylvania, we showed that we can do big things again.*

*I believe in my heart that we can do big things here. That the work we did together in Northeast Philly on that stretch of road wasn't the exception – it should be the norm.*

*Big things. GSD.*

*Let me give you a few more examples of our GSD attitude at work and how together, we've gotten some big things done.*

*Working together with a bipartisan group of lawmakers, we made good on a commitment I made during my campaign and delivered the largest targeted tax break for our seniors in nearly two decades.*

*Next year, nearly 175,000 more seniors will qualify for property tax relief and many of the 400,000 seniors who already qualify will see their rebate nearly double.*

*Led by the Pro Tem, we passed first-in-the-nation legislation to ensure women at high risk of breast cancer can access screenings and genetic testing without having to pay out of pocket.*

*We delivered universal free breakfast for kids in our schools.*

*Now 1.7 million kids have the chance to start every school day with a full belly.*

*While we were at it, we made the largest ever investment in our public schools.*

*For kids in the Steelton-Highspire school district down the road, that means nearly one and a half million more dollars in their classrooms this year.*

*That's a nearly 13% increase from last year.*

*We delivered funding for almost 400 new Pennsylvania State Police troopers – and we dropped the college credit requirement for Pennsylvanians who want to serve.*

*In the 2 months following that announcement, PSP saw a 258% increase in applicants taking the test to become state troopers. More troopers to help keep our communities safe, along with a \$40 million investment in anti-violence prevention partnerships.*

*In the first 10 months, we capped more than 127 abandoned wells that were leaking dangerous methane into our air – putting the health of our rural neighbors at risk, damaging our environment, and increasing threats to our farmers' crops.*

*Let me put that in perspective for you.*

*That's more wells than Pennsylvania capped in the last 7 years combined.*

*We still have a ways to go but now we have a strong foundation for progress.*

*I authorized automatic voter registration – a safe, secure, and streamlined way to get more eligible voters to register and participate in our democracy.*

*Since September, nearly 58,000 voters have updated their registration or registered for the first time at the DMV.*

*That's a 70 percent increase compared to the same time period two years ago.*

*That means more Pennsylvanians are making their voices heard in our democracy – and our local election officials receive more regular updates when folks change their names or addresses, which keeps our voter rolls more accurate.*

*As I've said many times, the more people who participate in our elections, the stronger our democracy.*

*Speaking of PennDOT, in my first budget, we delivered 125 million dollars in additional funding for our roads and bridges.*

*And from January through October, we repaired 74 bridges and 5,567 miles of roads.*

*We're about 500 miles ahead of where we were last year.*

*That's 500 more miles of easier commutes and smoother supply chains.*

*We delivered the largest investment in our state parks in decades.*

*So that generations of Pennsylvanians yet to come can experience the same wonder we feel when we get outdoors and witness the beauty of our Commonwealth – how it lowers your blood pressure and brings a smile to your face, brings people together in polarized times.*

*And we've responded to crises with compassion, care, and a determination to get the job done.*

*I already talked about I-95, but on the other side of our Commonwealth, we held Norfolk Southern accountable after their train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio on the border of Beaver County.*

*We organized independent air, water, and soil sampling, and we put the results of that testing online so that our residents could see them for themselves.*

*We got first responders new equipment because their old stuff was contaminated after they ran towards danger to keep our communities safe...*

*And we ensured families were made whole for their losses, including Emily from Darlington, who was reimbursed for the eggs she couldn't use or sell because of the derailment.*

*The corporation paid for all of this – including her eggs – not taxpayers.*

*As I've traveled across Pennsylvania it's reaffirmed that, although we have our differences, although we may come from different walks in life, the truth is most people just want the same basic things.*

*They want safe communities, good schools for our kids, an economy that works for everyone.*

*They want to have a fair shot in life for them and their children. They want to know that their government is on their side and solving problems for them.*

*That's what I'm focused on every single day.*

*I firmly believe that every Pennsylvanian deserves the freedom to chart their own course and the opportunity to succeed.*

*That's why – on my first day as your Governor – I announced that 92% of Commonwealth jobs no longer require a college degree.*

*And as a result, 10 months later, nearly 60 percent of the Commonwealth's new hires don't have a college degree.*

*That's several percentage points higher than last year – representing hundreds of new employees who were given a shot – not shut out due to some arbitrary requirement.*

*My Administration is showing that we value skills and experience.*

*Every Pennsylvanian has a different path in life.*

*For some, that means a college degree.*

*For others, it means hands-on experience – in a trade, in the military, in the field.*

*We need to respect both of those paths equally – and ensure Pennsylvanians have the chance to chart their own course and the opportunity to succeed.*

*That's what I had in mind when I fought for and delivered significantly more funding for vo-tech in our classrooms and apprenticeships after high school.*

*Since January, the Department of Labor & Industry has registered 28 new apprenticeship programs and those programs have enrolled more than 4,600 new apprentices.*

*Those workers are going to be in high demand in the years to come as Pennsylvania puts significant federal dollars for infrastructure repair to work in our communities.*

*That's why I did something no other Governor has yet and created a first-in-the-nation program to help companies building infrastructure projects provide on-the-job training to new workers.*

*The Commonwealth Workforce Transformation Program will train 10,000 new workers and supercharge our work to rebuild Pennsylvania's infrastructure.*

*10,000 jobs!*

*And to be clear, this isn't a pipe dream. This is fully funded and we're already taking bids from contractors who will work on these projects and train these workers.*

*We're not just rebuilding though – our Commonwealth is also making its mark as a leader in clean energy infrastructure.*

*You see, we're also the only state in the country to secure 2 regional clean hydrogen hubs.*

*We worked hard on this.*

*We must reject the false choice between projecting jobs and protecting our planet.*

*We can do both – embrace our Commonwealth's legacy as an energy leader and create good-paying jobs.*

*We can protect our planet, public health and public safety, and invest in a strong economy that gives Pennsylvanians the freedom to build a business and watch it grow right here in our Commonwealth.*

*You want proof?*

*Heck just last month I stood with a natural gas CEO, a Pittsburgh union leader, and the president of a major Pennsylvania environmental organization to announce a first-of-its-kind initiative that will responsibly produce energy, create jobs, and protect public health and safety – building on the work I did as your Attorney General.*

*And energy is not the only area where we're making progress.*

*Since January, my Administration has announced more than 1 billion dollars in new private sector investment in our Commonwealth.*

*These are private companies that have chosen to come here to Pennsylvania or expand their operations here – because my Administration helped make it a worthwhile investment for them.*

*That 1 billion dollars means more jobs for Pennsylvanians, more families who have a little extra to spend at local shops, more resources in our communities.*

*And the downstream affects are substantial.*

*Here's a concrete example –*

*Just last week I was at Astrobotic, a company in Pittsburgh we've invested nearly 10 million dollars in that is literally about to put a lander on the moon.*

*Astrobotic sources parts and supplies from 140 different Pennsylvania companies.*

*That's 140 Pennsylvania companies benefitting from our investments – not to mention Carnegie Mellon University, home of groundbreaking scientific advancements and researchers that helped make the lander possible.*

*The story of Astrobotic shows how government can help connect the dots between groundbreaking companies and our world-class research institutions and empower Pennsylvania-driven innovation.*

*Astrobotic is doing big things – but it's not the only Pennsylvania company pushing the envelope.*

*In Philly, Spark Therapeutics is developing life-saving gene therapies and a center for biotech research and breaking new ground on their expanded corporate HQ.*

*In western PA, Westinghouse is developing the future of nuclear energy serving underserved areas with clean, portable energy.*

*And in Carbon County, Little Leaf Farms has the largest and most technologically advanced greenhouse in the world...*

*All supported by the Commonwealth.*

*When we talk about economic success, we also need to be talking about agriculture.*

*Pennsylvania is home to about 53,000 farms that cover 7 and a half million acres and support 1 in 10 jobs across our Commonwealth.*

*Every year, ag contributes 132 billion dollars to our state's economy.*

*But too often, ag gets left out of conversations about economic growth and development and future opportunity.*

*Agriculture needs to be a key part of that conversation, and it is now on watch.*

*In the same sentence when we talk about biotech and manufacturing, we should be talking about investing in our farms and in our farmers.*

*That is exactly what my Administration is doing.*



*That's why the budget I signed into law this summer fully funds the PA Farm Bill into its fifth year and includes major new investments to help farmers address some of the challenges they face – including a 34-million-dollar investment in our state's Hi-Path Avian Influenza Recovery Fund.*

*With Secretary Redding at the helm, coordinating with key legislative stakeholders like Scott Martin, my Administration led a coordinated response to HPAI, reducing the spread and allowing us to lift all quarantine areas in the Commonwealth.*

*I want to thank big business, small family farmers, Amish community for their coordination.*

*Pennsylvania poultry is once again being sold to customers across the country and around the world – and for those farmers who did lose birds, we've paid out over 12 million dollars in relief so far to help make them whole.*

*We are committed to building an economy that lifts everyone up – from the largest corporations that dot the skyline in Philadelphia to the smallest family-run businesses on main streets across our Commonwealth.*

*That's why – for the first time ever – this year's budget included 20 million dollars in state funding for small minority-, women-, and veteran-owned businesses across the Commonwealth.*

*It's also why I signed an Executive Order to help more small and small diverse businesses compete for state contracts.*

*This isn't a feel-good executive order that sounds nice in theory but establishes a quota we'll never meet.*

*It puts real accountability in place to expand opportunity for small and small diverse businesses in Pennsylvania.*

*But those investments will only go so far if those small businesses and entrepreneurs can't get online.*

*In today's world, internet access isn't a luxury – it's a necessity.*

*But too many communities in Pennsylvania don't have access to affordable, high-speed internet.*

*Across Pennsylvania, more than 276,000 households, businesses, schools, and libraries don't have access to internet at all – and another 52,000 don't have access they can rely on when they need it.*

*Thanks to significant federal investments that we've secured, my Administration has put together a plan that aims to connect all of these communities to high-speed, affordable internet by the end of the decade – with the vast majority in the next 5 years.*

*That means parents won't have to drive their kids to the library in the next town over just to do their homework, like the one I visited not too long ago in Beaver County...*

*Small businesses and entrepreneurs will have a better chance to succeed and grow...*

*And doctors' offices will have the modern tools they need to communicate with patients and consult with their colleagues...*

*These are tangible things that make a difference in people's lives.*

*Connecting people to the services they need online is something we're working on in state government, too.*

*Because if we are going to best serve the people of Pennsylvania, then we have to meet people where they are – and more and more, Pennsylvanians are online.*

*I've said it from the beginning: there needs to be no wrong door.*

*No matter how you choose to access government, you need to know you're going to get help – whether you're walking into a building or going online.*

*That's why we created the Commonwealth Office of Digital Experience, or CODE PA.*

*They're our very own tech start up – right here in Harrisburg.*

*By creating an internal team that is able to write code, build apps and digital programs, and work across agencies, systems and services, we are going to build a comprehensive, user-focused online experience for Pennsylvanians.*

*And while we are at it, fulfill the promise of our CODE PA leader, Bry Pardoe, to make forms that suck less.*

*Bry just launched one of CODE PA's first products earlier this month.*

*Let me tell you about it.*

*In January, I made a commitment to the good people of Pennsylvania, that my Administration would move at the speed of business.*

*Pennsylvanians work hard – and they deserve a government that works just as hard to help them succeed.*

*That's why we've worked every day to improve our state government's permitting, licensing, and certification processes.*

*And now, we're putting our money where our mouth is.*

*On November 1<sup>st</sup>, we launched PAYback – our new online money-back guarantee system where you can request a refund of your permit, license, or certification application fee if we fail to deliver on time.*

*Now, you can see processing timelines for permits, licenses, and certifications, how much money you may be entitled to, and request your refund – all from your computer or your phone.*

*But we didn't wait to start speeding things up.*

*Throughout the spring and summer, we worked to eliminate backlogs and cut wait times for permits and other government services.*

*Let me give you just a few examples:*

*Too many historically disadvantaged small business owners feel shut out of opportunities to do business with our Commonwealth.*

*So the team at the Department of General Services went to work and cut down certification times for these small businesses by 33% – allowing them to bid on government contracts sooner and help us better serve Pennsylvanians.*

*We also adopted prompt pay policies to ensure prime contractors pay their subcontractors within 10 days of receiving payment from the Commonwealth.*

*I heard from so many contractors across Pennsylvania who told me they didn't even want to compete for state work because it would take too long to get paid and they didn't want to float that kind of capital.*

*We fixed that.*

*Our team at Labor and Industry cut the average wait time for Unemployment Compensation phone calls down from over an hour when I took office to just 17 minutes today.*

*While I'm not satisfied, this is tremendous progress.*

*Over at the Department of Education, we cut processing times for new in-state teacher certifications from 12 weeks to just 2 or 3 weeks helping get more teachers in our classrooms at a time when we are facing critical shortages.*

*And for folks ready to start a business, the Department of State cut the average turnaround time down for a business license from nearly 8 weeks in January to just three days right now.*

*We're delivering vital services faster, helping entrepreneurs start small businesses, and getting teachers in the classroom.*

*We're increasing accountability and creating new online tools to ensure that our government moves at the speed of business.*

*And we're showing what good government looks like.*

*That brings me back to where I started. I think it's pretty clear, we got a lot of shit done in the first 10 months.*

*Through this hectic pace, when I'm out and about, people ask me, what is it like being Governor? How does it feel?*

*I feel humbled every day by the opportunity to do this work and by the significant challenges that we face.*

*As we move rapidly to make progress, know that I'm also impatient about the work we still need to do to address violence in our communities, to give every child of God a quality education, build a more fair and just society, and defend real freedom.*

*There's still a lot of unfinished business and bills that have passed one chamber but not the other...*

*From raising the minimum wage to finally passing a civil window for survivors of sexual abuse to seek accountability and justice in court, and more – we need to continue to work together to get stuff done for the good people of Pennsylvania.*

*I'm also mindful that after the election earlier this month, I'm now the only Governor in the nation working with a divided legislature in these hyper-polarized times – and we are embarking on a presidential election that is only going to drive people further apart.*

*But I'm going to continue to do what I do – which is bring people together inside and outside of our state Capitol building, find common ground, and get things done as we've shown we can do here.*

*I would hope that the people in this room, whether you agree with me or not on a particular issue, would not feed into the cynicism and the division that surrounds us.*

*And instead honor and appreciate the work that Democrats and Republicans, people who have been in this building for decades and those who are just arriving, are doing to make this Commonwealth a better place.*

*I'm proud of the work we've done together, and I look forward to continuing to bring this GSD attitude to the Commonwealth for years to come.*

*And with that, I'll end this as I end all of my press conferences by saying, "now I am happy to take your questions."*

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