Governor Matt Bevin:

Thank you all very much. What a wonderful welcome. God bless you. Thank you so much. It's interesting. I want to first start by saying thank you for the invitation into these chambers. I want to thank Senate President Robert Stivers. I want to thank our house speaker, David Osborne. I want to thank our lieutenant governor for being here tonight. I want to thank our constitutional officers. I want to thank our members of the Supreme Court. Thank you very much for being here tonight, for honoring this Commonwealth of Kentucky with your presence. Of course, to my lovely bride, the First Lady of Kentucky, Glenna, thank you very much. I appreciate it. Thank you.

I think we all know that that's sympathy applause for her, and it's well deserved I can tell you, but thank you so much. Couple of things. I want to start by literally just addressing this phrase that's on the screen behind me. You hear me say it often, you hear me end videos with it. You see it in a hashtag form on various things that we put out. It's something that I've noticed is increasingly being said in recent years on a number of fronts, but what is it we mean by that? What is it when we say, "We are Kentucky." What is it that I'm referring to? What is it that you're referring to? I have great gratitude to each and every one of you that sits both behind me and before me, the 138 of you to whom that term means something distinct, unique, and separate.

We have much to be proud of. I was thinking even as we stood outside and listened that we're blessed to live in a country and in a state where we can open in prayer, where we pledge allegiance to our flag, to our nation. That this is a state that honors and respects these things. What is it that is Kentucky when we talk about we are Kentucky? I'm going to try to utilize this thing. I may be going the wrong way here. We'll figure this out before the night is over.

These are the things that we're talking about. We're talking about family. We're talking faith and freedom. We're talking about opportunity that comes in the form of education and jobs. We're talking about life itself right there in the middle. These are things that we in Kentucky value. These are things that we respect. These are things that we fight for. How blessed we are to have the privilege of representing 4.5 Million people, the vast majority of whom have great appreciation for these things that are right here. It's interesting too though because I think about what does that look like? What's the embodiment of that in many respects? It encompasses things like this. These are scenes that... And things like this, and like this. These are scenes from each of your respective communities, near and far, urban, rural. This is some of the beauty of the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Take a moment to look at these and think about the significance of these individuals, the products that you see, the things that we make, the scenes themselves. It's interesting, some of these are iconic, some of these are things that people aspire to on a bucket list. Others of which are things that just happen day to day, some of which go unnoticed at times. There are to each and every one of us certain things, however, that hold special significance. This last picture I'll show you in this moment is one such picture for me. When I say, "We are Kentucky," I'm thinking about my responsibility as one. Your responsibility as 138, and as 6/7, as 4/5.

The bottom line is this. Each of us, it means different things, but to me, this is the type of thing that I think about. I have 10 very significant things, very powerful, meaningful things to me when I speak about Kentucky. These are my children, my wife. This is what I fight for. This is why I come to work every day. People ask me, "Why do you do this?" I'm often asked, "Why would you actually go through all this?" I'll tell you why. It's because I love Kentucky. I love Kentucky. I love America. I love what is
afforded us to be able to pursue the American dream, to be able to do it in this state, in the center of this nation. I'm grateful for the privileges that have been afforded to us.

It's interesting, Daniel Boone, when he came through the Cumberland Gap back in the 1770s, it wasn't long after being here despite the fact that it was wilderness, the fact that he had to plow his way through things unforeseen, things dreaded by others. He very famously said, "Surely heaven must be a Kentucky kind of place." And indeed it is. How blessed we are to live in a state like Kentucky. These things that we've looked at, these photos, these are a few of the things that we care about, a few of the things that we fight for. I've been asked to stand before you tonight and give you an update on the state of the Commonwealth. I'm delighted to be able to say, as I do when I talk to people all over this country and all over the world, that the state of the Commonwealth is strong, very strong. We have much to celebrate tonight. It really is.

When I first came into these chambers three years ago now, maybe it was four years ago, I guess this is the fourth time I've addressed you. When I first ran for office and explained to people what I would attempt to do, I put out what I called a blueprint for a better Kentucky. It spelled out a variety of things. Some of the things that we agreed on and some of which we didn't. I happen to be a conservative person on a number of fronts, but the things that I put in that blueprint for a better Kentucky, some of you remember it was a little thing. It was written down. It was handed out to people. It was handed out on purpose so that we would be held accountable.

As I talk about the state of the Commonwealth, I want to just touch briefly on the seven things that were there in this blueprint for a better Kentucky, and just a couple of the things that have changed, that have gotten better, as we have moved through these last several years. These were ideas that I had as a candidate that I have attempted to champion as governor, but the vast majority of them, and in fact pretty much every one of them, could not possibly have happened without the input of those in this room. Wouldn't have happened. The way it works, the legislation, the laws, the change that must come, comes through this body, led by the gentlemen behind me, and others of leadership that are represented in this room.

The very first thing we talked about was enacting pro-business, right-to-work legislation. This was controversy. It was controversial to many. Many were concerned. People were afraid that there would be dramatic change, that it would be to the detriment of Kentucky, and yet what we've seen is that as this blueprint has unfolded in this very first point, we've seen $17.7 billion in new private capital invested in our Commonwealth in the last three years. We've seen 49,870 jobs created. New jobs in Kentucky.

You all deserve the applause for this. You all have passed legislation that's made a powerful difference. Increasingly, we are seeing business leads that over the last three years we have seen a 65% increase in business leads. What does this mean? This means that our economic development cabinet is overwhelmed by the opportunities that are knocking on our door. We are fishing in bigger ponds than we have ever fished before, and people the world over are looking to North America, looking to the United States, increasingly looking here to the heart of America, which is Kentucky.

A second point that we've talked about is modernizing Kentucky's tax code. This was something that was discussed as part of the blueprint. I won't touch on everything that has happened, but as many of you know we've got to move to a more competitive tax environment. We've got to move to more of a consumption-based tax code, and less of a production-based tax code, or we will continue to lose out
relatively and absolutely to the states around us. You look at what you all have done. Yes, there's some clean up, it'll get done. It's the nature of how legislation happens. You've made these changes. There is more yet to be done, but we have, just based on what you all did last year, we have moved, per the Tax Foundation in terms of our business tax climate, from 37th in 2016 to 23rd in 2018 among the 50 states. Congratulations.

We've talked about one that I'm sure is not gone unnoticed in the Commonwealth, and that is addressing our pension crisis. There's been a lot of conversation about it. We could make this a very long conversation tonight, but we won't do that. You know what needs to be done. You've been talking about it for years. You've been meeting on this. I applaud the bipartisan approach that you all are taking even now, even today as meetings went on, talking about what we can do to come up with a solution.

We've made promises to hundreds of thousands of hardworking Kentuckians, people that are plowing the roads, people that are teaching our students, people that are protecting and serving the people that are... the social workers in the... prison workers, and the people who on so many different fronts are standing in the gap for us. We've made them a promise. We have a legal and a moral obligation to fulfill that promise, and yet we don't have the money set aside that should have been. The thousand reasons for that, but it must be addressed. The important thing to understand is it starts by actually paying what we're supposed to. This is the first administration supported in turn by legislation that came out of this body that has ever funded 100% of the arch ever, ever.

It's interesting, I had somebody say to me, "You know, these proposals that have been made and this idea of putting this much into the pension, it's costing us more money than it used to." Yes, that's called paying the freight. I have said, and it's true, if you were to walk into a store, walk out with a loaf of bread and a gallon of milk without paying for it, it costs a lot less than if you go to the register and actually purchase it. We are now, and I applaud you for this, paying our freight. We are paying... This is the beginning though. It's just a drop in the bucket, and yet it's not, because if you look at these dollars that we've put in, $4.9 billion in the last two budgets have been dedicated to our pension system. $4.9 billion that you have found to put into something that needs to be addressed.

It hasn't come without pain, it hasn't come without controversy. Indeed, every dollar we've put into the pension has come from somewhere else. Something that people have talked about, wished for, imagine that we could have more of. But at the end of the day, the money is a finite amount, and I applaud you as we address this for the fact that we have started to pay as we go, but we must do more. There's still a need for structural change on a going forward basis. Has to or the money will not be there, and so I thank you in advance for what has been done, but what will be done in 2019. Time is of the essence.

We talked about reforming Kentucky government. One of the most critical things we've done is cutting red tape. You see these red pins that a number of us wear, a pair of scissors cutting through red tape. There were 4,700 regulations when I was first elected. And these, as many of you know that have been here for a number of years, they pile up, they never sunset. Historically, you have addressed that. You now have passed legislation that will cause these to sunset after seven years, and I applaud you for that. There are many states around the country that are looking to follow you in that example.

But of those 4,700, we have currently cut 562 completely, and we're no less safe or less secure. Things are still getting done, in fact, with a greater sense of urgency. 571 have been amended, have been updated. There's other things too when we talk about reforming government. It includes simple things like cleaning up where we are and who we are. This was the freeze that was above the Capitol on the
front steps a couple of years ago. I showed this to you before. It's worth repeating in terms of our awareness level. You look at the moss and the mildew that was on this, you couldn't really even fully appreciate the beauty and the history of it. What a difference a little bit of time and a little bit of attention makes.

This is the first time... We should take great pride. We really should take great pride in this building and in so many others as well. You see them side by side, you see it even in greater contrast. We still have to do the dome. The top of it is yet to be cleaned, but this is the first time since this building was built in 1910 that the exterior has ever been cleaned. These are the kind of things that we are taking care of when we talk about reforming state government. It's simple things like this. It's our state parks. It's the fact that so many of you in our state parks walked into them and found, as did many of our guests, things like this. Simple things, but if that's the first thing somebody sees as opposed to something like this, it makes a profound difference. What we've seen as we've put tens of millions of dollars through the budgets you've approved into our state parks. We now have, just in terms of the number of increased nights, 18,000 more last year than the year before that. 18,000 more room nights at an increased spend of ... I forget how many percent, but each person is spending more than they've historically spent, because we're starting to modernize and upgrade and improve. This is part of improving state government.

We've talked about fixing our bridges and infrastructure. 1,000 bridges are in the process of being fixed right now, being upgraded. None of you will ever have the luxury, nor will I, of cutting a ribbon to fix a bridge. Nobody ever applauds the idea of going underneath and fixing things. It's the opening of new things that get the attention, but this program, Bridging Kentucky, 1,000 bridges being fixed that will make a difference in terms of infrastructure, safety and getting goods and services to market, getting our children safely to and from school, and those of us to and from work.

We've talked about modernizing our education system. We could have an entire multi-hour session on this. What does it mean? It means different things to different people, but to the credit of those of you in this body, there is more money per pupil being budgeted for K through 12 education per pupil and in absolute dollars than ever in the history of Kentucky. Ever. And what does that mean? It means better opportunity for young people.

Additionally too, you see that we have Work Ready Scholarships. They've already served 16,640 students. What are these Work Ready Kentucky Scholarships? They affect five different disciplines where we have more than 100,000 unfilled jobs where we've said, "We'll come alongside anyone. You could be coming out of high school. You could be 40, 50 years old. If you've never gotten an associate's level degree and you want to pursue a degree in logistics or healthcare, or IT, or construction trades, advanced manufacturing, 60 different disciplines within those five fields, the state will come along and pay last dollar." You have approved this, and indeed already it has served over 16,000 of our fellow Kentuckians. It's making a profound difference.

Other things that we've done on this front with dual credit training, something that this body put forward for the first time in the last couple of years. We now have high school students, while they're getting credit for high school certifications, are also getting post-secondary certifications and credits as well. It has served now 74,633 of our high school students. That's remarkable, and increasing rapidly. Over $15 million has been spent. We have young people now, including some of your constituents, who literally have earned associate's degrees by the time they have graduated from high school. It's remarkable. It really is. This is something that is cause for celebration.
We've seen other changes. We've talked about other things. We'll leave education aside for the moment and talk about health care. We talked in our Blueprint for Better Kentucky about modernizing Kentucky and improving Kentucky health care. I'll touch on one thing and one thing only on this topic, because we still have so much work to be done here. We know this. We lead our state and lead our nation in a whole lot of areas related to cardiovascular disease, and hypertension, and heart disease, diabetes, lung disease, a variety of things where we wish we were at the other end.

How are we going to make a change? It's going to come about by getting people engaged in their own health outcomes. How can we get people engaged? Empower them, trust them, believe in them. The dignity associated with making decisions. This 1115 waiver where Kentucky has been afforded the first in the nation ability to require things of able bodied working aged men and women with no dependents in exchange for something that they need and want. It also has afforded us in this 1115 waiver the ability for the first in the nation ability to use Medicaid dollars for behavioral health, for drug addiction, for things where we have tremendous need. These are things that are in the process of being implemented. They will be implemented in the calendar year 2019, and these are seeds in the ground. They will take time to germinate, but expect them to make a profound difference.

The sixth thing we talked about or the seventh was fighting federal government overreach. This was the seventh point of the Blueprint for a Better Kentucky that we put out. Now, this has changed a bit in the last couple of years under the current federal administration, but these are things that not that long ago that shocked people in Kentucky, and for good reason. When we had the federal government telling us that they would decide who went into which bathrooms and locker rooms in our schools, our high schools and middle schools, and people in Kentucky were appropriately outraged and were offended at the idea of this and said, "We can decide this for ourselves," and so we fought back. This is something that our administration has done. Should be led by other offices in this state who are the ones intended to defend the people of Kentucky. Hasn't always worked out that way.

The bathroom rule is one. The overtime rule is one. Doctors being forced to perform sex changes whether they wanted to or not. These are the kinds of things that, believe it or not, were being foisted down upon us waterways of the US which would have defined days like today as being just about everything in Kentucky as a waterway. These are the kind of things where we've had to push back, and what has come about as a result of this, through things like this red tape reduction, through things like the criminal justice reform, et cetera, no longer are we pushing back, we are now being sought out here in Kentucky increasingly as a state to emulate, not only by the White House but by other states as well. Now we are leading the nation in regulation reform. We are leading the nation in many respects as it relates to criminal justice reform. Much work yet to do on all those fronts, of course, and indeed legislation is moving its way forward in these chambers in this year, and they will in the years to come, as well they should, but we're making tremendous strides.

These are some of the things that have happened as we have moved through this Blueprint for a Better Kentucky. It's interesting, though, because despite all these great progresses that we've made, the great progress that we've made, there's still things that should concern us. I want to remind us of a couple of things, not to bring us down, but just to cause us to realize that we're all in this together. That what it is to be Kentucky, to be Kentuckians, is to remember not only that which we celebrate and the progress we're making, but the things that have cut us to our quick.

I want to show you a picture here. This is a picture that was taken many years ago of two little kindergartners, first day of kindergarten. 10 years later, these two young people were killed in a school...
here in Kentucky. I want you to look at that again. How many of you have photos like this in your homes, of your children, of your grandchildren, people near and dear to you, innocent children, nervous, excited, happy? Nobody would ever have imagined what would have happened just 10 short years later, and yet it did. And I want to thank you personally on behalf of these families, on behalf of every student and every teacher and every administrator and every parent in Kentucky for addressing this as you have, and for the fact that Senate Bill 1 is making its way forward, and I encourage you to pass this piece of legislation.

To protect our schools, our students and the adults who go into those classrooms every day should indeed be, as it is, a high priority. And I don't think I speak out of turn to say that in my communication today with both the Holt family and the Cope family, little Preston Cope, little Bailey Holt, you've spoken today, those of you in those committees heard from their parents today. They are grateful to you. They thank you, and I thank you, and the people of Kentucky thank you.

I want to show you another photo. This is a picture that was taken of the Lieutenant Governor and myself and a young man, sweet little kid. I remember that day he was fired up, had his flag sweatshirt on. This was during a Veterans Day parade. A young man with tremendous promise and excitement wearing a Harvard University hat, aspirational at every turn, full of life. About two years later, this is him, his school photo. Shortly after this picture was taken, this young boy took his own life here in Kentucky, because he was bullied, because he didn't feel like he belonged, because he was picked on to a degree that he didn't feel like he had any out.

His mother and father raised him well. He was loved. He was cherished. His name was Seven Bridges. I sat in his funeral last week and wept with a whole lot of other people at just the opportunity cost to Kentucky. Kids in rural communities, as we saw kids in urban communities, as we are seeing, these are the faces of Kentucky. This is also what we’re talking about when we say we are Kentucky.

I read this week of a young girl. I won’t put up a photo and I won’t name names. 18 years old, graduated in a rural community in our state, went to the big city in Louisville. She finished high school last year. Was studying in college, working at a fantastic firm, pursuing her own version of the American dream, 18 years old. She died this week of a fentanyl overdose because she was exposed to something and decided to try something that has become increasingly deadly. This too is what we talk about when we say we are Kentucky, but guess what? We could ignore these things, but we’re not.

There is a couple of things that are going to be handed out when some of you leave here and leave this chamber. As you leave, grab a couple of these things. One is a list of a whole litany of things that have been done by you in the last couple of years. Things that have addressed this on the opioid front alone. Literally the Don’t Let Them Die campaign. The Find Help Now awareness campaign. The 1-800 numbers, the websites. The three day prescription limit. The increased funding that you have done and then done again as it relates to and heroin crisis that we face. The innovative section 1115 waiver that we just talked about a moment ago, and the ability to use it for drug prevention. The expansion of the substance use disorder treatment services. All these things you are doing, and more besides. These and a variety of other things are going to be on a piece of paper. You’ll also be given something that speaks to some of the positive things economically that we talked about, but this is what it means when we say we are Kentucky.

I also want to remind you of these men and women. These are the faces of those who, in uniform, on our behalf, on nights like tonight and nights not unlike this, have fallen protecting and serving us. They
come from many of your different communities. Again, rural, urban. They put these uniforms on. They go out on dark nights, wet nights, cold nights, icy nights. They respond to noises and to dangerous situations. They do it on our behalf. May we never forget this, because this too is what we're talking about when we say we are Kentucky. We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to these officers. We truly do.

These are the ones who stand in the gap, so what can we do about it? What is our responsibility? There's a lot that ails us. It's interesting, because every year I stand before you and I give an update, and every year thus far, I have suggested a book that I would encourage you to read. This year I had an idea of a book that I was going to share with you. I decided to change my mind on that and encourage you in a different direction, and not to a specific book, although I have my own thoughts as to what that would be.

But I was struck by the fact, and all of you probably are aware of it, that just recently in recent days, there was a tremendous act of vandalism in a desecration to a Hindu temple in our state. This is a small body of worshipers. Theirs is a very minority view of faith in our state, and yet we protect and honor and respect this per the Constitution of the United States, which is the ability to worship freely as one sees fit. I was amazed and grateful for the outpouring, including some of you in this room, who were there that day when they asked people this past Saturday to come and show your support, to help clean up, but more importantly to put an arm around, to extend a hand, to make a friend, to love on your neighbor as yourself. This too is what it means when we talk about being Kentucky.

And so what I would like to encourage you to do, as men and women of faith, most of you, for those of you watching on TV, for those of you in the gallery, whatever your faith is, I would encourage you to read the sacred scriptures and the sacred text that have motivated you and have inspired you. As a Christian, for me, that is the Holy Bible. For others who are watching, it is different texts. But I will tell you this. I don't know of any that would encourage us to not become better versions of ourselves, that would not encourage us to love our neighbors, to help the downtrodden, and to those that are outcast. We owe this to each other. We don't have to agree on everything. We sure don't do it politically. We don't do it in any number of fronts. We're not going to do it necessarily in our faith or in our ideology, but we can sure extend our love to one another. We can sure extend our appreciation to the least of these, and what are some of the ways in which we're doing this?

I am so proud and so grateful to be the governor in a state where these chambers, in overwhelming majority, 80 plus percent of bipartisan support are strongly pro-life. How awesome that in Kentucky, we value life? When you see, as we have seen, the horrific, regardless of your thoughts on anything associated with when life begins, the horrific legislation that has come out of states like New York, that has been proposed in states like Virginia, that is literally, you can couch it any other way you want, straight up infanticide, where you take a child that is a viable living human being and you kill it for the convenience of others. This is reprehensible, it's disgusting, and I'm grateful for the fact that this body and this state stands strongly on the side of life. I truly am grateful for you.

And indeed, just simply saying it. It's passing legislation in recent years, and I applaud you for doing it. A 20 week ban, informed consent, ultrasound, dismemberment, transfer agreements. Some of these, as you can see, are being challenged, and we are defending. Again, these are laws that you have passed. These are laws that certain constitutional officers have a sworn responsibility to defend. They are choosing not to do so. But we in this administration, on your behalf, as the people who have legally passed these into law, are defending them. And we will prevail. Some of these will go all the way to the
US Supreme Court, but at the end of the day, we will prevail because we stand on the side of right, and we stand on the side of life.

And yet it isn't simply enough to just be for the child until it comes into this world. There are people who need help on many fronts, and we're reminded of the fact that life is a continuum from beginning to end, and we have a responsibility to our fellow citizens. I want to put a picture up on the screen here for you to look at. There's 10,000 dots on that screen. Every one of those represents a child in our foster care system here in Kentucky. One out of every four of those dots is a child that is eligible to be adopted, that wants to be adopted, that is begging for a forever family.

This is sobering. We have tremendous obligation and responsibility, for those of us as legislators, for those of us in the judicial branch. For myself and the executive branch collectively, individually, all of us have a responsibility. How do we care for the least of these? And in this case, children who just plain need a shot. 10,000 dots on that page. We've talked about this before. I won't go into it in great detail, but we need to rethink what is in the best interest of the child. It isn't necessarily always to put that child right back into the same situation because it happens to be a blood relative. We need to start to put the interests of the child above everything else in Kentucky.

This will take time, and this will take change, and I'm so grateful to my wife, the first lady, but I'm so grateful also to legislators among you who last year as House Bill 1 brought forward incredible changes that are also seeds going in the ground, that are also starting to germinate, that are starting to transform, that are giving more latitude and opportunity to those in the judicial ranks, that are encouraging us to think differently about how we care, and indeed recently this program, which is now being referred to as Uniting Kentucky to Solve Our Foster Care Crisis, this program had a meeting just a couple of weeks ago in January and somewhere between 800 and 900 people including many in this room came to talk about what we can do when we say we are Kentucky, to care for all of Kentuckians. I guess I rounded up a little bit. These numbers are down, and that's a good thing, but they go up and down. Interestingly, the number in foster care has gone down a little bit. The number that are looking to be adopted has actually gone up.

I'll leave you with this thought on this front. We are largely a people of faith. Different faiths, different creeds, different beliefs, but I will say this: There's about 6,500 houses of worship here in Kentucky. I don't know of any of them that don't value taking care of children. If out of 6,500 houses of worship, we can't find a home for 2,700 children, what are we doing when we go to these houses of worship every week? Seriously, if we can't find one home for every two, two and a half houses of worship, perhaps we're not taking our respective creeds and mandates and responsibilities. Seriously, we can fix this. This is absolutely possible. Why? Because we are Kentucky and this is what we do. We take care of our own.

I'm often asked as I travel around this state, and as I travel around this nation, and as I travel around this world, "Why Kentucky?" What do I mean when I say we are Kentucky? I want you to know that I brag on this state, and I do it knowing I'm going to be backed up by those of you in this chamber. Not on everything, not with the sense of urgency sometimes that I want, but frankly, this is the beauty of our legislative process. It serves as a check and balance. It's frankly sometimes good. Sometimes you're the gas and I'm the brakes. Sometimes I'm the gas and you're the breaks. Sometimes we're in complete unison.

But the beautiful thing is this. I go out with confidence knowing for a fact that when I talk about our competitive advantages anywhere in the world, and I talk about the freedoms that we have in this
nation, and the opportunities that we have in this state, that here in North America, where the rule of law and the protection of intellectual property is revered, unlike so much of the rest of the world, and when there are trillions of dollars literally looking for a place to get a return on their investment, looking for a place to invest, and they look at North America. And while we’re not perfect, among all of the geopolitically unstable places in the world, we look pretty good by comparison. Among all the continents. North America certainly would seemingly be the most hospitable for business to grow. And yet more importantly than that, we have things that others dream of, that you couldn't buy for any price.

This is what I want to encourage you to think about. We’re all in this boat together. The things I'm about to say don't matter whether you're in Eastern Kentucky or Western Kentucky, whether you're in Northern Kentucky or Central Kentucky. How often do we categorize ourselves in this way? How often do we paint ourselves volitionally into these boxes? "I'm from here, and I'm from there," all ending in the word Kentucky and starting with some geographical reference. We're better than that. We're bigger than that.

We are Kentucky, and when I talk to people about our quality of life, when I talk to people about our incredible workforce, when I talk to people about the fact that we value and respect innovation, that we will be bar none the center for engineering and manufacturing excellence in the United States, not just simply making things, but inventing them, innovating them, engineering them, this is contagious to people. They want workforce. Every state in America wrestles with this. We're blessed with an incredible workforce. We have regions in some of your respective communities that are begging for jobs and opportunity, and we are working hard as we noted with the 65% increase in inquiries to make sure we connect people to every single corner of the Commonwealth.

We have an abundance of potable water that is the envy of the world, and 50 years from now will be more valuable than gold or oil. Mark my words. We will see it in the lifetimes of some of us in this room, where it is the most valuable commodity. We're blessed with an abundance of it. We have four seasons, none of them too extreme, sometimes a little volatile, as we've seen in the last week. You came in here with 70, it's going to be about 30 when you leave here tonight probably. But other than that, we have fairly good stability on any number of fronts. Logistically, with UPS and DHL and now Amazon building their air hubs here in Kentucky, you can get any product anywhere in the world. You can drive to 60% of the country's population within one day's drive.

You know these facts, but these are things that we tell people, which is why they are coming in record number because we are upside surprising them at every turn. We also have cost of living that is affordable, a quality of life that is high. Energy rates are the lowest East of the Mississippi, but it doesn't come by accident. Some of you are aware of the fact that we are seeing continued pressure. Back to the overreach by the federal government in previous administrations, there was tremendous pressure put on coal. We sit on an abundance of it. It affects many of you in the East and the West. The energy landscape is changing, but guess what? We have hundreds of years of an incredible resource that still provides the cheapest and most reliable electricity in America and in the world, and we sit on an abundant supply of it.

There is going to be this Saturday, and I'm not going to miss the opportunity to encourage you, this Saturday in Western Kentucky, we can get you the specifics afterwards, in Paradise Park, Paradise unit number three, it's a TVA coal fired power plant, there's going to be a decision made by their board in a week as to whether or not to shut that plant down. I would encourage you, if you care about Kentucky,
even if it's not in your county, even if you're not what you would consider to be a coal county, we're all a coal County. We are, because guess what? 80% of our electricity is powered by this resource. One that we have an abundance of, one that because we have, it allows us to be competitive, to attract people, to employ people, that will create jobs and opportunity, that will allow our young people to be able to continue to raise their young people and theirs as well, in this Commonwealth.

At 11 o'clock this Saturday, there's going to be people gathering, asking the TVA to postpone this decision, to wait until the federal government is through looking thoroughly, at not only the security, but the reliability of our electrical grid. Why does this matter? Because if this is shut down, it affects all of us. It will hurt every single community in Kentucky. Not just in economic dollars, but in the opportunity costs of what will invariably be higher energy costs for us, making us less competitive.

We deserve better than this. It's interesting. Look what just happened in Michigan. They literally had to shut down certain auto production lines because they were concerned. That was a three day cold snap, 72 hours of brutal cold. What if it had been seven days or 10 days? Interestingly, it's plants like this that were the ones that were standing in the gap.

These are things I talk to people about that we have this abundance, that we have a people that are anxious to work, that we want the dignity and the respect and the opportunity. We have so much ahead of us. I want to communicate that with you, above all else. We have more legislation you all are working on. We have things we've touched on that we need to address. We have progress yet to be made. But we've made so much progress.

Do grab one of these sheets on the way out the door, one of these flyers. Spread it around, spread the word, tell your constituents what you have been doing. We are so blessed to be Americans. We are so blessed to live in the Commonwealth. United we stand, divided we fall. We are Kentucky. Thank you.