

Columbus, OH--The full text of Governor Ted Strickland's address, delivered today at the Columbus Metropolitan Club, is below:

The Foundation of Ohio

"It can't be done, a man might as well try to fly."

That was once a common put down, a quick way to dismiss a powerful, optimistic idea. It was a taunt Orville and Wilbur Wright knew well. Because, as Wilbur put it, "men had by common consent adopted human flight as the standard of impossibility."

Across the ages, many great minds had tried to solve the puzzle of flight before conceding defeat. But against the impossible, a humble pair of Ohioans who sold hand-built bicycles for a living triumphed.

How did they do that?

The Wright Brothers studied everything written on the subject. They stared at birds for hours and hours at a time. They tinkered with their designs during sleepless nights in their shop. But more than anything, they made history because they were willing to accept the cost of believing in the future.

John Daniels was one of a handful of assistants who helped Orville and Wilbur set up their plane at Kitty Hawk that famous December day in 1903. Among everyone who knew what the Wright Brothers were trying to do, Daniels was one of the most supportive voices. And yet, before he actually saw it happen with his own eyes, Daniels said, "We couldn't help thinking Wilbur and Orville were...nuts."

But, it turned out, those nuts could fly.

Those nuts changed the world. They laid the foundation for modern flight and made Ohio an international center of aviation research and production.

On a foundation they built a century ago, today Ohio is home to 1,200 aerospace firms that together employ more than 100,000 Ohioans.

On a foundation they built a century ago, today Ohio is the largest supplier of parts to Airbus and the second largest supplier to Boeing. And NetJets operates the world's largest private jet fleet from right here in Columbus.

That's the legacy of two Ohioans puttering away in a Dayton bicycle shop 110 years ago. Two Ohioans who refused the cold comforts of a cynical life.

Now, I don't need to tell you that every part of this country, every city, every industry was hit by this international recession. In fact, there's an example from aviation that pretty neatly sums up what we've been up against.

Last year, Southwest Airlines received over 90,000 job applications. They had 831 openings. That means -- as a matter of statistical probability -- it was harder to get a job with Southwest last year than to get into Harvard.

When we watch the news on TV, it's easy to get the idea that disasters are what happens to other people. But think about this number for a moment: a Pew survey found that most, not some, not many, most Americans have faced either unemployment, a loss of hours, or a cut in their base pay since this recession began.

Too many of our neighbors have lost their jobs, their savings, their hope. In this great and powerful nation, we live

this day amidst homeless and hungry families. We must remember that struggle is not a vice and compassion is not a character flaw.

But for all that we have seen this economy do to people, it could have been far worse. Because this entire economy stood on the brink of a total collapse of the international financial markets. A collapse that would have swallowed even the most profitable companies and likely brought on a second Great Depression.

But the President and the Democratic-led Congress took strong action that avoided the cataclysm that loomed over us. It's easy to say 'the government shouldn't be in the car business.' But the government saved the car business and tens of thousands of jobs in Ohio. The assembly line is running in Lordstown today and they'll be making cars there for generations to come because in the moment that decided our future, steady hands re-wrote the standard of impossibility.

Right here in Ohio, we were faced with the first wave of this economic storm, a storm the likes of which no one under the age of 85 can recall seeing before. But we didn't throw up our hands, give into despair and say man might as well try to fly.

I am proud of that. I am proud that we buckled down, we met the critical needs of our people, and we strengthened the foundation of Ohio.

According to the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, over the last 12 months Ohio has the fifth fastest growing economy in the nation.

According to Deloitte Consulting, Ohio is third in manufacturing job growth this year.

According to the "New Economy Index Report" published last month by the Kauffman Foundation, Ohio is tied for first among the 50 states in the growth of information technology jobs. Ohio is tied for first in attracting knowledge workers to our state. Ohio is among the top five states in growth of high-wage service jobs in insurance, finance, and the like.

And we've seen Ohio's unemployment rate drop for seven months in a row.

There is much we must leave unfinished. But I know this. The foundation of Ohio is stronger now than the day I took office.

Because we've built a strong foundation for 21st century economic growth. We've built a strong foundation to support Ohio's great middle class. And we've done it with investments and policies that value job creation and job creators; we've done it by providing Ohioans a world-class, modern education system; and we've done it with a commitment to live within our means so that we can invest in what matters.

In Ohio, we were one of the first states to take on this economic crisis with a clear strategy to invest in high growth industries and jobs that can't be outsourced.

One of those investments is in advanced energy. This is an industry that is growing and vital to our economy, our environment and even our national security. And, what's more, advanced energy depends on the kinds of research and manufacturing might that Ohio has provided for generations.

On Columbus' south side this spring I had the chance to take part in the ground breaking celebration for Quasar Energy. This is a company that has worked with Ohio State University and with our Ohio Department of Development to advance their technology and create new Ohio jobs.

Now what they can do--and this is pretty impressive if you think about it--they can turn heaping piles of manure into energy. You know, I'm still wondering if they might be willing to bring their equipment over to the statehouse.

In four years, we've gone from a few scattered solar panels on people's garages to being home to the largest solar array in the Midwest. In fact, since we passed the energy reform bill I proposed--we have raised solar energy production in Ohio by 855 percent.

And at the statehouse two months ago, an international alliance came together to announce their plans to build one of the largest solar farms in the world right here in Ohio. They are going to power Ohio homes and Ohio businesses and Ohio jobs--and they are going to do it with solar panels made in Ohio by Ohioans, pointed toward the sun with solar trackers made in Ohio by Ohioans.

Along the way Ohio now has the most renewable and advanced energy manufacturing projects in the nation.

When I took office Ohio had the weakest advanced energy standard for electricity production. But now Ohio has one of the most aggressive standards in the country thanks to the energy bill we passed.

That means utility companies are seeking new and better ways to create power, and creating new Ohio jobs in the process.

And it means lower electricity prices. States that failed to act saw electricity rates jump as much as 70 percent. But in Ohio, electricity rates are 10 percent below the national average.

We said we could keep electricity rates low and make Ohio a leading advanced energy state. Doubters said "it can't be done, a man might as well try to fly." But we re-wrote the standard of impossibility, and the foundation of Ohio is stronger for it.

Across our economy, we put state government on the side of job creators.

We accelerated the funding of our most promising job-creating transportation projects, improving our roads and rails and ports while prioritizing projects for industries like Logistics and Distribution that rely on the quality of Ohio's infrastructure. We looked to the future with a 21st Century Transportation Priorities Task Force and a long-term plan to build efficient, multi-modal systems that help move people and products.

And when the federal government offered Ohioans 400 million dollars to create passenger rail service linking four of Ohio's biggest cities, we celebrated. The new administration has decided the train will leave without us. Quite frankly, that saddens me because those funds meant new development, new jobs, and a new transportation era for the most populated corridor in the nation without rail service. Those funds and that train meant a stronger foundation for Ohio, and now they'll mean a stronger foundation for California and Florida.

We built a ten-year economic development strategy that focuses our efforts on helping our cities and regions do more of what they do best with new programs like our Hubs of Innovation and Opportunity that match state resources with local economic strengths.

We saw voters overwhelmingly endorse the renewal of the Third Frontier and stake Ohio's claim to leading the research economy. In fact, according to that Kauffman report I mentioned, Ohio is tied for second in the growth of our public R & D funding.

We took on problems in state government that plagued our business community and sapped the faith of Ohio voters.

Four years ago a few bad apples and many bad decisions had rendered Ohio's Bureau of Workers Compensation an embarrassment.

And now it is a source of pride.

We created an independent board of directors and a deputy inspector general position to watch over the BWC. We made perfectly clear our expectation that the BWC meet the highest standard of integrity. And it has.

Because of our commitment to professionalism and following best business practices, we have kept faith with injured workers and employers. In fact, Bureau of Workers Compensation rates are now at a 20-year low.

I grew up the eighth of nine children. My older brothers worked nearly all their lives finishing concrete. And but for the opportunities I had in school, I very likely would have joined them. Finishing concrete is good work, but it's a hard, dirty, bruising task.

I am so grateful for the opportunities I have had in this life and the opportunities I have had to serve the people of this state. It has been my great privilege and my great honor.

I know that I stand before you on a foundation built by education. And I know from summers spent working with my brothers that when you're building a foundation you often have to move on to the next job before the entire project is completed. But you build that foundation strong because for generations to come people will stand on your work.

And so we took an education system that in many key respects was designed to help young people thrive in the 1800s, and we remade it for modern students and the modern economy.

We dumped a funding system that was found unconstitutional four times by our state supreme court. And in its place, the state will take responsibility for an unprecedented share of the costs of our schools, and our schools will accept unprecedented financial accountability for the dollars we invest.

At its core, our education reform puts critical thinking, problem-solving and creativity at the center of the school day. Because success in life requires more than memorizing the times tables. We have to challenge our children to not only repeat the old answers but to ask new questions.

Our education reform provides the most progressive teacher training, teacher quality, and teacher career path in the nation. Quite frankly, a student who graduates from our schools will have been taught by the best trained and best supported teachers in the country.

Our education reform creatively measures academic progress against the standards set by the best students in the nation and the world. A student who graduates from our schools will have demonstrated not only comprehension but the ability to solve problems and make connections between pieces of information.

If ever there was a "It can't be done, a man might as well try to fly" issue, it was to squarely take on the challenge of strengthening education in Ohio. We took it on.

And we took home an award from the respected, non-partisan Education Commission of the States for the best education reform plan in the nation.

And we've seen Ohio schools leap over 22 other states to claim a spot among the top five school systems in the country according to Education Week.

And we competed against 46 states to win 400 million dollars in Race to the Top education funding.

That's strengthening the foundation of Ohio.

Our Race to the Top funds and all these accomplishments are in jeopardy now. But let me say this. It would be foolish to expect Ohio students to succeed in a 21st century economy by turning back to a 19th Century system of education. And I am certain of this truth: no one has ever made Ohio stronger by chipping away at the foundation of our public schools.

In higher education, we united all our colleges and universities with a common name and a common purpose within the newly created University System of Ohio.

We built a ten-year plan to increase the educational attainment of Ohioans and increase the economic impact of our great schools.

We launched innovative programs like 'Seniors to Sophomores' to increase achievement and access among our young people. And we led the nation with a first of its kind commitment to provide a tuition-free education to veterans. Just last week the Beacon Journal reported that more than 1300 veterans had moved to Ohio to go to school under the Ohio G.I. Promise. I think that's a good thing, because you can never have too many heroes as neighbors.

We've made a difference in the lives of Ohioans and a difference in the future of Ohio.

When I took office, there were slightly less than 460,000 students in our state colleges and universities. In four years we've added 86,146 more. That's 86,146 more Ohioans standing on a foundation of opportunity.

College graduates make almost double the weekly wages of high school graduates. And their unemployment rate is about two-thirds lower than high school graduates. But all this means more than creating personal prosperity. Because an educated workforce attracts employers and economic opportunities and strengthens the foundation of Ohio for us all.

You know, several of our universities offer internationally-respected research programs in aerospace, including some of the nation's top rated aerospace engineering graduate departments.

We have those programs today because we had leaders who strengthened Ohio by educating our people. We have those programs because a foundation was laid a century ago by two bicycle shop-keepers.

That first plane the Wright Brothers flew, it had no seats. It had no shield to keep bugs out of the face of the pilot. The controls weren't very reliable and the pilot had to steer the back rudder with his hips. The plane could stay airborne only briefly and traveled all of seven miles an hour.

In fact, Orville and Wilbur's plane would have lost a race with a train. Or a horse. Or a person for that matter.

But they gave the world its first machine that could lift itself from the ground in free flight. And they knew it would be the foundation of things to come. In fact, Wilbur said they were just doing, quote, "their little bit to help the future worker who will attain the final success."

The invention of the airplane changed the world. But the greatest lesson the Wright Brothers taught us wasn't how to fly, it was how to live. Because when the doubters said a man might as well try to fly, they did.

My friends, our journey together has been cut short. And we may not have reached our final destination. But by God we got the plane in the air. We built a stronger foundation for Ohio.

And for that I sincerely thank everyone who worked alongside me these four years: Ohio's Lieutenant Governor Lee Fisher; the most talented and diverse cabinet ever assembled in Ohio; the incredible, dedicated people in the Governor's Office. And, to Ohio's First Lady, Frances Strickland, my undying love and gratitude for four years of service to the state and for every day we've been together.

The legendary playwright George S. Kaufman had a very distinct philosophy about what made a good play. A young admirer who had written a new play once asked Kaufman how he could improve it. Without seeing the play, Kaufman replied, "Make it shorter."

But in politics, unlike the theater, less isn't more. I loved this time leading Ohio, and I can tell you, we were writing a stirring second act.

But this is not a day to lament. "Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right," the scriptures teach. And so I say to each of you: I believe in the future. I believe in Ohio. And when time casts the final vote, the foundation of Ohio will speak for us.

Thank you and God Bless Ohio.