

59th *Inauguration*

Inaugural remarks Dec. 13, 2011 Governor Steve Beshear

Thank you, Jane, for your love and support, and for being such a great First Lady. Thank you to our sons, Jeff and Andy, and their families, for making us so proud.

And thank you to Jerry, Madeline and Sidney Abramson, for agreeing to join us in leading this state over the next four years.

We began this day with solemn prayer, and we will bring it to an end, late this evening, with ceremonial music and dancing. Inaugurations, after all, are a collage of tradition and hope.

But as I stand here with the eyes of Kentuckians upon me, what I feel – more than anything – is the call of responsibility.

What we observe today is not the triumph of one man or the victory of one political party. It is the collective will of a people who *yearn for* – and *deserve* – a better future.

Nearly 850,000 Kentuckians went to the polls on Nov. 8, and they delivered an explicit message.

They want leaders who build bridges, not dams.

... who are motivated by the common good, not ideology.

... and who reject the politics of division and intolerance.

Kentucky must resist becoming another voice in Washington's acrimonious shouting match. After all, shouting does not foster unity. It only makes people cover their ears.

Jerry Abramson and I campaigned hard, but campaign season is over. Now it's time to govern. And it's time to come together.

219 years have passed since Kentucky adopted an official state seal. The buckskin jacket and the swallowtail coat pictured in that seal are out of date, but the symbolism of the two men clasping hands is as relevant as ever.

If the frontier woodsman and the formally educated landed gentry could look past their striking differences 219 years ago, then we in 2011 are capable of doing the same. And my friends, we *must* do the same. For the challenges that confront us demand nothing less than unity of purpose and unselfish cooperation.

As your governor, I accept – indeed I enthusiastically embrace – that charge.

During my second term, we will continue to draw *on* and draw *in* Kentuckians from all over the state – Kentuckians of all races, creeds, income levels and political leanings.

In Washington today, the national discourse suggests that only two opinions exist – Democrat and Republican. But in Kentucky, we know better. Here, we are more than our political loyalties.

Our state is richly populated with people who identify themselves by other names first – titles like Mom or Dad. Sunday school teacher. Farmer. Police officer. Student. Auto worker. Professor. Volunteer. Those are the voices we need to hear.

We will continue to create partnerships – not only among Democrats and Republicans but also among the private and public sectors, urban and rural areas, management and front-line workers, and state and local governments.

Kentuckians invest tax money and trust in their government. Unfortunately, when I took office four years ago, I found both money and trust to be scarce.

And like governors before me, I was stunned by a destructive atmosphere that had come to be known as the “culture of Frankfort.”

Partisan rancor so strong that consensus was almost impossible.

A reckless attitude toward ethics.

Decisions guided by self-preservation.

And a dysfunctional way of tackling problems.

I knew things had to change, and so immediately we implemented a set of strong ethics policies and training. We created an atmosphere of accountability and openness.

In my first inaugural address, I pledged to put our “house in order.” In this, my second address, I can now tell you that the house *is* in order.

There is a new culture, and it’s based on honesty, integrity and putting the people first.

Four years ago, we also began a battle against an economic crisis that had begun and gained strength outside our borders. The global recession has forced state government – like families and businesses -- to take a harsh look at how and where we spend money.

Ten times now we've balanced Kentucky's budget. So far, we've cut over \$1.3 billion in spending, shrinking the executive branch to its smallest size in decades. We've even sold airplanes on e-Bay.

Some cuts were painless ... but others affected beneficial programs and services.

Some people suggested we cut across the board. And we could have done that. It would have been quick and easy.

But real leadership isn't about making *easy* decisions. It's about making the *right* decisions.

So in addition to being aggressive, we've been strategic. We've made systematic changes to increase efficiency and save money on an ongoing basis.

And we've *targeted* cuts to protect our priorities – education, public safety, job creation and health care for the most vulnerable.

As a result, Kentucky is on sounder footing with less turmoil than most other states. And your government is both smaller *and* smarter.

But my friends, hard times are not over. While the economy and state revenues are beginning to recover, the lingering effects of the recession pose immense challenges.

Difficult decisions loom. And more sacrifice lies ahead ... because our next budget may be the most challenging yet.

We *can* and we *will* fight through these challenges, but we will have to stand *together* to do it.

My top priority remains jobs – creating new Kentucky jobs and saving existing ones.

With support from the General Assembly, two years ago we totally overhauled our economic development programs. For the first time, we now have the tools to aggressively help existing Kentucky companies and small businesses who want to expand facilities and work forces. And we can also more effectively recruit new companies to our state.

I've traveled to other states to bring back jobs. I've even brought them back from places like India, Japan, Mexico and China.

But too many Kentuckians remain out of work. Too many parents go to bed worried about feeding their children. And too many students graduate college with debt ... and no job.

To them I say this: I will continue to fight for you, to find you security and opportunity.

But short-term survival is only the first step. To succeed long-term, Kentucky must strengthen its core. We must position ourselves to be more competitive in this demanding global economy.

Tax incentives, while helpful, aren't enough. Good roads and low energy costs, though also important, aren't enough either.

What companies desire *most* are talented employees – highly skilled, educated, trained and motivated. And this is where Kentucky *must* improve.

We must start with the newest generation. And we must focus on education at the youngest ages, because education is the foundation of a strong and vibrant work force.

People talk a lot about vision.

Well my vision is this:

I want to create a Kentucky where every child – regardless of whether he or she is born in the inner city, in a mountain hollow, on a farm or in the suburbs – *every child* is guaranteed the potential for a life of promise and meaning.

A Kentucky where every child is given the opportunity and the ability to succeed.

We're not there yet.

Too many Kentucky children get a poor start in life.

Too many children enter school with preventable health problems, with undeveloped minds, with no sense of curiosity or engagement in life around them. They start out behind and never catch up. We must do better.

Kentucky was once the land of invention, innovation and ingenuity. But that energy has been eroded by fundamental weaknesses in how we educate and care for our youngest children.

For too long, these weaknesses have been ignored or tolerated. No longer.

Over the last four years, we've been attacking those flaws ... and in the next four years we will accelerate our efforts.

We will continue to find health insurance for uncovered children ... to improve dental care ... to make sure our children have enough to eat ... and to prevent chronic problems by reducing smoking.

We will continue restructuring our preschool and day-care programs to ensure every child is mentally and physically prepared for kindergarten the day he or she enters the classroom.

And we will continue tuning up our education infrastructure at every level – from preschool through college – to improve its fundamental mission.

Kentucky was the first state to adopt new national academic standards, and our math and reading scores are rising faster than other states. We are aligning our K-12 system with the demands of higher education and the work force. And we're re-fashioning our community and technical education system around a more robust academic foundation.

Without doubt, we have made progress. But we are not moving fast enough.

Today I call on all of Kentucky's leaders – in government, education and business ... in our churches, civic organizations and non-profits – to come together and commit to looking beyond the next election, commit to looking beyond the next crisis and commit to looking beyond the next headline.

Together, we must take transformational action whose impact will be greatest *not* for us but for our children and our children's children.

We must engage, strategically and boldly, in our future. And we must find the political courage and the will to lay the foundation for a better tomorrow.

A foundation which requires, as we come out of this recession, the restructuring of our tax system to make it more fair and efficient to meet the needs of our people.

And a foundation which requires allowing the people of Kentucky to vote on expanded gaming within our borders.

This isn't about credit. I don't want a building that bears my name.

I want a Kentucky where every child has access to education and development programs from the day they're born ... where full-day kindergarten is available to all ... where health problems like tooth decay and obesity never interfere with learning ... where dropping out of school is an obsolete concept ... and where every teen-ager sees college or high-level job training as something that's not only achievable but necessary.

This transformation won't happen overnight, especially because we are only now beginning to emerge from the worst recession of our lifetimes. But it can and will happen.

How do I know?

Because we are Kentuckians.

We have given the nation one of the greatest presidents ever ... some of the sharpest minds to ever wear black robes on the Supreme Court ... one of the best compilation of writers to ever wield a pen ... explorers in space as well as the inner reaches of the human body ... creative geniuses in music and film ... and electrifying breakthroughs by Nobel Prize-winning scientists.

In the last year alone, we've inspired the world with a Medal of Honor recipient and a National Book Award winner.

And beyond the front pages are a tested people whose strength and resolve run blood-true back to our ancestors on America's first frontier.

As governor, I've shaken the hands of courageous Kentucky soldiers in the combat zones of Iraq and Afghanistan ... I've served sandwiches at a shelter in a West Kentucky town hemmed in by ice ... I've comforted a single mother determined to find health care for her child ... and I've encouraged laid-off workers desperate for the chance to get back on the job.

These are the people I serve. And they've shown me that Kentuckians do not surrender. That no matter what challenges lie ahead, we *will* overcome.

With the spirit of our people to guide us, with a state united by a common purpose, I'm confident we can build a better tomorrow.

After all, we are Kentuckians.

Thank you, and God bless the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

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