

State of the State Address
Ohio Governor John Kasich
Medina, Ohio
February 24, 2014

Beginning at 7:03 p.m.

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(Opening Remarks Omitted)

(Applause)

GOVERNOR KASICH: Thank you, Mr. President, and Mr. Speaker. Thank you members of the General Assembly, members of the Cabinet, the people of Medina, and, of course, my dear wife Karen, and my daughters Emma and Reese. Thanks for coming, girls. We love you. We love you.

(Applause)

We know Medina is the hometown of our great House Speaker, Bill Batchelder. This is his last year in the Legislature, and Keith and I are going to miss working with him. And Keith, thank you for your leadership and everything you've done in the last year.

You know, Bill, over the period of the next year, there's going to be a lot of celebrations of your greatness in serving the people of this state. No question. This Speaker, by the way, has been the most consistent and hard-working supporter of the Highway Patrol, and I want to be the first one to kick off this next year of celebration of Bill Batchelder. In honor of that support, I'm proud to announce that we are renaming the Medina Highway Patrol Post for you.

(Applause)

Speaker Batchelder, congratulations, and thank you for your service.

(Applause)

Medina is one of Ohio's great communities, and like all great places, the reason is its people. One of Medina's most famous citizens was H.G. Blake. Mr. Blake was an orphan who was raised by his neighbors. He tried his hand at medicine and shop-keeping and the law, and eventually became Speaker of the Ohio House, was elected to Congress and became a friend of the great Abraham Lincoln.

It was in 1860, as a freshman member of the U.S. House, at a time when the debate over slavery was at its most heated and our country was about to tear itself in two, that Congressman Blake introduced a brave resolution that had really never been introduced before—a resolution to simply abolish slavery. It was one of his first official acts. There had been other similar efforts, but up to this point abolitionists in Congress had been less direct, fearing the backlash of going too far too fast. Congressman Blake didn't really have that concern. He was impatient and probably a bit of a pot-stirrer. I imagine we would have gotten along just fine.

Needless to say, Congressman Blake's resolution was soundly defeated. He didn't win on that day, but he set an example of courage for others to follow. Congressman Blake has an elementary

school named for him here in Medina, and we're remembering him still tonight, 138 years after he died. Why? Because he stood up and made a difference. What difference will you and I make?

Some of the best times I've had in my life have been hiking in the mountains with my family. When you start out on a hike you're moving through the trees and the brush and you help clear the way for each other, then you scramble over the scree and the loose rocks and help each other to keep from falling. After you've struggled through the early obstacles you get out on more solid ground, and you get the first glimpse of your goal—the summit—and you come together and it lifts your spirits, and you get an extra boost to keep going.

And you come together and it lifts your spirits, and you get that extra boost to keep on going. Right, girls? We just keep on going. That's kind of where we are now in Ohio. Together we've come through a very difficult patch. We had an \$8 billion budget deficit—\$8 billion—the largest in Ohio's history. We had lost 350,000 private sector jobs. That's filling the Ohio Stadium three times with some left over who no longer had any work. We had 89 cents in our rainy day fund. Most kids in Ohio have more than that in their piggy bank. We were on the verge of losing hope, and many of us feared that our best days were behind us.

That is not the Ohio that we wanted. We knew that we had to change things, so we took up the hard work and we moved ahead, without fear of failing and with urgency and resolve. We set priorities, and I hope you realize nobody got special treatment. There were no favorites that we played. We made tough choices, and we got our budget back in shape.

We turned around that historic \$8 billion shortfall, and now we have \$1.5 billion in our surplus fund in the state of Ohio, and positive credit outlooks.

(Applause)

We didn't raise taxes, but instead we cut them. You know, as I like to say, if you have a restaurant and you don't have any customers, the answer is not to raise your prices. You have to reduce your prices and maybe change the menu. And we did cut taxes by \$3 billion. We killed the death tax. Bill Batchelder wanted that death tax killed for a couple reasons. One is no one should have to visit the undertaker and the tax man on the same day. But more important—

(Applause)

—more important than even is the fact that now, if you have a family farm or a family business, you can pass it on to your kids so they can build an even stronger business going forward in our communities.

(Applause)

We cut small business taxes by 50 percent. I think we all know that half of the private sector workforce that we have in this state comes from small business. So that's why we constantly want to cut the taxes for small business—so they can hire more and invest in their business and be more modern. And we cut income taxes by 10 percent so every Ohioan can take home to their family more of what they earn.

You know, Ohio's economy grows strongest when it grows from the bottom up. Frankly, Ohio or any state or any country works better when power goes from the bottom up, not from the top down. That is not the prescription.

(Applause)

And God bless those Ukrainians who drove power from the bottom up to restore their freedom in that country.

(Applause)

You know, sometimes we think we have tough votes. Think about them in the square in Kiev, facing people with guns. They were not deterred. We have to learn from their courage.

But I also want to tell you in growing Ohio from the bottom up it means that Ohioans have to have more money in their pockets. We're going to stay true to the fundamental idea that made our nation great. Government works for the people; the people do not work for the government—plain and simple.

(Applause)

We have a great Lieutenant Governor, Mary Taylor. She's created a permanent system—

(Applause)

She's created a permanent system to streamline regulations. She's just trying to put common sense in the way that we regulate to provide for health and safety, but not all this blizzard of regulations that choke our small businesses and drive people crazy because they don't represent common sense. For those that are out here, and you still have problems, you need to let us know, because we want you to be successful, and we don't want it to be more difficult than it needs to be as you run your businesses.

All of this has been done to help unleash Ohioans' natural energy, our creativity and our hard work. And as a result, our folks have created more than 170,000 jobs over the period of the last three years.

(Applause)

That's 155 new jobs each day for the past three years. 155 families every day getting stronger, more hopeful, and more secure. We've made long overdue investments in education so students everywhere have the resources to achieve, and we did it by putting students first, not buildings, equipment, or adults.

Albert Ratner is here with us tonight from Cleveland. He along with that great mayor of Cleveland, Frank Jackson, have gone to work to reform the schools in Cleveland working with all of you. It's a new day, and a new way in the City of Cleveland for our children. They're on a path to excellence. And it took courage and it took the Legislature on a bipartisan basis to do it.

Cleveland, to me, is the greatest example of school reform in the North in America, and we hope it will become contagious. I love Michael Coleman, the mayor of Columbus, and we're working with him to try to bring about reforms.

But anybody in this state that supports a reform agenda to put our children first, please come and see us. We will help you. We will work with you to give our kids what they need to be successful so they can realize their hopes and dreams. Bring us the plans that you want, and we will get it done. Am I right, Mr. Speaker and Mr. President?

(Applause)

You know, our colleges and our universities are working together. They wrote a single unified plan for new buildings and construction. We asked them to sit down and figure out which of these institutions really needed the help to advance education and jobs in Ohio. They did it, and they've now created a new funding system so they're focused on helping students graduate, not competing against each other just to sign up as many students as possible, and I will talk a little bit more about that. We're making breast and cervical cancer screenings available for more low-income women so we can start saving more lives.

We're rebuilding our highways without a gas tax increase and helping our cities and towns rebuild their roads and their bridges, and we're using the untapped potential of our turnpike to make these efforts as strong as possible. As we rebuild our economy, we are rebuilding the infrastructure of the state of Ohio.

In the process, we did not ignore those in need. We did not. We're doing a better job of making sure that people with disabilities have the opportunity to work and to live independently. We're doing a better job of helping those with addiction. We're doing a better job of caring for the mentally ill and their families. We're taking on Ohio's historically abysmal record on infant mortality. And I'm proud of my wife for her work on this effort in Columbus, together with Cincinnati—or, with Columbus City Council Member Andy Ginther. Karen, thank you for your hard work on this. We will make great progress.

(Applause)

We're taking on the evil of human trafficking by going after traffickers and treating the victims and the young, young people who have been put into this incredible situation—and we're treating the victims not as criminals, but as children of God who need our help.

Every Ohioan—

(Applause)

Every Ohioan deserves a chance and an equal opportunity to achieve their God-given potential, and that's the Ohio that we're rebuilding for everyone. Everyone.

All of these things have helped Ohio move up to higher, more solid ground. And if you look—if you look, the clouds are beginning to move apart. The sun is beginning to break through and to shine its bright light on that summit. If you look, you can see it.

We've got much further to go, but the success we have gives us the confidence to climb higher. We are not hopeless. We are hopeful. We are not wandering. We have direction, and we need to keep going to advance the state of Ohio.

(Applause)

Folks, we have to keep Ohio's budget strong and balanced. We have to do it. We worked hard to restore our financial health, and we must zealously protect it. You know the reason? Jobs.

When job creators see that Ohio's budget is in great shape—and I talk to them every week, almost every day, and I tell them about our surplus and our credit ratings and our balanced budget—they're frankly shocked. You know, they look at Washington—they look at Washington—and some of our states, and they see gridlock and deficits, and I'm sure they think that's how government works everywhere, but we know Washington's broken, sometimes I wonder if it's even on the same planet as the rest of us.

You know, Ohio's different. In fact, of course, with that balanced budget and that surplus, we didn't let state government try to paper over problems with higher taxes, but instead we solved them so Ohioans can keep more of their own money and businesses have certainty so they can create jobs. Without certainty, you have no job creation. We have it now in the state of Ohio. And if we keep our fiscal house in order, it will help us hold onto the jobs that we have and to grow new ones as well. It will also help us to attract jobs from around the country and around the world.

But to do that we also have to keep working with job creators the right way, and that's what JobsOhio is—this new organization that's beginning to hit its stride. The nation's business leaders are realizing that our new approach to economic development is something that—it sets us apart. We treat job creators with respect by giving them peers, business experts, and specialists in their fields to work with and we work at their speed, which is the speed of business, not the speed of bureaucracy and government. It's working. We believe in an open economy and a free market, not a closed economy controlled by bureaucrats, and they understand it.

(Applause)

We cannot overestimate just how important it is to connect with businesses on their level. We've got to talk their language. This was made clear again in our recent work with Nestle's. From those in Cleveland, you remember the day we celebrated. I called their senior leaders several times, many times, to build a relationship and to encourage them to grow in our state. Our work paid off when the CEO of Nestle U.S.A. called and told me they were moving their pizza business from Chicago to Solon, Ohio, creating 250 jobs in the process.

That's the kind of call that every governor, every leader, every legislator, every person wants to get. But then they said something especially gratifying, and I've heard it over and over again. He praised the JobsOhio team for helping Nestle collect the data it needed to make its decision. When a company of that caliber – international—compliments JobsOhio for its ability to add value in a core way, it is further proof that JobsOhio is working. We saw that proof again last year when Chief Executive Magazine said Ohio has the most improved business climate in the nation. And we have to keep it up.

(Applause)

The reason that JobsOhio exists is in its name. Because it's all about jobs. We all want Ohioans to have good job opportunities, because good jobs provide paychecks and they strengthen our families and our communities. Those paychecks belong to the people who earn them, not to the government. There are two ways to try and grow an economy. The old way, where government

takes your money and tries to pretend it's smarter than you and it spends your money for you. Well, we've seen that way fail time and again. And then there's the natural way to grow an economy. When you get to keep more of your own money and you can use it to control your own future and to help your family and your community. That is our basic philosophy. And out of respect—

(Applause)

Out of respect for the Ohioans who get up every day— they go to the mill, the office, the factory, the farm, out of respect for the small businesses that are into job creation, we've got to keep cutting taxes. We have to keep doing it. That's why I'm proposing another round of tax cuts that will finally succeed in getting Ohio's tax rate below 5 percent.

(Applause)

You know, sometimes I say to people, if you want to find an Ohioan about half of the year, you go down to Naples, Florida.

(Laughter.)

And it isn't because of the weather. It is not because of the weather. Since 1995—listen to this—\$12 billion in income has left Ohio for states with lower income taxes—\$12 billion since 1995 walked out the door. Fewer help for our restaurants, our communities, our charitable giving. And you know what? A lot of these people are our best and our brightest, and we don't want to lose them. They bring innovation. They bring good ideas. They help support our charities. \$12 billion walking out of the state is not acceptable. That's why we need to cut these taxes, income taxes, once again, which will also help our small businesses once again. We can get that tax rate under 5 percent.

Balanced budget. Surplus. Regulatory predictability. Lower cost of doing business. That formula will work, and it is working for our state right now.

And if the reason we're cutting taxes is to make Ohioans more prosperous, let's do our part to make sure that no one—and I mean no one—is left behind, especially our minority communities. They have to be included in our growth and our success. And one way we can do this—

(Applause)

I've got some script here, but let me just tell you this. I have told my Cabinet, we have laws on the books that say when Ohio is involved in the process of goods and services, we have to help our minority partners in this state. We haven't been doing it in this state for—I voted for it when I was a young state senator. Not only is it good enough to go and try to help on goods and services, but our highway construction dollars have to help our minorities to grow from minority businesses to majority contracting businesses. Now, let me say to you—

(Applause)

—we want more entrepreneurship across this state. Now, this isn't going to be done overnight, but I want to tell you—my Cabinet knows it and we do it almost every Cabinet meeting. We are going to help minority businesses to succeed and thrive in the state of Ohio. We are committed to it, and we must get it done. I want you to understand that.

(Applause)

You know, we've made some great strides in education. To address some of the most pressing needs, we had the largest increase in state aid in a decade. And now we can build on that foundation to start taking on other challenges, including one of Ohio's and the nation's toughest problems. And that is the issue of dropouts.

There's a 17-year-old girl somewhere in our state right now. She's thinking about not going back to school tomorrow. Not just tomorrow, but maybe—maybe never. She's sick of it. She could care less about algebra. She's not very good at reading. She struggles with it. And you can't even talk to her about the need for her to learn Spanish. Not interested.

Tell me, how do we get her excited about learning? I don't care what Party you are a member of—we need an answer for her and the 24,000 other Ohio kids who face this same decision and drop out every year. 24,000 kids in this state who drop out each and every year, and they join one million adults who live in Ohio who don't have a high school diploma.

Dropping out is a dead end. It can lead to a life of unrealized dreams. It can lead to poverty. We need to help get these kids back on track. Our administration will be sending ideas to you, members of the Legislature, soon, to help us do a better job of identifying and reaching out to the most at-risk kids so we can keep them from dropping out. Okay? And then—

(Applause)

Now, stay with me. Then we're going to ask our local school districts to craft unique plans for these students that chart a completely alternative path to their high school diploma. And if that path takes some of them out of the traditional classroom and into real-life job training, so be it. We've got to have the courage to think outside of the box, because we have to reach every student.

And let me put it in a simple way. If a young student doesn't want to learn the algebra, the math, or maybe even the English, let them go to a body shop, let them be supervised by somebody, and have the person in that body shop say to them, now that you're working on this car, are you going to charge somebody? Well, then you better know your math. And are you going to advertise so they come in and use our services? Well, then you better learn English. There are ways to get to these young people. We have to think out of the box, and you're going to get the plan put in your laps. And I hope that we can do this for these young people.

You know, we have these adults in Ohio without the diplomas--a million. Could you imagine trying to survive in this world without a high school diploma? Well, we're starting to build an innovative system to let them work with our two-year colleges to get high school diplomas. They're not going to go back into high school. Let them go into our two-year schools, and we're going to try this slowly to see if it's going to work. They can get their high school diploma. They can get credentials. They can get training. And then they can stand up straight again. We need to do this. This will help us in our battles that we face on poverty.

Never before has Ohio reached out in such a focused way to help dropouts. It's not going to be easy, and it's going to force us to think creatively. And I ask you—you come up with a program that's better than ours, we'll sign it. Plain and simple. But this is something we need to do. And if we know we're on the right path, we'll expand the program and make it work.

You know, something I hear a lot from teachers is that parents need to be more involved in their children's education and that communities should do more to support their schools. How long have we heard this? I agree, so why don't we just do it? Why don't we get our communities involved?

And we're going to launch a new initiative, Community Connectors. It's an initiative to support the best ideas in our state for bringing together schools, parents, communities, community organizations, faith-based groups, business leaders, and, of course, our students in mentoring efforts based on proven practices. We're going to ask you, the Legislature, to take the \$10 million from casino receipts, and we're going to ask you to create a program that will give these communities a \$3 match for every dollar they put in to build these mentoring efforts.

And all of us in Ohio, we're hungry to help. We know what's missing out there. We just don't always know how to do it. And Community Connectors is going to give us a chance to listen to the better angel inside of all of us to figure out how to make a difference in somebody's life.

If we do this right and do a better job of connecting our communities, think about this. Our businesses, our schools, our parents, the faith-based institutions. Everybody that surrounds our schoolhouses and our children, it's going to lift up our educators, it will lift up our kids. We can show them why learning matters. We can teach them about workplace culture. It's important. We can teach them about professional etiquette. We can help them appreciate how important values are to success and life. Values like hard work, discipline, and personal responsibility, all of which could help motivate and inspire our children to find their purpose and reach for the stars.

This is working in many places around Ohio, but we don't see enough of it. If you think of Cincinnati Youth Collaborative, 96 percent of those kids graduate, go on to college, the military, or a job. Toledo Schools' Community Hubs program, United Way's new efforts in 17 schools as part of the Cleveland Plan.

I would ask you, as you made it through your life, it might have been your mom, it might have been your father, it might have been your grandfather, it might have been your coach, but there was somebody that taught you how to be successful, somebody that taught you how to dream, someone that taught you that nothing could stop you. We need to do that for our children all across the state of Ohio, and I hope you will help me in creating a program that can stand out in America. Will you help? I sure hope so.

(Applause)

You know, folks, as we move on this program, with these fired-up volunteers and people that care, we've got some other ideas as well. We're going to have a new kind of direction in terms of giving kids the information they need. That's what's behind our new online career road maps coming later this spring. Let me tell you about this. Young Ohioans are going to be able to understand the in-demand jobs that exist in this state. They're going to learn about what it takes to get one. They're going to learn about what they pay. They're going to learn about what those jobs are all about. They will be able to get this information on their phones. And the adults who love them and care about them will get that information as well.

Our kids need direction. They need to understand where they are going. And with the in-demand information about jobs, we can turn education and reform education in a real way that actually

connects kids to jobs and their passions in life. And we can do it right on their phones. And that's what they love.

(Laughter.)

You know, I've traveled the state, and I've visited our schools. Some of the most advanced training I've seen anywhere are in our career centers. Let me ask you a question. How did we ever lose our way on vocational education? Why did we put it down? Why did we not understand its value?

I had a group of kids in vocational education come in to see me a couple weeks ago. They were dressed to the nines. They were motivated. They were smart. They were excited about what they were studying. They had a sense of direction. I mean, they knew exactly what they wanted to do. One wanted to be an accountant--was out in the field and getting their math and everything else in the traditional school--wanted to be an accountant. That's where she wanted to go. Another one, a teacher—wanted to be a teacher and was excited about the prospects. Another one wanted to be a veterinarian, twelfth grader, “I want to be a veterinarian. I'm going to go to school and do it.” One of them wanted—wants to own his own construction company. Okay? I asked him, maybe, someday if I could get a job.

We would all have been proud to call them our kids, and that's why I want to see this kind of high-quality experience in both jobs and learning. We're going to bring it down to the seventh grade. We want kids to have a connection to this in the seventh grade.

Now, Mom and Dad, I have to tell you—you can clap for that. We want to bring it down.

(Applause)

Mom and Dad, your kids can get that kind of training for a skill and a purpose, and it does not keep them from going to a two-year community college or the four-year school. In fact, they're going to have a better sense of where they're going if we allow our kids to enter those vocational schools and we're putting more money in it. But I think taking it down to the seventh grade and getting our school districts to work with us on this will be a big change.

Now, vocational education prepares our kids for careers in college. Now, here's the thing I think is really good: I believe every Ohio student should have the chance to prepare for their college degree by earning credit while they are still in high school. You take those courses; you should get credit. Period.

(Applause)

Now, you can get it some places in Ohio, but you can't get it everywhere. We're going to get it everywhere. Because you think about getting that credit while you are in high school. Think about the things that it does for you. It gets you motivated. It gets you focused. You get good grades in high school, you get good grades in college, you get a good job, good career. Right, Bill? Good career. This is something we've tried for a long time. Haven't been very successful. Work with me on this; would you? Work with me on this.

All of these ideas are going to be coming soon as a part of a package of proposals to better connect kids with career opportunities in a very meaningful way. Even as we work to help better

prepare students for college and their careers, we're not going to forget their early years. To make sure Ohio is doing everything it can to help our youngest learners, we're raising the standards for publicly funded early childhood education so that more children enter school ready to succeed. And at the same time, we're going to make sure we're spending those important dollars in ways that will make a difference. We believe in early childhood education. We're going to promote it. We're going to make it work in our state in an effective way.

(Applause)

Okay. You know what? These community college and university presidents, they're absolutely unbelievable. Think about this. They came together to decide if there's a few slices of pizza in the box, I won't take one if you need it. I won't take money for my building if you actually need it for your building. And we've seen it happen across the state. Sharing resources. A common purpose. A university system, not a system of universities.

Let me tell you what they've agreed to do now. We will lead the nation—and I'm going to announce tonight—we lead the nation. Colleges and universities will not get any of these state dollars that has gone to them traditionally based on enrollment. You know what they've agreed to do? They will only get paid if students complete courses or students get degrees. No more wandering around. This is a big deal for our students and for our schools.

(Applause)

I'm going to be giving you this legislation soon, but just think about this for a second. A student goes into the community college or in the four-year schools. They really don't know what they want to do. You know, they park their car a mile from the academic building where they're going to go to class, and then they get frustrated and they quit with two years' worth of debt. Our colleges are committed the same way our K-12 schools are in giving them a virtual menu so they can know what their pathway ought to be.

The colleges and universities will be working to make sure that when you enter that building, when you enroll in that school, you will have somebody that will guide you through the process and guarantee you--or do their best to guarantee you--that you will get a degree.

This is skin off their backs. They're fantastic—these college and university presidents. And you please tell them when you see them, thank you. And we'll get you the legislation to enact this.

You know, we also think education is like, you know, preschool, and then it's high school, and then maybe the two-year school or the four-year school. We have a different philosophy in Ohio. You must have lifetime learning. We must have a system that allows you in the 21st century, in the global marketplace, to consistently upgrade your skills so that you are in control of your own destiny and one day you don't wake up and find out you don't have the skills to compete and win. And that is our philosophy. It's not just K- or pre-K through J—job—it's going to be all the way through your lifetime. And this is the strategy that I believe we need to take.

Now, folks, one of the best kept secrets in our state are veterans. Not only do they deserve our thanks for the sacrifices they've made for our freedom. They deserve our help to transition back into civilian life. We're starting a new effort to give them college and academic credits for the training and experience they've received in the Armed Forces, and we want to give them these credits for free.

(Applause)

Think about this. Think about this—I'm with you. Yes.

(Applause)

Yes. Think about this. This is really unbelievable that we haven't done this. Whether it's engineering, heavy machinery, construction, auto and truck repair—or as my wife said the other night, advanced technology, so I put it in here—

(Laughter)

—the U.S. Armed Forces train more—well, there's no question—they train more people in more sophisticated ways than any organization on the planet. The training has prepared veterans for many of Ohio's most in-demand jobs. We know what they are, we know what those in-demand jobs are. Go on OhioMeansJobs and see it. We know what these jobs are. The training that they've received has prepared them for these jobs and letting them more easily put it into place in the workplace, of course. It helps them when they come home.

Let me ask you this. If you can drive a truck from Kabul to Kandahar, Afghanistan, don't you think you should be able to drive a truck from Columbus to Cleveland?

(Applause)

Folks, look. I think we're making gains. There are too many people in our state that don't have work. We're not forgetting you. I'm not forgetting you. We go to work every day focused on creating this jobs-friendly climate that's essential to helping our people get back to work. That's why I can't fritter away the surplus. The others—there are needs and demands, but we can't do that, we've got to keep the job-friendly climate in this state.

You know, but we also can't forget Ohioans who can only dream of being able to hold a job. These are people who struggle with mental illness and addiction. They're part of our mission, too. We've taken a new approach to mental health so that families and communities have more resources. Doctors and clinics are available in more places. Communities can offer more care to those in need, including many who may not be poor.

We should be proud that we're making a difference here, because it's so easy in politics to run over them, because they don't organize and many don't vote. Many do, but some can't. So we should be proud that we have been standing up for them. We are building on the work that we've done already by creating more safe places where people in crisis can get the care they need so they can stabilize, regain control, and be at home with their families.

I'm so struck by the former candidate for governor in Virginia, Creigh Deeds, who took his son to a hospital in a crisis. No room. A day later, he attacked his father. It's terrible. We need these places. Tracy Plouck is creating these. There are some already, we're going to expand them, because if you ignore people who have these severe problems, people can hurt themselves, hurt someone else. And we read about it. We shake our heads.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Mr. President, for your help on getting those resources here for the mentally ill, but, you know, another group of people who live in the shadows are those who are addicts. It's impossible to imagine. The devil never leaves their shoulder. They go through the

valley. A man whose son went to my daughter's school—one night they knocked on his door, “We found your son dead of a drug overdose in his car.” A lady who took a prescription, her son took one pill, took him to the emergency room, brought him home, put him to bed. He never woke up. Or our friend Sam, who took prescription drugs that led to heroin addiction, fights it for the rest of his life.

We have to take this issue on. It's intractable. You and I, the Attorney General, we shut down pill mills. We got all the local law enforcement and the Highway Patrol and the sheriffs, and we're busting them, driving their—this trade, this artery, out of our state. Yes.

But it's not enough. We have to deal with the demand. The demand is in every one of our neighborhoods. Our minority communities dealt with it alone for a long time, alone. It wasn't right. Now we're all dealing with it. It knows no race. It knows no demographics. It knows no community.

So we can bust them, but we've got to build the courage and the strength in people to say no. Now, we have launched our Start Talking! program. It's going into the schools. It's involving people who the—their peers will listen to and respect. Our Highway Patrol's involved. Our local sheriffs are involved. Local law enforcement, athletes in the school who are their peers who become ambassadors.

We know—we know that if you talk to your kids about not—you or anybody—about not using drugs, there is a 50 percent chance they won't use them. We just don't want them to ever use them, because rehab is so difficult. It's like having an alligator chase you around in your living room. You've got to constantly feed them before he eats you. Oh, you can get off of them, but it's so difficult.

The providers of prescription drugs in this state have come together with Ohio State Medical Association, the dentists, the nurses, and everybody, to come up with a protocol so that when we treat people who have pain, we don't give them so much medication that it leads to addiction.

Well, we've got to tell you that this Start Talking! is working. We've now spoken to almost 9,000 students. We now have 207 student ambassadors who will stand up, but we need you. We need you in every school. You need to talk to your principals, please, and your superintendents. Peggy was there and saw it and heard it, and it inspires people to keep them from doing drugs. And we will work with you. We will dedicate a staff member to work with each and every one of you to make this easy. And then once we get through Start Talking!, we need to make it a part of our very fabric of our culture so that kids can have the strength to say no. We're making progress, but we have so far to go.

You know, together we can warn our kids and fellow citizens about the dangers of addiction and abuse and give them the self-confidence to say no.

Another addiction that hides in plain sight is tobacco. Tobacco. Ohio once was a national leader in smoking cessation efforts, and we need to take up that cause once again. That's why today I'm announcing that we're dedicating new tobacco settlement funds to the fight against this addiction, a fight that will drive down our medical costs and improve Ohioans' health. I hope you will join me on this.

(Applause)

I know this is a lot of work. And, frankly, I've only talked about a portion of what we're going to be sending to you soon. Not all this is going to get done this spring or this summer. Maybe some of it won't get done this year, but I want to say it's going to take time to get things right, but if we're not moving forward, we're moving backward.

We've got to let Ohioans keep more of their hard-earned money. We've got to keep more kids in school, motivate more kids, keep them in college, give veterans a hand back into the civilian workforce and keep improving mental health and fighting addiction.

As you know, we've been talking more and more about poverty, how to help people to get out of it and how to prevent people from slipping into it to begin with. We took some big steps last year, especially in health care. And the reason for much of what we're proposing this year is so that we can continue to do more.

But let's be clear. It's going to take all of us, not just the government, to make progress. I will have much more to say about this issue over the next couple of months, but remember our greatest purpose will continue to be helping every Ohioan have a chance to find a job that lets them fulfill their purpose.

Jobs. The more jobs, the less poverty. You have a job; it's self-confidence. You have a job; you have hope. You have a job; you have control. You have a job; you can contribute not just to your family but to those around you.

Yes, we do have much more to do, but because of what we have already accomplished, I can say tonight the State of the State is stronger, more hopeful, more optimistic, more excited, and more confident here in the state of Ohio.

(Applause)

None of us have a monopoly on good ideas. You can figure some of this out? I'm with you, but we know we can accomplish greater things when we pull together, instead of pushing against one another. Because in our unity is our strength. Some people are going to want to divide us. It's unavoidable. Please don't let politics—H.G. Blake didn't—please don't let the fact that we're in an election year make us weak, too partisan, not willing to take on big issues.

Here's how I see it. If you voted for me or if you didn't, I'm your governor. If you're a CEO or if you're unemployed, I'm your governor. If you're living in your own house or you're living under a bridge or if you're an honor student or if you're an inmate, I'm your governor. I'm the governor of all of Ohio, and it's my duty to serve everyone. This is my life and this is my mission. None of us know how long we have on this Earth, but for as long as I'm here, I'm going to do everything I can to bring people together and lift our state.

Now, some people wonder when I talk about my faith. I think I kind of felt God when I was a little boy, but I don't know that I met God until 1987, when my mother and father were killed by a drunk driver. I didn't know if I even believed in Him anymore. I didn't know if He was out there. I didn't know if He cared about me—1987, 27 years ago.

Just about every day I search for what the Lord wants me to do, because I know life is short, and I know that my purpose on this Earth, whether I'm the governor or whether I'm a has-been, is to bring

about a healing. It's not so much about judgment. It's about love your neighbor. It's about lifting somebody who people can run past at 90 miles an hour.

So every day I think about what I can do to make Him pleased with the fact that He ever created me. Some people don't share that. Some people think there are other ways to get there, and I believe them, but what I know is, in our lives, we must carve a road, carve a path so that those who are hurting and those who are in need and those who are yet to come have a clear path for success and opportunity and to fulfill their God-given purpose.

You know, many times I stand in awe of the human spirit. I mentioned the Ukrainians. How about a scientist toiling away for years in a lab to cure a terrible disease or a soldier charging into combat to fight? I have a friend whose brother flew a helicopter, we think, we're not even quite sure, into Tora Bora, received the Distinguished Flying Cross. He won't even talk about it—life on the line—unbelievable.

You know, I look to these things, and these people just so inspire me. And I wonder sometimes where they find the strength. I think we all do. I think it comes from a higher power, but regardless of where you think it comes from, we can all agree that these stories lift us and make us better.

Last year, the world heard a story that words could barely describe. It is a story of hurt beyond anything we can imagine, but it fortunately doesn't end there. It is also a story of three women who found an inner strength and a courage that brought them through and sustained them.

No one rescued them. They rescued themselves, first by staying strong and by sticking together, and then by literally breaking out into freedom. It's because of that courage that I'm humbled to present the 2014 Ohio Courage Medals to Amanda Berry, Gina de Jesus, and Michelle Knight, three extraordinary women who, despite having the worst in the world thrown at them, rose above it and emerged as victors, not as victims.

(Applause)

Wow. You know, on Saturday, Ohio will be 211 years old. Our state has seen so much change in that time, and change is difficult, but, you know, once you have done it and you move forward, there's a newness, a freshness, a sort of youth to everything that you do and touch.

Together we breathed new life into Ohio in just three short years, but we're not anywhere close to the summit yet. Think about what Ohio will be like when we get there. What will it look like on the top of that mountain?

Well, Ohio will be a place where people can attain their dreams because they're prepared for the jobs of the 21st Century. And rugged individuals can start and grow their own businesses, regardless of their background or their social status, and they will be—they will succeed because we will not let government stomp them out with mindless rules and high taxes.

Ohio will be a place where everyone takes responsibility for themselves and where children have the encouragement and support they need to navigate the currents of life and enjoy the same success our parents helped provide for us. Ohio's communities will be built on a foundation of the values that made America great, values like personal responsibility, self-reliance, compassion, teamwork, faith in our creator. And our communities will care for one another and come together to lift those up who are hurting.

This is the Ohio we are becoming, and the more we make these goals a reality, the more that Ohio will be recognized as one of the best places in our world to live, work, and raise a family. We're making Ohio a place where anything is possible.

Government has a role in all of this. It certainly does. I don't think we should have—I'm a believer that it has a very important role, but we've all experienced the limits of what government can do when it comes to solving some of our toughest problems. It's going to take you and me and our neighbors and our neighbors' neighbors all deciding to pitch in to carve that road if we're going to take our state further up the mountain towards that summit.

Folks, I can tell you, I get around. The nation and the world, they have their eyes on Ohio. They know we're coming back, and they want to know, frankly, how we're doing it. We're not done. We're not done by a mile, but we've made good progress. We're getting there.

It's great to see it happen. Isn't it great to be part of it? To be part of this rebirth? I hope you'll stay with me on the path as we go higher. I hope you'll keep up the teamwork, keep taking on the impossible tasks. Keep tossing aside the status quo. Keep shaking things up.

It's like my mother said, shake 'em up, Johnny. Things will get better when you do it. If we do, we'll create the stronger, better Ohio that we all want.

God bless America, God bless Ohio, and God bless our future together. Thank you.

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