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## Lawmakers hear workforce message in Kasich address

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*Associated Press*

STEUBENVILLE, Ohio (AP) — Republican legislative leaders say they took away from Gov. John Kasich's State of the State speech a renewed focus on bolstering training programs for Ohio workers, answering the governor's call to find ways to better match residents' skills with growing opportunities in energy, technology and science.

Lawmakers charged with passing bills that enact the governor's policy priorities say that meant making sure community colleges were more closely aligned with businesses' needs, so vacant jobs could be easily filled.

"We got to get people trained to get back to work," said House Speaker William Batchelder, a Medina Republican.

During the speech Tuesday in blue-collar Steubenville, Kasich announced a plan to boost 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 address mostly devoid of big initiatives.

He spoke for nearly 90 minutes in a rambling, unfocused address in the auditorium of a high-performing elementary school, taking the speech outside Columbus for the first time in history.

Kasich 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."

The broadband initiative he 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.

Republicans said they didn't think that the governor's broadband proposal needed legislative approval, but they were reviewing whether they'd have to OK opening it up to business.

"That is the new infrastructure for today," said Senate President Tom Niehaus, a New Richmond Republican. "While we need the highways and we need the bridges, you also have to have high speed internet and certainly OARnet is a tremendous asset that we want to make sure utilize for economic development in the state."

Kasich 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 No. 1 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."

But Democrats blasted the speech as long on rhetoric and short on details.

State Sen. Capri Cafaro of Hubbard called the address “more of a retrospective than a prospective.”

She said the speech was supposed to provide an overview of Kasich’s plans for the year, but “I did not get a lot of that.”

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 — also one of the few legislative initiatives he heard in the speech.

He called it “an uplifting and accurate recitation” of Kasich’s first-year accomplishments and Ohio’s assets.

“Where I thought it was a little short, unlike traditional State of the State speeches, was on any specific legislative agenda that he wants us to pursue,” Seitz said.

Senate Democratic Leader Eric Kearney of Cincinnati said he had wondered where the governor’s plan was to help local governments after communities took a hit in the state budget.

“Secondly, he said we’re out of the ditch. Well, I’d like to know how we’re out of the ditch when there are more food pantries than there have ever been in our state,” he said, adding that people are struggling with foreclosures.

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.

“It’s not good enough to do research if you don’t commercialize and create jobs, what’s the point?” the governor asked. “I can find your research on the top shelf of a building 40 years from now? Commercialize, create jobs, spin off companies. We can get that done, but it’s going to take new and renewed focus.”

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.

Overall, state Rep. Teresa Fedor, a Toledo Democrat and former schoolteacher, said she found the governor’s speech lacking in detail about the future of public education in Ohio.

“Where is it? It was devoid of any real plan,” she said. “(Former) Gov. (Ted) Strickland put forward I think a very bold, aggressive plan for the state of Ohio, and Gov. Kasich dismantled it.”

On Tuesday, Kasich offered to go door to door with Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson to lobby lawmakers for changes needed for some of the mayor's education proposals.

Jackson wants to make performance a key factor in deciding how much teachers are paid and to eliminate seniority in deciding who is laid off in the shrinking district. The mayor controls city schools through an appointed board.

A handful of protesters, likely admitted to the speech on public tickets Kasich distributed through an online lottery, temporarily interrupted the speech about an hour and 10 minutes into it — shouting "John Kasich is selling out Ohio!"

The ruckus came as Kasich was talking about drilling for natural gas in eastern Ohio.

He said large energy companies flocking to the state amid the Marcellus and Utica shale boom don't want to leave the state harmed. "We can't degrade the environment at the same time we're developing this industry," Kasich said.

Outside the school, which shares Steubenville High School, more than 100 demonstrators gathered — some to oppose the use of hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, to reach Ohio's oil and gas resources. One sign read, "Frack Off Kasich." Others demonstrated in support of the Occupy movement.

One protester, Shane Hanley, a 47-year-old locked-out worker from Cooper Tire & Rubber Co. in Findlay, said he came to let Kasich know a bitter collective bargaining fight — in which voters turned back a bill limiting the rights of unionized public workers — would not be forgotten.

"The union movement ain't going away and don't forget that."

Moving the speech was a chance for Kasich, whose approval rating with voters is under 40 percent, to reconnect with voters after the collective bargaining debate. Ahead of the address, he enjoyed handshakes with guests and congratulations from supporters for a job well done.

Kasich said he's hearing from businesses that are excited to invest in Ohio again.

"We're alive again. We're out of the ditch. We're growing," he said.

Ohio unemployment fell to 8.1 in December, down from 8.5 in November and from 9.5 in December 2010.

Ahead of the speech, state Democratic Chairman Chris Redfern criticized Kasich's promotion of a Bob Evans Restaurants expansion last year that relocated the company from Columbus to neighboring New Albany.

"It's not about moving Bob Evans across town," he said. "It's about investing in American automobile jobs that help real communities like Defiance in a tangible, trackable, empirical way."

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