

Inaugural Address

January 9, 2023

Governor Laura Kelly Remarks As Prepared for Delivery

Hello, Kansas! I stand today humbled by the confidence that's been placed in me, once again, to serve this state and its people. Every single day in this job is an honor and an opportunity.

I can't help but think back to this day four years ago. The skies were gray and gloomy – and it felt as if Kansas had frozen over. A reflection of where we were as a state.

But today... four years later ... it's warm and sunny – and so is the future of Kansas.

Thank you to my family – my husband Ted Daughety, my daughters Molly and Kathleen, my son-in-law Mathias...and the newest addition to our family, my first grandchild, Laura Janeway Weiden, better known as “Rory.”

My family has been by my side, supporting me every step of the way for the past four years and long before that. There's no question: I would not be here without them.

I'd also like to thank Tabatha Rosproy for emceeding today. She is THE National Teacher of the Year. That's just about the highest honor one can achieve.

You earned it, Tabatha, because of your dedication to our children and the innovative approaches you take in educating them – I hope you also take pride in knowing that, though you are the first early childhood educator to achieve this honor, you represent all Kansas teachers.

To all the educators here and around the state, I want you to know that you have my unwavering respect and gratitude. You go above and beyond for our children *every day*, but especially these past few years.

The past few years have been unlike any others.

Just when we got our schools fully funded, our economy back on track, and the state's fiscal house in order ... The deadliest pandemic in a century came roaring in ... without warning or remorse.

But from a public health crisis, the likes of which we have never seen . . . rose a spirit of togetherness, the likes of which we've never seen.

Remember those early days ... let's put ourselves back there, for just a moment.

As our hospitals filled ... we saw heroes get up each day to serve their fellow Kansans, even when they didn't yet understand the risks to their own wellbeing.

From our health care workers...to our first responders...to the folks at our meat packing plants ... Kansans came through for one another.

Neighbors checked in on neighbors.

We felt a new appreciation for the people in our lives...whom we love and who love us.

For a brief moment, right at the beginning of the pandemic, politics was nowhere to be seen.

Its absence was a ray of light in an otherwise dark situation.

And filling the void left by a moment without partisanship – a basic sense of shared humanity.

There was the mother of three from Overland Park, who, after a year of battling cancer, had planned a celebration for her last day of chemotherapy.

Then COVID hit. She had to cancel that party to protect her health...but her friends surprised her with a parade of cars, horns, and signs, to welcome her home.

There was the owner of the Ladybird Diner in Lawrence, Meg Heriford, who worked day and night to provide 13,000 free meals to anyone in need - “no questions asked.”

And the public librarians all across the state who personally delivered books, internet hotspots, and laptops to homebound families.

Acts of kindness and of togetherness.

It is part of who we are. It's a part of who we've *always* been.

From the days of the Wyandotte Constitutional Convention of 1859, when Kansans from all walks of life gathered together and paved the way to women's suffrage ...

to the Kansas Freedman's Relief Association in the 19th Century, where everyday people came together to help the Exodusters flee the Ku Klux Klan and find freedom here in Kansas...

We see it during floods and tornadoes and wildfires, when Kansans open their hearts and their homes to neighbors in need.

Woven through all of these experiences are hope, optimism, perseverance, and resilience. They have defined the Kansas spirit, *Ad Astra per Aspera*, throughout the years.

But we see kindness and togetherness not just during times of crisis, but, every day, in every Kansas community.

Time and time again, in ways big and small, Kansans choose kindness ... cooperation ... and civility.

Those in leadership positions have a particular responsibility to follow Kansans' lead.

The times demand it.

We cannot let the hostility and anger that has poisoned our national politics spread here to Kansas.

A politics where disagreements turn into violence.

Where political points are scored by knocking someone else down, rather than lifting people up.

Where facts give way to baseless conspiracies.

Where loyalty to political party comes ahead of loyalty to the people we serve.

Where sowing distrust in our government and the media – and even in our public schools – is seen as a valid political strategy.

And when that happens at the national level, most Kansans - and most Americans - are left shaking their heads in disappointment and disgust.

Lamenting friendships they've lost because of politics...Family dinners that have turned sour long before the food arrives.

We should all agree ... now is the time to turn down the volume.

This hate, this vitriol, this divisiveness, it's *not* who we are as Kansans.

The people of Kansas are civil.

Its elected leaders must also be civil.

In the tone of our discourse.

And in the manner in which we govern.

It is civility that enables collaboration. And collaboration that enables compromise. And it's compromise that enables good policy. And good policy means better opportunities for Kansans.

We're often told that there's "a fork in the road" ... and you have to make a choice - you can either go right or you can go left.

I believe that is a false choice.

I believe the best choice is right down the middle of that road.

Because the middle of the road ... is where left and right come together; where well-intentioned people who hold different positions find common ground. Nobody gets everything they want, everyone gets something they want. And progress is made.

That is how life works.

It's how the government should work too.

It's been a successful formula for us here in Kansas.

Just look at the past four years.

We took innovative approaches to problem solving, repeatedly bringing leadership together to overcome our differences and hash out a consensus. It was critical to our state's success.

And look what we've accomplished.

We fully funded our schools – because it's the best possible investment we could make in our collective future.

We came together and provided tax relief for families, veterans, homeowners, farmers, and ranchers, at a time when inflation raged.

We fixed our roads and bridges, working with communities large and small to build the infrastructure that makes our state safer, stronger, and more vibrant.

We recruited businesses from around the world, including the largest economic development project in Kansas history.

That happened because Democrats and Republicans forged a deal ... Everyone recognized it would be a win for Kansas, even if neither party could take full credit.

We fully funded our State Water Plan for the first time in 15 years, taking the initial steps to secure a sustainable water supply for generations to come. And we took a deficit and turned it into the largest budget surplus in our state's history.

We got our state back on track – and we did it by working together, as One Kansas. Not Western or Eastern, not Democrat or Republican. One Kansas.

Now, we look to the future.

And it is a *very* bright one.

Later this week, I'll lay out a more detailed agenda in my State of the State address.

But our north star is this: to make Kansas the best place in America to raise a family.

Where you can see opportunity for yourself, for your children, and for your grandchildren.

Where we take pride in our strong public schools.

Where the world's most innovative businesses choose to locate.

And where the family farm still gets the respect, and the support, it deserves.

Where the goodness of Kansans extends to the halls of government.

We want families to choose Kansas as a place to lay down roots and to call home – just like my family did nearly 37 years ago.

Let us be guided by civility and kindness, even when we disagree. Perhaps, especially when we disagree.

And years from now, if we're remembered for one thing, let it be this ... at a time when national politics was defined by hostility and division ... here in Kansas, we chose civility and unity ... and the people we serve, and the state we love, are better off for it.

Thank you for placing your trust in me once again. It is truly the honor of a lifetime. Together, we will build on all we've accomplished in the past four years to achieve a brighter future for all Kansans.

God bless the people of our great State of Kansas.