



*State of the Commonwealth Address*  
GOVERNOR ANDY BESHEAR  
January 7, 2026

Members of the General Assembly, Lt. Gov. Coleman and Secretary Adams, justices of the Kentucky Supreme Court, former Gov. Steve Beshear and former First Lady Jane Beshear, our amazing current First Lady Britainy Beshear, and to every Kentuckian and every American watching from home, good evening.

Tonight, I'm speaking from the Thomas D. Clark Center for Kentucky History here in Frankfort as our State Capitol undergoes its most significant renovation in more than 70 years.

The renovation is a reminder that our great democracy at times can buckle, and that cracks in the foundation and stress on the joints can threaten our very future. Because our democracy, our way of life, even the stability of our Capitol Building is not guaranteed.

Instead, it takes work, effort and cooperation to sustain, strengthen and leave a thriving state and a functional country to our kids and our grandkids. Every generation has a solemn duty to safeguard this great experiment that has persisted for more than 250 years. That means every generation must roll up their sleeves and do the work.

Over the past six years, our people have been putting in that work to secure a brighter future. And we've been doing it together. Together, we're building a future where every Kentucky child can achieve their Kentucky dream, no matter how big.

Together, we've set an example for all of America: a state where officials are both Democrats and Republicans; a state that is both urban and rural; a state that stretches from the Appalachian Mountains to the Mississippi River. Yet, we've found a way to work together, to find unity, and to succeed.

That's why folks around our country are no longer looking down on Kentucky; they're looking up to us. They are looking to find hope beyond the chaos. And they're finding that hope right here.

While our national politics has been poisoned with division, here in the commonwealth we've won as one team – Team Kentucky – by pushing out that noise and finding common ground to move our state not right, not left, but forward for everyone.

We've done this by recognizing the most important things to our people are not partisan. They are not even bipartisan. They are nonpartisan.

A good job, affordable health care, safe roads and bridges, good schools, safe communities. These aren't red or blue issues. They're just what every Kentucky family wants, what every Kentucky family deserves, and what our American families demand.

To keep succeeding, we must remain focused on what matters most: our people and bettering their lives. And that's why I remain optimistic about what we continue to accomplish, together.

This is my seventh State of Commonwealth and my last Budget Address in this job. So tonight, I'm proud to report once again that the state of our commonwealth remains strong.

But our people, our commonwealth and our country are facing serious new challenges, and it's our job to meet this moment. For the first time in my lifetime, a large portion of the American public is questioning one of the most important foundations of our country: the American Dream.

The American Dream is as simple as it is powerful: that if you work hard and play by the rules, you can get ahead. You can build a better life. You can leave your kids better off.

For generations now, my family has lived the American Dream. My grandfather, who couldn't afford to go to college, worked hard, saved up and bought the local funeral home.

Through that small business, he was able to do what his parents couldn't. He was able to send his kids through college – one to med school; another to law school. And then their children – myself included – had even greater opportunities.

But today, too many American families feel this dream is just a hallucination. The costs of groceries and health care are too high. The family vacation they took as kids just doesn't fit in the budget. That first home for a young couple is simply unaffordable – maybe unattainable.

As leaders, we have a responsibility to reignite and refuel the American Dream. For the sake of future generations, it must burn bright in the minds of our people. So tonight, I'm going to discuss the American Dream, both where we are succeeding and where we must do more.

The American Dream starts with a job. It's what supports a family and drives our economy. I'm proud to say that no administration has created more.

Last year we delivered once again, announcing more than \$10.5 billion in private sector investment, and creating nearly 9,600 new jobs. That's the second-best year in the history of our state. That means this administration has had the first-, second-, third- and fifth-largest years on record.

Over the past six years we have become an economic powerhouse, more than doubling Kentucky's previous investment record, with over \$45 billion in new investment. For our families, for the American dream, we've also broken our job-creation records, with 68,000 new jobs.

But not just any job will do; because while the American Dream is about working hard, it's also about getting ahead. So our people deserve good jobs. Jobs where you can not only pay the bills at the end of the month, but you can save for your kids' education, for retirement, for that down payment on a new home, or for that summer vacation that you deserve.

That's why I'm proud to report that we've recruited the best jobs in our history, with the highest three-year average for new wages we've ever seen. Last year, our average incentivized wage was just under \$30 an hour.

And despite national headwinds, despite the damages of President Trump's tariff policy that both of our U.S. Senators and this governor strongly oppose, Kentucky's economy is still growing.

According to a recent Moody's study, most states saw their economies slow and even slide into recession last year. But in Kentucky, we're still expanding, showing our nation what an economy built to last looks like.

Take a 10-day window in August, where we welcomed more than \$6.3 billion in new investment and over 1,000 full-time jobs. Four iconic companies – GE Appliances, Ford, Apple and General Matter – all chose Kentucky.

On August 11, GE Appliances announced the investment of \$3 billion in new American manufacturing and the creation of 800 new Kentucky jobs. CEO Kevin Nolan shared that when it came to writing the next chapter for GE Appliances, he knew it needed to start in Kentucky. He said, "We're making this commitment because we believe the future of manufacturing is in America and here in Kentucky."

We have representatives from GE Appliances with us tonight. Let's thank them for their investment.

Just two days later, Jim Farley, the CEO of Ford Motor Company announced a nearly \$2 billion investment in Louisville. It's going to revolutionize Henry Ford's assembly line and create an affordable EV from Kentucky, that can compete anywhere.

He said Ford's goal is to put an affordable, unbelievably great product within reach of millions of Americans, built in the U.S., by U.S. workers. Who did he trust for this massive, company-changing investment? He trusted us, Kentucky. His exact words were, "We made a big bet on our country. And we made a huge bet on the Commonwealth of Kentucky."

Also in August, General Matter announced a \$1.5 billion investment in Paducah. This company will change our nation's energy economy in profound ways and bring modern nuclear power to our state. Their project is already creating interest up and down the supply chain with the possibility of dozens of future companies making Western Kentucky their New Kentucky Home.

Some will be surprised that I mentioned this investment tonight. Now, it's true that some of the company's investors and I don't share the same politics. But we do share a commitment to get

this job done and to strengthen our nation's energy economy. And we know a simple truth: There ain't nothing Democrat or Republican about a good job.

This is how we find common ground. This is how America is supposed to work. Leaders from General Matter are here with us tonight. Let's welcome them.

Folks, that was just 10 days. Over the rest of the year. we saw great announcements like:

- Nitto, creating 220 new jobs right here in Frankfort.
- Alta Alloys and Shinsung USA – 95 jobs in Simpson County.
- Paragon Metal Fabricators – 40 jobs in Pendleton County.
- Toyota and SteelBlue Building Components – 163 jobs in Scott County.
- Lockheed Martin – 70 jobs in Fayette County.
- Sazerac – 50 jobs in Taylor County.
- Louisville Brands – 210 jobs in Jefferson County.
- Morris Packaging – 276 jobs in Marion County.
- E. Hoffman Packaging – 165 jobs in Hopkins County.

And in Glasgow, we celebrated some great news when we closed a deal, in person in Ireland, with Tate. This company's \$61.2 million project is the largest announcement for Barren County in 18 years. It has 400 new jobs.

Maureen Carpenter, the president and CEO of the Barren County Economic Authority is here with us tonight. Maureen, thank you for all of your work. This is a huge win for your county and our commonwealth.

Kentucky, our job-creation efforts are being recognized nationally as we secured another top 5 ranking for economic development. That's five straight years of being in the top 5 in the country.

And we've been congratulated by the toughest of critics, as we secured three credit upgrades, which say Kentucky is on the upswing.

The products we make are being sold all over the world as we've set back-to-back records on exports.

Of course I can't miss the opportunity to thank our hardworking unions. Being pro-union creates jobs. It creates opportunities. And our unions have fought for the American Dream longer than I've been alive.

In Kentucky, we've proven that you can be pro-job, pro-business and pro-union. Everyone wins together.

So, that's a lot of good news. But often on sunny days, there are storm clouds on the horizon. Bad tariff and trade policy are impacting our national economy, slowing or pausing many projects, and other states are shedding both investments and jobs.

This means competition will only intensify. We'll have to work even harder to keep winning.

That's why my proposed budget begins with job-creation. It contains \$70 million for site development to create build-ready, job-ready sites. It contains \$100 million for large projects that just need that last bit of infrastructure or an access road to say yes. And for the first time, it includes a \$25 million rural economic development fund to bring jobs to areas that have been so close but haven't had that big announcement yet. We must invest there, because you should be able to live the American Dream in every part of our state.

A good job is where the American Dream starts, but a home is where it lives. Our homes are where we raise our families and make memories together. Sadly, owning that home seems out of reach for too many Americans.

In Kentucky, we're doing better than most. Last year Kentucky scored as one of the best states in the nation for home affordability. We've been recognized for our efforts to not just build affordable housing, but to build housing in Western and Eastern Kentucky for those impacted by natural disasters.

In Western Kentucky, we're building 254 homes for tornado survivors through our relief fund. And I announced the single largest affordable housing investment in our history, with \$223 million going toward 953 rental units.

In Eastern Kentucky, we've embarked on the most ambitious rebuilding effort our country has ever seen through our high-ground initiative. With eight communities underway, this initiative will eventually bring more than 500 new homes to Eastern Kentucky. Two sites are already complete: Wayland in Floyd County and The Cottages of Thompson Branch in Letcher County.

Robbie Williams, the Judge/Executive of Floyd County, is with us tonight. And he can share firsthand how a bold housing initiative like our high-grounds can transform a region and its future.

Great work is continuing at the other high-ground sites. Homes are springing up at Chestnut Ridge in Knott County and New Hope in Floyd County. And people like Samantha Turner are already moving in at Skyview in Perry County.

See, Samantha was volunteering at the Hazard Airport in 2022. She was helping flood victims as they stepped off a National Guard helicopter. In 2025, her home was destroyed by a similar flood. But last year, I got to walk her through her New Kentucky Home in Skyview. Now, she'll never have to worry when it rains.

While these efforts are amazing, they're not enough. To preserve the American Dream of owning a home, Kentucky needs a big, bold investment now. It can't wait. It can't be incremental.

So I am proposing a game-changing \$150 million investment in our Affordable Housing Trust Fund. Combined with private dollars, that would create a billion dollars of new housing.

We must tackle the shortage in housing, and we must do it now.

While most dreams at night are short, the American Dream is about a long, healthy life where you raise your kids and eventually spoil your grandkids. That's why we've continued efforts to expand health care to keep our people healthy and happy. Our people are healthier and our workforce is better when every Kentuckian can see a doctor close to home.

Late in 2024, we opened Norton West Louisville – the first hospital in West Louisville in 150 years. In its first year, the hospital has served nearly 60,000 Kentuckians. Norton West Louisville is changing lives through increased access to quality care – something every person deserves.

Thank you to the Norton team, including Russ Cox and Corenza Townsend.

Since 2020, we've also opened the PMC's new children's Hospital and its Appalachian Valley Autism Center. These facilities serve over 100,000 children covering 23 Eastern Kentucky counties.

These services are critical and lifechanging. Before these investments, parents in Eastern Kentucky were told the best thing they could do for their kids was to move. That is wrong. No Kentucky family will have to hear to those words ever again.

We've also broken ground on, or opened:

- A new AVA Center location in Floyd County.
- UofL Health in Bullitt County.
- The Birch in Owensboro.
- The Mercy Health-Lourdes cancer center in Paducah.
- Baptist Health Hamburg in Lexington.
- The new Reach Clinic in Mason County.

And we celebrated Appalachian Regional Healthcare's new mobile clinic, which is bridging the gap between hospital visits and house calls.

We haven't just expanded access; we've also expanded coverage. I was proud to expand Medicaid to include dental, vision and hearing. That's resulted in 267,607 Kentuckians receiving glasses; 16,274 Kentuckians receiving dentures; and 675 being fitted for hearing aids.

When it comes to our fight against addiction, we continue to make meaningful progress that has saved lives, reunited families and created safer communities. We are now up to 35 Recovery Ready Communities, and I've banned harmful drugs like "designer Xanax" and deadly forms of kratom. The result: Drug overdose deaths have now gone down three straight years in Kentucky. Thank God.

We also recognize that mental health is just as important as physical health. Since I've taken office, our number of mental health professionals has nearly doubled.

Our efforts to rebuild our state-run health care exchange, kynect, have been hugely successful. Last year, nearly 100,000 Kentuckians enrolled – the highest number in the past decade.

And, as of last month, safe, regulated medical cannabis is now available in the commonwealth.

Sadly, a lot of our progress is now at risk due to decisions at the federal level. Decisions like Congress voting “yes” to extend tax cuts for the wealthy but voting “no” to extend tax credits for working Americans to afford health care.

And the impact of the President’s “big, ugly bill” – it’s going to hit Kentucky the hardest. It could close 35 rural hospitals, fire 20,000 health-care workers, and eliminate coverage for 200,000 Kentuckians. That ugly bill? It also cuts nursing scholarships at a time where a shortage threatens the quality of care our families receive.

The combination of these federal failures threatens the American Dream with lost jobs, higher costs, shorter lives and longer drives just to see the same doctor.

That’s why my budget pushes back, investing in our people and our health care. My budget fully funds Medicaid, even with the increasing cost.

It provides \$100 million to lower the cost of coverage on kynect. It expands the number of Michelle P. Waiver slots for families of children with special needs. It includes \$25 million for nursing student loan forgiveness. And it creates a \$125 million rural hospital fund. We simply cannot allow our rural hospitals to close. And we cannot accept a future where a Kentucky woman must travel several hours to give birth.

Tonight, we have a real-life health-care hero with us: Dr. Jason Smith, the CEO of UofL Health. Jason showed courage leading through COVID-19, speaking out after mass shootings, and recently he spoke truth to power, writing an op-ed titled “Medicaid cuts threaten lives, jobs and Kentucky’s future.”

Jason, please see this budget as a reflection that Kentucky believes in you and we believe in health care for all of our people.

The American Dream doesn’t begin with success. It’s a journey toward it. The paths that lead us there are the roads and bridges across our state and country. Whether it’s to work, church, a doctor’s appointment, or dropping your kids off at school, our infrastructure is essential to our daily lives.

Since 2020, Team Kentucky has replaced or repaired 660 state and local bridges. During that same period, 20,000 miles of road improvements have been completed or are currently underway.

We celebrated some big wins over the past year, finishing the U.S. 460 Corridor in Pike County, a project 23 years in the making. In early November, we cut the ribbon on the completed approach to the I-69 Ohio River Crossing, which will open up new lanes of commerce in our

state and our region. And, this year, we began construction on the final stretch of the Mountain Parkway through the heart of Appalachia. It's been talked about for decades, and now I'm the first governor that can say that every portion of 4-laning the Mountain Parkway is now complete or under construction.

The American Dream is rooted in hope. But it can be extinguished through fear. So public safety is everyone's job. A job where we work together. Where we not only make our people safer – but they feel safer – at all times.

As a state or as a country, we don't accomplish this by stunts in the short term – we accomplish it by putting in the work for the long-term. We do it by hiring more law enforcement and paying them better; by protecting our children online and on our streets; by reducing recidivism; and through the best natural disaster response in the country.

When I came into office, our Kentucky State Police force was dwindling. The previous governor had attempted to cut promised retirements, and morale was low. So we rolled up our sleeves, increased pay and made real changes. Now, the full KSP agency is up to 1,896 team members.

We put in the same effort in training local police and sheriff's deputies. Now, Kentucky has over 8,000 local law enforcement officers protecting our streets.

We also opened the new Western Kentucky law enforcement training center, which had its first graduating class of 21 officers. Tonight, we have the top graduate of that class with us: Brionna Ray, now a deputy with the Hardin County Sheriff's Office.

In October, we announced the good work of our State Police in protecting our children. Since late 2019, they have arrested 474 online child predators. That's 474 predators that will no longer threaten our children.

Let's give KSP, the Child Crime Task Force and Brionna a round of applause.

Making our communities safer is about more than just arresting criminals. It's about preventing crimes altogether. When a crime doesn't occur, there is no victim, no family left grieving. One way we prevent crime is working with our inmates to ensure that once released, they do not violate again.

Last year, we did that, securing another record low recidivism rate. A good part of that is thanks to our efforts to provide second chances and real job opportunities. It's not just the smart thing to do – my faith teaches me second chances are what we are called to do.

Last April, we announced more than a dozen new vocational programs in our prisons. Inmates are receiving training in CDL, construction, cosmetology, HVAC and painting.

But it's time to take these efforts to the next level.

So, we've teamed up with the Kentucky Community and Technical College System. And together, with President Ryan Quarles, we're seeking funding for a non-partisan, game-changing project: a reentry campus that will make our people safer and make Kentucky a national model.

I want to thank our Council of Second Chance Employers, who are working together to help continue this important progress.

Making our people safer also means having the best emergency response to natural disasters. We've had far too much practice, with 14 federally declared weather disasters, a pandemic, helicopter crashes, mass shootings and a major plane crash.

Last February, our state was hit with another devastating flood. In the end, 25 of our fellow citizens were killed. In early April, much of the state endured even more flooding. This time, we lost 7 Kentuckians. In May, an EF4 tornado struck southeastern Kentucky, with 19 children of God taken far too soon. And, as if natural disasters weren't enough, we suffered the catastrophic UPS plane crash in Louisville. We lost 15 souls to that terrible accident.

I want you to remember these are real people.

In response to each of these disasters, our emergency personnel stepped up and showed this country how it's done. Our swift water rescue teams were pre-positioned before the floods, jumping into action and making hundreds of rescues. Our National Guard responded time and time again. And in Louisville, 18 different fire departments and 50 fire trucks – led by the Okolona Fire Department – responded to the inferno, preventing more loss.

It's impossible to know why Kentucky gets hit over and over and over again. But my faith teaches me that God saves his biggest challenges for the strongest of people. And each response reminds me that strength is not bravado or bullying but a resolve built on love, kindness and a commitment to our fellow human beings.

Tonight, let's recognize and remember all the families that have suffered loss, and let's give a big thank you to all our first responders.

Part of the American Dream is about us, the adults, doing well; but the core of the American Dream is about empowering our kids to do better. As it says in Psalms, "Children are a gift from the lord; they are a reward from him."

Our priority, always, must be the future. And our future is molded in our public schools.

I am unapologetically a 100% pro-public education governor. Every budget I've proposed has invested in our school systems, starting with our educators. Once again, I'll be doing what's right: I'm proposing \$159 million for mandatory raises for educators; and a proposal to increase take-home pay by nearly 7%.

My budget also increases education funding per pupil and adds \$560 million to our teachers' retirements.

But that leads me to the most important choice in this session for our future, our businesses, our families and our children. The single-most effective way we succeed with this next budget is by funding Pre-K for All.

Right now, more than half of Kentucky's kids are showing up to kindergarten already behind. They come to school with fewer vocabulary words. Some don't know their colors. Others aren't even potty-trained.

Most Kentucky parents can't afford pre-K. So many of our neighbors want to work but simply can't find or afford child care. At a time when things cost too much, pre-K saves parents thousands of dollars every year. And one study shows it boosts parents' earnings by nearly \$9,000 per year for at least six years.

Over time, pre-K is projected to grow Kentucky's workforce by up to 70,000 people. And studies show that for every \$1 invested in pre-K, we get \$10 cycled through our economy.

It's clear: Kentucky needs Pre-K for All.

And to members of the General Assembly: We were able to work together on medical marijuana, to make sports betting legal, to protect horse racing and gaming and our horse industry. Surely we can come together for 4-year-olds.

For those that say Pre-K for All is political, let me remind you: 4-year-olds can't vote. They aren't registered. So if you're against this because you think it gives me a win, what you're really doing is handing these kids a loss.

Pre-K for All is the right thing to do, so let's get it done.

Our state is on a roll, but with the challenge of tariffs, national uncertainty and more, life is going to be tougher than in the past. Without action, Kentuckians are going to suffer.

So, in addition to our proposed investments in housing, jobs and health care, tonight I have two more proposals to help our families.

First, my faith tells me no one should go hungry. The miracle of the fishes and loaves is one of the only miracles that appears in every book of the Gospels. That tells us it's pretty darn important.

But actions by the Trump administration to the SNAP program are going to result in soaring costs and 114,000 Kentuckians are going to go hungry from losing their food assistance. We can't let that happen. That's why my budget provides \$50 million to help our hardworking Kentucky food banks do more.

Let's give a big round of applause for Feeding Kentucky, their network of food banks, and everyone working to end hunger in Kentucky.

Second, we cannot let our people freeze in the winter or suffer heatstroke in the summer. My budget creates a \$75 million-dollar fund to help at-risk Kentuckians pay their utility bills.

I'll close tonight with a grand understatement.

We live in chaotic times.

In such times, I hope and I pray that God grants us the wisdom to see beyond the anger of today's politics to the possibility and promise that tomorrow holds. And even in chaotic times, we see the goodness of our people.

If you need proof of that, look at Trooper Jude Remilien, Jimmy and Jessica Alexander, Taylor Hall and Adam Arnold. These heroes exemplify this goodness.

When Trooper Remilien was shot while protecting Kentucky, Jimmy, Jessica, Taylor and Adam did what we hope we would all do in a life-threatening emergency: They stepped up, stepped in and helped save a life. They didn't ask Trooper Remilien about his background, his politics, or even which basketball team he roots for. They just helped him.

Scripture (James 2:22) tells us: "You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and that his faith was made complete by what he did."

Some of these good Samaritans are here tonight. Let's show them our appreciation.

We always come together in times of need. And it's what makes me so proud to be a Kentuckian.

In Kentucky, we've turned down the temperature. We've worked together, because our people deserve a government that unites instead of divides; works for the good of all of us instead of creating an "us" versus a "them."

If you walked into the construction project that is our state capitol, you'd find our statue of Abraham Lincoln. His address at Gettysburg is on a plaque on the wall, another reminder that our democracy is, indeed, fragile.

President Lincoln said to his countrymen, "We are not enemies, but friends. ... Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection."

While the national media fixates on the rage, we focus on results. While social media lifts up the angry and judgmental, we must amplify kindness, acceptance and empathy.

This polarized moment in our history, it won't last forever. And, like Lincoln all those years ago, Kentucky can lead the way out of the darkness and into the light.

It's our job. It's our duty. And we cannot leave a broken country to our children.

As we repair our state capitol, let us also repair ourselves, our communities and our country. Remember: Your neighbor is not the enemy from within. She's just your neighbor, trying to do her best in this difficult world.

This moment in our history, how we conduct our business today, will determine how future Kentuckians view us. Did we favor division or unity, discrimination or inclusion.

This is the moment we've been entrusted to navigate. So let's stay focused and deliver a 2026 filled with prosperity and promise.

Thank you. God bless the Commonwealth of Kentucky; God bless the United States of America; and good night.

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