

VIEW POINTS

38 |

Business First Louisville

BusinessFirs

EDITORIAL

Feb. 6, 2009

Beshear's speech to legislators sets right tone

In his State of the Commonwealth address delivered to the General Assembly this week, Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear laid out a clear course for dealing with the projected \$459 million revenue shortfall caused by the national economic crisis.

The governor correctly noted that trying to balance the budget strictly by cutting spending would be shortsighted and would unfairly punish the state's needy. Citing the need for additional revenue and the fact that Kentucky leads the nation in smoking-related deaths, Beshear reiterated his call for raising the cigarette tax from its current 30 cents a pack to \$1.

Support for an increased cigarette tax, which died in the Kentucky Senate last year, has been gaining momentum. Even Senate President David Williams, long an opponent of any tax hike, acknowledged this week that the state cannot balance its budget without new revenue.

In a surprise move, Beshear called for a "thorough review" of the 1990 Kentucky Education Reform Act. He also announced the creation of an early childhood development task force charged with creating a comprehensive plan to expand and improve early childhood development.

We applaud both of Beshear's initiatives. KERA was ground-breaking legislation that finally made education a top priority in Kentucky. Much good has come out of the act, but it is 20 years old and could stand a comprehensive review by education, business and legislative leaders.

The push to expand and improve preschool opportunities also is right on the mark. Kids who start behind never catch up. If the state is serious about boosting educational attainment levels, it must find a way to get more 3- and 4-year-olds into preschool programs.

In his address, Beshear went out of his way to praise both houses and both parties for their cooperation in seeking solutions to Kentucky's financial challenges.

Differences will arise as legislators try to work out the specifics of the budget-balancing plan. Because of the severity of the problems facing the state, we hope that legislators and the governor can find bipartisan ways to steer the commonwealth through these difficult times. |