



2026 State of the State Address Special Guests

During the 2026 State of the State Address, Governor Mike Kehoe recognized several special guests for their individual achievements, for the broader communities they represent, and for their shared commitment to strengthening and bettering the state of Missouri. Photos of special guests can be found on [Flickr](#).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Missouri Works

Missouri Works 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.

Chris and Karen Green | Green's Welding and Sales

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.

Pawsperity

Pawsperity is the nation's only nonprofit pet grooming school, headquartered in Kansas City, with the mission of breaking the cycle of generational poverty. The program has helped more than 190 students into stable careers, putting them on the path to no longer needing government assistance programs through hands-on job training.

Amy Hall and Natasha Herdman | Pawsperity

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.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Operation Relentless Pursuit

Operation Relentless Pursuit (ORP) is a component of Governor Kehoe's Safer Missouri public safety initiative, announced on his first day in office. As outlined in Executive Order 25-02, ORP is a regional anti-crime effort that emphasizes intelligence-led policing and cross-jurisdiction collaboration to apprehend dangerous fugitives. In its first year of operations, ORP led to the arrest of over 1,100 criminals.

Lieutenant Nathan West | Randolph County Sheriff's Office

Sergeant Derrick Powell | Missouri State Highway Patrol Division of Drug and Crime Control

Trooper Dustin Harrison | Missouri State Highway Patrol Troop B

On October 12, during an ORP 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 the responding emergency services. Lieutenant West was later released and has now returned to duty.

AGRICULTURE

Missouri FFA

Missouri FFA is the state chapter of the national youth organization dedicated to making a positive difference in the lives of young people by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success through agricultural education.

Ag Ed on the Move

Agriculture Education on the Move is a 10-week hands-on education program delivered by educators, such as FFA members, to elementary school children about where their food comes from, how farmers support their communities, and more. The program identifies key classroom objectives and meets standards primarily in the areas of science, math, reading, and writing.

Lexus Fordyce and Hayden Courtney | Milan FFA Chapter, Milan C-2 Schools

Lexus and Hayden are seniors at Milan C-2 Schools in Sullivan County. In addition to their many school leadership positions and involvement, they served as Ag Education on the Move student teachers, working alongside their chapter to teach over 60 third graders.

EDUCATION

MO Scholars

The Missouri Scholars Program (MO Scholars) is a K-12 scholarship program in Missouri, funded by tax-credit-eligible private donations and public funding, which provides educational opportunities and resources to Missouri students and families. MO Scholars provides options for eligible families, allowing them to seek an array of alternative educational services ranging from private schools to therapeutic services.

Annie, Katanna, and Atarah Webber | MO Scholars Family

Annie Webber, a single mother, has worked tirelessly—like many parents across Missouri—to ensure her daughters have access to the best educational opportunities possible.

Through the MO Scholars program, a tremendous financial burden was lifted from their family, allowing Katanna and Atarah to attend New Covenant Academy in Springfield.

DISASTER RECOVERY

In 2025, communities across the state were tested time and 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.

Ozark County Fires

Fire Chief Greg Watts | Bakersfield Volunteer Fire Department
Firefighter Lloyd Stone | Bakersfield Volunteer Fire Department
Assistant Chief J.B. Duke | Tecumseh Volunteer Fire Department

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 14 and 15. 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.

Butler County Tornadoes and Flooding

Robbie Myers | Butler County Emergency Management Director

Just weeks after the March 14 and 15 storm series, many of the 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.

West Plains

Lieutenant Bud McMillen | West Plains Fire and Rescue

Lieutenant Drew Findley | West Plains Fire and Rescue

Engineer Corbin Thompson | West Plains Fire and Rescue

Former-Firefighter Chris Brockelbank | West Plains Fire and Rescue

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.

May 16 St. Louis EF3 Tornado Response & Recovery

On the afternoon of May 16, an EF3 tornado struck St. Louis, putting Missouri's first responders to the test once again. Just blocks from where Governor Kehoe grew up, the morning after the destruction, the Governor witnessed first responders and community leaders in action. In the days, weeks, and months following the tornado, both volunteer organizations as well as local, state, and federal partners have played a vital role in stabilizing the community and laying the groundwork for recovery, which continues today in St. Louis

Probationary Officer Dakota DeClerck | St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department

Field Training Officer Kenneth Schmittgens | St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department

Officer Sarah Jerden | St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department

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.

Randy Sanders | Missouri Task Force 1

Fire Chief Doug Westhoff | Boone County Fire Protection and Missouri Task Force 1

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.

Captain Glenn Longhibler | Missouri National Guard

First Sergeant Travis Hilburn | Missouri National Guard

The Missouri National Guard supported relief efforts in St. Louis, with Captain Glenn Longhibler and First Sergeant 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.