



Inaugural Address
GOVERNOR ANDY BESHEAR
December 10, 2019

My fellow Kentuckians:

Our commonwealth is more than just a state. It is a commitment. A commitment to an idea and an ideal that we will come together for the common good of all people.

Together... common good.

The commitment to be that commonwealth for the common good is our north star. It should lead and guide us.

But just saying we are a commonwealth is not enough, for today it seems that we are further from realizing our commitment than ever.

We not only teach our children that words matter, but that our actions speak just as loudly. My hope is that together we can work to live the values we teach our children in both our words and our actions.

I intend to lead by example. And I will strive to build an administration that does the same.

As a people, we have succeeded when we have shared a common purpose. When Kentucky came together to fix the injustice of our rape kit backlog – that was government at its best.

Members of the legislative and executive branches, members of law enforcement, and our nonprofit community worked together to make sure that each and every rape kit from our historic backlog was tested. And we continue to seek justice and closure for survivors and their families.

I hope that my legacy as attorney general will be never giving up. Every time we helped make an arrest or helped secure an indictment in a 20 or 30-year-old crime, we restored a little faith in our system and our government. We showed we would never give up.

As we sit here today, Kentucky is one of only a handful of states that has ended their historic backlog. That's the type of history we want to make for Kentucky. One where we lead instead of lagging behind.

We succeed when we focus on our shared values; values that tie us together as Kentuckians and as Americans.

We succeed when we put the collective interest, the common good, ahead of our personal ambitions.

We succeed when we focus, right here in Kentucky, on making life better for our people instead of allowing national divisions to distract us from the work at hand.

We succeed when we stop treating each other as the enemy.

That is when we get government at its very best.

That is when we get Kentucky at its very best.

We have a chance right here and right now to get this right when so many others are getting it so wrong.

My faith teaches me to treat others with dignity and respect. My faith also teaches forgiveness. That's why on Thursday, I will sign an executive order restoring voting rights to over a hundred thousand men and women who have done wrong in the past but are doing right now.

They deserve to participate in our great democracy.

By taking this step, by restoring these voting rights, we declare that everyone in Kentucky counts. We all matter.

Americans have been disagreeing about things since the founding of our nation. Even the structure of our government creates conflict – but, it's only when we view those who disagree with us as the enemy that our differences become irreconcilable or insurmountable.

Kentuckians have more in common – regardless of what party we belong to – than any national divisions can ever pull us apart. We are on the same team.

Here in Kentucky, we know a thing or two about winning teams. We know that winning requires putting the team above oneself. Well, we're all in this together on team Kentucky. Which means we have to begin looking at each other as teammates, as fellow Kentuckians, not as republicans and democrats - not as liberals and conservatives, not as rural or urban.

Because each of us is so much more than a letter or a label. We are wonderful, complex, flawed but amazing human beings, shaped by our families, our communities and our experiences. When we realize that, we will have the freedom to focus on what's most important: making life better for our families. All of our families.

That's what being part of a commonwealth means to me. Striving together to lift one another up, to realize that we are better when we work together and we have the chance of bettering the lives of our friends and families and neighbors when we do so.

Those are real Kentucky values.

It means helping our neighbors, no matter who they voted for.

It means treating everyone with dignity and respect. No matter what party they belong to.

As one of my first acts as governor-elect, I traveled to Clay County with Senate President Stivers, Senator McConnell and Attorney General-elect Daniel Cameron. Together we opened a drug treatment facility. Numerous members of the Clay County community attended. Some of the best conversations I had that day started with people telling me they didn't vote for me, but now they were filled with hope, excited and now they are ready to work with me. That they have hope.

I am now the governor of all the people of Kentucky. I will be governor just as much for those who voted against me as those who voted for me. Because I view this election as an opportunity...

An opportunity to heal wounds. An opportunity to work together instead of angling for political gain. An opportunity to make room at the table for voices that have been excluded.

One of those voices you just heard from, is Lt. Gov. Jacqueline Coleman. Not only is Jacqueline the first teacher to serve as Lt. Governor since Martha Layne Collins, she is the first Lt. Governor to also serve as our Education Cabinet secretary. Jacqueline has gone from being locked out to lieutenant governor.

This morning, I reorganized the state board of education and appointed new members who support public education. These members were not chosen based on any partisan affiliation, but based on their commitment to make our schools better. To put our children first.

Today, for the first time, Kentucky's teachers and educators led the inaugural parade. Because they represent the best of us. They are the ones on the front lines fighting to give our children the opportunity to succeed. They are the ones Muhammed Ali – a great Kentuckian – referred to when he said, "Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth."

After this ceremony, the doors to this Capitol – your Capitol – will be open to all who wish to enter. To help us celebrate our democracy and to remind all of us up here who we work for – you. And every day I'm governor these doors will remain open to all Kentuckians. No one will be locked out. Because everybody counts.

In the attorney general's office, we worked hard every day to fight for the lost, the lonely and the left behind. For victims of child abuse, sexual assault and human trafficking...

For seniors who were taken advantage of and for families worried about losing their health care. For victims who needed someone to fight for them.

Leadership is not about doing what's popular; it's about doing what's right. But above all else, it is about doing what is necessary for all of our people. To do that, we have to meet people where they are and work with those we disagree with. While I cannot and will not promise to please all the people all the time – I can and will pledge to work with an outstretched hand.

Twelve years ago, another Kentucky governor, in his inaugural address, quoted Thomas Jefferson saying, “Every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle.”

I know that governor pretty well. He’s sitting right over there.

To Steve and Jane Beshear, I am grateful for your wisdom and passion for helping the people of our great state. You have been wonderful parents.

And, I am grateful for the greatest family anyone could have. Britainy, Will and Lila-you are my foundation, the core of who I am, and I love you with every part of my being. Thank you.

For my family and for all of our families, we need to work to find common ground because our challenges are many. And solving them will not be easy.

Kentucky faces a critical shortage of teachers. And far too many work a second job just to make ends meet. Prioritizing our children also means prioritizing their teachers. If Kentucky is to compete nationally – not to mention with our neighbors – we need to pay our teachers a living wage.

We will start by including a \$2,000 across-the-board raise in the budget we submit to the legislature. If our public schools – especially those in struggling communities– are going to survive and thrive, we need to make sure they are adequately funded. That means looking at class size, providing technology and striving to give every child true opportunity. This is not a partisan issue. This is a Kentucky issue.

The same goes for protecting the retirement of all our public employees. Kentucky’s educators, social workers, police officers, firefighters and other first responders keep their promise every day to serve, protect, rescue and educate. We must keep our promise to them and their families. This is not a partisan issue. This is a Kentucky issue.

When Kentucky expanded Medicaid, it provided four hundred thousand more of our fellow Kentuckians access to affordable health care. These are our brothers and sisters. We sit next to them in the stands on Friday and pray next to them in the pews on Sunday.

After the expansion, these neighbors could go see a doctor without fear of bankruptcy. And the expansion ensured that nearly all of Kentucky’s children had real access to health care. I will honor and strengthen this commitment to our families...

I will do everything in my power to ensure that Kentuckians with pre-existing conditions do not lose their coverage. And I will fight to lower the cost of prescription drugs and we’ll start with insulin.

Health care should not be a partisan issue. Because health care is a Kentucky issue.

Kentucky is still 47th in the country in per capita income. Let's admit what that means. Far too many of our families live in poverty.

Worse, 22% of Kentucky children live in poverty. That means nearly one quarter of our kids are never certain about their next meal or whether they'll have a roof over their heads.

There is no easy solution and this is a bigger problem than any one governor can solve alone. As a start, we have to recognize that this is not just about the number of jobs.

And it's not enough that the unemployment rate is low. That statistic doesn't tell the story of families struggling to make ends meet with two, and sometimes three, jobs. We must implement a comprehensive economic plan to create the better-paying jobs our families in need. We need it desperately. We owe that to our children.

We can start by investing in agritech and advanced manufacturing, two areas where Kentucky is poised to be a national leader if we have the vision and the will to be bold.

We all want Kentucky to be a place where our children and grandchildren want to – and can afford to raise their own children, keeping families together and growing our commonwealth. For the common good.

Daniel Boone once said, "Heaven must be a Kentucky kind of place."

He was right. But we are now living in the most divisive period of our lifetime.

Today gives us a chance to get this right. To be a lighthouse in the storm, to be a beacon in the night.

Today is a day to celebrate our history, our democracy and our freedom. It is also a time to recommit to being a commonwealth for the common good.

We're all on Team Kentucky. Let's prove to this country and to each other that we can get this right. I can't wait to get started.

Thank you. God bless you and god bless the Commonwealth of Kentucky.