



## Remarks of Governor Andy Beshear

September 10, 2020

Good evening, Team Kentucky.

Since I became your governor in December, I've provided three direct addresses to you, the people of Kentucky.

An inaugural address, where we laid out our plans for a better Kentucky for everyone, where every single Kentuckian counts.

A State of the Commonwealth address, where we discussed how our strength as a state is about the strength and opportunity available to every Kentucky family.

And a budget address, where I sought to put our precious resources behind transformational priorities of education, health care and better jobs in every Kentucky community.

Those were the addresses, the speeches, that I expected to make.

But here we are tonight, with a fourth address – not an inaugural, state of the commonwealth, or budget address. Tonight I want to speak directly to Kentuckians and provide a state of this pandemic.

It is a painful address to make.

That starts with the pain of all of our loss. The loss of over 1,035 Kentuckians, 22 today alone making this the deadliest day in the commonwealth, and we know at least hundreds more to come.

But, despite this painful loss, we know many other states have lost so, so much more.

Our challenge, our adversity, started just over six months ago, on March 6.

I remember, it was a Friday.

I'd just tried to go home a little early, excited to see my kids and enjoy the weekend – one filled with baseball, horses or whatever my kids would be willing to do with their dad.

But then the call came.

It stopped me and all of Kentucky in our tracks. Our first case of COVID-19.

Our lives since that day have been very different.

We have lived through days worrying about whether there would be food on the shelves of our groceries.

Not knowing about jobs that had paused, whether they would ever come back.

Not knowing if our parents and our grandparents would be with us next year.

The toll of this virus is devastating, given most Kentuckians and most of the world had never even heard of this virus as early as December.

It was sudden, shocking and deadly.

And we learned, maybe for the first time in our lives, that we were all connected.

Every Kentuckian's decisions would impact everyone else.

Our actions could make the difference in saving another person's life, or in taking it.

My faith teaches me to love my neighbor as myself. And that is more important now for all of us than ever.

In this fight, we have been unwavering and so is the science: The coronavirus threat is real.

To protect one another and our economy – we have acted and must continue to act with unity and purpose.

And we must understand battling a brand new virus requires flexibility.

Guiding us from the start have been bipartisan health experts from all levels, from Dr. Fauci and Dr. Birx from the White House task force to our own Dr. Steven Stack, commissioner of the Kentucky Department for Public Health.

Based on their guidance, and a lot of prayer, I have taken aggressive action in order to protect Kentuckians.

Most of the time, these choices have been difficult.

They have been choices where every option causes pain.

And none of those choices would be popular.

But as I told you, I am way past politics or concerns about popularity.

My job is to do my best by my family, my faith, and by the people of Kentucky.

So I made the best decisions I could, reducing commercial and social gatherings; limiting travel; and, most importantly, instituting a statewide mask mandate.

All these steps generated criticism. But all of them are working.

The steps we've taken are not just based on what health experts think might happen, they are based on what has already happened.

We committed in the face of a new worldwide virus, we would not be rash, that we would not act the fastest. That we would not experiment with our people. That instead we would try to be the smartest.

So we watched as states like Florida, Texas, Arizona and others tried to be first and suffered terrible losses.

From the beginning, here in Kentucky, we have blazed our own path. Not a path of red states or blue states, but a path of our state.

As cases and deaths surged across the nation in early March and April, here in Kentucky, we came together and we crushed the curve.

We beat every prediction.

The actions of our people – your actions – saved thousands of lives.

For that, I will always be eternally grateful.

This summer, when cases started increasing at alarming levels you did it again, ensuring we were not the next Florida, where over 12,000 people have now died.

None of you chose this fight. But you have showed up to the battle.

Just like our health care heroes showed up for their patients.

Or other essential workers like first responders, grocery store employees, farmers and poll workers who put their own health at risk to keep our families safe, to help us vote safely and to help us put food on the table.

Our educators shifted to online classrooms to protect our kids.

And our kids have been resilient. As the father of a 10- and 11-year-old, I see the sacrifices they are making.

And they've often done so with a great attitude.

When my own son had to postpone his baptism, he told me, "Dad, if it helps other people, I'm OK with that." That's a special kid.

Many of our businesses stepped up too. They moved operations to produce hand sanitizer, they donated PPE and adapted to remote work to keep Kentuckians Healthy at Home.

Yet, this global health pandemic also caused unprecedented unemployment and economic hardships around the world.

During these times, many have had to leave a job, sometimes to become a caregiver.

Many are experiencing painful isolation, sacrificing time with family and friends, knowing it is the right thing to do to keep them safe.

And through these tough and trying times, we have tried to keep each other's spirits up.

We light our homes green for compassion and we ring our bells at 10 a.m. for those we've lost.

When we feel surrounded by darkness, we give each other light.

We call our neighbors to check on them, our kids decorate the streets with chalk art and window signs, and we go out of our way to thank our frontline workers.

As a state, we have tried to help the countless number of Kentuckians who are suffering.

We created the Team Kentucky Fund to help our fellow Kentuckians stay afloat during this difficult time.

We expanded unemployment to include independent contractors and substitute teachers, and the state has paid almost \$4 billion in benefits to help more than 1 million Kentuckians.

We extended food benefits aimed at keeping Kentucky children healthy and properly fed and delivered more than a million meals to seniors – I packed that 1 millionth meal myself.

We have ensured Kentuckians can see a doctor during this pandemic by signing them up for Medicaid, and we created an eviction relief fund to help our tenants and landlords stay Healthy at Home and avoid insurmountable debt in the future.

And we have helped distribute hundreds of millions in CARES Act funds to support local governments, law enforcement, nursing homes and health care facilities.

These are just a few examples of how we care about and we love one another. I think that may be the hallmark, what truly defines Team Kentucky.

Yes, this pandemic has exposed long-standing racial inequalities, including health and economic disparities.

Our Black and African-American Kentuckians are disproportionately dying from this virus.

We must commit to addressing these problems now.

And we must defeat this virus once and for all.

Folks, we're not there yet.

We now have lost more than 1,000 Kentuckians.

And we will lose many more.

The depths of our losses can't be explained in numbers alone. These are our neighbors, friends and even our own health-care workers.

On Tuesday, we learned of the passing of EJ Mike, a 58-year-old frontline worker. He was a physician's assistant at the Louisville VA Medical Center.

But, more importantly, he was a loving father to his twin girls, just 13 years old.

EJ fought hard for 6 weeks at Norton Brownsboro, during which time he was on a ventilator.

We are very sorry to his family, to his entire community.

There is one of more than 1,000 painful stories, 1,000 Kentucky families that are hurting.

And shame on anybody, including many of our legislators and those online, who claim these deaths aren't real. They are.

And we just set back-to-back records for weekly COVID cases in our commonwealth.

Last week we recorded 4,742 new coronavirus cases. The week before, we had 4,503 cases.

Just today, we are reporting 805 new cases, bringing the state's total to date to more than 54,000.

This week's White House report, like every report they have issued, tells us to keep a mask requirement in place statewide, because we still have more than 50% of our counties in red or yellow zones.

Higher rates of cases also means we are going to lose more Kentuckians.

We now know that we will lose more Kentuckians to COVID-19 than we lost to the Korean or Vietnam wars.

Both of those conflicts raged on for years and required deep sacrifice.

We're still only six months into fighting this battle, but it is clear this is the fight of our lifetimes.

Now, as Americans, as Kentuckians, it is our time to fulfill our patriotic duty to protect one another.

And in this fight, that means:

- Wearing a mask
- Social distancing
- Keeping gatherings to 10 or fewer people
- Washing your hands
- Limiting travel

We are asking so little. Just small, but powerful actions that may save somebody's life.

Everything over the coming months – our lives, our economy, and our children's education – depends on how we address this virus.

And we must be extra careful because we're now fighting COVID-19 along with other viruses and diseases that often spike as we approach the fall and winter, like the flu.

In the weeks ahead, we will continue to provide as much information as possible, including new information to help communities and families as children and educators return to the classroom.

While we're in the fight of our lives, we also have remained focused on the fight for which I ran for governor: to better the lives of our fellow Kentuckians.

Even as we are meeting the challenge of this COVID crisis, we are paving a pathway to create a better life for more Kentuckians.

We're taking the necessary steps to address longstanding inequities while also working to create better opportunities for quality health care, more good-paying jobs and better infrastructure with new and improved roads, drinking water, water ports and airports for our communities.

Because this pandemic will end.

And when it does, we want to have all the pieces in place to propel our state into the next phase of making this a better commonwealth.

These last six months have been difficult and even dark at times.

But we are together.

This morning, the Kentucky State Police Honor Guard hung a wreath in the Capitol recognizing the over 1,000 Kentuckians who have died from this virus. Today, we honor them. We will always remember them, but our duty is to recommit to them and to each other to defeat this virus.

The sixth chapter of Galatians, verse 2, says, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

I know that other religions agree – we have a duty to serve one another.

On Team Kentucky, we care about one another.

As Kentuckians, we have many shared values of family, faith and compassion for our neighbors.

That has been so evident in this pandemic.

If we are going to keep moving forward to build that brighter, better Kentucky, now is the time.

While this virus physically keeps us apart, we cannot let it drive us apart.

As a team – Team Kentucky – we cannot give up.

We will get through this. We will get through this together.

Thank you and God bless!

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