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Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear greets attendees during the Fairness Rally at the Kentucky state Capitol Education Center in Frankfort, Ky., on Wednesday, Feb. 25, 2026.

Beshear melds 'faith and fairness' at Kentucky LGBTQ rally where 2028 looms

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FRANKFORT

Faith and fairness were the overarching themes of Gov. Andy Beshear's address at the Kentucky Fairness Rally as Beshear reiterated his support for the state's LGBTQ community and hinted more at his possible candidacy for the Democratic nomination for president.

In both his time as governor and in the recent months of his press tours and comments as speculation increases that he'll run in 2028, Beshear has couched his defenses in LGBTQ people in terms that relate to his Christian faith.

"I'm tired of faith being hijacked to hurt people instead of to help people. I think it's time that we take it back as a force for good in public life," Beshear said to a crowded room at the Capitol Education Center Wednesday.

The governor cited two different parables of Jesus'

works in his speech and referenced his Christian faith at the event, which is an annual gathering of LGBTQ advocates in the state in Frankfort.

It is something of a differentiating factor for Beshear among previous Kentucky governors — his father, former Gov. Steve Beshear, also a Democrat, defended Kentucky's constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage — and among fellow Democratic presidential hopefuls, who don't talk about faith as fluently.

The younger Beshear became the first sitting governor to speak at the annual Fairness Rally in 2020 and has since repeatedly spoken at the event.

Beshear has contrasted his own views on a hot-button issue like transgender women and girls participation in sports with that of California Gov. Gavin Newsom, who is considered by some to be a frontrunner for the 2028 nomination. Newsom said on his podcast that he

doesn't believe transgender girls should participate in girls sports, while Beshear said the decision should be up to agencies that oversee the sports.

It's a meaningful difference in a Democratic Party that is still trying to figure out its national message on LGBTQ rights. One of the most memorable ads of the 2024 campaign cycle between former Vice President Kamala Harris and President Donald Trump insisted that Harris was for "they/them" and Trump was "for us."

Kentucky Fairness Campaign Executive Director Chris Hartman said Democrats nationwide will find Beshear's approach "to be a breath of fresh air."

"He's somebody who is coming and speaking with candor about what drives his values, how they are rooted in faith, and how faith and fairness can coexist together. The synergy there is what's going to give folks the energy and the motivation to move forward. I think that Gov.

Beshear has a really positive path forward for the entire nation," Hartman said.

Hartman opened his introduction of Beshear with some jokes about 2028 and Beshear's upcoming book release, which has been interpreted as a move in advance of the primary.

"He is officially running..." Hartman began, pausing for dramatic effect as the crowd chattered. "...one of our nation's most popular political podcasts!"

Beshear closed his speech hinting that his fight for LGBTQ rights on a presidential scale might look like how he's pushed back against the GOP legislature. He has vetoed multiple bills related to the LGBTQ community, but all of them have been overridden by Kentucky's Republican legislature, which hold four-fifths majorities in both chambers.

"Don't back down — not to a Republican supermajority here, not to a president elsewhere. We know what's right. We

know we're on the side of right, and I'll keep standing up to him, or them, because I believe in you," Beshear said.

Others in the crowd seemed energized by Beshear's approach. Jerome Hickman, Jr., a Louisville resident, told the Herald-Leader he'd be first in line to help Beshear win the Democratic nomination.

"I hope he gets it. I'm going to canvass for him to make sure he gets it. I love his message because his message is he wants to make sure that everybody's treated fair, treated equally, and that they don't get discriminated against," Hickman said.

A Democratic candidate for Kentucky's 6th Congressional District, Erin Petrey, said she thought Beshear's approach worked because it felt deeply rooted.

"He roots it in humanity. This isn't about 'you have to have a pride flag on' or 'you have to go to a drag show.' It's about just treating people like people because that's the right thing to do," Petrey said.

OTHER TOPICS AT FAIRNESS EVENT

Also at issue were pushes

from the Republican-led state legislature.

Hartman and several speakers urged those in attendance to lobby against Senate Bill 72, which would allow Kentucky health care providers, including doctors, to refuse treatment if it were to go against their conscience. LGBTQ advocates argue it gives providers a free pass to discriminate in who they provide care for, but proponents say provides needed protections for doctors.

Hartman also warned against House Bill 468, which would strip power from the state and local human rights commissions that enforce civil rights law for the public, instead directing aggrieved people to hire lawyers and file lawsuits.

Elections this cycle were mentioned as well.

Former Kentucky poet laureate and bestselling author Silas House warned those in attendance about U.S. Rep. Andy Barr, a Republican who has for more than a decade represented much of Central Kentucky in Congress.

He referenced a recent ad from Barr where he tells the viewer "it's not a sin to be white. It's not against the law to be male. And it shouldn't be disqualifying to be a Christian."

"We have to do all we can to make sure that he does not become our next senator... He has voted consistently against equality acts, and he claims that straight white men are the ones who are under attack these days," House said.

Two candidates for U.S. Senate this year, Democrats Charles Booker and House Minority Floor Leader Pamela Stevenson, D-Louisville, also spoke.

Stevenson expounded on Beshear's theme of faith and LGBTQ rights, citing her role as an ordained minister in stating that "God makes no mistakes."

Booker tied the use of LGBTQ people in political attack ads to his message on wealth inequality. He accused Republicans of "weaponizing identity" to "drive people apart," and listed off a series of economic problems in the state.

"We could be addressing all of these issues, but instead of fighting for you, we have politicians who are using your identity to tear us apart so that they can rob us blind. So hear me clearly: we're not taking the bait anymore," Booker said.

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Thompson said that Monday's "event in the theatre and foyer, unfortunately, is a frequent occurrence related to aging HVAC equipment due for replacement. We continue to monitor this condition at Dunbar and other schools to make repairs or replace equipment as needed."

FCPS HAS SIGNIFICANT NEED FOR BUILDING UPDATES

The most recent building problems at Dunbar were captured in a district-wide report that showed about \$594.4 million in unmet facility needs, part of FCPS' 2025 District Facility Plan.

"The methodology we must use to develop this plan tends to understate costs, and we estimate the true need is closer to \$1,200,000,000" district-wide, Thompson said.

Thompson said the district's bonding capacity is about \$300 million, and the current focus is to maintain aging infrastructure with limited resources until major renovations can take place.

FCPS officials didn't immediately provide more information beyond what was in Thompson's email.

Faris said the school has long been promised renovations.

"I've taught at Dunbar for 22 years," Faris said. "We had been promised renovations in a 2012 (district) report for HVAC, roof, and new classrooms yet we always got moved to the bottom of the list, and now, we aren't even on the list for renovations due to the district's financial mishandling. While I'm grateful they will be replacing our roof and our turf this summer, those are only being done because they absolutely must be due to warranty and insurance issues."

Faris said the library also has suffered pretty significant facility issues. "We couldn't use half the library after the snow days that first week back due to falling ceiling tiles and water damage," Faris said. "While that side has since re-opened, the display window has been ruined and needs significant cleaning to be usable again."

Staff members are sending emails to school board members with a document written by Brooke Jackson, a technology resource teacher at the school, outlining some of the maintenance problems.

"Dunbar is nearly forty years old and has never undergone a renovation," Jackson wrote. "Since Dunbar was built, Lafayette, Henry Clay, and

Tates Creek have all been renovated."

"In addition, the district has constructed entirely new schools for Henry Clay, Bryan Station, Bates Creek, Douglass, The Hill, STEAM, and Locust Trace," Jackson said. "Meanwhile, Dunbar continues to deteriorate. This disparity is unacceptable."

Jackson said the roof issue made the leak "akin to rain inside the building," and classes frequently have to relocate because of leaks, smoke and lack of heating or air conditioning. Jackson also said there had been rodent problems and bats seen inside the school.

"With constant moisture, failing pipes, and poor ventilation, there are legitimate concerns about mold and air quality," Jackson said.

Bathrooms are missing flooring, tiles are damaged and missing in other rooms, and doors are falling off hinges, Jackson said.

"I wrote this letter because I love Dunbar," Jackson told the Herald-Leader. "This place is so incredibly special. The people and opportunities are unmatched. I graduated from here, I work here, I live in this community, my children will go here. The school deserves the same level of love and respect that it has given so many in its 36 years."

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first time, they requested new information that had to be compiled by actuaries, and it was delivered today at 3:22 p.m. ET by the state budget director," Ellis said. "The Beshear administration has provided every piece of information the General Assembly has requested, in addition to a nearly 390-page report delivered on Jan. 7."

"These political games distract from what should be an easy choice for the General Assembly — which is to not increase health insurance costs for 310,000 hardworking state employees."

The 2026-28 executive branch budget proposal was filed as House Bill 500 in a "preliminary" form and is expected to change through the legislative process, Republican lawmakers have said.

But House Appropriations and Revenue Chair Jason Petrie, R-Elkton, previously said the "major theme" of the budget will be reduced spending.

The data as part of the request is necessary, according to lawmakers, to evaluate its bare-bones budget which could lead to spikes in public employee insurance premiums.

The back and forth between Petrie and Kentucky State Budget Director Hicks began in November when the repre-

sentative asked the budget director for spending recommendations from cabinet secretaries for their departments. Hicks refused to hand over the documents, saying the reports were preliminary and even then, were intended for the governor's use to put forth a proposal.

Just after the committee meeting, the governor set forth a budget reduction plan that asked his executive branch — including his office and cabinets for economic development, transportation, energy and other sectors — to reduce their appropriations from the general fund by approximately \$77.7 million.

"I find it atrocious, abhorrent that the executive branch can't share information about potential plans on how to deal with budgets that affect Kentuckians in unbelievable ways," Petrie said to Hicks Nov. 5 during last year's final meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Appropriations and Revenue.

"Wait for the budget address, wait for it, wait for it." How about collaboration? Put us under an NDA, put us under a whatever you need. Collaboration."

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tion plan that asked his executive branch — including his office and cabinets for economic development, transportation, energy and other sectors — to reduce their appropriations from the general fund by approximately \$77.7 million.

The reduction plan came just days after a group of economists forecasted the state would soon see a revenue shortfall of roughly \$156 million.

Laura Leigh Goins, spokesperson for the House Majority Caucus, said she believes this is the first time such subpoenas have been filed in modern history.

Osborne told reporters Tuesday lawmakers have been requesting information needed to finish putting some touches on the budget and verify some numbers in regard to the state health insurance plan.

"The very first piece of information that we got that we had requested was didn't come to us," Osborne said. "It went out in a letter to state employees and retirees. We have no idea if that information is accurate or not because they won't provide us with the information."

When asked what happens if lawmakers don't receive that information in a certain time frame, Osborne said "we won't have to cross that bridge, but there are some options that we have available to us."