

Journal of the House

THIRD DAY

HALL OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
TOPEKA, KS, Wednesday, January 15, 2025, 9:00 a.m.

The House met session pro forma pursuant to adjournment with Speaker Hawkins in the chair.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND CONCURRENT RESOLUTIONS

The following bills were introduced and read by title:

HB 2009, AN ACT concerning abortion; prohibiting abortion procedures except when necessary to save the life of the pregnant woman; providing a private cause of action for civil enforcement of such prohibition; amending K.S.A. 65-2837, 65-6731, 65-67a01, 76-3308 and 79-32,195 and K.S.A. 2024 Supp. 60-1906, 65-2401, 79-32,182b, 79-32,261 and 79-3606 and repealing the existing sections; also repealing K.S.A. 65-4a02, 65-4a03, 65-4a04, 65-4a05, 65-4a06, 65-4a07, 65-4a08, 65-4a09, 65-4a10, 65-4a11, 65-4a12, 65-6702, 65-6703, 65-6704, 65-6705, 65-6707, 65-6709, 65-6710, 65-6711, 65-6712, 65-6714, 65-6715, 65-6721, 65-6722, 65-6724, 65-6725, 65-6726, 65-6741, 65-6743, 65-6744, 65-6745, 65-6746, 65-6747, 65-6748 and 65-6749 and K.S.A. 2024 Supp. 65-4a01, 65-6701, 65-6708, 65-6716, 65-6723 and 65-6742, by Representatives Fairchild, Hill, Poetter, Rhiley, Schwertfeger and Seiwert.

HB 2010, AN ACT concerning abortion; prohibiting abortion; creating the crimes of unlawful performance of an abortion and unlawful destruction of a fertilized embryo and establishing penalties therefor; restricting the use of fetal tissue; relating to exclusions from sales and use tax exemptions for certain abortion providers; amending K.S.A. 21-5301, 21-5302, 21-5303, 65-2837, 65-6731, 65-6732, 65-67a01, 65-67a02, 65-67a04, 65-67a07, 76-3308 and 79-32,195 and K.S.A. 2024 Supp. 60-1901, 60-1906, 65-2401, 79-32,182b, 79-32,261 and 79-3606 and repealing the existing sections; also repealing K.S.A. 38-2003, 65-4a02, 65-4a03, 65-4a04, 65-4a05, 65-4a06, 65-4a07, 65-4a08, 65-4a09, 65-4a10, 65-4a11, 65-4a12, 65-6702, 65-6703, 65-6704, 65-6705, 65-6707, 65-6709, 65-6710, 65-6711, 65-6712, 65-6714, 65-6715, 65-6721, 65-6722, 65-6724, 65-6725, 65-6726, 65-6741, 65-6743, 65-6744, 65-6745, 65-6746, 65-6747, 65-6748, 65-6749 and 65-67a09 and K.S.A. 2024 Supp. 65-445, 65-4a01, 65-6701, 65-6708, 65-6723 and 65-6742, by Representatives Fairchild, Poetter, Rhiley, Schwertfeger and Seiwert.

HB 2011, AN ACT concerning taxation; relating to property tax; decreasing the rate of ad valorem tax imposed by a school district; amending K.S.A. 2024 Supp. 72-5142 and repealing the existing section, by Committee on Taxation.

HB 2012, AN ACT concerning taxation; relating to income tax; providing a tax credit for the sale and distribution of ethanol blends for motor vehicle fuels, by Committee on Taxation.

HB 2013, AN ACT concerning sales taxation; discontinuing the imposition of tax on cable, community antennae and television services; amending K.S.A. 2024 Supp. 79-3603 and repealing the existing section, by Committee on Taxation.

HB 2014, AN ACT concerning property taxation; relating to exemptions; providing exemptions for certain personal property including watercraft, marine equipment, off-road vehicles, motorized bicycles and certain trailers; amending K.S.A. 79-213 and 79-5501 and repealing the existing sections, by Committee on Taxation.

CHANGE OF REFERENCE

Speaker Hawkins announced the withdrawal of **HB 2004** from Committee on Transportation and referral to Committee on Taxation.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM STATE OFFICERS

From: Alan D. Conroy, Executive Director, Kansas Public Employees Retirement System; pursuant to K.S.A. 74-4914; annual report on the number of retirees who are granted an exemption from the working after retirement penalty in the previous calendar year.

From: Gabrielle Hull, Legislative Coordinator, Kansas State Department of Education; in accordance with K.S.A. 72-5170(2)(A), annual report on statewide assessments.

From: Kansas Board of Regents; Annual Report on Exceptions to the Minimum Admission Standards at State Universities.

From: Kansas Board of Regents; in accordance with K.S.A. 76-7,152 (2022 SB 450); Report on Disposition of Surplus Property.

From: Kansas Board of Regents; per K.S.A. 75-7226; KAN-ED Summary Report.
From: Kansas Board of Regents; per K.S.A. 74-32,402(a)(12); Postsecondary Technical Education Authority FY 2024 Summary Report.

From: Kansas Board of Regents; K.S.A. 74-32,418; Kansas Training Information Program (K-TIP), Academic Year 2023, Career Technical Education Report.

The complete reports are kept on file and open for inspection in the office of the Chief Clerk.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

Announcing adoption of **HCR 5002**, a concurrent resolution providing for a joint session of the Senate and House of Representatives for the purpose of hearing messages from the Governor, the Supreme Court and the Adjutant General.

The following escorts are appointed:

For the State of the State:

To escort the **Governor**: Senators Bowers and Pettey

To escort the **Lt. Governor**: Senators Alley and Faust Goudeau

To escort the **Supreme Court**: Senators Warren and Holscher

For the State of the Judiciary:

To escort the **Supreme Court**: Senators Warren and Corson

For the State of the Military:

To escort the **Adjutant General**: Senators Billinger and Schmidt

To escort the **Military Advisory Board**: Senators Bowser and Francisco

On motion of Rep. Croft, the House recessed until 10:00 a.m.

LATE MORNING SESSION

The House met pursuant to recess with Speaker Hawkins in the chair.

It being the hour in accordance with **HCR 5002** to meet in joint session with the Senate to hear the message of the State of the Military, Reps. Proctor, Buehler and Weigel escorted the Adjutant General to a seat in the House.

Reps. Thompson, Turk and Miller escorted the Military Advisory Board to seats in the House.

Reps. Penn, Goddard and Mosley escorted members of the Senate to seats in the House.

STATE OF THE MILITARY
JANUARY 15, 2025
ADJUTANT GENERAL MICHAEL VENERDI

Mr. Speaker and Mr. Senate President, thank you for inviting me here. Governor Kelly, cabinet secretaries, elected officials, distinguished members of the legislature, and citizens of the Great State of Kansas, good morning! Thank you for the opportunity to address this body and discuss the great things the Soldiers, Airmen, and civilians of the Kansas National Guard are doing to make our state and nation safe, secure, and free. Before I begin, I want to recognize Speaker Pro Tempore Carpenter and Representative Turk for their service in our Kansas National Guard.

The Kansas National Guard comprises over 7,000 Soldiers, Airmen, and civilians. The National Guard is the primary combat reserve of the Army and Air Force, seamlessly providing forces to fight and win the nation's wars and defend the homeland.

The Guard has evolved from primarily a strategic reserve to an operational force with an expanded role in our modern military and national defense. It is no longer held solely in reserve for large-scale conflicts but is actively engaged in ongoing missions at home and abroad. This shift has positioned the Guard as a critical component of the total force, routinely deploying alongside Active-Duty counterparts for combat missions and peacekeeping operations.

Partnerships...a theme you will hear over and over again because they matter. Community partnerships enhance trust and enable the military to remain connected with the people it serves. This community engagement provides critical support to service members, improving morale and easing transitions during deployments and after service. These deep ties strengthen our shared history and create a more cohesive, resilient society.

Kansas proudly hosts three major federal military installations – Fort Riley, Fort Leavenworth, and McConnell Air Force Base. The Kansas National Guard has deep and

enduring partnerships with each of these military installations. These partnerships immensely benefit Kansas, with an annual economic impact exceeding \$5.2 billion and a seat at the table when national security decisions are being made. Members of our Congressional delegation sit on key committees and caucuses because of Kansas' prime military and defense resources.

The U.S. Army's First Infantry Division, based at Fort Riley, builds, maintains, and deploys combat-ready forces to conduct Decisive Action and fight and win in complex environments worldwide.

Last year, the Division's Combat Aviation Brigade completed a deployment to Europe in support of Operation Atlantic Resolve. Combat aviation has been a critical component of this operation, showcasing the United States' commitment to deterring aggression and ensuring stability in Europe, particularly in response to Russian activities near NATO borders.

The forward deployment of aviation units, such as Apache and Black Hawk helicopters, has bolstered reconnaissance, air support, and logistical operations, ensuring a swift and coordinated response to potential threats.

By integrating advanced aviation technology with allied cooperation, combat aviation under Operation Atlantic Resolve reinforces NATO's deterrence strategy and underscores the U.S.'s unwavering commitment to European security.

Fort Riley's training ranges host much of our Army National Guard training. This includes long-range fires for units like the 130th Field Artillery Brigade and the 1-635th Armor Regiment.

The U.S. Army's Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth is considered the "Intellectual Center of the Army," and prepares the Army to successfully conduct unified land operations in a joint, inter-agency, inter-governmental, multinational environment.

Its training team produces simulation tools to meet the readiness training requirements of National Guard units. Twelve full-time Army National Guard members work throughout the Combined Arms Center to ensure Active Duty and the National Guard are closely linked to Army transformation efforts.

Fort Leavenworth is investing \$89 million to upgrade base housing and quality of life and an additional \$37 million to construct a new Child Development Center. This will increase childcare capacity to over 300 children, with a groundbreaking scheduled this spring. These investments ensure that our military personnel have access to critical resources.

The Combined Arms Center has a strong relationship with the National Guard. Fort Leavenworth hosts our 35th Infantry Division, one of only eight divisions in the National Guard and only 18 divisions in the entire U.S. Army.

Finally, McConnell Air Force Base hosts our Air National Guard's 184th Wing, a force of cutting-edge intelligence, cyber security, and battlefield command and control Airmen, nearly 1,400 strong.

Last year, the U.S. Air Force's 22nd Air Refueling Wing at McConnell Air Force Base partnered with the Air Force Reserve's 931st Air Refueling Wing, utilizing the KC-46 Pegasus and KC-135 Stratotanker to deliver global air refueling capabilities, airlift, and aeromedical evacuation to U.S. armed forces, NATO and coalition forces.

Team McConnell had a monumental year, executing the first KC-46 circumnavigation flight. Project Magellan executed a west-bound nonstop flight around

the world, taking off and landing at McConnell. This Maximum Endurance Operation enables greater reach over greater distances to surge personnel, supplies, and aircraft anywhere in the world.

Reservists from McConnell also performed extended aeromedical evacuation capabilities, in one instance conducting a mission to Hawaii, Guam, Japan, and back to the United States for seven patients.

Our work depends on our partnerships with our military installations and their leadership teams. The relationships are strong and enduring.

The National Guard is a unique military component with both a state and federal mission, allowing us to apply the personnel, training, and equipment for our wartime missions to our state responses in the homeland. When disaster strikes in the homeland, the National Guard stands ready to deploy and serve at a moment's notice to protect life and property in our communities.

2024 was a significant year for the Kansas National Guard. Nearly 1,200 Soldiers and Airmen were mobilized to support federal missions. The 635th Regional Support Group, headquartered in Wichita, had nearly 500 Soldiers from the Brigade's 1st Battalion, 635th Armor Regiment, deployed to the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility last year.

The Armor Regiment, based in Kansas City, operates Abrams tanks and Bradley Infantry Fighting vehicles.

Over their nearly year-long deployment, they conducted missions supporting Operation Spartan Shield and Operation Inherent Resolve across 12 countries in the region. Operation Inherent Resolve is the international coalition's intervention against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, commonly referred to as ISIS. Elements of the battalion conducted mounted combat patrols across eastern Syria.

The Battalion provided security for Operation Neptune Solace; a humanitarian mission led by the United States to deliver aid to the people of Gaza via a temporary floating pier. This operation significantly enhanced the delivery of humanitarian aid to Palestinian families in need.

Thanks to the security provided by our Soldiers from ground, sea, and air threats, Neptune Solace delivered over 25,000 tons of aid, the most ever for a humanitarian mission in the Middle East.

Additionally, 117 Soldiers from the Brigade's 242nd Engineer Company in Coffeyville deployed to the Southwest Border in Arizona, supporting U.S. Customs and Border Protection's Tucson Sector. Soldiers assisted in combatting drug trafficking, human smuggling, and other illicit activities that threaten public safety and economic stability.

Leveraging advanced surveillance technology and supporting coordinated Border Patrol operations, our Soldiers mitigated risks associated with terrorism and transnational crime, fostering a more secure and orderly border environment essential for national security and sovereignty.

Last year, the 69th Troop Command, based in Topeka, had 48 Soldiers from its 117th Medical Company deployed to Kuwait and Iraq. The team treated over 1,000 allied and coalition force personnel and managed the immediate area of triage. This is where the most critically wounded patients are initially stabilized, treated, and prioritized for surgery.

Additionally, seven Soldiers from the Brigade's 105th Mobile Public Affairs

Detachment deployed to the U.S. European Command in Poland to support Operation Assure, Deter and Reinforce. In response to Russia's invasion and ongoing military action against Ukraine, NATO forces in the Baltic act as a visible deterrent against expanded Russian aggression and demonstrate NATO's commitment to defending its members, which reinforces its guiding principle of collective defense. The Kansas National Guard Public Affairs Soldiers played a key role in countering Russia's extensive use of disinformation, misinformation, social media manipulation and other unconventional tactics.

The 69th Troop Command's 1st Battalion, 108th Aviation Regiment, deployed 87 Soldiers and their Blackhawk Helicopters to the Washington, D.C. region, where they are currently performing their federal mission. We look forward to their return next month.

The 130th Field Artillery Brigade's 170th Maintenance Company, headquartered in Manhattan, deployed 70 Soldiers to Central Command alongside the Armor Regiment in 2024. As part of Task Force Reaper, they performed over 6,000 hours of maintenance on a fleet of over 500 wheeled and tracked vehicles, allowing seamless operations and the completion of multiple gunnery cycles.

Perhaps nothing in the Kansas National Guard is more of a testament to partnerships than the 35th Infantry Division. We are incredibly fortunate to have this proud and historic headquarters in Kansas, which is one of only eight divisions in the Army National Guard. It has subordinate commands in Oklahoma, Missouri, Arkansas, Texas, and Tennessee. Through coordination, exercises, and partnerships across all the division-aligned states, the 35th stands ready for multi-domain and large-scale combat operations.

In 2024, they conducted a combined command post exercise with the 1st Infantry Division at Fort Riley, which included First Army, the U.S. Army's mobilization, readiness, and training command, as well as the National Guard Bureau's Mission Command Training Support Program.

The Kansas Army National Guard has five Brigade-equivalent commands. One of these, the 35th Division Artillery, is the newest unit in the Kansas National Guard. It was activated and federally recognized last September.

Its activation brings the division into closer parity with active-duty divisions and is a great step toward a fully equipped, deployable division ready for large-scale combat operations.

The Kansas Air National Guard deployed worldwide and at home in 2024. Airmen from the 190th Air Refueling Wing in Topeka deployed to four geographic combatant commands. Operating the KC-135 Stratotanker and providing rapid global mobility air power, the wing deploys expeditionary forces in support of worldwide combat, contingency, and humanitarian operations in addition to maintaining a nuclear deterrence tasking.

The Wing's 117th Air Refueling Squadron has crews supporting U.S. Strategic Command missions, maintaining a combat-ready force capable of deploying worldwide at a moment's notice, providing air refueling to support our nation's nuclear enterprise. Airmen from the 190th participated in eight major exercises primarily focused on the Great Power Competition and conducting air operations in contested environments with minimal support.

Partnering with outside entities to prepare for high-end combat, the Aircrew Training

and Tactics section worked with Boeing and Air Mobility Command to validate low-level air refueling operations and introduce the Real Time Information in the Cockpit system. This capability allows the aircraft to receive, process, and display real-time information, including threats, mission updates, and friendly force positions. It significantly improves the aircrew's decision-making, enabling them to adapt to dynamic combat environments and conduct seamless coordination with other forces.

The 184th Wing in Wichita is one of few Air National Guard wings in the country that does not have aircraft. It provides unique capabilities to the Joint Force in cyber security, intelligence, and command and control.

In 2024, it mobilized and deployed almost 400 Airmen around the world and at home to conduct and support global contingency operations.

Smoky Hill Air National Guard Range near Salina, the largest bombing range in the Air National Guard, was host to several training events and exercises. These included multinational exercises with partners like Canada, the Netherlands, and New Zealand, as well as multiple components of the U.S. military, including Special Operations Forces.

The 184th Wing deployed members to Japan for the U.S.–Japanese Bilateral Intelligence Analysis Cell. This critical collaboration enhances regional security and addresses shared threats in the Indo-Pacific.

By combining intelligence resources, expertise, and advanced analytical tools, this partnership enables both nations to recognize emerging challenges, such as Chinese military activities, cyber threats, and regional instability.

While closing the chapter on an incredibly busy 2024, we are turning the page to 2025, where we continue to deploy forces to global combatant commands, modernize our forces, and train and exercise for future deployments.

We must build and maintain our readiness to respond and execute our missions across a spectrum of operations. It encompasses the training, equipment, facilities, personnel, and resources necessary to ensure units can rapidly deploy and perform their assigned duties under any conditions. By building readiness, we deter aggression from those who would harm us, bolstering state and national security.

This year's deployments will commence with the 190th Air Refueling Wing supporting U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. Its air refueling and rapid global mobility capabilities provide power projection and deterrence, enabling extended operational reach for aircraft across the vast expanse of the Pacific region.

By supporting bombers, fighters, airlift, and reconnaissance aircraft, their involvement allows the U.S. and its allies to maintain a persistent presence and respond swiftly to emerging threats. It ensures U.S. forces and allied partners can operate effectively from distant bases, countering the Chinese Communist Party's attempts to restrict access and free flow of commerce in the region through anti-access, area denial strategies.

The 184th Wing's Air Control Squadron will deploy to provide Command and Control of air assets across the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility, controlling aircraft and enabling a common air picture for the air component commander in the region. The Air Control Squadron is at the leading edge of integrating command and control with intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, which is a significant initiative of the U.S. Air Force.

With an Air Control Squadron and two Intelligence Squadrons co-located, 184th Airmen are working closely together to become a single source of action against

advanced adversaries like Russia and China.

By fusing these functions, the Air Force can achieve real-time situational awareness, enabling faster and more informed decision-making across all domains of warfare.

Our Army National Guard units are continuing preparations for their upcoming deployments. The 130th Field Artillery Brigade will deploy to the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility, supporting Operation Spartan Shield and Operation Inherent Resolve.

The Brigade will serve as Army Central Command's Force Field Artillery Headquarters. The brigade will provide theater-level planning and synchronization of long-range, precision artillery fires while conducting theater security training engagements with host nation field artillery forces, building partner nation readiness and lethality.

With a home-station mission, the 235th Regiment provides and facilitates training and accreditation for units from 18 states. In 2025, it will train over 40,000 Soldiers, Airmen, Marines, and first responders.

The Regiment's Officer Candidate School and Warrant Officer Candidate School partner with 14 states to train and commission Officers and Warrant Officers. This rigorous program combines military discipline and intense academic instruction to forge tomorrow's military leaders. Successful candidates emerge ready to lead and troops and adapt to complex, ever-changing operational environments.

As we build readiness, we have two major initiatives we are working on at the federal level. First, the U.S. Army has equipped its Active-Duty Divisions with MQ-1 Gray Eagle unmanned aircraft but did not equip the eight National Guard Divisions. Congress has funded two Guard divisions in recent years, and we are working to make the 35th Infantry Division the third. This is a critical capability as the Army transforms how it fights with a directive that unmanned systems will make first contact with the enemy.

Army National Guard Divisions must be equipped like their Active-Duty counterparts, and we are asking our Congressional delegation to advocate on our behalf to fund this capability.

Second, the 190th Air Refueling Wing is one of seven finalists to receive the KC-46 Pegasus aerial refueling aircraft to replace its aging fleet of KC-135 Stratotankers. The transition to the KC-46 Pegasus represents a significant upgrade in air refueling capabilities, including greater fuel capacity, advanced refueling systems, and increased reliability.

The KC-46's enhanced defensive systems and situational awareness features make it more survivable in contested environments, a critical advantage when operating against near-peer competitors like China and Russia. This modernization ensures that the 190th Air Refueling Wing can sustain global operations, maintain strategic reach, and project global power. It reinforces its ability to deter aggression and respond decisively to threats in an increasingly contested battlespace.

As we compete with six other states for this mission, we will receive a site visit at Forbes Field in March to present our case that Topeka and Kansas are unparalleled in our ability to host and execute this new mission. Kansas is an ideal location for next-generation capabilities due to its central geographic location, which provides strategic national defense and logistics advantages. Our vast open spaces and uncongested airspace are well-suited for aviation operations, integrated training exercises, and

testing advanced technologies.

Kansas is second to none when it comes to a strong tradition of military support. Our local communities foster a welcoming environment for service members, affordable cost of living, a strong education system, and Midwest values that embrace the patriotic mission of our military force. We are thankful to have your support as we pursue this new mission for Topeka and for Kansas and expect a decision late this year.

Allow me to transition to a strategic gem in the Department of Defense...the State Partnership Program. Under this program, states conduct military-to-military engagements through the National Guard with a designated foreign nation partner to support defense security goals while leveraging whole-of-government relationships. This facilitates broad interagency cooperation spanning government, economic, education, and social spheres. Since 2003, Kansas has enjoyed a partnership with the Republic of Armenia. Last year was a monumental year for that relationship.

In cooperation with U.S. European Command, we assisted in the establishment of the Armenian Noncommissioned Officer course, focusing on leader development. Our American Noncommissioned Officer Corps is renowned as a highly educated, disciplined enlisted force capable of leading and making decisions at the lowest level.

We participated in Eagle Partner 2024, a bilateral exercise between U.S. Army Europe and Armenia to exercise interoperability during peacekeeping and stability operations.

Additionally, Kansas trained alongside Armenia's 12th Peacekeeping Brigade as it prepared for and passed its NATO evaluation, qualifying it for future NATO missions. Key leader engagements took place throughout 2024, including a visit to Kansas by the honorable Lilit Makunts, the Armenian Ambassador to the United States. She met with Governor Kelly and discussed the whole-of-government relationship between Kansas and Armenia.

Armenia sits at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, making it a critical player in regional and global geopolitics. It shares a border with Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Iran and lies near Russia.

This positioning provides Armenia with both opportunities and challenges and serves as a vital link between major energy corridors and trade routes. The State of Kansas and the Kansas National Guard are key partners for continued peace and prosperity in Armenia and the Caucasus. We look forward to many more years in this great partnership.

Unlike any other military service component, the National Guard stands alone in its authority to act in domestic operations. Under the authority of our Commander in Chief, the Kansas Governor, we are available for the state's disaster response and providing support during emergencies.

The National Guard is instrumental in maintaining public safety and supporting local authorities. We work alongside local and state agencies to strengthen the state's resilience and provide resources when needed.

This unique hybrid state and federal military organization has its roots long before the foundation of our country itself. The National Guard's origins date back to December 13, 1636, when the Massachusetts Bay Colony established organized militia units to protect its settlements. Rooted in the concept of a community-based defense force, these early militias were composed of ordinary citizens who took up arms to safeguard their homes and neighbors.

This tradition of citizen-soldiers laid the foundation for what would become the National Guard, embodying the principle that a nation's defense begins at the local level. Over centuries, the Guard has evolved into a dual-purpose force, ready to respond to state emergencies and federal missions while maintaining its deep ties to communities.

Its enduring legacy as America's oldest military organization highlights the unique bond between service members and the civilians they serve. The organization upholds a tradition of readiness, resilience, and patriotism that has lasted nearly 400 years.

The Kansas National Guard responded to multiple events around the state in 2024. Blackhawk helicopters from the 1st Battalion, 108th Aviation Regiment, performed fire suppression missions in Riley, Pottawatomie, Marshall, and Sedgwick Counties, conducting 166 water drops. Cyber personnel supported the Kansas Office of Information Technology Services in response to a cyber incident against the Judicial Branch.

The Kansas National Guard Counterdrug Task Force provided analytical support to ten agencies. They provided analysis and enhanced communication between local, state, and federal agencies. The Task Force's analytical support led to multiple felony arrests and seizures of drugs, cash, weapons, and vehicles, totaling tens of millions of dollars in street value.

The 73rd Civil Support Team is a 22-person unit comprised of personnel drawn from the Kansas Army and Air National Guard. The unit supports civil authorities in chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear material incidents by identifying substances, assessing current and projected consequences, advising on response measures, and assisting with appropriate requests for additional support.

The 73rd CST conducted two live missions supporting civilian partners by screening a potential bio lab and testing suspicious materials. The 73rd Civil Support Team also conducts standby operations to ensure the safety of public events in Kansas and throughout the United States and its territories.

The team supported state and federal agencies as part of Joint Hazard Assessment Teams at over 20 events, including NASCAR races, Wichita Riverfest, major sporting events, concerts, and the Kansas State Fair. During two external evaluations, they were given exceptional ratings.

Our Guardsmen respond to incidents throughout the state using our armories in the local communities. The Kansas National Guard maintains 38 armories, six field maintenance shops, and additional training and logistical support facilities—admittedly a significant footprint for a state of our size. However, our National Guard armories serve as vital hubs for military readiness and community connection, symbolizing the intersection of defense and local support.

These facilities provide a base for National Guard units to train, prepare, and mobilize for national defense and disaster response missions. Beyond their military function, armories are rooted in the fabric of local communities, often hosting public events, emergency shelters, and civic activities. They serve as a point of pride and resilience, reminding residents of the Guard's dual mission to protect the nation and support neighbors in need.

As the state's needs change, we constantly evaluate the laydown of our forces and armories. A key consideration in these decisions is how we respond to emergencies across the state, our ability to recruit and retain Soldiers at each location, and the

strategic alignment of forces. As we look to the future, we will continue to evaluate our force structure and armory footprint to ensure that we are ready to meet any challenge at home or abroad.

Several major construction and renovation projects are underway as we modernize our force for the future fight. A new federally funded Joint Force Headquarters building at Forbes Field in Topeka will be completed in the next few months.

In November, Governor Kelly broke ground on a new headquarters for the Kansas Division of Emergency Management, which will also house the new State Emergency Operations Center. This project is also federally funded, utilizing American Rescue Plan Act funds.

Site preparation is underway in Hays to construct a new armory in a project funded by the state legislature. I want to express my gratitude to you for your investment in that armory.

Additionally, we are renovating and modernizing two armories in Kansas City, including one that was acquired from the Army Reserve and will eventually function as a new brigade headquarters.

Finally, we are competing for a federally funded project on Fort Riley to construct a new headquarters for the 130th Field Artillery Brigade, which we expect to begin around 2030. We strive to build our facilities using the latest technology to be cost-effective and energy-resilient. And that work has carried over to our current facilities.

We have completed significant energy consumption and cost reduction projects by installing technologies such as LED lighting retrofits, high-efficiency HVAC systems, direct digital controls, water line infrastructure improvements, and ground source heat pump technology.

Solar energy projects are underway in Salina and Topeka, with future projects at Fort Leavenworth and Fort Riley. These projects will realize cost efficiency and energy resilience through emergency power generation for two of the state's major concentrations of forces.

Another area of interest for the National Guard is education. By working with our community partners we provide the STARBASE program, an educational initiative designed to inspire and prepare youth, particularly those in underserved communities, for careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

These hands-on experiences and immersive learning opportunities introduce students to the critical thinking and problem-solving skills essential for STEM fields. This program directly supports U.S. national security by cultivating a patriotic and well-educated workforce capable of innovating and maintaining the advanced technologies that underpin the nation's defense capabilities. STARBASE is our investment in the next generation of Kansas leaders and innovators. We provide this program with an annual federal investment of \$2.7 million dollars.

Kansas has the largest STARBASE program in the country, with five primary sites in Kansas City, Manhattan, Salina, Topeka, and Wichita, and a sixth will be a satellite program in the new Hays armory once it opens.

Last year, we provided educational programs, STEM clubs, youth camps, and Junior ROTC outreach to over 14,000 Kansas school children. I want to expressly thank Senators Brenda Dietrich and Elaine Bowers for their leadership on the Kansas STARBASE Board of Directors.

Recruiting and retention is foundational for everything we do in the National Guard.

As a force composed of citizen-Soldiers and Airmen, the Guard relies on recruiting motivated individuals from diverse communities who bring unique skills and perspectives to the organization. Effective recruiting ensures that we remain fully staffed and prepared to respond to emergencies, natural disasters, and military missions at home and abroad.

Retention, on the other hand, preserves institutional knowledge, leadership experience, and operational expertise, which are essential for maintaining unit cohesion and readiness.

The Kansas Army National Guard had a tremendous recruiting year in 2024. Thanks to the extraordinary efforts of our Recruiting and Retention Battalion and your partnership as a legislature in providing benefits to our Soldiers and Airmen, we have 100 more people in our formations than we did a year ago.

The Guard's ability to sustain its ranks depends on providing service members with the right combination of benefits, educational opportunities, and professional development.

It also takes a strong sense of purpose, and support for balancing military and civilian lives. We can't do this on our own, and this is where we look to you for assistance and partnership in building a strong, ready, and resilient force.

Our strong retention numbers are also an indicator of the culture we have built of putting people first. Fostering a culture that prioritizes our people creates an environment where our members feel valued, respected, and supported. Our strong retention numbers show this is happening in Kansas.

Last session, you passed a comprehensive update to modernize the Kansas Code of Military Justice and overhaul the Department's administrative functions. Many of these had been in place since the late 1800s and desperately needed an update.

Our commanders now have the modern tools and guidance to lead and manage their formations. Last session, we also partnered with the Kansas Department of Labor to pass a bill to include National Guardsmen performing State Active Duty in the workers compensation program. This is a tremendous upgrade in providing coverage if our members are injured in the line of duty for our state.

A highly educated military force is essential for maintaining operational effectiveness and addressing the complex challenges of modern warfare. Education enhances critical thinking, decision-making, and adaptability, enabling Guardsmen to assess dynamic situations and develop innovative solutions.

The Educational Masters for Enhanced Readiness and Global Excellence, or EMERGE Act, expanded National Guard scholarships to include Master's Degrees. This important upgrade brought Kansas into parity with 36 other states already offering this to their own National Guardsmen. By investing in the education of its National Guard personnel, Kansas not only enhances readiness and capability but also equips its members to excel in their civilian careers, doubling the return on investment and reinforcing the connection between military service and the state's prosperity.

We continue to make progress on employment initiatives for Guardsmen and their spouses. Many Guardsmen transfer states during their careers, and streamlining employment processes is essential as they and their families navigate the challenges of having both military and civilian careers. It makes Kansas an appealing destination for members looking to transfer.

In 2024, bills were passed to streamline military spouse licensing and enact interstate

licensing compacts for dentists, dental hygienists, and social workers. Kansas has now passed about half the interstate employment licensing compacts available.

These compacts streamline the transfer of occupational licenses across state lines, allowing Guardsmen and military spouses to maintain their careers without significant delay or financial strain. We look forward to continuing to work with you on employment initiatives in 2025.

This year, we will continue to work on education initiatives. We are due for a comprehensive update of our education programs, addressing both undergraduate and graduate programs.

As I mentioned earlier, cutting-edge education programs hone and sharpen our force to overcome any challenge. Education benefits are also one of the most powerful tools for recruiting and retaining the highest caliber of service members.

The best part of this initiative is that these programs are already funded adequately, so we are not asking for additional money. All we are looking for is the modernization of the statutes.

Finally, we look forward to support for initiatives that benefit military families. Childcare, especially, remains a challenge for our members. The Kansas Army National Guard participated in a pilot program in 2024 that was a collaborative effort between the Army Reserve, the Army National Guard, and Upwards, the nation's largest childcare network.

This pilot program offered no-cost childcare to eligible military families on drill weekends, which are very difficult times for our members to find childcare. While this is a step in the right direction, it is still only a pilot and does not address the needs of our Air National Guard families.

The strength of our service members is deeply connected to the support of their family. By fostering resilience and stability at home, family programs enhance the morale and focus of the service members and enable them to perform their duties with confidence and peace of mind. The strength of our military families is directly tied to the readiness and effectiveness of our force.

As a professional military force, we are fortunate to work all these issues in a nonpartisan manner and as a nonpartisan institution dedicated to defending our state and nation and upholding treasured constitutional principles.

Such impartiality is vital to maintaining public trust and the integrity of our mission. By focusing on state and national security, we preserve our role as a stabilizing, trusted force. This stance safeguards democracy by ensuring that military power remains subordinate to civilian control and accountable to the collective will of the people.

Thank you for the opportunity to tell the story of our Guardsmen and their families. They are the quiet professionals who seamlessly blend civilian and military careers in Kansas and in the National Guard.

Thank you for your partnership in building readiness and especially in the recruiting and retention initiatives that are critical to building our force. It is the honor of a lifetime to serve as the 36th Adjutant General of the great State of Kansas.

I look forward to working together this legislative session, across the Executive and Legislative branches of our government, to do what I know everyone in this room is here to do – make Kansas safe, secure, free, and the best state in the nation to live, work, and raise a family.

Your unwavering support of the Kansas National Guard makes that possible. May

God bless all of us in that endeavor, the state of Kansas, and God Bless the United States of America. Thank you!

On motion of Rep. Croft, the House recessed until 1:15 p.m.

AFTERNOON SESSION

The House met pursuant to recess with Speaker Hawkins in the chair.

It being the hour in accordance with **HCR 5002** to meet in joint session with the Senate to hear the message of the State of the Judiciary, Reps. Humphries, Laura Williams and Curtis escorted members of the Supreme Court to seats in the House.

Reps. Lewis, Resman and Martinez escorted members of the Senate to seats in the House.

STATE OF THE JUDICIARY
JANUARY 15, 2025
CHIEF JUSTICE MARLA LUCKERT

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, Governor Kelly, legislators, other honored dignitaries, and my fellow Kansans—good afternoon.

Thank you, Speaker Hawkins and President Masterson, for the opportunity to provide a report on the state of the Kansas judiciary.

I want to first congratulate the new members on your election to the Legislature and the returning members on their re-election. And congratulations to all those elected to a leadership position. New members, I look forward to meeting you. You will soon learn, if you don't already know, that I strongly believe we do better leading our great state when we work together.

This is the fourth time I've had the honor of speaking in this beautiful chamber. In contrast to the previous occasions, I won't be talking about how the courts dealt with a disaster that required re-engineering virtually every business process. I am very, very happy to report we had no worldwide pandemic to deal with, and no attack by foreign cybercriminals.

When I told my oldest granddaughter that I would not be talking about cybercriminals like I did last year when she attended my address to you, her immediate response was, "Sounds kind of boring." Still, she came, along with her parents and her grandfather, who are in the gallery. Her presence means a great deal to me for many reasons. Most relevant to today is the fact she inspires me. She, her sister, her cousins, and their friends motivate me to do all I can to ensure we have a strong, accessible, and trusted legal system for them and generations to come. Sadly, if we maintain the status quo, that dream is at risk.

I make that grim prediction because the stark reality is that we have a justice gap in Kansas and across the country—a growing divide between people with the means to access basic legal services and people who need those services but cannot afford them or, even if they can, are unable to find an attorney within a reasonable driving distance to represent them. As the recently retired Chief Justice of Texas told the United States Congress a few months ago, the "justice gap also threatens the integrity of the rule of law itself, suggesting that it applies not to all and not equally, as promised, but only to

people of means." It is our duty to protect the rule of law—that core tenet of our democratic society, which President Dwight Eisenhower described as "ensur[ing] justice between man and man however humble the one and however powerful the other."

When I think of this gap, I see the faces of real people in my courtroom when I was a trial judge. The young mother with small children whose spouse moved them to Kansas for a job and then abandoned them, leaving her with no money, no food, no car, no pride, and no support in a community of strangers. The grizzled combat vet overwhelmed by medical debt from his wife's last illness. The list goes on and on and on.

If we are to help these people and avoid an all-out crisis, complacency cannot be our approach. We must all put on our hero capes and work together to find solutions. I'd like to share some thoughts about how we might do that.

Courts can and are doing many things, including working to simplify procedures without sacrificing due process. Our court system and rules of procedure, both civil and criminal, were built to handle complex cases in which the parties are represented by attorneys. For those complex cases, the system works well and fosters just results. But those cases make up only a small part of the 330,000 plus cases Kansas judges handle every year. In the rest of the cases, those procedures slow resolution, are inefficient, and are costly. And in 80 to 90 percent of cases at least one party appears without an attorney.

Our court system is not well-equipped to serve these self-represented litigants, and they face many barriers.

In one study, researchers identified almost 200 discrete tasks that self-represented litigants must perform in even simple cases. Some are straightforward, but others can be complex, requiring the ability to read complicated documents, research, gather evidence, and understand difficult legal principles.

Missing just one step could mean you have to start the process all over again or even cause the case to be dismissed, sometimes without the option to refile. The failure can carry enormous consequences for an individual—a loss of property, a staggering judgment, a loss of home, a division of their family. Plus, study after study shows that those consequences have a rippling, negative impact on communities, other public services, and the economy.

I have had the honor of chairing a national project that developed guidelines to simplify and expedite procedures for cases like evictions, debt collection, and uncomplicated employment and contract cases. The objective is to make the system easier to navigate for litigants who represent themselves, help connect them with community resources, and make the process more efficient for legal aid providers.

Two Kansas courts—Sedgwick and Douglas Counties—that have implemented these procedures in eviction cases were highlighted during a nationwide webinar series conducted as part of this project. Johnson County also has a similar docket.

These courts and the national effort were aided by the work of the Kansas Ad Hoc Committee on Best Practices for Eviction Proceedings. That committee is chaired by Judge Sarah Warner, who became Chief Judge of the Kansas Court of Appeals on Monday. The committee she chaired developed best practice advice and many resources, including a six-video series explaining the Kansas eviction process.

Johnson County is piloting similar innovations in its domestic dockets. It diverts high conflict or complicated cases to one procedural path and less complicated cases to a more streamlined process. Again, the goal is to simplify, expedite, and reduce costs without sacrificing due process and justice.

These efforts supplement the growing body of forms, videos, and resource packets made available on many subjects in courthouses, libraries, and online. And the number of self-help centers and court navigator programs designed to assist the self-represented litigants continue to grow.

We also continue to work on providing more online services to self-represented litigants. In previous addresses, I've mentioned our cutting-edge portal. It allows a victim of abuse, stalking, sexual assault, or human trafficking to complete an application for a protective order using a guided form and other tools that explain the process. It also directs the applicant to both legal and nonlegal resources. In calendar year 2024, more than 60% of all protection order petitions filed statewide were filed through the portal. About 40% of these petitions arrived outside of normal business hours, which shows how online services help us meet public needs.

We are also a member of a national project focused on developing guided e-filing systems for self-represented litigants. Our goal is to build a sustainable, secure, and highly navigable e-filing platform for self-represented litigants in Kansas.

Even with these reforms, justice partners who help self-represented civil litigants are overwhelmed. So we have requested a budget increase to support the growth of our various programs designed to help self-represented litigants and to increase the fund that provides grant support for others' efforts to meet these needs. We respectfully request your support for this funding. Your investment will have impact across Kansas and in your communities.

As to the justice gap in juvenile offender cases, each of the three branches has received the National Juvenile Defense Center's assessment of juvenile defense in Kansas. The report presents us with a call to action after noting current deficiencies in meeting the constitutional obligation to provide effective assistance of counsel. It provides us with a roadmap for reform that deserves discussion, and we look forward to participating in that process.

The Juvenile Defense Center's report highlights that there is no substitute for having an effective attorney by your side when you have legal issues. But judges obligated under the United States and Kansas Constitutions to appoint attorneys increasingly struggle to find attorneys to represent people at both the trial and appellate levels. Even where attorneys are taking these cases, they often have high caseloads that hinder their ability to efficiently provide quality representation.

Like judges, everyday Kansans seeking legal assistance often have trouble finding an attorney because we face a shortage, especially in rural Kansas. Two years ago, I established the Rural Justice Initiative Committee to gather data and make recommendations about how to respond to the attorney shortage. The committee, led by Justice K.J. Wall, includes leaders from across the state with a passion and interest in serving rural Kansas, including Senator Elaine Bowers and Senator (formerly Representative) Tory Blew. The committee reported their findings a few weeks ago on December 20.

Some findings were not surprising: For example, they confirmed we have a shortage of attorneys across all counties. But other data points were startling. For example, there

are more active attorneys with a Kansas law license practicing in Kansas City, Missouri than in all our Kansas rural communities combined. And in 98 of the 100 Kansas counties classified as rural, there are two or less active attorneys per 1,000 residents, which is half the number reportedly necessary to meet demand. This shortage impacts Kansans with legal needs. But there are other consequences because attorneys run small businesses, they employ people, and they and their families generally strengthen the fabric of their communities as they often take on leadership roles.

The report includes ten recommendations that address the major barriers to recruiting and retaining rural attorneys. These include asking the Supreme Court to collaborate with the Kansas Legislature and our law schools to establish a rural attorney training program and tuition reimbursement incentives for those who attend a Kansas law school and ultimately practice in rural Kansas. These recommendations are modeled after similar initiatives aimed at addressing other professional shortages in rural Kansas, like doctors and veterinarians. We look forward to introducing that legislation this session.

We also see a justice gap in Child in Need of Care cases. We have already taken steps to help with this problem and, working together, we have made monumental strides thanks to our three-branch child welfare initiative. This initiative is chaired by Justice Melissa Standridge. Last April, more than 700 participants came together at the first Child Welfare Summit to discuss ways to make lasting improvements for children and families navigating our child welfare system.

If you know Justice Standridge, then you know this wasn't a sit-and-get kind of conference. This summit called for leaders at all levels—district judges, child welfare workers, advocates, agencies, and state elected officials—to work collaboratively to identify strategies and best practices.

In the months following the summit, three significant projects have started. The first is being called "Child Welfare Reimagined." It is a legislative project that came about at the direction of House Majority Leader Chris Croft. The project has been led by former Representative Susan Concannon and Representative Jarrod Ousley. The goal is to identify child welfare policy reforms to be initiated over the next three to five years.

The second project is Families Ad Astra, a judicial branch project that brings together local and statewide legal partners to improve court processes and legal advocacy in Kansas child protection cases.

The third project relates to bringing the specialty court model to family court. You may have heard me speak before about our growing use of specialty courts to handle criminal cases in which drug or alcohol abuse or mental illness is detected as an underlying cause of a person's criminal behavior. The Family Treatment Courts use a similar concept when one or more family members have a substance abuse addiction. Like all other specialty courts, family treatment courts use a multidisciplinary team to coordinate services, hold the participants accountable, and provide them support in meeting their goals—all in a non-adversarial environment the parents voluntarily enter. Participants agree to the court's policies and procedures, which include increased court participation, chemical dependency treatment, and intense case management so they can reunite with their children.

In September, three pilot family treatment courts began operating in Miami, Lyon, and Cowley counties. This effort would not have been possible without support from the Department for Children and Families and the Department for Aging and Disability Services. The interbranch collaboration on this project has been amazing, and we are

thankful for everyone's hard work.

We also saw more and more other specialty courts. Our district courts operate drug courts, veteran treatment courts, behavioral and mental health courts, and youth courts. What we know, and now have data to support, is that people who graduate from a specialty court program have a better chance of living a stable life without repeat offenses that would bring them back into the court system. Unfortunately, these programs are not available in every judicial district. So we have a gap in access.

But we have taken steps to address this problem through the work of a statutorily created 12-member committee. The committee has already undertaken a variety of projects, including evaluating funding resources and recommending legislation and rules to aid developing specialty courts.

The Specialty Court Funding Advisory Committee includes four legislators: Senator Rick Billinger, Senator Kellie Warren, Senator Ethan Corson, and now-Senator (formerly Representative) Stephen Owens. This year, that committee is recommending the appropriation of \$3 million to support the ongoing work of specialty courts.

We look forward to sharing with the Judiciary and Budget committees the work being done by our specialty courts and to explain how they offer a powerful return on investment for Kansas.

As I close, I want to express appreciation for your support. I also want to invite you to listen to arguments before the Supreme Court a week from today at 5:30 p.m. in what was formerly the Supreme Court courtroom on the third floor of this building. The case involves the interpretation of a statute you passed as part of the Kansas Tort Claims Act.

To all in the chamber, thank you for your service, your leadership, and your dedication to the great state of Kansas. And thank you to all judicial branch employees and judges. It's been a trying year in the aftermath of the cyberattack and the completion of our transition to a statewide case management system. Not only have you endured those trials, but it's also your inspiring work that has brought about the innovation and reforms I have discussed.

Together we are making great strides in improving and strengthening our courts and serving our communities. But much work remains to be done. Together, let's do all we can to give future generations a justice system that protects the rule of law and provides access to justice for every Kansan regardless of means or where they live.

May you and our great state be blessed. Thank you.

On motion of Rep. Croft, the House recessed until 6:00 p.m.

EVENING SESSION

The House met pursuant to recess with Speaker Hawkins in the chair.

It being the hour in accordance with **HCR 5002** to meet in joint session with the Senate to hear the message of the Governor, Reps. Tarwarter, Bergquist and Ousley, escorted the Governor to a seat in the House.

Reps. Corbet, Awerkamp and McDonald escorted the Lt. Governor to a seat in the House.

Reps. Howerton, Estes and Simmons escorted members of the Supreme Court to seats in the House.

Reps. Wasinger, Minnix and Oropeza escorted members of the Senate to seats in the House.

**STATE OF THE STATE
JANUARY 15, 2025
GOVERNOR LAURA KELLY**

Mr. Speaker...Mr. President...Madam Chief Justice and the entire Kansas Supreme Court...members of my Cabinet...leaders of the Kansas tribes...and all the constitutional officers and legislators assembled – it is an honor to speak with you tonight.

It is also my honor to welcome Lieutenant Governor David Toland and his family: his wife Beth and their children Caroline and William – along with my family members, especially my granddaughter Rory, who are joining us tonight via live stream.

For much of my time in office, we've been focused on righting the wrongs of the past – getting our state back on the road to prosperity. And that's exactly what we've accomplished together:

We've funded our public schools six years in a row.

We've balanced the state budget six years in a row.

We've closed the Bank of KDOT and invested in our roads, bridges, and broadband.

We've attracted the largest economic development projects in the history of our state.

We've paid down our debt. We've seen our state's financial ratings be upgraded three times.

We've completely axed the tax on groceries.

As of two weeks ago, no Kansan is paying state sales taxes on groceries. It took a while, but we finally got it done.

And there is more tax relief on its way. In total, I've signed into law \$2 billion in tax cuts.

It wasn't easy, but together, we made it happen for Kansans.

This April, seniors won't pay any state income tax on their Social Security.

A higher standard deduction will ensure that Kansans pay less when they file their taxes.

And we lowered the tax that everyone hates – the property tax.

In an era that might be defined for its divisiveness at the national level, we've shown that here in Kansas, we can still find common ground and get things done.

We have accomplished so much.

But because of the nature of our challenges, we've often been so focused on whatever's needed immediate fixing – our schools, our infrastructure, our foster care system – that we haven't always spent as much time talking about what lies ahead for Kansas. Not just next year or the year after, but in the decades ahead – the Kansas we'll leave for our children and for our grandchildren.

Since I've been in office, we have built an incredibly strong foundation for our state – Kansas has never been in better financial shape. Responsible, steady governance has earned Kansas recognition nationwide for our economic achievements and for our education system.

And now, it's time to build on that foundation. We're two weeks into 2025 – a quarter of the way through the 21st century.

So tonight, instead of looking back at last year and ahead through the current year, let's think about the rest of the century and how we prepare for it.

As the CEO of the state, I am going to deliver what is, essentially, a quarterly report – outlining how we've reached key metrics over the past 25 years and what we must accomplish over the next 75 years for Kansas to prosper throughout the rest of the 21st century.

When I think back on the year 2000, it's hard to fathom just how much Kansas – and the nation and the world in which we live – has changed.

I wasn't in politics yet; I was across the street as the Executive Director of the Kansas Recreation and Park Association.

In 2000, except for Representatives Ballard and Helgeson and Senator Haley, none of us were here in this chamber.

In 2000, fewer than 5 percent of rural Americans had internet access. A gallon of gas cost \$1.50 and the average price of a dozen eggs was 91 cents.

There were no smartphones. Social media was still in its infancy. People actually talked to one another at the dinner table.

Our world has changed in colossal ways. Probably more than in any 25-year period in history.

Everything moves so quickly now. Maybe a little too quickly.

When I talk to Kansans – I hear two things that can be true at once.

First, Kansans are excited about the future. They really are – they see the new educational opportunities and the new innovative companies setting up shop here in Kansas – and they can see bright futures for themselves and for their children.

But I can also hear in people's voices that they're worried – worried that the traditions they grew up with, the way of life they cherish so much – could be slipping away.

I think we can all relate to that – nobody really wants a world where we speak more to computers and AI bots than we do to our neighbors.

Nobody wants a world where it seems like we're always at each other's throats.

And as I think about our state's future, I keep coming back to the same thought: how do we embrace change, how do we embrace opportunity, how do we embrace innovation, but do it the Kansas way?

Where we remain true to our Kansas core values: a place where 'the good life' means getting a great education, working hard, and doing right by our children, our grandchildren, and our neighbors.

Where our common decency always rises above our differences.

As the leaders of our state, we have a responsibility to set this tone – to show Kansans that we, too, have our eye on the future – that we intend to embrace it the

Kansas way. Starting right now.

First, let's talk about our very youngest Kansans.

Children born today will live to see the 22nd century.

How we invest in those children now will determine our state's trajectory for the rest of this century.

Research is clear that a child's experiences from birth to age five determine the trajectory of his or her entire life, from social/emotional development to academic achievement to career success.

We've done a lot on this front over the past few years. We've aggressively tackled our child care crisis, recognizing that shortages across the state and skyrocketing costs have handicapped our workforce, our businesses, and hurt our children during their most formative years.

Because of our investments and our work to lift up child care providers, today, more families can access affordable, quality early childhood education and care than ever before.

Even better – we are on track to add more child care capacity in the next two years than we have in the past 15. Families are still struggling with the cost of child care – but we are addressing this issue with the urgency it requires.

But all of this would be so much easier if we eliminated the red tape that makes it so difficult for so many families to access services – and for child care providers to even operate.

Right now, early childhood services are siloed in four different state agencies. If a family is searching for care for a newborn, that family must navigate among three different agencies to figure out which program is the right fit.

If a child care center wants to get off the ground, it must work with one state agency to get licensed, another to receive financial aid and workforce support, and a third to get assistance with start-up costs.

A system overloaded with bureaucracy might be manageable for some parents and for some providers – but it is a nightmare for most families who don't have the time or the resources to plow through the maze of unnecessary paperwork.

And they shouldn't have to.

Thankfully, there's a solution readily available: Let's put the functions of these agencies under one roof – the Office of Early Childhood.

Let's offer a one-stop-shop for young families, for child care providers, and for businesses to access early childhood services. Let's do what Missouri, North Dakota, and Arkansas have already done.

In Kansas, this concept already enjoys bipartisan support: over 700 child care providers, business leaders, and families have spoken out in favor of the one-stop-shop idea. Last session, it passed the House with 110 votes.

Eliminating unnecessary government bureaucracy, cutting red tape, and making it easier for parents and businesses to support our kids isn't a Democratic or a Republican idea – it's a commonsense idea we can all get behind.

So, let's get this done.

But early childhood is just the first step. If we're going to continue to attract new

businesses and young families – we must have strong public schools.

It's pretty straightforward: 90 percent of our students go to our public schools. Along with early childhood education and care, the smartest, most effective investment we can make in our next generation is through our public schools.

But even beyond the economic gains, when we talk about protecting the Kansas way of life – our public schools are the heart and soul of so many of our communities.

It's where we come together – particularly in our rural areas – for Friday night football and for school plays.

For carnivals and bake sales – it's where we gather to build strong communities.

So, for both the future we aspire to create and the values we aspire to maintain, we must continue to make our public schools our top priority.

That's why my budget proposal this year will again, for the seventh consecutive year, fully fund our public schools.

Prioritizing our public schools means investing in them. Protecting them. Always fighting to make them better. And never, ever taking taxpayer dollars from our public schools to give to private schools.

Doing so weakens our public school system, particularly in our rural communities. As a state, we just can't afford to do that.

So, simply put, I will continue to reject any attempt, no matter what it looks like, to re-route public taxpayer dollars to private schools.

So, now, back to the quarterly report.

In the last 25 years, high school graduation rates have increased by 11 percent – and today are at an all-time high.

Ten years ago, we were neglecting special education – ignoring state funding requirements and looking away as special education students didn't get the support they needed and are entitled to.

Last year, we invested \$75 million into special education, the largest single-year investment in state history, putting our state on track to fully fund special education by the 28-29 school year.

In 2000, only 59 percent of fourth graders were reading at a basic level. We've made modest progress. According to the most recent data, 63 percent of our students have now reached that level. That is not good enough.

In response, last year, Republican and Democratic leaders came together and passed the Blueprint for Literacy. This is an all-hands-on-deck approach to ensure our teachers have the training and the tools they need to bring 90 percent of our students to the reading benchmark by 2033.

The Blueprint for Literacy is an amazing example of what can happen when we think long-term and when we work together.

I'd like to recognize the two people who championed the Blueprint for Literacy effort – former state Senator Molly Baumgardner and Dr. Cynthia Lane, who actually stepped down from her position as a member of the Kansas Board of Regents to direct this new initiative.

Unfortunately, Senator Baumgardner was unable to join us tonight, but Dr. Cynthia Lane, would you please stand and be recognized?

Because we came together, because we funded our public schools, we've gotten ourselves back on track, finally ending decades of litigation and judicial oversight.

We should all take pride in this milestone but we should not take it for granted.

And this is where we talk about taxes.

We cannot risk our state's financial stability by implementing any semblance of the reckless tax experiment that devastated our schools a dozen years ago.

As Kansans know, I'm all for tax cuts. To date, I've already signed over \$2 billion in tax cuts – but going forward, I will not support any proposal that robs our schools of the funds they need to teach our children.

For instance, there was a proposal to slash the state corporate income tax to zero. That is a non-starter. We've seen that movie before. We know how it ends. We know what happened to our schools, to our roads, and to our reputation.

We must stay on the path to prosperity as we move through the rest of the 21st century.

With all that said, let me add a caveat: While I would prefer that we postpone discussions about taxes until next session, when we'll have a better handle on the full impact of the tax cuts we passed last year, I will consider proposals to modify our tax structure that pay for themselves and don't threaten our state's long-term financial health.

Speaking about long-term health issues – and, no, I am not going to talk about Medicaid Expansion, for now anyway... instead, I want to talk about childhood hunger.

Roughly 49 percent of Kansas kids live in low-income households. We know these kids cannot afford to pay for school lunches.

That's why my budget proposal this year will provide free school lunches to over 35,000 Kansas students, many of them in our rural areas.

When it comes to eliminating childhood hunger, we have advocates all over this state doing all they can to ensure our kids don't go to bed hungry and that they don't go to school hungry.

Let me introduce you to one of them.

Connie Vogts is the Director of Nutrition Services for USD 480 in Liberal. She is also the president of the Kansas School Nutrition Association. She knows firsthand how difficult it is for children to learn or even behave when they're hungry. Connie also knows how many hardworking families struggle to put food on the table.

Currently, 87 percent of students in USD 480 qualify for reduced or free lunch. That's the highest percentage anywhere in Kansas.

By eliminating this burden, we can reduce childhood hunger, we can reduce the stigma our low-income students face in our school cafeterias, and we can increase academic success.

In addition, we can streamline administrative nightmares for our school districts and for professionals like Connie.

Connie, thank you for what you do. Could you please stand and be recognized?

Let's do this for our children. Work with me to pass this budget and make sure no Kansas child goes hungry.

When I imagine the end of this century and the state our youngest Kansans will

inherit, I see so many good things on the horizon.

But there is one thing that is seriously concerning: our dwindling water supply. Forget making it 75 years down the road – some parts of western Kansas don't have the groundwater to last another 25 years.

And without that water, the agricultural industry that fuels our economy and sustains our rural way of life cannot survive.

No one knows that better than Joe Ferguson. Joe is a soldier in the Kansas Army National Guard and a senior studying sustainable agriculture at Fort Hays State University.

After Joe graduates, he will return to Kensington, Kansas, as the fourth generation in his family to work their wheat, corn, and hay fields.

Even though he's only 23, Joe is already thinking about succession plans for his farm. What will he leave for that next generation? Will there be anything left for the next generation?

Joe's generation of family farmers are depending upon our generation of state leaders to secure the water supply.

Farmers like Joe are the backbone of our state – and the tradition of family farming is core to who we are. We owe it to Joe and other young farmers across the state and those who come after – to act now – before it's too late.

Joe, will you please stand and be recognized?

I'm so grateful to those of you in the legislature and beyond who have been working with me to change decades of inaction on our water supply. The Kansas Water Authority has gone all over the state, listening to farmers, crop insurers, feedlot owners, and bankers – over 1,500 stakeholders.

As a result, we've set a goal: From now on, each generation will work to protect our water supply for the next two generations that follow. We're calling it the multigenerational promise.

It may look different in different areas of the state, but the fundamentals are the same: stabilize the Ogallala Aquifer, maximize the capacity of our reservoirs, and ensure all Kansans have access to clean, sustainable water.

That requires us to attack this issue on two fronts:

First, we have to develop a better water management system.

Right now, water faces many of the same issues I described with early childhood: it's managed by 14 different agencies, making it very difficult, if not impossible, to align efforts around policy, planning, and investment.

If this is going to work, that's got to change – let's create an Office of Natural Resources.

Let's streamline our systems to make our work so much more efficient and effective.

Second, to deliver on that multigenerational promise, we need to invest more resources.

Last year, the legislature came together and provided \$35 million additional dollars every year for the next five years.

In my budget tomorrow, I will propose another additional \$30 million above what the legislature added two years ago to safeguard our water supply – bringing our overall

investment to \$90 million every single year.

In addition to enhanced resources, it is imperative that we develop a comprehensive, long-term, and sustainable strategy to ensure that Kansans have the water supply they need to exist, much less to thrive, for generations to come.

Over three and a half decades ago, the Kansas Legislature understood that to create a transportation system that would effectively serve our citizens, support commerce, and ensure public safety, we needed to have a strategic plan that included a dedicated funding source. And thus, the legislature created the first of now four comprehensive transportation plans.

That innovative, visionary thinking is exactly what Kansas needs now to ensure that people like Joe, his children, his grandchildren have the water needed to farm their land, preserve their communities and their way of life.

No doubt this is a tough task. Perhaps even more challenging than the one faced by the legislative task force that overhauled our transportation plan in 2018.

But it is one to which my office and so many of you are deeply committed.

We have already invested substantial resources in time, money, and political capital. We stand ready to support the legislature's efforts in any way we can to solve our state's most pressing problem.

If I'm presenting the Kansas quarterly report, I think it's fair to say that the first quarter brought us our share of challenges. In the last 25 years, Kansas has endured two historic recessions, a devastating tax experiment, a once-in-a-century pandemic, and then, global inflation. At times, we were dangerously close to collapse.

Given all that, it's amazing how we've brought our state back from the brink.

Since I've come into office, we have brought over \$20 billion in new business investment to every corner of the state, created and retained more than 70,000 jobs, created the largest budget surplus and the largest rainy day fund Kansas has ever seen, and did it all while cutting taxes for veterans, for seniors, for homeowners, for businesses, and for our farmers and ranchers.

Long gone are the days of Kansas making headlines for failure and mismanagement. Now, we're attracting companies bringing in \$4 billion and 4,000 jobs to De Soto, nearly \$2 billion and 2,000 jobs to Wichita, and over \$1 billion and 1,000 jobs to Dodge City.

We're winning award after award for economic development – just stop by David Toland's office sometime. There's barely space for all the trophies.

Now, I would like to introduce you to the Segraves family.

Two years ago, Mike Segraves, his wife Cassie, and their two children, Landon and Layne, moved to Independence, Kansas, from North Carolina.

Since then, they have welcomed their third child, Leigh, who was born in 2023 and thus is a Kansas native.

Mike is the Associate Vice President of Soy Processing for Bartlett Grain in Cherryvale, while Cassie works as a therapist providing much-needed mental health services for people in the community.

Their two older children are enrolled in public school at USD 446 in Independence, and their youngest just started daycare. Mike and Cassie have even formed a little league baseball team so Landon can continue to play his favorite sport.

They have been warmly welcomed by the community, and they are making significant contributions through Mike's work at Barlett Grain and Cassie's work in mental health.

Over the course of my administration, we have created a modern economy that's attracting cutting-edge companies and families like the Segraves.

Segraves family, please stand and be recognized.

You know, when you are able to recruit from Tarheel and Blue Devil country to Jayhawk and Wildcat country – I can't tell you how satisfying that is.

And when it comes to making Kansas a place more families want to call home, trust that I continue to be laser-focused.

We must keep supporting our home-grown businesses while working around the clock to bring new, innovative companies to Kansas – they're not just job creators, they're career creators.

And these are careers not just for people with four-year degrees.

I want a future where our economy is fueled by people in every corner of our state – where there are educational opportunities, be it an apprenticeship, an internship, a certificate, a two or four-year degree.

No matter where you're from or where you live – our cities, our suburbs, our rural communities – you need a career for which you are prepared, on which you can support a family, and for which you are passionate.

Let's agree right here, right now, that Kansas must continue to aggressively pursue innovative business opportunities, both domestic and overseas.

Speaking of opportunities, here's another idea: Medicaid expansion.

Now, I've proposed this the last six years, and I will propose it again this year.

Let's be honest: the only reason we haven't expanded Medicaid is partisan politics.

Over the past six years, all the horror myths around Medicaid expansion have been debunked, and all of our surrounding states have expanded.

The one myth that continues to linger here in Kansas is that expansion is too expensive. That is patently false.

In fact, it actually costs us money not to expand Medicaid.

In 2022, the cost to Kansas taxpayers was \$68.5 million. In 2023, \$71.5 million. In 2024, \$61.8 million.

And if we don't expand Medicaid this year, 2025, it will cost Kansas taxpayers another \$78.3 million.

In total we've wasted over \$280 million Kansas taxpayer dollars holding on to an ideological falsehood.

Imagine the property tax relief we could have given Kansans.

And that doesn't count the \$7.6 billion in Kansas taxpayer dollars that has been left on the table in Washington, D.C.

Imagine any CEO of any business rejecting nearly \$700 million every year just to score a political point.

It just wouldn't happen in the real world.

If we can strip away partisan politics and just look at the numbers, we will expand Medicaid this year.

I'll end on this tonight: So often, it's easy to get lost in the day-to-day rough and tumble around here. How do we score points on him? How do we out-maneuver her?

It's easy to forget that we aren't playing some kind of game here. We have real power. The decisions we make in this building touch every aspect of the lives of the people we work for.

And here's the truth – the Kansas our grandkids will inherit is up to us right now.

Is our agricultural economy booming because we preserved our water for farmers like Joe, or is rural Kansas dried up and deserted? That's up to us.

Are we turning out the best and brightest workers because we have made it a priority to ensure Kansas has superior public schools? That's up to us.

Is Kansas going to be an economic powerhouse in the center of our country – where young families, like the Segraves, move to build a life? That's up to us.

Will Kansas be a place where we hold on to the small-town traditions we cherish while also embracing the future with a sense of optimism and energy? That's up to us.

It only happens if we put partisanship aside and put Kansas and Kansans first.

The only way we'll move forward on any of the challenges facing us is if we recognize that both parties have brought good, commonsense ideas to the table. And, both parties have also brought some pretty wacky ideas to the table.

Our job is to lift up the commonsense, smart, reasonable ideas that will help Kansans – and then meet in the middle to get them done.

I'm not asking you not to love your political party – I'm just asking you to love your state a little more.

That's the only way we build that future we all want for Kansas.

Ad Astra Per Aspera. Thank you, and good night.

On motion on Rep. Croft, the House adjourned until 11:00 a.m., Thursday, January 16, 2025.

JENNY HAUGH, JULIA WERNER, *Journal Clerks.*

SUSAN W. KANNARR, *Chief Clerk.*

