



State of the Commonwealth Address

Governor Andy Beshear

January 8, 2025

President Stivers, Speaker Osborne, members of the General Assembly, Lieutenant Governor Coleman, fellow constitutional officers, justices of the Kentucky Supreme Court, including our new Chief Justice Lambert, former Governor and First Lady Steve and Jane Beshear, Kentucky's incredible First Lady Britainy Beshear – and to all our Kentucky and American families watching from home – good evening.

Tonight, I'm proud to report the State of the Commonwealth is strong, and it's growing stronger.

Every day, we are welcoming more businesses, more families and more visitors to our New Kentucky Home. We are making progress like we have never seen before, and the rest of the country is noticing.

Right now, all eyes are on Kentucky. We've earned that attention through achievement, by getting things done, and by breaking record after record after record.

Over the past five years, we've now announced over \$35 billion in private sector investment in us – in Kentucky. I'm proud to report that this is the largest investment amount, by far, under any Kentucky Governor.

Over the same period, we've broken our job-creation records, announcing over 59,800 new, good, full-time jobs for our people. We've broken our all-time exports record, meaning business in Kentucky is now global. We've broken our tourism records, celebrating the two best years for this industry back-to-back, and we fully expect 2024 to be the best year ever for Kentucky tourism.

At the same time, we've expanded access to health care and invested in cleaner water. We're building and repairing our roads and bridges. And we are installing high-speed internet across Kentucky.

Put simply: We're not looking at the same Kentucky anymore.

That's why now is the time – the time to reintroduce ourselves to the world, to leave the stereotypes of the past behind us, and to welcome the world to our New Kentucky Home.

Our New Kentucky Home is a place where the pace of business is fast, but the pace of life is just right. It's a state that has ranked No. 2 and 3 in the country in per capita economic development

in back-to-back years. A state where we have secured upgrades from all three major bond rating agencies. A place that is building three of the largest battery plants on planet Earth, and we just announced a fourth.

Our New Kentucky Home is also a place where the cost of living is 11.1% below the national average. A place that ranks third for utility affordability and in the top 10 for affordable child care.

Our New Kentucky Home is a place where we are focused on our people. At a time when things cost too much, we've lowered the income tax, and we've lowered property taxes four years in a row. We froze the gas tax when times were tough, and we've capped the price of insulin.

Our New Kentucky Home is a place where our economy is booming, and our people live good lives.

There is so much to be proud of, Kentucky. And the great part is how we've gotten here: by finding common ground, by applying common sense and then making good things happen for our people.

This starts with recognizing that when most Kentuckians – and when most Americans – wake up in the morning, we aren't thinking about politics. We wake up thinking about our jobs and whether we make enough to support our families. We wake up thinking about the next doctor's appointment for ourselves, our parents or our kids. We wake up thinking about the roads and bridges we'll drive on that day. We wake up thinking about the public school our kids attend. And we wake up thinking about safety in the communities we call home.

Yes, there are a lot of big, important issues facing our country. ... But if you are staring at the cost of your child's prescription and wondering how you are going to pay for both it and your family's dinner, the offense of the day in Washington just doesn't seem that important.

In Kentucky, we've made progress by pushing out that national noise, by working together, by setting politics aside and focusing on what is most important to our families.

So over these next three years, we must stay laser-focused on creating better jobs, more affordable and accessible health care, safer roads and bridges, and the best education for our children. Let's continue to make sure our communities are places where our people aren't just safer but also *feel* safer.

Let's let our positive actions speak louder than the nasty words we hear on TV or read online. And we can do this by focusing on the core areas where we can and should find common ground.

...

Let's start by talking about a family's most critical worry and a family's most critical need: the need for a good job.

I mentioned earlier the staggering statistic that we've now announced more than 59,800 new, good jobs for Kentuckians through economic development. When you add in our tourism development projects, that number grows to more than 64,000 jobs.

And let me tell you, that 64,000 isn't just a number. That's 64,000 Kentuckians, 64,000 of our neighbors who are less stressed about paying their bills, who can put food on their tables, and they just made sure their kids celebrated a good Christmas.

We know that, because we've had the best three-year average for new wages, with the average incentivized wage topping \$26 per hour for three straight years. That's the first time that's ever happened in Kentucky's history.

And folks, we aren't slowing down. This past year has been one of our best. 2024 was the fourth best year for private sector investment in the commonwealth's history.

In total, we announced \$6.9 billion in investment and over 9,400 new jobs through economic development. Add the announcements from the tourism projects, and 2024 saw \$7.25 billion in investment and over 11,100 new jobs.

Joining us tonight we have Jeff Noel, Secretary of the Economic Development Cabinet, and Abby Dixon, Executive Director of the Henderson Tourist Commission. Let's thank them and everyone working in their industries for their hard work.

This past year had some game-changing wins. They included the third-largest jobs announcement of my administration: Shelbyville Battery Manufacturing!

This company is moving into a 1-million-square-foot building where Kentuckians will make the large-scale storage batteries that will bring reliability to our power grid and that powered last year's Super Bowl! This project is creating 1,572 skilled, high-tech jobs. Let's welcome Shelbyville Battery to their New Kentucky Home.

To truly address this core concern about having a good job means we have to create the jobs where our people live, ensuring opportunity and prosperity reach every corner of our great state. In 2024, we did just that.

In Western Kentucky, we celebrated the largest jobs announcement in more than two decades for Christian County with Kitchen Food Company. They are creating 925 full-time jobs.

In Daviess County, Swedish Match is creating 450 jobs.

Greenville Manufacturing, in Muhlenberg County, is adding 250 new jobs.

In Allen County, we announced that Belmark is creating 159 Kentucky jobs. This is the largest investment in a decade for the county.

We broke ground in Logan County with Kentucky Aluminum Processors building a new facility, creating 75 quality jobs.

In Bowling Green alone, Vista Metals is creating 52 new jobs; Shinsung is bringing 80 new jobs; and we officially opened Tyson Foods, welcoming 450 jobs!

In Elizabethtown, we cut the ribbon on Whiskey House of Kentucky, which is creating 100 jobs. And we opened the center that will train Kentuckians for new jobs at the BlueOval SK Battery Park, which has already hired 750 Kentuckians.

In Louisville, we announced that HealthTrackRx was creating 230 new jobs; Medvantx another 122 new jobs; and that homegrown Dan-O's was further spreading Kentucky-made spices to the world, creating 30 new jobs.

And just a couple of months ago, we cut the ribbon on the largest economic development project in West Louisville in decades. That's the \$137 million investment by pretzel manufacturer Stellar Snacks. That an announcement is generating 350 full-time jobs in West Louisville.

There, Kentuckians are making pretzels that are sold all over the world – and are now being provided on Southwest Airlines flights! Elisabeth Galvin – part of the incredible mother-daughter duo who own this business – is here with us tonight. Let's give Elisabeth a round of applause for their help in creating new opportunities in West Louisville.

In Central Kentucky, we announced the largest dollar investment of the year with Toyota investing another \$922 million at its plant in Georgetown.

Piramal Pharma Solutions announced an expansion creating 45 new jobs in Lexington; Grissan announced 20 jobs are coming to Marion County; and Goose Creek Candles in Casey County is creating 160 jobs!

In Northern Kentucky, DHL broke ground on an aviation maintenance facility creating 300 new jobs; Chick-fil-A announced plans for a distribution center creating 178 Kentucky jobs; and L2 Aviation announced 250 new jobs.

In the east and southeast, AVA Redundant Web Services is creating 50 new jobs in Clay County; Eastern Light Distilling is creating 50 more jobs in Rowan County; Progress Rail Services announced 30 more jobs in Knox County; and last month, we were in Grayson with AT&T celebrating 115 new jobs, and they pledged to at least double their workforce!

Folks, economic development is a team sport. Let's give a big round of applause for everyone on the state, county and local level who helped make this incredible year happen.

While we are creating these jobs, we must continue to ensure our workforce is strong and is ready for the future. And we are breaking records there, too.

In January of 2023, we recorded over 2 million jobs filled for the first time ever, and we've stayed above that number ever since. But we must continue to work with urgency to make it both easier and faster for companies to find and develop their workforce through our Statewide Workforce and Talent Team.

It starts at the state level, where the largest projects will now receive a trained workforce coordinator. This coordinator will connect companies to our amazing career and technical education programs in our public schools, where this General Assembly has invested over \$250 million.

They will work with our great KCTCS campuses that have opened their doors for employers and employee training. And they will work with our storied universities, which are expanding their engineering programs and launching new, tailored, advanced manufacturing and logistics programs.

Tonight, we are joined by leaders in higher education. We have Kim Schatzel, president of UofL, and Ryan Quarles, president of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System, with us. Let's thank them for their great work.

We also must continue the critical work of site development, ensuring we have an ideal location for the next project, and for the next one and for the one after that.

Finally, we must invest in a talent attraction program. And a talent attraction program must be run by the state and regional agencies that do this work every day.

See, our New Kentucky Home offers so much, and a talent attraction program will show that next family just why we are so special.

...

A strong workforce is a healthy workforce. And for most Kentuckians, health starts with their next doctor's appointment.

In 2024, we made getting to that appointment a lot easier, with massive expansions of health care all across Kentucky.

In November, we opened the doors to the new Norton West Louisville Hospital. That's the first new hospital built in West Louisville in over 150 years.

In March, we opened UofL Health's South Hospital in Bullitt County and the University of Kentucky broke ground on a new cancer center.

In August, we went to Owensboro and opened The BIRCH, a place that provides specialized care for youth.

In October, we traveled to Maysville and opened the J. Ugrin Primary Plus Medical Center.

In addition, Baptist Health has a new hospital in Lexington, which is creating 700 new jobs!

Baptist Health Corbin is doing the site work, utilities and excavation for a new medical tower.

Livingston Hospital is planning a \$60 million expansion; St. Elizabeth Healthcare has expanded its Florence campus, and Southern Kentucky Rehabilitation Hospital in Bowling Green is expanding the region's ability to care for brain-injury patients.

In addition to access, we've boosted research. Last year's state budget provided record funding for childhood cancer research. We did this by working together, because ending childhood cancer is not and cannot be partisan. No parent should ever have to hear that there are no more treatment options. No parent should ever lose hope.

With us tonight is Elizabeth Turner, president of the Kentucky Pediatric Cancer Research Trust Fund. I got to know her and her son, David Turner Jr., as he heroically fought a brain tumor. Now, in David's memory, she advocates for all families impacted by cancer. Let's thank her for her courage.

We also continue the fight for those suffering from addiction, tearing down the stigma of asking for help and ensuring there are treatment options and recovery help in every community.

Over the last year, we have certified more than 14 Recovery Ready Communities. This brings our total to 21 Kentucky communities standing up to make change and bring hope. Because of their work – and the work of so many – Kentucky has seen decreases in its overdose deaths for two straight years. Thank God.

In our New Kentucky Home, we recognize that mental health is just as important as physical health. We continue to improve the 988 mental health lifeline and are expanding mental health resources for students. Remember, it's okay to not be okay. You can get help with just one phone call.

And in 2024, we also worked to prepare our commonwealth for medical cannabis. Kentuckians that live every day in pain or misery, they deserve this medication. Veterans suffering from PTSD, they deserve relief. And because we worked together, our people will be able to secure safe, regulated medical cannabis right here in Kentucky THIS YEAR.

...

Our Kentucky jobs and our access to health care are critical. So is how we get to them.

Kentuckians think about the quality of our roads and bridges every day. And the reliability of our water systems and the speed of our internet, those are vital to our families.

At the beginning of my administration, I made it a priority to complete the four-laning of the Mountain Parkway Expansion. In 1963, Governor Bert Combs called this Parkway “an age-old dream of Kentucky’s mountain people.”

Now, in 1963, I was -14, so this expansion has been talked about for a long time.

My father’s administration began the work to four-lane the parkway from Campton to Salyersville. This work continued under Governor Bevin’s administration. So I’m not the first Governor to work to four-lane and expand this vital highway. But I’m determined to be the last.

And just over two months ago, we secured the final piece of the puzzle – a \$116 million federal grant to complete the last portion of the Mountain Parkway. That, plus the foresight of this General Assembly, which appropriated \$150 million to pair with this grant, means that together, we are getting the job done.

I want to thank each of our legislators here for helping make good on this decades-old promise.

Last month, we also announced a milestone for Western Kentucky that moves us ever closer to completing the massive I-69 project. We announced 55 miles of new interstate to provide better, safer commutes for our families.

We’ve worked hard to upgrade 34 miles of the Edward T. Breathitt Pennyryle Parkway and 21 miles of the Julian Carroll-Purchase Parkway to interstate standards. Those sections have officially been accepted into the national highway system as Interstate 169 and the newest section of I-69.

And in a major step for Northern Kentucky, in 2024 we secured a critical environmental approval to move forward with the Brent Spence Companion Bridge.

We’ve been continuing our work to bring clean drinking water to every Kentuckian. Working with this body, we established the Cleaner Water Program, where we’re investing \$500 million to bring cleaner water to our people. In 2024, 158 projects were completed under this program.

Kentuckians also deserve access to high-speed internet. We know that the internet is no longer a luxury. It’s a necessity for education, health care and for our economy. And I’m proud to report, we have now approved projects that will connect 80,229 additional homes to high-speed internet.

Last May, I traveled to Berry, Kentucky. It’s a small community in Harrison County. About 350 Kentuckians live there, and they have never had access to high-speed internet. We’re changing that. Team Kentucky awarded \$22 million to help connect homes and businesses in the county.

Soon after, Spectrum announced that the town will be their 10,000th community served in the United States. Ultimately, this project will connect more than 3,700 homes and businesses in Harrison County, including every home in Berry.

Tonight, we have Berry Mayor Keith Ison with us. Mayor, your town is important to me. Now it is important to the entire country. Congratulations!

Last month, we also marked the 3-year anniversary of the tornadoes of 2021. On that anniversary, we remembered the 81 lives lost. We made a promise to build back, and to build toward a brighter future.

On the third anniversary, I visited Marshall County. Following the tornadoes, AT&T replaced damaged and destroyed lines with high-speed internet lines that are now available to over 1,100 residents and businesses in Gilbertsville.

That same day, we also were in Bremen, handing over new keys to the Oglesbys, a family who suffered the ultimate tragedy – losing their five-month-old son, Chase, to the tornadoes. The Oglesbys are a family of strong faith. They said God chose to make a tough day just a little better by receiving the keys on the anniversary of their loss.

The Oglesbys new home was built with help from the Team Western Kentucky Tornado Relief Fund, which paid for every funeral, helped local farmers, and we've now built or repaired 220 new homes using the fund.

And in June, we announced plans to build 953 new rental units. We believe this is the largest single housing announcement in our commonwealth's history.

So much of this progress we're making wouldn't be possible without the dedication and tireless work of our nonprofit building partners and so many volunteers.

We would also not be here without the amazing support of local leaders like Mayfield Mayor Kathy O'Nan, who is here with us tonight. Mayor, I was proud to stand with you this year to help break ground on the new city hall and police station. You have done a remarkable job.

We have seen this same teamwork in the east following the historic flooding in 2022 that tragically took the lives of 45 Kentuckians.

While we can never understand the "why" in these moments, we can always see God in the response. We see God in the strength, resilience and compassion of our people. That compassion is still on display as we continue to make progress on seven high-ground communities.

Infrastructure and roadwork are continuing at the sites, and new homeowners are already moving into their homes. Look at the work we're doing in Perry County, at the Skyview site. We plan to

build nearly 100 homes there. The access road is complete, and the subdivision roads are underway. Utilities are being installed throughout the site.

Tonight, we're joined by Perry County Judge/Executive Scott Alexander. Judge, we're keeping our promise to you, and our Eastern Kentucky families. Thank you for your work. We're moving forward, just like we both promised.

In Floyd County, 11 families have moved into new homes, and we're also working to build 33 additional homes. In Breathitt County, we're planning to build 20 homes along Highway 30 ... right outside of Jackson.

Our non-profit partners have gotten to work, too. The Housing Can't Wait coalition has completed 393 homes in the region. With us tonight is Jim King, the CEO of Fahe. Let's thank Jim and all of our partners for their great work.

We've proven over and over again that Kentuckians don't break. We lean on each other, and we get through whatever the world throws at us – and we get through it together.

Sadly, recovering from natural disasters is something that we know a lot about. So when Hurricane Helene caused massive flooding and catastrophic damage in North Carolina, over 330 Kentucky Transportation Cabinet employees answered the call for help.

One crew worked in Boone, North Carolina. They fixed roads that had been washed out by the floods. One of those crew members was Derek Darnell. He works for District 7. Tonight, we're joined by Derek. He is representing all of Team Kentucky from KYTC to KSP to everyone else who answered the call to help our fellow American citizens. Derek, thank you, and thanks to each and every person who answered the call.

Perhaps the most important infrastructure to our families are the roads that connect our homes to our schools. With so many new job opportunities, we must make sure all of our children are getting the very best education. We all want a New Kentucky Home where our kids and grandkids never feel they have to leave, because every opportunity is right here.

We've made significant progress.

In 2024, we welcomed new Kentucky Colonel Dolly Parton to celebrate Kentucky's statewide expansion of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. It provides all Kentucky children access to one free book per month, from birth to age 5. Currently, 48% of eligible Kentucky children are signed up. We can do better. Getting every child signed up would go a long way.

Folks, we would not have had this expansion without the incredible work of someone I love very much ... our First Lady. Thank you, Britainy, for how much you care.

But for Kentucky to reach its full potential, we must stop the attacks on our public school system. In November, Kentuckians soundly rejected Amendment 2. The message was clear: that public dollars are for public schools. And, look, it wasn't even close. Amendment 2 was rejected in every county, and by over 30 points statewide.

That's a mandate – a mandate to prioritize public education. So let's stop with the attempts to defund; let's stop the voucher nonsense; let's stop the end-runs through tax shelters. Instead, let's do the hard work to strengthen and improve our public schools.

To do so, our educators need better salaries. They deserve it; our kids deserve it. We should get it done.

To do so, we must enact universal pre-K for all 4-year-olds. Pre-K provides proven, lifelong gains. And right now, we are failing our kids. More than half of our Kentucky kids – 54% – are showing up for kindergarten unprepared. Those students are behind before they ever got started. Those students were behind before they ever walked into a public school.

Think about that, and then think about the positive impact of extending universal pre-K to roughly 34,000 more Kentucky children.

Universal pre-K is also the single most impactful policy that can boost our workforce. ... Many parents are ready to get back to work, but the high cost, and in some places, total absence of child care makes that simply impossible.

Universal pre-K will strengthen our education system; it'll grow our workforce; and it'll boost the entire economy. It's time to make this a reality for our kids.

...

Building a New Kentucky Home is also about ensuring that every corner of our commonwealth is a safe place to live, work and raise a family. All of our communities must be safe, and all our people deserve to feel safe.

We're doing that by getting dangerous drugs off our streets. Last year, the Kentucky State Police seized more than \$26 million worth of illicit drugs and made nearly 3,000 drug-related arrests.

Tonight, we are joined by Commissioner Burnett from the Kentucky State Police. Let's thank him and all of law enforcement for their work in keeping us safe.

We've also seen incredible work by the Kentucky Counterdrug Task Force – a collaboration between KSP, local and federal law enforcement, and the Kentucky National Guard – the best Guard in the entire country. In fiscal year 2023, this team seized enough fentanyl to kill 28.9 million people.

The National Guard has also been protecting us abroad. Last year we welcomed 700 of our soldiers home from overseas deployments. Each of these soldiers spent time away from their families to defend our country and to preserve our way of life.

Several of these soldiers were at Tower 22 in Jordan, where a drone attack killed three soldiers from Georgia. The attack on Tower 22 should remind us that our enemies are not members of other political parties, but real foreign adversaries who want our country to fail. It should remind us that we are Americans first and Democrats and Republicans second, third or tenth.

And it should remind us of the bravery and sacrifice of our Guard. Today, we are joined by Sergeant Grayson Johnson and Specialist William Price of the 138th Field Artillery Brigade. Both heroically served at Tower 22 and both received the Purple Heart medal. Thank you, gentleman.

We're also making our communities safer by decreasing recidivism.

Sadly, we can't always stop the first crime someone commits. But for those currently incarcerated, we have an opportunity to teach the skills or trades that can help them become productive members of society, so they don't fall back into criminal behavior – so they don't commit that second or third crime.

That's why my administration is working toward a goal of having at least one trade being taught in each of our prisons.

My faith teaches me about the importance of second chances. Scripture (Ephesians 4:32) tells us to forgive each other, just as God forgave us. And in story after story in the Bible, God reaches and teaches people who have done wrong to do right.

This means that second chances aren't just the right thing to do, they're what we're called to do.

...

Because of our work, Kentucky's economy is surging, and we've become a global economic leader. Keeping this momentum going is as simple as taking the way that we Kentuckians live our daily lives and making sure we apply it to Frankfort, too.

When a neighbor loses a loved one, we are there to lend a hand or a hug. We don't ask who they voted for. When a person who attends your church is sick, we don't check their social media before asking if we can help. When your child's friend needs a ride to an event or a practice, we don't ask to see their parents' voter registration. When someone gets hurt, you keep checking in on them, without asking whether they watch Fox News or MSNBC.

These small acts of love – they grow. The kindness we show others compounds. So, Kentucky, this year, let's double-down.

Let's push out all the toxic noise we hear on TV and social media. But let's do more. Let's all show more compassion and forgiveness to one another.

I promise you, for the next three years, I'll remain focused on helping our families. I'll work on finding common ground and use common-sense approaches to move this commonwealth forward.

And in this spirit, I'd urge this General Assembly to be thoughtful, even prayerful, about the legislation you choose to pass this session.

While tonight's speech was in many ways a New Year's speech, we just journeyed through Christmas to get here. To me, Christmas is about so much. It's about God's love that brings hope to our world. It's about recognizing the value of every human being, no matter how high their status, but most especially, no matter how low.

In the Christmas story, God chose Mary, an unwed teenager, whom he favored above all others. He chose someone people in those days would judge, would look down on, would pass legislation against.

To me, God's selection of Mary is a profound statement about how we should treat one another. About being able to see the face of God in those others might judge.

So please be thoughtful of how legislation treats those suffering from poverty or addiction, how it treats the homeless or the hopeless. Do we make more room at our tables or in our prisons?

Do we recognize that the difference between the carrot or the stick is the difference between feeding or beating?

I hope and pray that God grants us the wisdom to see beyond the anger of today to the possibility and promise of tomorrow.

So, to everyone out there tonight, remember: Life is short, so do good things and be kind to each other. Show each other compassion, love, generosity, and even patience.

Thank you, and God bless you. God bless the Commonwealth of Kentucky and the United States of America.

Good night.

###