



Ohio's Kasich touts education, broadband in speech

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STEUBENVILLE, Ohio — Ohio Gov. John Kasich announced a plan to boost to broadband network speeds, introduced an award honoring courageous Ohioans and said shale drilling shouldn't come at the expense of the environment in an annual State of the State speech mostly devoid of big initiatives.

Kasich spoke for nearly 90 minutes in the auditorium of a high-performing elementary school in Steubenville, picking a blue-collar town he said reminded him of his Pennsylvania hometown to take the speech outside Columbus for the first time in history.

He said Ohio has come far from a year ago when it faced an estimated \$8 billion budget hole and was ranked 48th nationally in job creation. The state now has money in its Rainy Day Fund once again and is the top job-creator in the Midwest, he said.

"We just looked at the problems honestly," said Kasich, a first-term Republican. "If you look at a problem and you see what it is, and you design a solution, it's amazing how far you can go."

A few hecklers interrupted the speech at one point, but they either left or were escorted out without incident.

The broadband initiative Kasich announced will use new technology to open up the state's technology infrastructure, increasing speeds from 10 gigabits per second to 100. The Ohio Board of Regents said the state will invest \$8.1 million to connect areas around the state with the faster network connections.

He cited the broadband upgrade, aerospace breakthroughs taking place at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, and collaborative research and development efforts in higher education as among avenues for economic growth.

"If we can train, educate, forecast, use our location, use our great people, use our resource, our assets, we'll be number one in America, we'll be the most powerful state in America," he said. "I have no doubt. We have the scale, the size, and everything that we need."

Kasich said he has asked Ohio State University President E. Gordon Gee to lead an effort among universities to dovetail resources and come up with ways to increase the state's college graduation rates.

After the speech, Gee said university leaders are set to meet with the governor in a week to discuss their proposal.

"In the end, we've got to start thinking about Ohio and Ohio higher education as an ecological system, not as a series of speedboats out there racing around each other," Gee said.

Sen. Mike Skindell, a Cleveland-area Democrat, said that while he supports collaboration among the universities, he questioned Gee's role.

"To have the president of Ohio State lead that effort is kind of self-serving," Skindell said.

Kasich's new "Governor's Courage Awards" honored a woman who lost her son to prescription painkiller addiction, another woman who survived being a victim of human trafficking to become a social worker, and the family of a soldier killed in Afghanistan.

The governor touted progress in his war on prescription painkiller abuse and received a standing ovation when he said he would declare a similar war on behalf of 1,000 Ohio teenagers who have been co-opted into prostitution.

He also said the state needs to allow felons who have served their time to work certain jobs such as cutting hair or driving trucks that are currently off-limits.

State Sen. Bill Seitz, a Cincinnati Republican, said he supports the so-called collateral sanctions proposal — one