# SOAR Summit Highlights More Than $22 Million in New Investments and Economic Development Priorities for Eastern Kentucky

**JESSICA CASEBOLT**
**SOAR COMMUNICATIONS**

CORBIN, Ky. — More than $22 million in new economic revitalization funding, a major broadband investment, and updates on infrastructure, workforce development, and emerging industries highlighted the final day of the 2026 Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR) Summit, held October 9 at the Corbin Arena.

The Summit, presented by Appalachian Wireless and the Appalachian Regional Commission, brought together leaders from government, business, education, and community organizations to advance economic and workforce development across Eastern Kentucky. The closing Principal Officer Plenary, presented by the University of the Cumberlands, highlighted regional investments and economic priorities. The three-day event also featured the EKY Experience, presented by Appalachian Regional Healthcare (ARH), showcasing businesses, industries, organizations, and opportunities throughout the region.

U.S. Congressman Hal Rogers and Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear, SOAR's Co-Principal Officers, jointly announced nine awards through the Abandoned Mine Lands Economic Revitalization (AMLER) program, supporting projects involving healthcare, emergency services, utilities, education, tourism, and industrial development.

"Creating lasting economic opportunity in Eastern Kentucky requires more than any one investment or organization. It requires communities, employers, educators, and government leaders working together to connect people with jobs, help businesses grow, and address the barriers that limit opportunity," said Dr. Reed Adkins, Executive Director of SOAR. "The SOAR Summit brings those partners together around the shared goal of building a stronger economic future for our region."

### *More Than $22 Million Awarded for Regional Projects*

Established by Congressman Rogers in 2016, the AMLER program has directed more than $280 million toward 120 projects in Kentucky, supporting economic revitalization in coal-producing communities.

The nine awards announced during the plenary include:

Leslie County: More than $4 million to expand natural gas infrastructure serving existing and prospective businesses and community facilities.

Laurel County: $3.5 million for infrastructure improvements at the Wilderness Road Event Center.

Johnson County: $2.9 million to expand nursing and agricultural education programs at the Johnson Central Career and Technical Center.

Clay County: $2.76 million for AdventHealth Manchester to acquire a robotic surgical system and expand surgical services.

Elliott County: $2.5 million to modernize and expand emergency medical services facilities.

Harlan County: More than $2.2 million to replace aging water infrastructure in Cumberland.

Letcher County: $2.15 million to extend water service to the Mountain Comprehensive Health Corporation Children's Autism Center and approximately 200 households.

Owsley County: $1.64 million for continued development of the Sag Hollow tourism project.

Pike County: $600,000 to prepare a build-ready site at Wolfpit Industrial Park.

Congressman Rogers emphasized that the new awards build on decades of investment and regional cooperation. Reflecting on earlier efforts to address flooding, substance use, and other longstanding challenges, he pointed to Eastern Kentucky's record of developing solutions through collaboration.

"We know we can offset some of the natural problems that stand in our way," Rogers said, identifying employment, education, and healthcare among the region's continuing priorities.

His remarks also highlighted recent federal funding for transportation, public safety communications, and community infrastructure, underscoring the importance of sustained investment in the region's economic future.

Governor Beshear highlighted statewide private-sector investment and job creation, along with ongoing initiatives involving workforce education, healthcare, housing, and transportation infrastructure.

"We are determined to make sure that this success continues because every community deserves the opportunity to secure that next big game-changing investment," Beshear said.

The Governor and Congressman also recognized a previously announced $25.7 million broadband investment to The Center for Rural Development, supporting six projects intended to expand high-speed internet access to more than 3,000 homes across 12 Eastern Kentucky counties.

### *State and Federal Leaders Address Regional Economic Priorities*

Kentucky Senate President Robert Stivers and members of the General Assembly's Mountain Caucus addressed regional transportation, utility infrastructure, energy development, and economic competitiveness.

Discussions included the Mountain Parkway expansion, US 460, the proposed I-365 corridor, and infrastructure improvements intended to strengthen connections between Eastern Ken-

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# SAMPLE BALLOT

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**NONPARTISAN CITY BALLOT**

**CITY OF BARBOURVILLE**
**Mayor**
(Vote for One)

- ○ David **THOMPSON** NONPARTISAN
- ○ Write-in

B104 Heidrick (City)
B106 S Barbourville (City)
C102 Boone Heights (City)
C103 Artemus/Trosper (City)
D101 Walker Park (City)

**CITY OF BARBOURVILLE**
**City Council**
(Vote for Six)

- ○ Rex Howard **MILLER** NONPARTISAN
- ○ Jacob **ROSE** NONPARTISAN
- ○ Chris "Mookie" **ROSS** NONPARTISAN
- ○ Tyler **DUNN** NONPARTISAN
- ○ Ronnie **MOORE** NONPARTISAN
- ○ Mike **JOHNSON** NONPARTISAN
- ○ Wilma **BARNES** NONPARTISAN
- ○ Write-in
- ○ Write-in
- ○ Write-in
- ○ Write-in
- ○ Write-in

B104 Heidrick (City)
B106 S Barbourville (City)
C102 Boone Heights (City)
C103 Artemus/Trosper (City)
D101 Walker Park (City)

**NONPARTISAN CITY BALLOT**

**CITY OF CORBIN**
**Mayor**
(Vote for One)

- ○ Suzie Barton **RAZMUS** NONPARTISAN
- ○ Write-in

**CITY OF CORBIN**
**City Commission**
(Vote for Four)

- ○ James **GAMBREL** NONPARTISAN
- ○ Allison **MOORE** NONPARTISAN
- ○ Brandon Seth **SHEPHERD** NONPARTISAN
- ○ Walter **PENNINGTON JR** NONPARTISAN
- ○ John **BAKER** NONPARTISAN
- ○ David Grigsby **HART** NONPARTISAN
- ○ Write-in
- ○ Write-in
- ○ Write-in
- ○ Write-in

E101 N Corbin (City)
E102 E Corbin (City)
E103 Lynn Camp (City)

**SCHOOL CANDIDATES**

**MEMBER OF BOARD OF EDUCATION**
**Barbourville Independent**
(Vote for Three)

- ○ Paije **TOWNSLEY** NONPARTISAN
- ○ Brandy **TAYLOR** NONPARTISAN
- ○ Bonita **WILLIAMS** NONPARTISAN
- ○ Chandler **SMITH** NONPARTISAN
- ○ Write-in
- ○ Write-in
- ○ Write-in

B106 S Barbourville (City)
C103 Artemus/Trosper (City)
D101 Walker Park (City)

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**I certify that the voting machine facsimile shown is true and correct and is a list of the names of the candidates to be voted for all precincts for the November Election Tuesday, November 3, 2026 in Knox County, KY**

MIKE COREY
KNOX COUNTY CLERK

PAID FOR BY THE KNOX COUNTY FISCAL COURT