



**John Kasich's Last State of the State:  
Good Message, Wrong Venue**

March 8, 2018

In giving his last [State of the State](#), Ohio Governor John Kasich proved again that timing is everything in politics. His broad message praising hope, unity, and determination was a good one as far as Kasich speeches go. The problem, however, is that it was the right message for a college graduation, not a speech designed to update Ohioans on how Ohio is doing. With his citation of philosophers, theologians, authors, and great historical figures combined with his plea to try to do right, wide-eyed graduating collegians would have liked his remarks.

Kasich had indicated the speech would be odd. It was, but it also was self-indulgent. Hundreds of people, including state policymakers, his cabinet, and dozens of media outlets, gathered in Westerville to hear how Ohio was doing. Instead, this captive audience got a roughly forty-five-minute lecture on Kasich's personal philosophy chock full of important thinkers to prove how well-read he is. Kasich essentially used the State of the State to make the case that he governed as the philosophers and theologians said great leaders should govern (unlike that guy in Washington) and signaled a 2020 run by ending with the statement that he and his team now "have a world to change."

In terms of details on how Ohio is doing, his speech was extremely light on specifics and heavy on opinions. With Ohio coming in [ranked 40<sup>th</sup> in the latest U.S. News & World Report](#) state rankings covering dozens of categories, Kasich's assessment that Ohio is the strongest it has been in a generation just doesn't jibe with what most Ohioans are experiencing. The fact is Ohio's [private sector still employs fewer people today](#) than it did in March 2000. Equally problematic, more Ohioans than ever are [dependent on government](#) and the percentage of [federal funds needed to balance the Ohio budget](#) has skyrocketed under Kasich. From [weak job growth](#) to [population losses](#), from educational mediocrity to [revenue troubles](#), Ohio remains a laggard among the states after seven years of Kasich's stewardship and, as he said, his "best" efforts.

Frankly, I found his one major announcement regarding the creation of the largest state park wholly lacking in imagination and good public policy. Instead of spending tens of millions of taxpayer fees to create another yet state park, why not work with a major resort developer to create a world-class outdoor destination spot? The last thing that part of Ohio needs is a state park that gobbles up land and won't bring many jobs. Imagine if Kasich could have lured a resort like the [Greenbrier](#) in West Virginia, the [Broadmoor](#) in Colorado Springs, or even a tourist mecca like Gatlinburg/Pigeon Forge. Think about the job opportunities that would come with a year-round resort with conferences and scores of outdoor activities in one of the most scenic

parts of Ohio. People don't come to Ohio for our state parks; they might for a long weekend of fun, great food, and five-star lodging.

Despite Kasich's pledge that he and his team would "run through the tape," the speech contained no new policy recommendations and this year is the first time he did not submit a mid-year budget proposal. As the media reported, Kasich [made more appearances](#) on Sunday new shows than in Ohio in 2017. Contrary to his words, the unintended punchline of Kasich's speech seemed to be that his work in Ohio is done.

It truly must be hard for Kasich to sit alone in the office he once coveted as a young college graduate and realize how much of an afterthought he has become. Republicans running to replace him and for the U.S. Senate wrapped their arms around President Donald Trump, not Kasich. With his [support among Republicans lower than his Democratic support](#), even his Lieutenant Governor shuns him. But for his constant criticism of Trump, MSNBC would ignore him, too.

For a guy who won every election except his two runs for the White House, it must vex Kasich that his timing on the national stage is always off. In 2000, his presidential campaign collapsed due to the George W. Bush juggernaut and his lack of name recognition from being just a congressman. Kasich and his team believed being the governor of the battleground state of Ohio would catapult him to the presidency. Unfortunately for his dream, his timing was off again in 2016, as the mood of Republican voters shifted away from career politicians to a populist willing to "drain the swamp."

As the 2020 election approaches, Kasich finds himself in no man's land. His position as the top NeverTrump spokesman has alienated too many Republican voters for him to win the Republican nomination against an incumbent Trump. Even if Trump doesn't run again, Vice President Mike Pence (or several of the governors from Kasich's Class of 2010 whose records far surpass his) would trounce Kasich. Despite what his team tells him, his chance as an independent candidate is [little more than an illusion](#). With the Democratic Party headed further left, his rebranding as a moderate Democrat is twenty-five years too late.

Whether he knows it or not, Kasich's last State of the State likely was his last major speech anyone will attend or pay attention to. If that is the case, it really is too bad he didn't use the venue to [reimagine Ohio by pushing for policies that really would make Ohio stronger](#) like enacting right-to-work and streamlining Ohio's 3,700 taxing jurisdictions. With supermajorities in the Ohio House and Ohio Senate, Kasich could have gotten so much more done during his tenure had he worked with legislators instead of repeatedly trying to force through bad ideas they clearly didn't support.