



# 'Be-shear' you know what you're getting before you buy

By Jim Waters

Gov. Steve Beshear talked a good game during his inauguration speech, but it's wait-and-see for me.

I've returned too many political "purchases" after words led me to "impulse buying" but deeds sent me back to customer service.

Among the words I liked from Beshear were these: "We can choose the path of least resistance, the status quo, or we can choose the path of progress. This new path will involve new thinking and new ideas . . . And it will demand courage."

These ideas have been consistent themes in my columns – while the politicians marched down the road of mediocrity, puffing themselves up like peacocks.

Remember, as a seller, it's Beshear's job to make us nod our heads in the affirmative like dashboard bobble-head dolls. As a buyer, I'm not shaking my head "no." I'm just not making my way to the checkout lane yet.

If the governor accepts sound economic and education ideas from experts outside his partisan purview, then Kentucky could enjoy a renaissance.

But what happens when good ideas for Kentucky – like right-to-work and school-choice laws – clash with the agendas of powerful labor groups? Will the governor consider long-term effects and all people or be content to grab short-term political gains? If he chooses the latter, Beshear can join a list of marginal leaders that dwarfs the state's roll call of courageous governors.

Beshear's fellow Democrats previously rejected the idea of a "right-to-work" policy, which would prevent employees from being forced to join labor unions or pay dues, whether they came with sufficient benefits or not.

Yet "right-to-work" is one of 16 critical economic variables for states in a new American Legislative Exchange Council report co-authored by highly respected economists Arthur Laffer and Stephen Moore. Without a right-to-work law, Kentucky ranks No. 46 among states — and dead last in the Southeast — in economic competitiveness, the council report shows.

Laffer and Moore report that having a right-to-work law represents one of two economic factors that stand out as "perhaps the most important in attracting jobs and capital."

Jim Henderson, Simpson County's Republican judge-executive, whose county sits on the border of Tennessee, once wrote in an article for the Bluegrass Institute that a lack of a right-to-work policy "sends

a signal that Kentucky is not a job-friendly commonwealth.”

Is anyone in Frankfort listening to Henderson?

Kentucky also fails with income-tax rates, the second of the council’s most important variables. According to the ALEC study, only eight states have higher personal-income tax rates than Kentucky.

Beshear spoke about how we’ve “fallen short” when it comes to “investing in our people.”

Does he think higher taxes means “investing” in Kentuckians? So far, it hasn’t worked. “It now takes the typical Kentuckian 13 months to make the income that a resident of Tennessee makes in a year,” the council’s report stated.

Meanwhile, Tennessee offers a right-to-work law, no personal income tax and ranks 41 spots higher than Kentucky in the report’s “competitiveness index.”

School choice is another good idea.

Controversial? Yes, with some. Would it make it difficult for Beshear to get the teacher union support in the next election? Probably.

But if that’s not “swimming upstream” and challenging the status quo,” what is?

Democratic governors nationwide have reaped handsome political rewards for swimming against the monopolistic public-education tide that threatens to drown our students. One of those governors – Janet Napolitano – leads Arizona to a No. 2 ranking in the council’s report and a No. 1 spot in the report’s “Education Freedom Index” and right-to-work category.

Beshear says a good idea is a good idea, no matter where it comes from.

However, many of his appointments – particularly in education and labor – offer a hint that he won’t challenge much of anything, least of all the status quo.

Nothing would delight me more than finding I am wrong about this administration. And if I am, I’ll prepare the “crow” myself.

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