

Attorney General David W. Sunday Inaugural Speech As Prepared

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE — Tuesday, January 21, 2025

HARRISBURG — Today, following his swearing-in ceremony as the Attorney General of Pennsylvania, Attorney General Dave Sunday delivered his inaugural address to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The following is the address as prepared for delivery:

Words can't express the gratitude I have to stand here today as the Attorney General of Pennsylvania. This office, which has a rich history dating back to the 1640s, holds a unique and important place within our great Commonwealth. It is a profound honor to take on this solemn responsibility as the chief law enforcement officer of Pennsylvania.

The trust placed in me today is not one I take lightly. The role of Attorney General carries with it the duty to protect and serve all Pennsylvanians – ensuring justice is upheld, that the rule of law is respected, and that every individual, regardless of background or circumstances, is treated with fairness and dignity.

Many years ago, as a young man, I stood in this very auditorium for my high school graduation. Only the top few members of my class addressed everyone from the podium... so I promise you... this is my very first time speaking from here. Back then, I have no doubt that my parents probably looked at me in my cap and gown and wondered what would become of their son.

Shortly thereafter, I made a decision that would change my life forever: I walked into the recruiter's office and signed up for a four-year enlistment in the United States Navy. My ship was deployed throughout the world and I learned many lessons in the Navy that have remained with me throughout my life. You see, on a Navy ship, you come together with people from all walks of life to achieve a common goal. Whether you are similar or different, whether you get along or you don't... you have no choice but to work together because the safety and security of a nation depended on our ability to complete our mission.

Upon returning home after my four years of service, very simply, I needed a job. I had no education past high school and I was starting from the bottom again.

So I applied for a job at UPS. I was hired, and I stayed with UPS for eight years. I attended undergrad classes during the day and worked at UPS at night and then I worked at UPS during the day and went to law school at night.

The life lessons that I learned during those years, to include a mission-based drive and passion for service, have served me well and will continue to do so as I embark on this new journey.

While I begin a new role today, the most important job that I have in my life is that of a father and husband. The hardest part of the campaign to get here was being away from you. Everything I do, I do to make a safer world for you to live in. I love you so much and I can't thank you enough for allowing me to do this work. People don't appreciate enough the sacrifices that families make so that we can follow this path of service. Thank you so much.

A few very important people who always believed in me, even when I didn't believe in myself are here today and I need to acknowledge them. First of all, my mom and dad. Give a wave. My brother Will... Thank you.

I can't tell you how moved I am to have the Navy honor guard with us to begin our ceremony. I'd also like to thank Pastor Walthour for his opening prayer and for Bishop Senior for being here as well. I'd like to thank the Central York High School Choir for an incredible singing of our National Anthem, Chief Detective Craig

Fenstermacher for leading the pledge and the Pennsylvania State Police for their participation. I also want to thank all law enforcement, district attorneys and local officials who came here today to be a part of this. Thanks to our MC, my friend, Senator Kristin Phillips Hill. She was one of the first people outside of my family that I talked with about running for this office and I'm grateful for her friendship and support.

Thank you to Judge Joe Adams for swearing me in and his role in my life. He is the reason I came to York County when I served as his law clerk. He has been a constant source of wisdom and I'm honored by his presence and his words today.

I also want to acknowledge my incredible team that helped me navigate a tremendously difficult campaign. Mike Long, Todd Nyquist, Ben Wren and the incredible team at Long Nyquist. Ryan Demara who ran the day-to-day operations of the campaign, Becca Ream Weigle and Jenise Harris who were just awesome, Matt Brouillette and Jeremy Baker who provided invaluable counsel and support throughout the race. My campaign co-chairs, District Attorney Nicole Ziccarelli and of course, Elizabeth Preate Havey.

I'm also blessed to have incredible people helping as I take office. The leaders of my transition committee, Former Governor and Attorney General, Tom Corbett, I appreciated your words today and your advice throughout this process.

Bob Asher, Elizabeth Preate Havey, John Verbanac and Dave White each of you in your own ways have been vital to my growth as a candidate and during the transition. I also would like to thank all those who are currently serving on the transition committee.

In building my transition team, it was critical to have voices from throughout the commonwealth with a diverse set of viewpoints. I didn't look at party affiliation or whether they supported me or even agreed with me. Rather, I wanted to know how they view the office, what is working, what could be improved, and hear their suggestions. I will be an Attorney General for all Pennsylvanians, and that is only possible if I listen to, and respect, the voices of all citizens.

I also want to acknowledge the previous caretakers of this office. Michelle Henry, Governor Josh Shapiro, Governor Tom Corbett. Thank you for the time you have spent with me as I prepared to take office.

Many of our federal legislators couldn't be here today because they are doing their jobs in Washington but I've appreciated the kind words and pledged partnership of our Congressional delegation and both of our United States Senators, Dave McCormick and John Fetterman, who have both been in regular communication.

I want to thank everyone from York County. There are so many of you here today who were with me from the very beginning. I am blessed and grateful for your friendship and support.

Finally, my incoming chief of staff and transition director Kyle King and senior counsel, Kara Bowser. Kyle and Kara are amazing leaders and critical members of my team.

I'm excited for the people in the office of Attorney General to get to know you and for Pennsylvania to benefit from your leadership.

So many people from our team from the York County DA's office are here. Throughout my campaign I used the word "we" a lot. Everything we do as prosecutors requires a team, and I've been fortunate to work with such an amazing group of attorneys, detectives and administrative staff. When I said "we" did something I had all of you in mind. The progress we made in York County would not have been possible without all of your work. It has been an honor to lead you as District Attorney and I look forward to continuing to work with you as Attorney General.

That concept of a “team” has been a constant in my life. The best outcomes I have ever seen, have been accomplished through the spirit of collaboration and teamwork. From the NAVY to UPS and certainly as a prosecutor and District Attorney.

I view the Office of Attorney General as having the potential to be a conduit for collaboration. This office has the ability to work with a dynamic network of individuals, organizations, agencies and systems. This includes everyone from police to district attorneys to medical centers and the behavioral health community, to crime victims and those returning home from incarceration, from organized labor to the business community and so many others.

Collaboration with a wide variety of partners is the approach that I took as York County District Attorney and is the approach that I plan to bring to this office. When someone from my office enters a meeting, I want them to treat others with respect and dignity and approach the issue through a “solutions based” lens.

That’s how I look at the criminal justice system by focusing on solutions and outcomes. My philosophy is rooted in two words “accountability and redemption.” We absolutely must hold criminals accountable. At the same time, we need to embrace redemption for those who have been held accountable and seek to better their lives. Remember, 95% of everyone who enters prison will eventually reenter society. There is a power in employment. I have seen and felt it firsthand.

From the Navy to UPS to the York County District Attorney’s office... Magic happens when people work together. There is no substitute for an increased feeling of self-worth and an understanding that individuals have the power within themselves to change the circumstances of their lives.

Just ask employers. Drawing from his experience as a business owner, Former State Senator Scott Wagner from York County observed that individuals with minor criminal records often faced significant barriers when seeking employment or career advancement. By advocating for the Clean Slate Act, he, and a bipartisan group of legislators, aimed to remove these obstacles, allowing rehabilitated individuals to contribute more effectively to society. Initiatives like Clean Slate show that we can come together around these issues and move the ball forward to help those who have served their time improve their lives.

We all want people returning home from prison to become productive members of the community, supporting their families and contributing to our world.

Citizens have the absolute right to demand that their government works to keep them safe from harm. And in order to do so, in addition to arresting and prosecuting violent criminals, we MUST focus on the root causes of crime.

Complex challenges such as the mental health crisis we are experiencing directly impacts public safety. Access to behavioral health treatment is critical for community well-being and as Attorney General I am committed to addressing this issue.

And that’s why as part of the transition team, I have a subcommittee focused solely on cross system collaboration and mental health. Their work is going to be crucial in identifying ways in which we can address the mental health crises ravaging our communities, driving up crime and tearing apart families.

Almost half of all incarcerated individuals have been diagnosed with a mental health condition. And even many more have a substance use disorder, or both.

The lack of available treatment in our rural communities and the lack of adequate treatment overall is putting an unbearable strain on our law enforcement, our prosecutors, our hospitals, service providers and Pennsylvania as a whole. I believe that this is one of the greatest challenges we face in our commonwealth.

The complexity of our challenges is also seen in the continuing opioid epidemic. As a DA, I very rarely saw pain like that of a parent watching their child slip away into the web of addiction.

We must work relentlessly to dismantle the criminal organizations trafficking this poison, killing our children while at the same time addressing the demand for these drugs by getting help to those suffering from addiction.

As your Attorney General, I look forward to collaborating with each of our 67 elected District Attorneys and law enforcement, alongside the health care and non-profit communities to tackle these crises and so much more together.

Now, despite these challenges, I have a deep sense of optimism because I've seen firsthand what we are capable of when we come together and join our unique talents, resources and perspectives to a single purpose. I've seen the power of a community that refused to sit back and watch any more young men and women die from gang violence.

Look no further than the York County Group Violence Initiative, which has reduced gang violence by bringing together community members, social service providers, and law enforcement, resulting in more graduations and less funerals.

We will take the fight to those who bring harm to our commonwealth, whether its organized crime, or the drug trade, those who exploit the vulnerable, or violate the public trust. We will support victims of human trafficking, aggressively go after child predators and fight for the safety of our ageing population.

We will embrace redemption for those who seek it. And we will do everything we can to make our communities safe because if our communities aren't safe nothing else matters.

That is the mission that I ask all of you to join in today, whether you are a part of the Office of Attorney General, a District Attorney or a member of law enforcement. To the Legislators and members of the Executive and Judicial Branch: your leadership and initiative is critical and I look forward to our partnership. To our friends in the business community and organized labor: there is nothing more empowering to a person than a good, family-sustaining career job.

Some of the most dedicated employees I've ever seen are people who were given a second chance, making a personal commitment to turn their lives around, for themselves and for the people they love.

I stand ready to work with anyone who is willing to embrace this philosophy of accountability and redemption-but it has to be both. They're not mutually exclusive and one doesn't work without the other. You can't have redemption without accountability just as it's hard to forgive someone without them actually having remorse.

One thing not a lot of people know about me is that I'm an avid reader on all things Abraham Lincoln. I believe in his concept of the "team of rivals." I have no pride in authorship, and I don't care who gets the credit as long as the mission is achieved.

It may make me a terrible politician, but I'd rather be a good person and a successful Attorney General.

President Lincoln once said "I must stand with anybody that stands right, and stand with him while he is right, and part with him when he goes wrong."

I think that's a good philosophy as we approach the work that lies ahead. The criminal justice system exists to ensure people "stand right" and to guide them back to the right path when they go astray and run afoul of the law.

As we look around us today in this magnificent auditorium, this building was designed to demonstrate the progress of humanity over the ages while also reminding us of our place in the universe. It's fitting that we use

this space to send our local youth on from high school and to swear in our leaders as we have done today, and I wish my friends Treasurer Stacy Garrity and Auditor General Tim DeFoor well as they begin their new terms.

I look forward to serving the people of Pennsylvania who have honored me with their trust by electing me to lead this office. I'm confident that we are up to the many tasks ahead and I'm ready to get to work.

Thank you all for being part of this day. May God bless you all, may he guide our leaders, protect our law enforcement and may he continue to bless the Great Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the United States of America. Thank you.