Q&A with Gov. Matt Bevin

By Courtney Daniel [1]

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Kentucky Gov. Matt Bevin is the 62nd governor of the commonwealth of Kentucky. He believes too many of America’s children are slipping through the cracks, and foster care reform is imperative to creating a thriving state and nation. Bevin married his wife Glenna in 1996 and they are now the parents of nine children ages 7–18.

Q As a husband and father to nine children, how do you balance the demands of the governor’s office with duties at home?

GOV. BEVIN “I have millions of constituents to look out for, but none more important than my immediate family. This is why I keep my weekends and evenings as free as possible. Sundays are reserved exclusively for family. I often bring one or two of our children with me to special events around the state and country. My job provides us with the opportunity for an ongoing, real-life civics lesson. It is important for my children to see and experience the responsibilities and human interactions necessary to effectively govern a state. It would not be possible for me to raise a family of any size (let alone nine) and also serve as governor, if I did not have a truly remarkable wife. Glenna is wise, loving, patient and understanding of the many demands on my time. She is the anchor of our home and a gracious and engaged first lady to the people of Kentucky. I am truly blessed.”

Q How did your own childhood shape you as a future leader?

GOV. BEVIN “I grew up in a three bedroom, one bathroom farmhouse and was the second of six children. We raised animals and grew crops to provide the bulk of our family’s food. It was a very financially humble home, so I learned the value and importance of hard work at a very young age. I shared a single, small bedroom with my three brothers and developed an early appreciation for the importance of teamwork. As I entered adulthood and then the military, I knew the world did not owe me anything. It was important to me that I gave to others the very best of what I had to offer. To pursue excellence, with integrity, in everything, at all times became my life’s goal. I also learned early in life that you are only as good as the people you surround yourself with, so I’ve always tried to keep the best company. True leaders lead by example—at home and at work.”

Q What priorities are you focused on for Kentucky relating to children and families?

GOV. BEVIN “My intention is for Kentucky to be the best model in America for adoption and foster care. We are focused like a laser on this mission. Seeing how many of America’s children are slipping through the cracks is one of the key reasons I decided to run for governor. There is no reason for the system to be as bureaucratic and slow as it has historically been. Our children deserve better than that. It is imperative that Kentucky’s children must come first. Everything we do should be focused on serving the best interests of the child. Our futures are all literally dependent on the educational, emotional, physical and economic success of our children. Strong children are best raised in strong families. Our state’s resources, tax policies, regulations and programs are being coordinated to deliver this possibility to the children of Kentucky.”

Q What policies have you worked to enact that will increase protections for children?

GOV. BEVIN “Our administration and Legislature have worked diligently in recent months to pass a wide array of bills that will better protect the lives of Kentucky’s children. Starting with protecting our most vulnerable children, Kentucky passed significant right-to-life laws, including a post-30 week abortion ban and an ultrasound bill. We passed a law providing liability protection to children & families those who rescue children locked in hot
cars and another authorizing unannounced visits to the homes of children deemed by authorities to be in danger. To help children in Kentucky's foster care system, we passed a fictive kin bill and legislation that allows foster children to obtain a driver's license, a law declaring more areas (such as churches and hospitals) as safe spaces to bring children you are unable to care for, and a law helping children get the insurance coverage they need to combat special illnesses.”

Q What education initiatives have you worked to implement to improve outcomes in your state?

GOV. BEVIN “In 2017, the Kentucky General Assembly passed historic legislation making Kentucky the 44th state in the nation to permit the establishment of public charter schools. Charter schools will provide education leaders in the state with another tool to help improve education outcomes for students, including achievement scores, postsecondary enrollment and success, employment, and wage earnings. Further, the new law will help to increase the number of public school options available to families across the commonwealth. In 2016, the Kentucky General Assembly allocated $15 million to dual credit scholarships for high school students. Beginning in the 2016-2017 academic year, with my issuance of an executive order, the Kentucky Dual Credit Scholarship Program provided funding to ensure that every high school senior in the commonwealth had the opportunity to take two dual credit courses. After only a year, the state has seen dramatic increases in dual credit course enrollment and success. Kentucky also just adopted outcomes-based funding for allocating state dollars to its state-supported postsecondary institutions. Each funding model has three basic components: student success (degree progression and completion), course completion (credit hours earned), and operational support.”

Q How are job training and apprenticeship programs helping Kentucky build a stronger future workforce?

GOV. BEVIN “During two rounds of competition in 2016 and 2017, forty applicant teams from across Kentucky were awarded $100 million in state funding for projects intended to build a highly-trained, modernized workforce, aligned with the needs of Kentucky employers. Applicants were required to apply for funds as collaborative teams that included school districts, postsecondary institutions, and business and industry partners. The state’s $100 million investment leveraged private sector, secondary and post-secondary funding to provide a total of $250 million in expanded facilities and industry-relative equipment to add capacity for students and adults in career and technical education. We also just introduced the Work Ready Kentucky Scholarship, which provides grants to students of any age to earn certificates and diplomas in one of Kentucky’s top five high-demand sectors (advanced manufacturing, construction and trades, transportation and logistics, information technology, and healthcare). Kentucky has also created a “Justice to Journeyman” program, which provides apprenticeship opportunities for incarcerated Kentuckians. This program will help reduce recidivism, giving Kentuckians a leg up as they re-enter the workforce with skills and certifications employers need.”

Q What is Kentucky doing to curb the opioid epidemic?

GOV. BEVIN “We have increased funding in our budget for fighting the opioid crisis and have also passed legislation increasing penalties on convicted drug traffickers. Changes have already come in the form of more treatment centers covered by Medicaid, increased access to naloxone, and new legislation that limits pain pill prescriptions to a three-day supply (the most restrictive in the nation), with a few exceptions. Kentucky also recently launched the “Don’t Let Them Die” campaign, focused on spreading awareness for the dangers of opioid and heroin abuse. This includes radio and television ads, a website and an upcoming student pitch project. In my role as governor, I have personally taken this topic out into the open by highlighting my own training to administer overdose-reversing naloxone and by telling the stories of recovering addicts who have turned their lives around.”

Q In your opinion, how can elected officials reach out to young people to make the governing process more open and accessible?

GOV. BEVIN “Use social media. It is simple, but it is powerful. Never before have constituents had such a direct connection to their government officials, or vice versa. Very few young people are without instant access to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, etc. Be engaging, be interesting, post behind-the-scenes pictures and videos, eye-catching graphics ... create content that will bring young people to your page. Everyone loves access, and social media gives you the ability to show who you are— in my case, as a dad, husband and friend—while also providing a platform to show constituents your vision. If we honestly believe that we are working to create the best possible future for our young people and their children, then visitors to our
social media pages should be able to see that.”

Q As governor, how are you working to make Kentucky a great place to have and a raise a family?

GOV. BEVIN "We choose to live in Kentucky because it is already a great place to raise a family. At every turn, I challenge each Kentuckian to take pride in our commonwealth and to become the very best version of themselves. Treating everyone the way we want to be treated is a great way to live. My vision is to make Kentucky the epicenter of economic and social excellence in America and to sparkle as the crown jewel we are for all the world to see. We are doing this by strengthening our economy and fiscal foundation, transforming our education system, refreshing tourism, overhauling our foster and adoption care systems, and so much more. There is something almost magical about life in Kentucky. This is a special place with a quality of life that is unparalleled. Once individuals and families discover our gracious hospitality, four seasons, low cost of living, core American values, great work ethic, stunning natural beauty and geographic advantages, they can’t imagine living anywhere else on earth. As Daniel Boone said upon discovering this territory, “Surely, heaven must be a Kentucky kind of place.”

Read the September/October issue of Capitol Ideas here. [2]

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