

STATE OF THE STATE

Kasich touts broadband, education

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STEUBENVILLE, Ohio — Gov. John Kasich said the state would dramatically increase the speed of its broadband network in his second State of the State address today, a speech that had at least one striking similarity to the address he gave last year.



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Kasich addresses the crowd at the State of the State.

Kasich, who likely became the first governor to deliver the State of the State outside the capital in Ohio, spoke for 1 hour and 23 minutes at Steubenville High School, which houses Wells Academy, the state's top-ranked public elementary. Kasich reviewed his administration's accomplishments and laid out a broad vision for the future that was thin on details, save for a pledge to raise broadband network speeds from 10 Gbps to 100 Gbps — which he said would benefit hospitals and schools working to coordinate research, among others.

According to a news release from the Ohio Board of Regents, the state will invest approximately \$10 million through a recent agreement with Cisco and Juniper to “harness new innovative technology that will, in essence, ‘open the faucet’ of Ohio's current broadband infrastructure, over 1,800 miles of fiber.” The expansion leverages the fiber optic network operated by OARnet, a member of the Ohio Board of Regents Ohio Technology Consortium, according to the release.

The project will use \$8.1 million to connect Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, Dayton, and Toledo to the network by June 2012. Akron, Athens and Youngstown are planned for connection by October 2012. The state also said public and private partners would invest \$2.3 million in a “state-of-the-art” innovation center to be located at the Ohio State University.

But like his speech last year, when hundreds packed the Statehouse Rotunda in opposition to Senate Bill 5 and one interrupted him inside the chamber, an unknown number of protestors made it inside and heckled him once Kasich started.

Some of them were seated in the balcony for Kasich's speech, and didn't begin their interruptions until he broached the topic of shale drilling. About 1 hr and 8 minutes into the speech, protestors began shouting that Kasich was “selling out Ohio” and chanting “power to the people.” But they varied the timing of their outbursts, so it was a few minutes before all of

them were escorted from the room.

There were 1,100 people on hand for Kasich's historic speech. According to Kasich's staff, 50 tickets for the public were distributed at random to those who participated in the governor's on-line raffle last week.

As for the "state" of our state, Kasich said Ohio is "alive again."

"We're out of the ditch. We're growing. It's happening in our state," Kasich said. "It's not me, it's all of us and it's the people of the state. But we've got cultural changes we need to make. And there are people who represent the status quo and they're going to fight us on the next set of things we need to get done."

During the speech, Kasich distributed three Governor's Courage medals, one to Theresa Flores, a Powell woman who was a victim of human trafficking and is now an advocate, one to Jo Anna Krohn, who lost her son to prescription drug abuse and began a support group, and one to fallen U.S. Army Specialist Jesse Snow.

Kasich also pledged a "war on human trafficking," citing a figure of 1,000 Ohio children with an average age of 13 who are victims in the "slave trade business."

"My girls are 12. Can you imagine someone snatching your daughter and somebody forcing them into prostitution at 13 and 14 years of age?" Kasich said. "We've got to stop this and snuff this out of our state."

Kasich gave a stern lecture to Ohio's House and Senate members on hand, saying "I think you've got to steer clear of mindless partisanship." On his plans to potentially lease the Ohio Turnpike, Kasich cautioned that no decision had been made and for "everyone" to "slow down, chill out a little bit."

The governor said he was asking Ohio State President E. Gordon Gee to "increase graduation rates for all of our universities. No more 14 percent."

Kasich, who has also charged Gee with bringing all universities together to streamline their infrastructure needs and submit one capital budget proposal to the governor, said the emphasis for the state schools "should not be on enrollment, it should be on graduation."

Kasich also said the state was working on a strategy to attract foreign and out-of-state companies to Ohio, and sounded familiar visions for the state in regards to manufacturing, logistics, the medical corridor and revamping the state's myriad worker training programs.

Kasich was accompanied on stage by four Wells Academy teachers and four students. The teachers were kindergarten teacher Amy Carducci, fourth-grade teacher Sara Carrocci, reading and math facilitator Dianne Casuccio and third-grade teacher Dawn Takach. The students were fourth graders Alex Barnhouse, Justine Hampton, Julia Johns and Makayla Walter. Wells Academy was chosen for the location of Kasich's speech in part because it's the top-ranked elementary school in Ohio.

It was long speculated that Kasich would use Wells Academy to drill home

proposals for education reform. But, if anything, the governor only nipped at the edges and referred back to a broad campaign pledge of getting schools to spend “more dollars in the classroom.”

“Wells spends its money where it really needs to go and it’s something we can all learn from, it directs its money to the classroom,” Kasich said. “And the teachers there work together like doctors do in an operating room. They use data to look at the struggles and the problems that children have, and as a group, they fix it. It’s very data driven.”

Kasich decried what he said was the state’s high school graduation rate — 80 percent — and what he said was a 35 percent drop-out rate in urban schools. He said he was relying on a program being pushed by Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson in his city that would recognize high performing schools, seek new labor agreements in which performance measures trump seniority, and getting parents more involved with the children’s learning.

“I am counting on Cleveland to deliver the goods,” Kasich said.

Protestors gathered in earnest around 11 a.m. outside the high school in opposition to a bevy of issues. More than 150 protestors were outside by 11:30, chanting against “fracking,” the privatization of state institutions, income disparity (consistent with the Occupy Wall Street movement), anti-abortion legislation and against Kasich.

About 35 protestors were bused in from Youngstown by state Rep. Robert F. Hagan, D-Youngstown, who told the crowd: “Governor Kasich has crossed the line many times.” Another bus arrived from Columbus.

Chrissy Heineman, a mental health worker from Youngstown, told the crowd “We’re offended he had the nerve to come to Steubenville. He’s breaking all of our traditions to try and avoid us. We are here.”

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