

## Making Michigan the comeback state

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*Gov. Rick Snyder has a lot to be proud of, but there's still much to do.*

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**Gov. Rick Snyder has a lot to be proud of, but there's still much to do. (Daniel Mears / The Detroit News)**

The governor laid out a diverse agenda for 2014 in his fourth State of the State address Thursday night. While he mentioned a few new issues, Gov. Rick Snyder's focus was more on what he has accomplished — as well as wrapping up the unfinished business.

It's a realistic agenda for a governor who wants to stick around another four years. Yet Snyder won't get everything on his wish list.

In his speech, Snyder touted what he's most proud of: Michigan's comeback. Snyder, always a numbers guy, highlighted progress on the dashboards he created when he took office, which measure everything from crime to education. The majority of the dashboards show progress.

The state has made huge strides the past few years and is now leading the country in economic recovery. Home sales and prices have risen, people are no longer leaving at significant rates and the jobs outlook has improved. But there's plenty left to do.

Here are some highlights from the speech:

**Early Education and K-12:** The governor mentioned Michigan's recent \$51.7 million federal grant through the Race to the Top program — the first time the state has achieved one of the grants. Low-income children will benefit from the additional funds, and this money is on top of the \$65 million boost the state gave early ed last year. The combined funds should eliminate the waiting list of families who want into the program.

Snyder defended his K-12 record. He is often criticized by opponents for cutting education funding, but he said the numbers tell a different story. Since 2011, K-12 funding has increased by \$800 million, and reforms to the state teacher retirement system have offered more savings for schools. In addition, he called for new funding to help the implementation of a statewide teacher evaluation system. Legislation to create the model evaluation has stalled in Lansing, and it's past time to proceed with it. The governor should take strong leadership on this. He's also supporting a common definition of truancy along with encouraging schools to offer year-round classes.

**Roads:** Snyder is determined to invest in Michigan's roads and bridges, yet he needs the Legislature to take up his proposals. Last year, Snyder rallied behind an additional \$1.2 billion for transportation funding. The governor believes his plan is a good one, although lawmakers aren't likely to raise taxes in an

election year.

**Surplus:** The governor briefly mentioned the state's nearly \$1 billion surplus, but as expected he made it clear he was in no hurry to commit that money. He did allude vaguely, however, to offering tax relief for low- and middle-income families in fiscal year 2015.

**Immigration:** One of Snyder's new initiatives is making Michigan the go-to state for immigrants. Through an executive order, he's going to create an Office for New Americans. Snyder is also working with the federal government to approve Michigan's application to become the second state with an EB-5 visa regional center to help attract investment and create jobs. This is a great plan.

**Budget amendment:** Snyder encouraged the House and Senate and pass a joint resolution supporting a federal balanced budget amendment to the U.S. Constitution, as a way to help Washington follow Michigan's example. We get that the governor is proud of his work, but the Legislature has more important things to do.

Overall, this is a more modest Snyder agenda than others we've seen. But realistically, it's ambitious for an election year when lawmakers will be reluctant to address big challenges.

- That figure comes from a study by the transportation group TRIP.
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