

Team Kentucky: State shows a surplus

Team Kentucky

FRANKFORT — In his weekly update Thursday, Gov. Andy Beshear talked about the general fund surplus, severe weather recovery, funding for affordable housing and more Kentuckians attaining their GEDs.

The governor named Jimmy Alexander, Jessica Alexander, Taylor Hall and Adam Arnold good Samaritans who helped to save a Kentucky State Police officer's life, as this week's Team Kentucky All-Stars.

SURPLUS

The governor announced that fiscal year 2025 ended with a general fund surplus of approximately \$313.5 million.

Of that amount, \$251.3 million will be deposited into the Budget Reserve Trust Fund, and the remaining \$62.1 million will fund necessary government expenses, such as responding to natural disasters, matching funds for Federal Emergency Management

Agency disaster grants and forest fire suppression.

DEVELOPMENT

Beshear announced yet another innovative company will establish its New Kentucky Home as Meridian Biotech will open a new facility in Franklin County.

The project, part of a partnership with Buffalo Trace Distillery to convert distillery byproducts into multi-functional alternative proteins, includes a \$40 million investment and will create up to 35 high-tech, well-paying jobs.

The Governor announced further growth of the commonwealth's agricultural manufacturing industry as Alltech Crop Science will move ahead with an expansion of its operation in Jessamine County, a nearly \$4.6 million investment that will create six new jobs.

The expansion is partially funded by a \$2.34 million award from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Fertilizer Production Expansion Program.

Beshear highlighted new momentum within the state's manufacturing and metals industries as Alta Alloys LLC, a specialty processor of titanium, nickel alloys and other super alloys, will relocate its company headquarters and expand its operations with a new facility in Simpson County, a \$20 million investment expected to create 45 new, high-quality skilled manufacturing jobs.

WEATHER

Last Wednesday, Beshear announced that President Donald Trump approved Public Assistance for 64 counties affected by severe storms, straight-line winds, tornadoes, flooding, landslides and mudslides on April 2, and 36 counties affected by severe storms, straight-line winds and tornadoes on May 16 and 17.

Thursday, the governor announced that even more counties have been approved for Public Assistance.

Now, all counties Kentucky requested support for

have been granted Public Assistance: 90 for the April 2 event and 39 for the May 16-17 event.

Pendleton County has been approved for flood relief assistance but is not on the list for tornado assistance.

For the May 16-17 severe weather and tornadoes, the deadline to apply for Individual Assistance has been extended to Aug. 22.

Since the commonwealth received approval, FEMA has disbursed over \$2.8 million in assistance.

For the May event, 23 households are being housed in travel trailers at Levi Jackson Wilderness Road Park, seven households are being sheltered in hotels and 56 households have transitioned out of the Commonwealth Sheltering Program.

HOUSING

Beshear announced \$2.5 million in Community Development Block Grant awards to support affordable housing.

The city of Franklin is receiving \$1 million to support the construction of six new affordable rental homes.

This is part of the Franklin Affordable Housing organization's Dixon Grove development project, which will eventually build 69 rental homes.

The city of Newport will receive nearly \$1 million to build five affordable homes.

Pulaski County is receiving \$540,000 to assist the county in purchasing 86 affordable apartment units.

GED RATE

Beshear announced that, since waiving the GED fee in his first term, more Kentuckians without a high school diploma are earning their GED, with a success rate that surpasses the national rate.

TEAM KENTUCKY

The governor named Jimmy Alexander, Jessica Alexander, Taylor Hall and Adam Arnold good Samaritans who helped to save

a Kentucky State Police officer's life, as this week's Team Kentucky All-Stars.

On July 13, KSP Trooper Jude Remilien was shot in the leg outside the Blue Grass Airport while protecting the Lexington community.

Jimmy, Jessica, Taylor and Adam, an airport police officer, worked together to apply pressure and a tourniquet to Trooper Remilien's leg and used Trooper Remilien's radio to call for help.

In addition to naming them this week's Team Kentucky All-Stars, Beshear commissioned each of these good Samaritans a Kentucky Colonel.

"Thank you all. Working together, you saved a life.

"You jumped into action without a second thought, and you showed the world the best of Kentucky," Beshear said.

"Your actions remind us of the good in this world. You are truly what makes Team Kentucky so special," he said.

Task force gains overview of energy assistance program

Capitol Update

FRANKFORT — Legislators on the Interim Joint Committee on Natural Resources and Energy heard Thursday from two stakeholders involved with a long-time program that helps Kentuckians stay warm in the winter, cool in the summer and manage energy costs year-round.

Shannon Hall, executive adviser for the Kentucky Department for Community Based Services, and Rick Baker, executive director of Community Action Kentucky Inc., testified about the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and a related federal grant.

"LIHEAP is 100% federally funded. It's a block

grant that comes through the department and then is used as a pass-through to Kentucky Community Action," Hall said.

Hall and Baker said LIHEAP was established in 1982 during the Reagan administration, and it helps residents manage high energy costs, reduces service disconnects, reduces the need for assistance through weatherization and promotes responsibility. Payments are made directly to vendors and utility providers.

Baker said 23 agencies subcontract with Community Action, which has administered the program since the 1980s.

The agencies help ensure local interest and coordination of local services, he

said.

"The largest benefit we have is we have a physical presence. We're the only community-based organization that has a physical presence in all 120 counties of the commonwealth," he said.

Committee Co-Chair Sen. Brandon Smith, R-Hazard, said the program has been vital, "as we continue to mop up the war on coal in our area."

"These programs have been so critical in saving the few families that we can from literally collapsing," he said.

Smith said LIHEAP has been effective for people who needed kerosene to survive. And as fuel rates have gone up, the program has been a godsend for

more and more people.

"I can't say that about all the programs, but this has been a remarkable one," he said.

Rep. Bobby McCool, R-Van Lear, said he has watched work being done for LIHEAP participants, and weatherization is hard work.

"You go on some of these trailers or buildings, and there's no room. And it's rocky. It's muddy. It's all these things. It makes it very difficult," he said.

He asked how return on investment is being measured.

Baker said initially there's a model that's used and a machine is set up to measure the air infiltration before work begins on a home.

"Every measure that they do, every measure like caulking or insulation, every measure has to show a return on investment greater than what the cost of those materials are. So, you're saving energy costs long-term in those homes," he said.

Sen. Keturah Herron, D-Louisville, asked about a breakdown of renters and homeowners participating in the program.

Baker said he didn't have the information with him, but that type of data is tracked and he will obtain it for Herron.

She asked about any potential funding cuts and what the legislature should be looking for or considering in the future budget session.

Hall responded that federal legislation, known as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, did not take any action against LIHEAP, and the next potential hurdle would be the federal appropriations bill expected this fall.

"It could be a topic of funding at that point. I think until we get there, we won't know," he said.

Committee Co-Chair Rep. Jim Gooch Jr., R-Providence, said he has supported the program for years.

"I want to echo the comments that Senator Smith made. I've worked many years with your folks, and you do a great job helping a lot of folks who really are in dire need, especially in this program," he said.

Committee examines potential changes to eminent domain law

Capitol Update

FRANKFORT — Two Kentucky lawmakers are looking to reform Kentucky's eminent domain law.

Rep. Ryan Bivens, R-Hodgenville, and Rep. T.J. Roberts, R-Burlington, were joined by two constituents to talk about eminent domain law on Thursday during the Interim Joint Committee on Judiciary meeting.

Bivens and Roberts both sponsored eminent domain legislation — House Bill 630 and House Bill 353 — earlier this year.

Neither of the bills became law.

Under HB 630, Bivens said he sought to better protect land that is subject to an agricultural conservation easement while adding more transparency to the eminent domain process.

"We've got to start looking at agriculture, not as an

open piece of ground that we can put a black top of concrete over it," Bivens said.

"We've got to think about what it does for the economy."

Rebecca Steele, a farmer from Bourbon County, said eminent domain has caused her family financial trouble, and even the threat of eminent domain can be costly due to the lack of transparency.

Steele said her mother invested more than \$400,000 in a dam on their property while also planning to use part of their farm as a wedding venue.

"When we caught wind of the threat of eminent domain, she completely stopped spending because any improvements (made to the property), we were not going to receive the value of that," Steele said.

"We need more transparency as to what was going on. We needed to know

if we were going to be compensated, that it was going to be fair and enough, because you can't just pick up your farm and move."

Bivens' bill also proposed changes to the fair market valuation process while additionally seeking to ensure owners of land used for agricultural or conservation purposes receive 125% of the highest appraised value of the property.

Roberts, who sponsored HB 353, said his ideas for improving the eminent domain process go well with Bivens' proposals.

Roberts told the committee he believes eminent domain has been "vastly abused" throughout the U.S., especially when it comes to the government seizing property for private use instead of public use.

Roberts said since the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of that practice, states, including Kentucky,

have made efforts to add protections for property owners.

"Here in Kentucky our efforts, unfortunately, did not go far enough," Roberts said. "We still have requirements that allow individuals to have their property taken and be given to other private entities."

Roberts said his legislation would have banned the use of eminent domain for private use. He also proposed property owners be given proper notice and adequate time to fix a blighted property. HB 353 would have also established a public hearing process for eminent domain.

"What we have to do is ensure that eminent domain is truly a last resort as is intended under our current statutory scheme," Roberts said.

Rep. Nima Kulkarni, D-Louisville, said she agrees with Roberts' ideas "conceptually," but has

questions about the details.

"Is this a model bill? Is this something that has been implemented in other states?" Kulkarni asked.

"The reason I asked that is because Kentucky is unique. Is there some way to tailor it more to the needs that we have specifically?"

Roberts said his bill was a variation on other legislation from other states.

"I did tailor it a little bit," he said. "I'm open to amendments to make sure that it's more of a Kentucky-centric model that adequately protects Kentucky property owners, of course."

Rep. Wade Williams, R-Earlinton, said he is "appalled" the government can take land for economic development. He said, as someone who works in economic development, he approaches property owners and seeks to compensate them appropriately if a deal

is made.

In relation to seizing property for public use, like utilities, Williams asked how the proposed legislation would impact critical infrastructure needs.

Bivens said better communication is needed to make the eminent domain process less burdensome for property owners while still meeting the needs of their communities. One example he shared is asking a utility company to wait to install powerlines until after the growing season to avoid harming crops.

"We don't think about what impacts we leave behind, what those unintended consequences were," Bivens said.

Lawmakers cannot take action on legislation until the 2026 legislative session begins on Jan. 6.

The next Interim Joint Committee on Judiciary meeting is scheduled to meet on Aug. 29 at 11 a.m.

Kentucky Environmental Education Council is seeking teachers for coming year

FRANKFORT — The Kentucky Environmental Education Council is encouraging people who want to kick-start their careers as an educator to apply with the Environmental Education Leadership Corps.

Selected individuals can get training, experience, a living allowance and other benefits starting as early as Sept. 1 at one of 11 sites in Kentucky.

EELCorps is an environmental education AmeriCorps program in Kentucky that recruits members to work for one

or two years at host sites across the state such as nature centers, conservation districts, public schools and solid waste programs. KEEC administers the program, which began in 2018.

Since then, EELCorps has had a total of 42 host sites and 147 member positions.

Applications for full- and part-time members will be accepted on a rolling basis until all 14 positions are filled. Priority will be given to applications submitted by July 31.

"As an education-first administration, we are encouraging Kentuckians to apply for this unique educator experience to teach communities about how to take care of our environment and solve current environmental challenges with a goal of maintaining a balance between sustainability and a thriving economy," said Gov. Andy Beshear.

The main goal of EELCorps is to help Kentucky learners build connections with the environment through education. Mem-

bers have the opportunity to teach environmental education lessons to youths and adults, lead or support outdoor learning and field trips, organize or support events and community programs, and create lesson plans and outreach materials.

"EELCorps gives members a chance to strengthen their connection to nature and build awareness in their community, all while getting the training and network to turn their service into a career" said Wesley Bullock, executive

director of KEEC.

Full-time EELCorps members receive a \$21,000 living allowance, a \$7,395 Segal Education Award, health insurance and other benefits.

The following sites have positions:

Bluegrass Greensource

Boyle County Fiscal Court-Solid Waste

Creasey Mahan State Nature Preserve

Fayette County Public Schools

Franklin County Fiscal Court-Solid Waste

Franklin-Simpson Parks

and Recreation

Jefferson Memorial Forest

Kenton County Conservation District

Louisville Nature Center

Louisville/Jefferson County Metro Government Waste Management District

The Parklands of Floyd's Fork

For more information, contact Willa Dawn Bayne or visit the KEEC website.

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