



As Sutton said, that's where the money is

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The wheels have begun turning in both Washington on impeachment and in Frankfort, where a brand new Democratic governor must work with an overwhelmingly Republican legislature.

In Frankfort, the biggest challenge is a new state budget when Democrats and Republicans disagree on things like education and how to pay for services the public wants but doesn't want to pay for.

Gov. Andy Beshear struck mostly the right notes in his State of the Commonwealth speech. He is correct that Kentucky cheats its future and its children's future by cheating education funding. He promised teachers a \$2,000 raise and he wants to reduce the state's unjustifiable incarceration rate and expense.

Beshear's father, Steve, cut higher education funding in every budget, though to be fair he operated during and at the height of the Great Recession. His successor, Republican Matt Bevin, was openly hostile to higher education.

When the younger Beshear enumerates his priorities, Republicans ask how he'll pay for them. He has the same answer as his dad: casino gambling which failed under the elder Beshear. The younger Beshear says public attitudes have changed because taxpayers have tied underfunding of schools to lack of revenue. The Senate has signaled it's not interested in expanded gambling.

Republicans seem even less interested in using the tax code to generate revenue for education -- and to do both, raise taxes and deliver education fairly among the entire population. Republicans -- even those who chair education committees -- begin such conversations by saying everyone wants to put more money into education but where do we get the money? (Hint: either in less important programs or in higher revenues. See Willie Sutton.)

Republicans acknowledge only one side of the ledger, an odd position for a party which claims it knows business. Frankly, during my time in Frankfort, most Democrats were just as ingenuous as Republicans.

Over the past 20 years, I've spent a lot of time living in, working in or visiting small Kentucky towns. Over that time, I conducted an admittedly non-scientific poll which indicates that "Mexican Restaurants" are easily Kentuckians' preferred cuisine when they dine out. I would be entirely unsurprised to learn we are among national leaders in the number of Mexican Restaurants per capita.

Those restaurants are often the only places I see very many Hispanics. (Maybe Walmart provides some competition.) I also notice more Hispanics around agricultural harvesting seasons -- doing the kind of short-term work teenage boys used to provide when I was a teen -- but no longer do.

Kentucky is located in the center of the country. It has seven boundaries, but none with a foreign country. It suffers from a raging opioid epidemic, has the country's worst funded pension system, is failing its children, educators and future; and is among the unhealthiest of all 50 states.

Kentucky has no sanctuary cities. A study by the conservative CATO Institute found immigrants consume 35% LESS welfare benefits than native-born Americans, although they consume slightly more in Medicare and Medicaid than native-born citizens (www.cato.org/archives/type/article/category/1220). Naturally, the number one legislative priority in the state Senate is to bar "sanctuary cities" in Kentucky.

Tuesday, Gov. Beshear delivered his State of the Commonwealth speech with the right tone and for the most part correctly identifying the priorities. He also extended the olive branch to the majority Republicans in the General Assembly. Their response was hardly promising.

Speaker David Osborne said the speech was "pleasant," implying it was full of warm platitudes and some pipe-dreams but no way to pay for them. Senate President Robert Stivers responded with a standard platitude of politicians -- he's looking to see if Beshear really wants to work in a bi-partisan fashion. These days, however, the majority seems always to define bi-partisanship as the minority giving up all of its priorities and acquiescing to the majority on all of its priorities.

That usually won't work regardless of which party is in power.