2026 State of the State Address: A FOUNDATION FOR GROWTH
Governor Mike Kehoe
January 13, 2026

Thank you, Lieutenant Governor, Mr. Speaker, statewide officials, Judges of the Missouri Supreme Court, members of the General Assembly, esteemed guests, and my fellow Missourians…

Exactly one year ago today, I stood on the steps of our State Capitol, my right hand resting on the Bible, my wife, Claudia, by my side, our friends and family surrounding us, as I swore to the people of Missouri to faithfully perform the duties of this office.

To talk with anyone, to work with anyone, and to root for anyone willing to join us on our mission of securing Missouri's future.

That promise is what guides this administration every single day.

This past year has been challenging, and I can admit that I have taken losses and faced hardships, we all have, but it has also shown what true Missouri resilience looks like.

And like many Missourians, hard work and faith continue to be the guiding principle for Claudia and me. She has been by my side through it all. She grounds our family.

Over the last year, Claudia has endured challenges, too, but has shown her incredible strength through it all.

Serving as First Lady is not a job she ever dreamed of, but she has continued on this journey with grit and grace, starting her Mansion on a Mission initiative to serve others, while still also supporting our own family. She never seeks recognition. Actually, she hates it, but please join me in recognizing my wife, Claudia.

And we would not be here today without our team in the Governor’s Office. These men and women have supported Claudia and me, some for the last year, and others for several years now.

We are so grateful for them and their willingness to serve on good days and bad days.

Join me in thanking the team in the Governor’s Office.

So, today, I stand before you at this dais, still incredibly grateful for, and humbled by the trust Missourians placed in us.

Yet, energized by the work still ahead.

Because today isn't just about reflecting on where we've been over the last year—it's about recommitting ourselves to where we're going.

As our nation approaches its 250th birthday, Missouri's story remains inseparable from America's.

From the Gateway to the West, where two young men set their sights on discovering a new horizon, to innovation exemplified at Missouri's military bases that change how America defends itself.

From rivers that power trade and opportunity, to generations of farmers, builders, innovators, and manufacturers, Missouri has never sat on the sidelines of history. We helped write it and will continue to do so in the years ahead.

And so, 250 years later, as we continue to build on the foundation of this great American experiment, we must recognize that we now join the ranks of those who shaped it as architects of our nation's history.

We are charged not only with preserving what we inherited, but with strengthening it for those who come next.

That responsibility includes securing the American Dream for those willing to work for it, and protecting the values that built this state and nation while building a foundation for growth strong enough to support not just the next year or the next term, but the next generation of Missourians.

The clearest test of whether we are serious about discipline and growth is how efficiently government does its work to best serve the people.

Our administration is blessed to have the leadership of dedicated public servants who understand the goal of improving state government.

Would the members of my Cabinet, your Cabinet, please stand to be recognized?

Let's give them a round of applause.

Since the start of our administration, I wanted Missouri to align with the spirit of President Trump's DOGE effort at the federal level.

In January of 2025, I signed an executive order requiring each Cabinet member to dedicate a minimum of eight hours a month meeting with stakeholders to increase accountability and identify best practices in state government.

And today, I signed an executive order that reinforces our commitment to government efficiency, a new initiative: Missouri GREAT.

This will not only involve members of the Cabinet, but business leaders from successful Missouri-made companies who will help us bring efficient, business-speed practices to our state agencies. They will recommend solutions to both my office and the General Assembly to increase efficiency, eliminate waste, and improve accountability.

Our belief is simple: smaller government equals better government. Not because it does less, but because it does what matters.

It focuses on its core functions and how to best serve Missourians, without overpromising and without overspending.

It means discipline, not excess.

Planning, not wishful spending.

And respect for every dollar Missouri families entrust us with.

That's the Missouri way.

That's what Missourians expect.

And that's what they deserve.

As Governor, I have a constitutional obligation to balance the budget. Simply put, the days of excusing budgetary decisions with fund balances and so called "surpluses" are over.

State government has to return to how budgets looked before COVID-19.

Over the past few months, my staff and I, along with our budget experts, have worked through the state operating budget to identify programs that no longer best serve our state, or that we cannot afford in today's budget climate.

Today, I am recommending a budget that I believe puts conservative values in action.

Our recommendation proves that state government can live within its means, and our economy can grow and deliver results for taxpayers all at the same time.

It cuts more than 600-million-dollars from the core, starting to correct a future spending imbalance of potentially over 2-billion-dollars.

Additionally, our recommendation works to bring ongoing spending back in line with ongoing revenues.

All while meeting priority and mandatory spending requirements such as Medicaid match, child care subsidies, and disaster relief – without cutting core funding for higher education and without cutting the K-12 foundation formula.

Last legislative session, we provided record funding for the K-12 education formula, an increase equivalent to ten years of funding increases.

And remember: Missouri is one of only three states that have Medicaid expansion funding required in our Constitution. That limits the ways we can balance the budget.

Since Fiscal Year 22, over 3400 new budgetary items have been added, at the cost of nearly 13 billion dollars in new general revenue spending. Again, that's just general revenue, this does not include federal dollars.

All of this demonstrates the historic imbalance we must fix.

Auditor Scott Fitzpatrick recently emphasized this very issue, and I appreciate his understanding of the seriousness of this reality.

Government has clearly grown too large.

Many in this building, and I'm not just talking about legislators here, will be tempted to reverse these cuts, to restore this spending. While that is certainly your prerogative, any reversal or new spending item must have a pay for.

This is my commitment to Missourians: when I take action on this budget in June, it will be balanced.

When conservative budget discipline is matched with strategic investment, decisive legislative action, and aggressive business recruitment, responsibility and growth will go hand in hand.

Missouri can deliver both.

That's how you build a foundation.

That's how you unlock opportunity.

And that's how Missouri grows.

So, we have to be bold.

Missouri brings real strengths to the table when recruiting jobs and investment. But when we're competing against states like Tennessee and Texas, states with no individual income tax, too often the conversation ends before it truly begins.

And the consequences are real.

Missouri's population is stagnant. Over the past decade, our economic growth has been average at best. That's not a trend we should accept, and it is one we cannot afford to continue.

The issue at hand here is competitiveness. And competitiveness starts with our tax code.

Missouri's tax structure must evolve.

I'll go one step further. I'm tired of being in the middle of the pack. I'm tired of pretending like merely keeping pace with everyone else is good enough.

Political expediency has confused survival with success.

From our cities to our small towns, I hear the same message: it's time to compete, it's time to win. And it's time to show the country what the Show-Me State is truly made of.

If we are serious about building a foundation for growth, to compete rather than be complacent, then we must begin the work now to phase-out and eliminate Missouri's individual income tax.

We can do both. We can maintain a balanced budget that supports essential services and pursue a tax policy that improves Missouri's competitiveness.

Because this will be done deliberately.

It will be done responsibly.

And it will be done sustainably.

The first step is straightforward: gaining approval from Missourians at the ballot box this year.

And that's why I am calling on the members in this chamber to pass a joint resolution this session placing this proposal before voters.

The question before Missourians will be clear: Should Missouri begin a phased elimination of the individual income tax, with a full repeal within the next five years.

Thank you to Speaker Patterson and Senator Trent for your leadership in sponsoring this legislation.

Once voters approve this measure, I look forward to working with the General Assembly next session to carry out the will of the people and put this plan into action.

The current tax system was designed for a checkbook economy.

Our plan pairs tax relief with closing loopholes. Today, much of our commerce happens through monthly subscriptions and digital services like online advertising, e-books, and AI platforms that fall outside our current sales tax base. Their billionaire owners don't pay.

When these types of modern services are taxed, it will create new revenue for local governments.

These increases will need to be offset by reducing local taxes, like property taxes, a high priority for Missourians and many of us in this room.

Our plan includes safeguards to ensure fiscal responsibility and protect against economic downturns, by requiring triggered reductions to the income tax rate.

Eliminating the income tax is not about runaway sales taxes.

And I will never support extending sales taxes on agriculture, healthcare, or real estate. Period.

This is the people's money, and they can spend it better than politicians.

This plan is about aligning our tax code with today's economy and not yesterday's. Missouri's tax code was built for the past 100 years. Our economy demands one for the next 100 years.

And Missouri has already seen success from cutting taxes so far.

Just last year, we were proud to support a historic elimination of the income tax on capital gains.

This is a gamechanger for farmers, businesses, and families.

Missourians can spend their money and generate economic growth a whole lot better than government. And as someone who raises horses and cattle, believe me, if you keep putting hay and grain in front of them, they'll eat. So will government.

Some critics and members of the media will claim that tax cuts put us in a bad budget situation. I disagree. The folks who say that just want to spend more of your money. I will never apologize for putting money back in the pockets of hardworking Missourians.

But it's not just tax policy that will make Missouri competitive.

Energy is top of mind for those in this building, and across our state and nation.

We made historic progress last year by signing Senate Bill 4 into law. However, we must also look to a sustainable, long-term solution for our growing energy demands.

And that's why today, I am proud to announce that Missouri, and this administration, is all in on nuclear.

We know nuclear is a safe, reliable, and clean energy source that can and will power Missouri's economic future for generations to come, so I am calling on the General Assembly to pass Senator Cierpiot and Representative Hurlbert's update to Missouri's Renewable Energy Standard.

Before this address, I signed an executive order establishing the Advanced Nuclear Energy Task Force to build on the work being led by President Trump at the federal level and promote nuclear energy deployment in Missouri.

In today's world, modern technology and artificial intelligence are critical to improving government efficiency.

So, I signed a third executive order ahead of this address that will reinforce Missouri's commitment to safely and effectively use AI in state government operations, building upon the initial success we have already seen.

This executive order will also support our state's role in, as President Trump calls it, "the space race of our time," and ensure that our policies around AI are both pro-business and pro-consumer.

Missouri is open for AI, and we're open for business.

Economic development is a top priority for this administration.

Missouri has some incredible tools in our toolbox to complement an updated tax structure and energy policy, including the Missouri Works program.

This program is the state's number one tool for business expansion and retention—because it rewards both large companies and small family-owned businesses that invest in Missouri and create real opportunity.

Joining us today are Chris and Karen Green of GWS Welding in Appleton City. What began in a rented, two-car garage now operates a nearly 52,000-square-foot manufacturing plant, with more than 100 dealers in 21 states. With the help of Missouri Works, GWS expanded their livestock feeding and handling equipment production this year, reinvesting in their people, their community, and this state.

Please join me in welcoming the Green family. Would you please stand to be recognized?

That right there is the American Dream. And it's exactly the kind of growth Missouri should be proud of.

This is why I'm urging the General Assembly to support enhancing the Missouri Works program to include incentivizing capital investments exceeding 50 million dollars, sponsored by Senator Burger and Representative Gallick.

In this budget, I also want to invest in something new that could be scaled and duplicated across the state.

Pawsperity is the nation's only nonprofit pet grooming school headquartered in Kansas City, with the mission of breaking the cycle of generational poverty.

Yes, I'm talking about pet grooming. But this concept is more than just giving a dog a bath.

The program has helped more than 190 students into stable careers, putting them on the path to no longer need government assistance programs through hands on job training.

Last year, I saw firsthand the impact of this program. Natasha Herdman, the founding CEO of the organization, joins us today with Amy Hall.

At just 14 years old, Amy spent time in juvenile detention and dropped out of high school. As a young mother, she struggled to hold a job and, at one point, turned to illegal activities because she thought that was the only way she could provide for her daughters. Amy knew she wanted a way out of that life but didn't know where to turn.

In 2018, Amy began learning the trade of dog grooming at Pawsperity while also gaining skills for self-sufficiency, and the rest is history. Today, she serves as an instructor, using her own experiences to empower others and help change lives for the better.

Our budget supports funding for Pawsperity to expand its proven workforce development and social enterprise model in other communities across the state.

Amy and Natasha, would you please stand to be recognized?

One year ago today, I signed six executive orders to launch our Safer Missouri initiative.

A piece of this included coordinating regional efforts to arrest dangerous fugitives through Operation Relentless Pursuit, which has now led to the arrest of over 1,100 criminals.

Today, joining us in the upper gallery are Randolph County Sheriff's Office Deputy, Lieutenant Nathan West, Trooper Dustin Harrison, and Sergeant Derrick Powell, Criminal Investigator with the Missouri State Highway Patrol Division of Drug and Crime Control.

On October 12, during an Operation Relentless Pursuit investigation in Paris, Missouri, involving a Ralls County murder, officers searched a suspect's residence and located the suspect hiding in a bathroom.

The suspect fired at officers, wounding Lieutenant West.

Sergeant Powell immediately transported Lieutenant West to the Moberly Regional Air Evac Helipad, coordinated medical care, and he was airlifted to a hospital. Trooper Harrison remained at the scene to maintain security and coordinate responding emergency services.

Lieutenant West was later released and now has returned to duty.

Lieutenant West, Trooper Harrison, and Sergeant Powell, would you please stand to be recognized?

I appreciate the service of these men and their families, and all law enforcement professionals.

There are success stories like these across the state. That's why, in our budget, we continue funding Operation Relentless Pursuit.

But our administration, and law enforcement officers, won't continue to make progress in this effort alone. You, the 103rd General Assembly, joined us in our efforts last session to prioritize safety. Together, we will continue to build on Safer Missouri this year.

Our Missouri Blue Shield program received 10 million dollars in funding from the General Assembly, allowing for just over 200 communities to receive grants of 50,000 dollars for law enforcement training and equipment. Because of the success of this program in helping departments of all sizes, our budget supports another 10 million dollars for Blue Shield communities.

Additionally, I am proud to report that the Public Safety Recruitment and Retention Act had over 700 applications for the 2026 – 2027 school year. That is why, once again, I am recommending 5 million dollars in our budget for these scholarships.

We want Missouri to be the best state in the nation for first responders.

And our efforts on recruitment and retention are already paying off. In 2025, we had more than 1200 peace officer licenses issued, the highest number in one year since 2012.

That's 1200 more law enforcement officers protecting our communities, our families, and our way of life. That's what this is all about.

Also, last session, we supported wastewater testing in schools and communities as part of our efforts to crack down on the fentanyl epidemic.

And I'm proud to continue that work to keep dangerous drugs and substances out of the hands of children. That includes unregulated products like intoxicating Hemp, Kratom, and 7-OH.

In August, I made the historic appointment of Catherine Hanaway as Missouri's Attorney General. Since taking office, she has been hard at work, focusing on fighting crime, protecting consumers, and defending the Constitution. She has also been a leader in fighting against these opioid-like drugs for the protection of minors.

Thank you, Attorney General Hanaway. And welcome back to the House!

I urge the General Assembly to continue modernizing the tools available to law enforcement.

As incidents at home and abroad have demonstrated, drones can be purchased by anyone, anywhere, and can be equipped with explosives, contraband, and any manner of weaponry. The General Assembly must pass legislation, with an emergency clause, regarding the use of unmanned aerial vehicles and law enforcement action.

With the FIFA World Cup coming to our state, we've been intentional about putting public safety and preparedness first, allocating funding to support comprehensive safety measures and personnel. Our budget also invests in the Missouri State Highway Patrol, the Missouri National Guard, and Missouri Disaster Management Teams to provide security and medical support at the matches and Fan Fest events, ensuring fans, families, and visitors are protected.

I am asking the General Assembly to support these new decisions items.

This is Missouri's chance to showcase Kansas City and our entire state to the world, and it must be safe.

To further improve public safety, our administration is also looking to take action on juvenile crime reduction and sentencing reform.

Violent crime committed by juveniles has reached a concerning level in Missouri.

Our juvenile justice system was designed to rehabilitate young people who make mistakes, but it was never meant to be a revolving door for repeat violent offenders who pose a real danger to the public.

We must allow prosecutors to request a hearing before a judge for certain violent crimes committed by juveniles and give judges the ability to determine whether those cases should be held in adult court.

Juveniles would remain in juvenile facilities and continue receiving services, but this reform would add accountability where it is needed the most.

I ask the General Assembly to pass Senator Schroer and Representative Christ's legislation to stop this revolving door.

Right now, when a judge sentences an offender, no one in the courtroom—not victims, not law enforcement, not even the court—can say what that sentence truly means. That lack of transparency undermines confidence in the system.

I support the sentencing reform sponsored by Senators Trent, Nicola, and Carter and Representatives Black, Cook, and Hardwick.

This will bring common sense and clarity back to the courtroom so Missourians can have greater trust in how justice is carried out.

Together, these efforts are a critical part of our Safer Missouri package and our commitment to making Missouri a better place to work and raise a family.

Because, in Missouri, we value families, and we value a culture of life. That includes pregnant women and their unborn children.

I ask the members of the General Assembly to support Representative Williams' efforts to allow pregnant women facing abuse to finalize divorce proceedings. This is bipartisan, common-sense bill and it protects vulnerable women.

And, this year, Missourians will have the opportunity at the ballot box to vote to restore our pro-life laws that protect innocent life and prohibit dangerous transgender procedures for minors.

Amendment 3 reflects Missouri's long-standing commitment to life and standing with women.

Protecting the unborn is important to Claudia and me, and we ask Missourians to vote yes on Amendment 3.

And while strong communities are built on protecting life through both safety and stability—for much of Missouri, that stability begins with agriculture.

From row crops to livestock, from research fields to rural main streets, agriculture remains one of the strongest foundations of Missouri's economy. Because when agriculture is strong, Missouri is strong.

Missouri's farmers and ranchers faced many challenges last year. Floods, fires, droughts, and tornadoes hit nearly every corner of our state while fuel, fertilizer, feed, and financing costs climbed higher than market prices.

But, while we may not be able to change global markets from Jefferson City, we did pass several pieces of critical legislation to help continue to build a state where agriculture isn't penalized for producing.

With our partners at USDA, we were proud to be granted a SNAP waiver that updates Missouri's food stamp program, emphasizing nutritious foods produced by the farmers that feed our state and nation.

We expanded health care options and telehealth access in rural communities.

At the end of last year, the Trump Administration awarded Missouri with more than 216-million-dollars in federal funding through our Rural Health Transformation plan.

This is in the top ten of all state applications submitted for funding nationwide – a gamechanger for rural communities and rural healthcare. I would like to thank the work of our Congressional delegation, our state agencies, and healthcare partners in helping us secure this win.

I would also like to thank Representative Byrnes for working with our congressional delegation to require the federal government to compensate victims of radioactive waste exposure.

And, I am supportive of efforts from Senator O'Laughlin to put basic guardrails around industrial solar developments that are dividing our rural communities.

Because we have to protect our resources for the generations to come.

Last year for the first time ever, we included ongoing funding for Missouri FFA. As Claudia and I traveled the state, we were able to see the Ag Education on the Move program in action in Morgan County.

This program, in partnership with Missouri Farmers Care, empowers FFA leaders across the state to go into elementary classrooms and teach hands-on agriculture lessons. It truly is the next generation teaching the next generation.

With us today, are the president and vice president of the Milan FFA Chapter, Lexus Fordyce and Hayden Courtney. Lexus and Hayden are seniors at Milan C-2 Schools in Sullivan County and, in addition to their many school leadership positions and involvement, served as Ag Education on the Move student teachers, working alongside their chapter to teach over 60 third graders.

Our budget funds FFA again, so that programs like this can continue to benefit the next generation of agriculture leaders.

Would you please join me in recognizing Lexus and Hayden, and FFA members across the state?

Growing Missouri requires giving that next generation access to opportunity and the tools they need to succeed.

Last year, we took an important step forward by including 50 million dollars in general revenue funding to strengthen the MO Scholars program.

That investment was grounded in a simple belief: families deserve options, and students deserve an education that fits their needs.

And with us today is a family that directly benefits from MO Scholars.

Annie Webber and her daughters, Katanna and Atarah, join us in the upper gallery.

Annie is a single mother, and, like many single parents, including my own mother when I was growing up, works hard to be able to send her girls to the best school for them.

The MO Scholars program has lifted a tremendous financial burden off their family, and Katanna and Atarah are now both able to attend New Covenant Academy in Springfield.

Would you please join me in welcoming them to the Chamber?

Our budget recommendation this year includes an additional 10 million dollars for the MO Scholars program for a total of 60 million dollars because this program is working, and Missouri families are counting on it.

Students across our state have brighter futures because their families were given educational choice. They remind us that when we put students first, opportunity follows.

Thanks to the One Big Beautiful Bill Act and the work of our federal delegation, Missouri will opt in to the new federal scholarship tax credit program.

Beginning in calendar year 2027, this program directs private dollars toward student scholarships, allowing Missourians to receive up to 1,700 dollars in federal tax credits for investing in students.

But giving families real access to opportunity means meeting them where they are. It shouldn't depend on whether a family can afford private tuition or whether a child lives on the right side of the district line.

The next step in school choice is clear: open enrollment.

Open enrollment gives families the freedom to choose the public school that best meets their child's needs, regardless of zip code.

It's about fairness. It's about access. And it's about making sure no child's future is limited by their address.

That's why I am once again asking the General Assembly to pass Senator Trent and Representative Pollitt's legislation supporting public school open enrollment.

In the meantime, we're including 7.5 million dollars in our budget to make open enrollment a reality as soon as possible.

Again, open enrollment is not about weakening public education, it's about strengthening it.

Because when families have choices, schools are pushed to innovate, improve, and respond to the needs of the students they serve.

Expanding access must go hand in hand with accountability. Parents deserve clear, easy to understand information about how schools are performing so they can make the best decision for their children.

That is why, today, I signed an executive order creating a statewide school accountability A-F grade card.

Missouri's current accountability system places too much weight on administrative process rather than student success, and it does not give a straightforward picture of how schools are actually performing.

The real test of Missouri's education system should be whether students are learning. Whether they can read, write, and do math. Our school grade card will accomplish just that, using a familiar A-F grading scale to clearly present academic performance.

Under this order, DESE will present data in a clear, concise way each year, giving parents and families the ability to easily discern results, all while maintaining existing reporting requirements that continue to hold schools and their leadership accountable.

And I encourage the General Assembly to advance similar legislation, sponsored by Senator Ben Brown and Speaker Jon Patterson.

Accountability isn't about inputs—it's about outcomes. And one of the clearest measures of success is whether students graduate ready for the real world.

That commitment to real-world readiness starts in the classroom. Last year, we implemented a bell-to-bell cell phone ban in our schools, and the results speak for themselves. We're hearing from educators that lunchrooms are louder, classrooms are more focused, and students are more engaged with each other, building real-world social skills without the constant pull of a screen.

As we modernize opportunity and outcomes, we must also ensure our public education funding model reflects today's realities and tomorrow's responsibilities.

While my budget recommendation for Fiscal Year 2026 included the largest increase since the foundation formula was created, the General Assembly chose to spend an additional 297 million dollars on top of this historic recommendation.

Although, funding education is a top priority for me, the current formula simply does not work.

I look forward to seeing the results of the School Funding Modernization Task Force's work on my desk come December but until then, the record investment K-12 education received last year will provide school districts with stability.

Again, we are not cutting core K-12 funding. Only a bureaucrat would say that continued record funding is somehow a cut.

And finally, as we talk about education and student success, we can't overlook the role athletics and other extracurricular activities play in building leadership, teamwork, and resilience.

That is why the organizations overseeing these programs must operate with transparency and accountability, always putting students first.

This is not happening now, and I look forward to legislation sponsored by Senator Bean and Representative Cook, establishing a governing oversight board for MSHSAA.

This reform is about good governance, consistent standards, and ensuring that decisions impacting Missouri students, and funded by Missouri taxpayers, are made openly, fairly, and responsibly. Unelected bureaucrats cannot act like kings.

The State of the State is not really about budgets or politicians, it's about Missourians. So, before I close, I would like to recognize the Missourians that showed us what true heroes look like over the past year.

Since we will be sharing several stories, please hold your applause to the end.

In 2025, communities across the state were tested time and time again with flooding, severe storms, wildfires, and tornadoes. President Trump approved five federal disaster declarations – more than any other state, which affected 41 counties and the City of St. Louis.

In the moments of uncertainty—when families were afraid and communities were shaken—our first responders and disaster response teams did not hesitate. They ran toward danger.

In Ozark County, Fire Chief Greg Watts, his brother Lloyd Stone, the five-man Bakersfield volunteer fire department, and Assistant Chief J.B. Duke from a neighboring volunteer fire department, answered the call during multiple disasters on March 14th and 15th. Battling wildfires and tornado damage, they drove through unsafe debris in their personal vehicles to save a woman from bleeding out when an ambulance couldn't make it.

Just a few weeks later, when many of those same counties were once again hit by storms, tornadoes, and flooding, Butler County Emergency Management Director Robbie Myers played a pivotal role in leading recovery efforts through the coordination of volunteer organizations and local, state, and federal partners. Local emergency managers like Robbie continue to be crucial in helping Missourians recover from disasters.

In April, West Plains Fire and Rescue Lieutenant Bud McMillen led his team members, including Lieutenant Drew Findley, Engineer Corbin Thompson, Firefighter Jeremiah Jones, and former Firefighter Chris Brockelbank, in responding to historic flooding, pulling victims out of vehicles and saving the life of a fellow firefighter who had been pinned against a tree after being swept off the road.

And on the afternoon of May 16, an EF3 tornado struck St. Louis, putting Missouri's first responders to the test once again. I will never forget being on the ground in St. Louis, just blocks from where I grew up, the morning after the destruction and seeing the work of first responders and community leaders in action, including men and women of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department, under the leadership of Chief Robert Tracy.

Probationary Officer Dakota DeClerck, who was just one month out of the academy at the time, his Field Training Officer Kenneth Schmittgens, and Officer Sarah Jerden carried survivors from the rubble and cleared debris in dangerous conditions. The body cam footage of their work is truly inspiring and shows the lengths that officers will go to help their neighbors.

Missouri Task Force 1 deployed to St. Louis, where they worked with the St. Louis City Fire Department and the St. Charles County Metro Strike Team to search damaged structures and save lives. Randy Sanders bravely led this deployment. The Task Force is one of 28 Urban Search and Rescue teams in the United States, managed by the Boone County Fire Protection District, led by Chief Doug Westhoff.

And, our Missouri National Guard supported relief efforts in St. Louis, with Captain Glenn Longhibler and First Sergent Travis Hilburn, serving as the command team responsible for providing critical engineer support. Leading a platoon of 32 soldiers, they coordinated and executed debris removal operations, removing hundreds of truckloads of wreckage. Their leadership played a vital role in stabilizing the community and laid the groundwork for recovery that continues today in St. Louis.

Would these brave men and women please stand to be recognized?

Thank you all. Many of their families and colleagues join them in the upper gallery today as well.

To each of you—and to all the first responders and emergency personnel and their families across the state—we thank you for your service to the people of Missouri.

Each of these stories, and the stories of thousands of others who stepped up, carry courage, sacrifice, and quiet heroism that cannot be summarized in minutes or words. But they truly are what the State of the State is all about.

They remind us of this: when Missouri is tested, Missourians answer the call.

Finally, to the men and women in this room who were elected to serve.

Over the last year, we came together for one regular session, two special sessions and everything in between. And throughout it all, there have been times when tensions ran high, and we found it easier to see each other's differences before our similarities.

But as we leave this chamber today, let us remember that beyond party labels, beyond floor speeches, and beyond the noise, we are here for a higher purpose. It is our job to serve—not as Republicans or Democrats, not as urban or rural—but as Missourians, putting our values first, working together when it matters most.

When the days get long, and your efforts seem to go unnoticed or unappreciated, remember what an honor it is to be exhausted by this challenge we chose to take part in.

Each of us brings our own perspective, our own convictions, and our own experiences—but we are bound by a common goal: To build a stronger foundation for growth, so that our children and our children's children, inherit a Missouri that is safer, stronger and full of opportunity.

May God bless you. May God bless the United States of America. And may God continue to bless the great state of Missouri!