

**MCCOOL**  
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committee concluded with a presentation from the Kentucky Distillers' Association on bourbon's economic impact and its longstanding connection to Kentucky agriculture.

**IJC on Appropriations & Revenue:** Members examined how Kentucky plans, funds and prioritizes school construction projects, hearing from the Kentucky Department of Education and the School Facilities Construction

Commission about the partnership used to assess facility needs, allocate state and local funding and help ensure students have safe, modern learning environments. Members also reviewed career and technical education investments that prepare students for high-demand careers and discussed the state budget process, including how the executive branch manages funding appropriated for agencies and programs.

**IJC on Judiciary:** Members heard from the Department of Correc-

tions on the state's prison system, inmate population and reentry programs designed to help individuals successfully transition back into their communities after incarceration. The committee also heard an update from the Kentucky Parole Board on its work and responsibilities. Finally, members received a presentation on House Bill 60 from the 2026 Regular Session, legislation related to geoenvironment, from the bill's sponsor

**IJC on Natural Resources & Energy:** Members heard a presentation

and public comments on Kentucky's application for federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funding for federal fiscal year 2027, which helps eligible households pay heating and cooling costs. The committee also received an update on the implementation of Senate Bill 8 from the 2026 Regular Session, discussed efforts to provide safe drinking water following disasters, and received reports on the state's solid waste management plan and utility pole attachments

from the Department of Environmental Protection and Public Service Commission.

**Education Assessment & Accountability Review Subcommittee:** Members discussed a series of reports and updates from the Department of Education and Office of Education Accountability. First, the Department of Education discussed the implementation of HB 257(2026), which restructured the state's education assessment and accountability system. Next, the panel discussed career

and technical education in the state's assessment and accountability system. Finally, the Office of Education Accountability presented its annual report.

As always, I can be reached anytime through the toll-free message line in Frankfort at, 1-800-372-7181. You can also contact me via email at, Bobby.McCool@kylegislature.gov and keep track through the Kentucky legislature's website at, legislature.ky.gov.

**FORD**  
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anti-development. It should make us disciplined.

The debate over AI data centers should not be reduced to a lazy "Yes" or "No." The better question is: On what terms?

Citizens and local officials have every right to ask hard questions about power demand, new generation, transmission upgrades, substations, water infrastructure, backup systems, incentives, permanent jobs and what happens if a project is de-

layed or downsized.

Those are common-sense questions. Local governments should not confuse attention with leverage.

If a private data center requires industrial-scale electricity, that demand should be matched with dedicated generation, firm infrastructure commitments and protections for existing ratepayers. Families in Eastern Kentucky, Southern West Virginia, and across Appalachia should not be asked to subsidize speculative private load through higher bills, stranded utility investments, or

rushed public agreements.

Appalachia can lead, but only if the deal is different this time. AI development should be tied to new power generation, local workforce training, transparent agreements, land and water protections and a tax structure that leaves lasting value here.

This series will examine what AI data centers could mean for Appalachia: Electricity demand, utility costs, water use, land use, tax policy, jobs, energy security, critical minerals and who benefits.

I am not writing this series to argue that Appalachia should


reject the AI economy. I am writing it because this region should not enter another industrial era blind, divided, or flattered into a bad bargain.

AI is coming to Appalachia. The question is whether we will shape it with clear rules, new power and local benefit — or be shaped by decisions made somewhere else.

**Editor's Note:** This is the first installment in a six-part series by Roger Ford of the Rural Renewal Institute examining AI data centers, energy demand, utility costs, tax policy, workforce needs

and local impact in Appalachia.


*Roger Ford is a Pike County native and founder of the Rural Renewal Institute, where his work focuses on rural economic development, energy policy, infrastructure and Appalachian renewal. He also serves as President of Eureka Energy Corporation and earned a Master of Arts in National Security from The American Military University. His thesis was on energy security and threats to the national power grid.*



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