

# Journal of the House

## SECOND DAY

---

HALL OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
TOPEKA, KS, Tuesday, January 13, 2026, 11:00 a.m.

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

The roll was called with 121 members present.

Reps. L. Ruiz and Winn were excused on verified illness.

Reps. Poetter Parshall and Sawyer were excused on excused absence by the Speaker.

Present later: Rep. Sawyer.

Prayer by Chaplain Holmes:

Dear Father, Today will be a long and busy day for each of these Representatives. I pray Your strength would fill each with sustaining power and patience, as the day progresses. Help each keep the plan, purpose and direction set before them as Representatives of the good people of Kansas.

If occasions arise where they are not sure of the proper response to a given situation, give them clarity of mind and an insightful spirit.

Remind us, if You would O' God of the words found in the letter sent to the churches in Galatia, where we are told, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control; against such things there is no law." Allow us to live our lives, both privately and collectively, as we look to embody these words of wisdom.

Keep our desires of service pure and without question, as we seek to comport our duties with integrity and thoughtfulness. If we should meet difficulty in decision making, keep us true to our calling of service to all who have entrusted us to make good decisions.

I pray for the families, who tonight will find an empty place at the table, because the person they love are away serving others. Help each of these family members to know they are an important part of the process of making Kansas an even better place to live.

I now pray for Your wisdom to surround and guide these who have been

charged with the responsibility of representing those who otherwise would not have a voice in their destiny. Bless them, I pray,

In the Name of The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Rep. Anderson.

### **INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND CONCURRENT RESOLUTIONS**

The following bill was introduced and read by title:

**HB 2435**, AN ACT concerning utilities; relating to the state corporation commission; enacting the natural gas infrastructure availability act; authorizing natural gas public utilities to defer to a regulatory asset all depreciation expense and carrying cost for any new plant, facilities or equipment that such utility has put into service; establishing an interim rate adjustment mechanism and authorizing recovery of such regulatory asset through such mechanism, by Committee on Energy, Utilities and Telecommunications.

### **REFERENCE OF BILLS AND CONCURRENT RESOLUTIONS**

The following bill was referred to committee as indicated:

Appropriations: **HB 2434**.

### **COMMUNICATIONS FROM STATE OFFICERS**

From Alan D. Conroy, Executive Director, Kansas Public Employees Retirement System, Annual Report on Pensions, Investments and Benefits on specified actions taken by the System under the Kansas Countries of Concern and Divestment Act.

From Kris Kobach, Attorney General of Kansas, Abuse, Neglect & Exploitation Unit, Annual Report for Kansas Fiscal Year 2025.

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 **SR 1721**, a resolution relating to the organization of the 2026 Senate and the selection of the following officers:

Ty Masterson, President,  
 Tim Shallenburger, Vice President,  
 Chase Blasi, Majority Leader,  
 Dinah Sykes, Minority Leader,  
 Corey Carnahan, Secretary,  
 Don Cackler, Sergeant-at-Arms,  
 and awaits the pleasure of the House of Representatives.

---

The Senate not adopts the Conference Committee report on **SB 30**, requests a conference and appoints Senators Alley, Owens and Faust Goudeau as Second conferees on the part of the Senate.

---

The Senate accedes to the request of the House for a conference on **HB 2347** and has appointed Senators Warren, Titus and Corson as Second conferees on the part of the Senate.

Announcing adoption of **HCR 5019**.

Announcing adoption of **HCR 5020**, a concurrent resolution providing for a joint session of the Senate and House of Representatives for the purpose of hearing messages from the Governor and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

The following escorts are appointed:

For the State of the State

To escort the Governor: Senators Gossage and Faust Goudeau

To escort the Lt. Governor: Senators Klemp and Francisco

To escort the Supreme Court: Warren and Corson

For the State of the Judiciary

To escort the Supreme Court: Warren and Haley

#### **INTRODUCTION OF ORIGINAL MOTIONS**

On motion of Rep. Croft, the House acceded to the request of the Senate for a conference on **SB 30**.

Speaker Hawkins thereupon appointed Reps. Tarwater, Turk and Sawyer Clayton as second conferees on the part of the House.

#### **CHANGE OF REFERENCE**

Speaker Hawkins announced the withdrawal of **HB 2433** from Committee on Water and referral to Committee on Local Government.

#### **COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENT CHANGES**

Speaker Hawkins announced the appointment of Rep. Featherston to replace Rep. Winn on Committee on K-12 Education Budget on, January 13, 2026.

Also, the appointment of Rep. S. Ruiz to replace Rep. Winn on Committee on Financial Institutions and Pensions on January 14, 2026.

Also, the appointment of Rep. Ballard to replace Rep. Winn on Committee on Education on January 14, 2026.

Also, the appointment of Rep. Haskins to replace Rep. Winn on Committee on K-12 Education Budget on January 14, 2026.

Also, the appointment of Rep. Ballard to replace Rep. Winn on Committee on Education on January 15, 2026.

Also, the appointment of Rep. Wikle to replace Rep. Winn on the Committee on K-12 Education Budget on January 15, 2026.

Also, the appointment of Rep. Xu to replace Rep. Alcalá on Committee on Appropriations on January 15, 2026.

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 5020** to meet in joint session with the Senate to hear the message of the State of the Judiciary, Reps. Humphries, Lewis and Brownlee Paige escorted members of the Supreme Court to seats in the House.

Reps. Bryce, L. Williams and Melton escorted members of the Senate to seats in the House.

**STATE OF JUDICIARY ADDRESS**

**Tuesday, January 13, 2026**

**Chief Justice Eric S. Rosen**

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.

This is the first time I've had the honor of speaking in this chamber and addressing a large and distinguished group of elected individuals who share a common interest – serving our fellow Kansans.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize my colleagues on the Supreme Court, Chief Judge Sarah Warner and members of the Court of Appeals. Thank you for being here today.

Though I have worked alongside many of you in the past, I want to formally introduce myself and share with you how I came to be standing before you today.

My name is Eric Rosen, and I have been a member of the Kansas Supreme Court since 2005. Following Justice Luckert's recent announcement that she would be stepping down as Chief Justice and retiring from the Court, I was appointed to fill that role – in accordance with the provisions outlined in the Kansas Constitution that the responsibility goes to the next most senior justice on the bench.

I am especially grateful to be joined today by my wife, Libby, with whom I have shared 52 wonderful years of marriage. Her support, wisdom, and commitment to our community have been a constant source of strength throughout my career. We are also joined by some of our children and grandchildren, whose presence reminds me every day why the work we do in public service and the policies you consider and adopt in this chamber matter so deeply.

Family, community, and service have shaped every chapter of my life, and they are at the heart of the remarks I will share with you today.

Some of you know that before law school, before opening a legal practice, and

before becoming a judge, my career began in education and social work. Then, as now, my passion has been public service and building meaningful relationships.

I am a Topeka native, educated in Topeka public schools, and a proud graduate of Topeka West High School class of 1971 and honorary graduate of Topeka High School. I also graduated from two Kansas colleges -- the University of Kansas and Washburn University School of Law.

I was born here after my parents moved to Kansas, when my father began post graduate training and his life's work at the world-renowned Menninger Clinic. That move shaped our family's story and my own. It's also how I met my wife. Her parents also moved to Topeka, and her father, Stuart Averill, like mine, trained and worked at Menninger and also served as clinical director at the Boys Industrial School.

At that time and for decades afterward, people from across the nation and around the world came to Topeka to train, to work, and to seek care at the Menninger Clinic. Growing up within the Menninger community fostered a distinct spirit: an unparalleled cultural and ethnic mix that is difficult to describe unless you lived it.

Menninger revolutionized mental health care. Its integrated, multidisciplinary model treated the whole person – not merely a diagnosis – and helped countless individuals achieve lasting recovery and success. Just as importantly, Menninger ignited broader conversations about systemic change, reshaping how society understands and responds to mental illness.

With us today is Dr. Walter Menninger, the last surviving member of the generation of Menningers whose vision and leadership helped define psychiatry and mental health treatment in the twentieth century.

What we came to understand then and what we know even more clearly today is this: without addressing underlying issues and providing individualized support, lasting change is unlikely.

In 2022, the judicial branch, the legislature, and the executive branch came together to host a mental health summit that served as a catalyst for us to break out of our silos and bring together the courts, law enforcement, mental health providers, and the community to improve how we respond to mental health issues. Following that summit, former Chief Justice Luckert signed an administrative order for our judicial districts to develop multibranch communities of practice.

When we convened for the second statewide mental health summit this past year, 26 of 31 judicial districts had established a community of practice or were in the process of putting one in place.

The 2025 summit, held at Fort Hays State University, brought together nearly 500 professionals from different disciplines. We once again saw the power of coming together to learn from one another and identify solutions to help those adults and children struggling with behavioral and mental health challenges. These professionals are on the front line working with members of our communities who are trying to access services. The summit combined national and local speakers who educated and informed participants on how each system partner can contribute to the common vision of improving court and community response to mental health issues.

As a district court judge for over twelve years, I saw firsthand how overwhelming it can be to navigate the justice system. I became acutely aware of how individuals with mental health challenges and substance use disorders enter and, too often, cycle through our courts. Recent data reaffirms this reality: young women with mental health

issues are significantly more likely to be arrested, while young men who are arrested are more likely to struggle with substance use disorders.

In response, Kansas has taken meaningful steps forward through interagency collaboration. We have implemented specialty courts, including drug treatment, veterans, and most recently, family treatment courts. The judicial branch has championed these problem-solving courts to address cases where mental illness or substance use disorders are an underlying cause of criminal behavior.

Specialty courts focus on accountability paired with treatment, supervision, and support. They aim to address the root causes of crime, not just its consequences. These courts are designed to break cycles—guiding people out of repeated contact with the justice system and into treatment, stability, and recovery.

The results are clear: individuals who graduate from specialty court programs are more likely to live stable, productive lives and are less likely to return to court. That is the power of treating the whole person, and it is the kind of justice system our communities deserve.

The judicial branch appreciates the legislature's action last year to provide state general fund dollars for specialty courts. Funding for these courts has historically come from multiple sources including state agencies, local partners and federal grants. While these investments have been instrumental in establishing courts in some areas, they are neither stable nor sustainable as demand grows. As grant funding becomes more competitive, or in some cases is eliminated, opportunities to expand specialty courts into new areas are limited. The legislature's investment allows for better coordination of services, additional data collection, program improvement, accountability and expansion of programs.

The Specialty Court Funding Advisory Committee, which includes four legislators, is recommending an appropriation of \$1.5 million in FY 2027 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 discuss how they offer a powerful return on investment for Kansas.

As I reflect on initiatives like specialty courts and the mental health summit, I continue to believe that Kansans are best served when our branches of government work collaboratively. As we consider the work that lies ahead, it is no surprise that the judicial branch is especially concerned about the growing attorney shortage and its impact on all communities – but most especially our rural communities.

In 2022, the Supreme Court convened the Rural Justice Initiative Committee to gather data and make recommendations about how to respond to the attorney shortage. The committee, led by my colleague Justice K.J. Wall, included 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 released its report and recommendations in December 2024.

The ten recommendations identified by the committee include both legislative and non legislative strategies for addressing this issue. I am pleased to report that we have made progress on many of the recommendations this past year. Recently, I signed an administrative order establishing a permanent Rural Justice Initiative Committee charged with monitoring this issue, implementing recommendations and evaluating their success.

Because so many of our rural attorneys are in solo practice, the committee heard

from law students and lawyers about being unprepared to set up and run a small firm. The University of Kansas and Washburn University law schools have taken steps to address this concern by developing a rural curriculum that prepares students practicing in rural areas to manage the business aspects of running a law firm.

At the same time, law schools and professional organizations are working to create professional networks to better support those practicing in more isolated areas.

During the 2025 legislative session, this body held hearings on legislation that would establish two programs – a rural attorney training program and a tuition reimbursement program for those who attend a Kansas law school and ultimately live and practice in rural Kansas. These programs were modeled after other initiatives in Kansas that seek to address similar challenges – most notably involving physicians and veterinarians. That legislation remains alive for your consideration this year and our budget request includes funding to get these programs started. The judicial branch asks, in the continued spirit of working together for Kansans, that the legislature advance SB 214.

I want to be clear about the challenges that lie ahead if we don't act. Accessing the court system will become more difficult for Kansas businesses and Kansans seeking remedies in criminal and civil matters. We currently have counties in Kansas with no attorneys. And, in other counties, attorneys are serving as city or county attorneys, prosecutors or judges – meaning they are not taking on any additional casework.

There is also the public safety impact of the attorney shortage: increased caseloads for guardians ad litem, lack of access to legal representation in child in need of care (or CINC) cases, domestic matters, criminal prosecution and defense, and the risk of being unable to continue the important work we have committed to do with specialty courts. Regardless of the legal question, our system calls for a fair and efficient process for all matters coming before the court.

Our urban and suburban communities are beginning to feel the impact of the attorney shortage as those lawyers take on cases in our rural communities, stretching themselves to reach all four corners of the state. This “stretch” is not just inconvenient – travel time means less time with clients, the challenge of scheduling hearings across multiple districts and, ultimately, a more expensive process overall. Remote hearings can provide some relief but cannot and should not be used for all types of legal proceedings.

Courts can and are doing many things, including working to simplify procedures without sacrificing due process. But 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, and for many individuals hiring an attorney is simply not possible.

To help respond to those challenges, this year, the judicial branch launched the Kansas Online Self-Help Center. This site includes links to pay fines online, court forms and topical information, district court contact information, where to find in-person self-help centers, hearing schedules, and other resources. While not a substitute for having legal representation, these resources can help individuals become more familiar with court processes and complete the necessary paperwork for filings. The portal has quickly become one of the most accessed resources available to Kansans through the judicial branch's website and we have delivered – to each of your offices – cards for your constituents to take with them when they visit you here. Those cards have information about how to access this service.

All this work aligns with the mission, vision and priorities set forth in our most

recently adopted strategic plan. Several years ago, with assistance from the National Center for State Courts, Chief Justice Luckert directed the judicial branch to develop a new strategic plan to guide the branch as it entered a new phase—particularly during the rollout of the statewide case management system.

In 2025, we convened a diverse group of judicial branch employees from across Kansas to develop an updated strategic plan. Working again with the National Center, the committee engaged in in-person meetings and online discussions, reviewed extensive survey data, and ultimately crafted a new mission and vision that reflects both where the branch is today and where we are headed.

The judicial branch's priorities moving forward are: enhance access to justice for court users; build public trust, confidence, and understanding; improve court operations and efficiencies; and foster a strong workforce.

The core values that I embraced in those early years of my training and professional experience – serving others, focusing on shared interests, working collaboratively to identify solutions and effect positive change, and acting with integrity – continue to guide my work today and I believe they are values that everyone in this chamber shares. Finally, I would like to take a moment of personal and professional privilege to recognize Justice Marla Luckert for her outstanding leadership and service as chief justice over the past five years. Justice Luckert and I have traveled parallel paths for much of our legal careers. We were appointed as Shawnee County district court judges within a year of each other in the early 1990s, and after her appointment to the Supreme Court in 2003, I joined her there in 2005. Together, we have served side by side for more than three decades.

Under her steady leadership, the judicial branch navigated some of the most significant challenges we ever faced with unflappable grace. She strengthened our court system, making it more resilient, more effective, and better prepared for the future. Equally important, she fostered strong relationships within the judicial branch and with our partners in the executive and legislative branches.

She will be deeply missed by all of us, and especially by me as a colleague and a confidant. While her tenure as chief justice has come to a close, she will always remain a trusted and close personal friend.

To all in the chamber, thank you – for your service, your leadership, and your dedication to the great state of Kansas. To all judicial branch employees and judges, we appreciate you and could not do this work without you.

Together we are making great strides improving and strengthening our courts and serving our communities. But much work remains to be done. The judicial branch stands ready to work with you to make sure that our court system is accessible and responsive to the needs of all Kansans.

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 5020** to meet in joint session with the Senate to hear the message of the Governor, Reps. Buehler, Stiens and Ohaebosim, escorted the Governor to a seat in the House.

Reps. Esau, Sweely and Wikle escorted the Lt. Governor to a seat in the House.

Reps. Caiharr, McNorton and Carmichael escorted members of the Supreme Court to seats in the House.

Reps. Goetz, Kessler and Sawyer escorted members of the Senate to seats in the House.

**2026 State of the State Address  
Governor Laura Kelly  
January 13, 2026**

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

Before I begin, I would like to recognize a special guest with us this evening– I believe many in this chamber know him, as he has been a tireless advocate for deeper economic and cultural ties between Kansas and Ireland, the land of my ancestors. Senator Mark Daly, please stand to be recognized. And as they say in the old country, *faillte!*

This is my first time standing before all of you since we announced some very exciting, historic, actually game-changing news for our state.

Our beloved Chiefs are coming home to Kansas.

Their world-class stadium, which opens five years from now, will make Kansas a sports and entertainment mecca. We'll compete to host Super Bowls, Final Fours, concerts, and so much more. Thousands of new jobs and billions in new economic activity.

And, as I said at the announcement, we're reminding the nation that we are not a flyover state, we are a touchdown state.

And we brought the Chiefs to our state without a tax increase on Kansans and without pulling a dollar from other priorities in the budget.

This is not only a massive win for Kansas. It's a win for the entire region. We were able to ensure that our kids, our grandkids, can carry on the tradition of roaring for the Chiefs just down the road.

I'm proud to welcome the local leaders who were instrumental in making this happen.

KCK Mayor and CEO of the Unified Government of Wyandotte County, Christal Watson, and Mayor of the City of Olathe, John Bacon. Please stand to be recognized.

And Mark Donovan is also in the gallery. Mark is the President of the Kansas City Chiefs and deserves much of the credit for getting this deal done. It is an honor to have you here with us tonight. Please give our regards to Clark and the entire Hunt family.

Ultimately, we were able to accomplish this amazing feat for two reasons.

First, we've made Kansas a place the Chiefs want to call home – with a strong economy, a strong workforce, strong communities, and – of course – an extraordinary fan base.

And second, because a bipartisan team of leaders in this chamber, along with the local officials we just recognized, and many members of my administration, worked together to make this happen.

Orchestrating these efforts was our own eco/devo wonder boy, the Lt. Governor of Kansas, David Toland.

David, please stand and take a bow for a job well done.

To land the Chiefs, we all put politics aside.

We all put personal differences aside. And we didn't care who got credit.

We did what was best for Kansas and for our shared future.

That's how you do big things.

That's the way it's supposed to work.

As you know, this is my final State of the State address. Hold your applause.

And as I reflect on my two terms as Governor, I think about three of the major challenges we faced.

First, we needed to stop the bleeding – because, when I took office, Kansas was in a world of hurt.

Our budget was pieced together with gimmicks and funny money.

Our schools were underfunded, and many had to resort to four-day school weeks. Our roads and bridges were crumbling and unsafe.

These problems had to be fixed.

Second, we needed to improve the quality of life for all Kansans.

We did that by cutting taxes, by creating thousands of good-paying jobs, and making our public schools not just functional – but exceptional.

And third, we needed to change people's perceptions of Kansas and become a place where young people are eager to put down roots, where businesses see opportunity, where tourists flock to visit, and a place where Kansans are proud to call home.

I know there is more to do.

But after 7 years, I also know that the state of our state has never been stronger.

And I know the state of our future has never been brighter.

Now, you all know me – I am an eternal optimist, but I am also solidly pragmatic.

So let me state the obvious – we live in extraordinarily challenging times.

And I don't just mean our politics.

If you think about the last decade in America, the speed of change we've endured is staggering.

We now live our lives attached to devices.

It's now how we do business, how we keep up with the news, how we talk to our coworkers and our friends, even our own grandchildren.

And in the midst of it all, we also survived a global pandemic, only to return to a world changing even faster – with remote work, AI bots, and cars that drive themselves.

Many of us wish we could go back to simpler times, but we know we can't.

We live in an era defined by disruption.

An era that requires more from our leaders than ever before.

Yet, right when Americans needed leaders they could look to for strength, for resolve, character, and a clear vision, they got the exact opposite at the national level.

From both parties.

Where it became acceptable for our nation's leaders to treat one another in the most uncivilized ways imaginable.

Language and behavior we'd never tolerate from our own children.

And instead of using this new technology to reach people with messages of unity and hope, these devices have been turned into weapons for elected leaders to ignite chaos, and anger, and even violence.

Instead of representing their communities, elected officials turned into foot soldiers for their political parties – firing off insults and vitriol to score likes or follows or wins for their team – instead of doing what's right for their constituents.

It's as if they checked their free will at the door and just did as they were told.

Treating their own colleagues in such angry and dehumanizing ways, just because they're in the other party.

And the most frightening part – it's now become the new normal.

An accepted part of political discourse.

Well, I reject it.

We must all reject it.

When I look at the successes we've had these last seven years, here's what they all have in common: they required elected officials from different parties, with different ideologies, from different parts of the state, to come together, meet in the middle, and find common ground to do what's best for Kansas.

There's a word for that.

It's called civility.

It's conducting ourselves with a sense of decency.

It's disagreeing on issues but doing so respectfully.

It's demonstrating the humility to know you're not always right.

Acknowledging that folks in the other party are also good Kansans, and that they might have good ideas, too.

It's being open to compromise, to building consensus.

And it's always being guided by the principle that if you simply treat people the way you want to be treated, anything's possible.

Since the beginning of my administration, by using this approach, we've been able to enact into law 587 bipartisan bills.

That's 587 times coming together, across the aisle – in today's politics.

That's something we should all be proud of.

And just look at what we've accomplished by doing that.

For seven straight years, we fully funded our public schools.

And we're seeing the benefits of that investment – graduation rates are now the highest they have ever been.

We established the Blueprint for Literacy to make sure all Kansas children are reading at or above grade level.

And, while the national discussion has only just recently turned to affordability, here in Kansas, we knew it was a top priority long before it became a political buzzword - just by talking to Kansans.

In response, to help Kansans deal with rising costs, we cut over \$1 billion per year in taxes.

We totally eliminated the sales tax on food, saving Kansas families \$500 a year.

That's huge - and we got it done together.

We cut taxes for seniors living on fixed incomes by completely eliminating the state income tax on Social Security.

We cut taxes for parents to make child care more affordable.

We cut taxes for farmers to lower input costs.

All of this is why, last year, CNBC named Kansas second in the country for cost of living.

There are two reasons we've been able to return so much money to taxpayers.

First, we've managed the budget responsibly – turning the deficits we inherited into surpluses.

Secondly, because we've grown our economy – increasing our annual revenues.

That's been driven by a sustained, historic stretch of economic wins.

I'm talking about:

- Urban Outfitters in Wyandotte County
- Amber Wave in Phillips County
- Bartlett Grain in Montgomery County
- Hilmar Cheese in Ford County
- Boeing in Sedgwick County
- Schwan's in Saline County
- And then of course, Panasonic and the Kansas City Chiefs.

In total, new businesses have invested over \$30 billion in Kansas.

That's 30 billion dollars.

And created over 80,000 new good-paying jobs.

These are careers that Kansans can build their lives around.

And it happened because we worked together.

And that's not all.

We also created the Office of Early Childhood.

We blended 20 programs into one so parents, providers, and businesses will have a single point of contact for everything they need to support our youngest Kansans.

We have developed partnerships with the private sector to exponentially expand access to quality early childhood experiences all across Kansas.

Right here in Topeka, the State of Kansas and Blue Cross Blue Shield will soon cut

the ribbon on a 160-slot child care facility just blocks away from the Capitol.

The Office of Early Childhood was a reform most of us agreed we needed – but we had different ideas how to get there.

So, we talked about it, we hammered out our differences, we compromised, and we got it done.

See, there it is again – civility in action.

Because we worked together, we also closed the Bank of KDOT once and for all.

And we've gone back to investing in our infrastructure the right way, the way we used to. Restoring Kansans' rightful pride in their highway system.

Together, we opened the Office of Rural Prosperity to put a focus on the unique economic needs of our rural areas.

We've invested millions in high-speed internet – connecting over 117,000 homes and businesses to this economic lifeline.

And together, we've provided record funding for law enforcement. And they've spent the money well.

Crime in Kansas is now at a 20-year low.

Everything I just talked about, we did it all while making sure our budgets were balanced. Every year.

We did it without a tax increase.

We paid down our debt.

Our credit rating is strong.

Our rainy-day fund stands at \$2 billion.

Together, we have returned fiscal sanity to Topeka.

Ultimately, we were able to get our state back on track because we showed that civility can still exist in our politics, that you can get a whole lot done when you work with others.

But we cannot take it for granted.

There are too many forces trying to push us all into our partisan corners and make the other party the enemy.

And, sadly, we have seen some examples where the ways of Washington have crept into our conduct here in Kansas.

Where the level of discourse in this building went places I know many of you weren't proud of or comfortable with.

We must have the courage to treat each other with respect, regardless of the intensity of debate and discourse.

We must have the courage to put what's right ahead of what's politically expedient.

We must have the courage to put compromise ahead of party purity.

This moment in our politics requires it.

And make no mistake, it's also what the people of Kansas want.

I stand before you as evidence of that.

I did not get elected Governor – twice – by screaming the loudest or bullying others to get my way.

Quite the opposite, I'm here because Kansans were looking for someone who would turn the volume down, to do more listening than yelling, to bring people together, to compromise, and govern from the middle.

Kansans are the most civil, decent people on earth.

They embody the spirit of neighbor helping neighbor.

And they expect that from us, too.

So, I say to everyone here – do not let the loudest voices, on either extreme, drown out the voices of the vast majority of Kansans, who want to see us work together.

It's been the right approach.

It's been an effective approach.

And it's what we need to do this legislative session to make it our strongest ever.

When it comes to this session, it won't surprise you that my priorities always start with our public schools.

Let's step back a moment and acknowledge this remarkable comeback story.

Just 10 years ago, in the aftermath of the disastrous tax experiment, we had many school districts in Kansas forced into 4-day school weeks.

Then, just as we finally restored full funding, Covid hit.

And educators and parents had to adjust to remote learning, which we all know was horrible for everyone, especially the students.

But our communities rallied.

Teachers went into overdrive.

Parents put in the extra time at home.

Kansans take so much pride in their public schools.

And together, we doubled down on our commitment to them.

Not only fully funding our schools, but record funding for our schools.

We all did our part – but it's our educators who are the real heroes here.

I'd like to speak about a special group of them for just a moment.

Joining us tonight are a group of educators from Topeka Public Schools.

They have the distinction, or perhaps, at the time, the burden of teaching my own daughters, Kathleen and Molly, well over 20 years ago.

Each made a lasting impression on both me and my daughters.

Like so many of our dedicated teachers, the work they do with their students extends far beyond the classroom walls – they build relationships, they mentor, they guide – in every sense of the word, they educate.

They're here tonight representing so many Kansas teachers who go above and beyond for our children and seldom get the recognition or gratitude they deserve.

So, please stand as I call your name:

- Marti Bass, Kathleen and Molly's kindergarten teacher at Potwin Elementary.
- Diane Kimsey, Kathleen's fourth grade teacher at Potwin Elementary.
- Kirsten Cigler, Kathleen and Molly's English teacher at Topeka High.
- Anton Ahrens, Molly's chemistry teacher at Topeka High.
- And Harry Peterson, Kathleen's gifted facilitator at Topeka High.

They're joined by Dr. Tiffany Anderson, Superintendent of Topeka Public Schools, who has transformed vocational and educational opportunities for students in Topeka, most notably by creating the Topeka Center for Advanced Learning and Careers.

Please give these educators and educators all across Kansas a huge round of grateful applause!

It speaks volumes that so many of us can think back decades and remember the teachers who touched our lives, and our children's lives.

I believe there's even more we must do to support them.

At the state level, we have.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about our federal partners. Once again, the federal government has dropped the ball on funding for special education.

When you think about what parents take on when they have a child with a disability, you realize just how unconscionable that is.

Now, Kansas has already stepped up and added over \$120 million for special education. We'll keep calling on Washington to cover its fair share, but until it does, my budget will continue to increase this investment.

We will never turn our backs on these children or their families.

We also know that tens of thousands of families in Kansas qualify for reduced-price school lunches – especially in some of our most rural areas.

And we know with grocery costs being what they are right now, that for many of these families, even that reduced cost is untenable.

So I am, again, including funding in my budget to allow students currently on reduced price meals to move entirely to free meals – to ease that stress on their families.

Let's make it clear: No child in Kansas should ever have to worry about having enough to eat.

Life is hard enough for our children these days.

And we need to face this fact: technology is making it much, much harder.

Smartphones and social media have exposed our children to a world they are not ready for, and to social pressures they don't need or deserve.

It's creating a mental health crisis and a learning crisis.

Talk to parents, these are the first concerns they raise - 9 times out of 10.

The research on this is now very clear.

Anxiety in our kids is up.

Depression is up.

And, tragically, even suicide is up.

Cell phones are making it much harder for our children to learn and for our teachers to teach.

We need to step up and do something about this.

This session, we must pass the bipartisan proposal to ban cell phone use during the school day.

I want to thank Majority Leader Chase Blasi and Minority Leader Dinah Sykes for their work on this critical issue.

Get that bill to my desk, and I will sign it into law.

We know that mental health challenges are not limited to our children.

It is a reality so many Kansans and their families face.

When I first took office, our mental health system in Kansas was seriously lacking. Our continuum of care – prevention, treatment, inpatient, post-discharge services – all had huge gaps, dangerous gaps.

We had no crisis hotline.

We had long waitlists for treatment.

We had a severe shortage of mental health professionals and services, particularly in our rural areas.

Fortunately, there were legislators on both sides of the aisle and leaders in our state agencies who recognized the danger and focused like a laser on solutions.

Now we have the Office of Early Childhood, which will ensure our youngest children get the start in life they need to become resilient, productive adults.

We were one of the first states in the country to implement the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic model, that will focus on the whole person approach.

We were one of the first states to operationalize the 988 Crisis Hotline, a vital link to lifesaving services.

We initiated and substantially increased mental health services in our schools, ensuring that our children have access to help where they need it, when they need it.

Soon, we will open a new state psychiatric hospital in South Central Kansas that will mitigate the wait lists at Osawatomie and Larned.

And now, when judges must incarcerate someone whose primary issue is substance abuse, they can be sent to the newly renovated East Campus at Lansing Correctional Facility, where they will live in a therapeutic environment designed to treat their addiction and prepare them for successful reentry to their community.

We have done a lot. We have filled many gaps.

But unfortunately, the needs of Kansans require that even more must be done.

We need more treatment beds.

We need more professionals.

We need more crisis response.

And my budget does just that.

Join me in making mental health a real priority this session.

When we announced the agreement with the Chiefs to move to Kansas, we showed Kansans – and the rest of America – that we are capable of coming together to do big things.

And that we're able to think long term.

Now, we must do that again.

We must do something that no legislature, no administration, has ever been able to accomplish, and that's to properly address our water crisis.

Last year, we took a critical step by establishing the Water Task Force, led by Representative Jim Minnix and Senator Kenny Titus.

Now, I'm calling on the legislature to support that task force in its work to lay out a comprehensive, long-term strategy and identify a dedicated funding source, much like we have successfully done for our highways.

I know it won't be easy.

I know it is a very sensitive political issue.

But the future of our entire state is dependent upon the actions we take today.

It will require looking beyond the next election and looking instead to the next generation.

And some day, when your great-grandchildren are looking at the family album, let it be said that when you were in the legislature, and you had the chance, you did the right thing.

Water isn't a partisan issue. It's a Kansas issue. And it is a time-sensitive issue.

Let's treat it that way and make it a top priority this session.

When you think back on this journey we've been on together, it's quite remarkable – the turnaround Kansas has made.

Ten years ago, Kansas was generating national headlines like:

“What's the Matter with Kansas? It can't do math.”

Late night shows mocked Kansas, calling us a Laboratory of Fiscal Disaster.

But now, instead of being a national punch line, we're winning national awards for economic development, for modernizing our unemployment system, for our first-class roads.

And perhaps the greatest recognition of all, the Kansas City Chiefs, who have won three Super Bowls while I've been governor, something no other current governor can claim, they will literally move Kansas to the big leagues.

Big things are happening in our small state.

And there are more big things to come if we work together.

In my first State of the State in 2019, I encouraged us to consider a fairly profound question: what is Kansas worth?

What sacrifices are we willing to make for the state we love?

Were we willing to do the hard work, putting what's right for Kansas above what's

right for our political parties?

Tonight, I highlighted all of the successes we've had by doing just that.

But that spirit of civility must endure in the months ahead and years ahead, as the challenges we face will only get bigger.

We must live up to our state motto, Ad Astra Per Aspera, and show America that civility in our politics is still possible.

That civility is what brings us together.

And that civility is a winning formula.

For governing. And for life itself.

Thank you. Good night.

On motion of Rep. Croft, the House adjourned until 11:00 a.m., Wednesday, January 14, 2025.

JENNY HAUGH, JULIA WERNER, *Journal Clerks.*

SUSAN W. KANNARR, *Chief Clerk.*

