

Governor Laura Kelly Remarks as Prepared:

2024 Ogallala Aquifer Summit

Good afternoon. Welcome and thank you for being here at the 2024 Ogallala Aquifer Summit.

Thank you, Susan, for that introduction. To the Irrigation Innovation Consortium, thank you for convening this informative and all-important summit focused on building trust and collaboration on one of the region's most pressing issues.

To Senator Moran, thank you for your ongoing partnership and advocacy around water in Kansas. Your work has been instrumental — advocating for Kansas communities in federal debates on water, agriculture, conservation, and more.

In my State of the State address earlier this year, I reaffirmed my commitment to protecting our most precious natural resource. Preserving the quality and quantity of water in Kansas remains a top priority for me in my second term because it is an existential issue for our state.

Having a clean, stable water supply is critical to maintaining our way of life in all communities across Kansas, rural and urban alike. It's critical to maintaining Kansas as we know it and love it.

The Ogallala Aquifer is, of course, critical to the viability of our agriculture industry—but also to maintaining the historic economic growth we've experienced across all industries in the last few years.

As I said in my State of the State, if rural Kansas succeeds on this issue, all of Kansas will succeed.

Kansas has already made significant progress in addressing our water crisis.

My administration has hired a Senior Advisor on Water, Vijay Ramasamy, and created a Water Subcabinet to take a collaborative, all-hands-on-deck approach to this issue.

In the last legislative session, we passed two landmark bills by working together with legislative champions like House Water Committee Chair Jim Minnix and Ranking Member Lindsey Vaughn.

One established a specific timeline for communities to develop strategies around maintaining water quality and quantity.

The second allocated an unprecedented investment in the State Water Plan — to the tune of \$35 million annually for five years.

I'm encouraged by the progress we've made so far, but, as you know, there is so much more work to do. It's crucial that we build on our progress — which is why a summit of this scope is so important.

I'm grateful to everyone who's here today because it is these types of forums that lead to lasting, meaningful reforms.

Make no mistake—this is an issue that affects every Kansan, and we all have a responsibility to come together to find ways to address it.

It's not going to be easy, but the good news is, we are in a better position than we have ever been to get this done.

We have the momentum.

Last year, for the first time ever, the Kansas Water Authority voted to reject the planned depletion of the Ogallala Aquifer. This alone will put us on a new path towards water conservation.

We have enough funding to jumpstart our efforts.

To ensure that we can stay on track, earlier this year, I directed the Kansas Water Authority to develop a long-term strategic funding plan for water to ensure that our communities have the resources they need to implement best practices for water conservation and quality on into the future.

We have the science.

Kansas has some of the best water data in the world, and the new Kansas Water Institute at Kansas State University will leverage resources and expertise from the university and beyond to develop innovative solutions to water challenges.

And we know what works.

Since 2019, we have piloted new technology around irrigation, water monitoring, and other key processes at farms across the state. We've seen successes across the region that we can learn from, replicate, and scale.

We've also learned—from initiatives like the Local Enhanced Management Area in Sheridan County—that we don't need to choose between conserving water and growing our economy. On the contrary, one is essential to the other.

Now is the time to secure the future of water in Western Kansas and throughout our entire state.

To meet this moment, we need to bring everyone to the table, and we need to be bold.

The need to maintain a reliable, safe water supply for Kansans in every corner of the state for generations to come is not a partisan issue. We are all in this together.

We have a tremendous opportunity ahead of us to be a model for the rest of the country when it comes to water conservation. We can show that collective, coordinated action is good for our pocketbooks and our communities in both the short term and the long term.

You have my word that, as governor, I will do everything in my power to create a viable path forward on this issue. By the end of my time in office, I want to have strong, regional plans in place that will ensure the stability of the Ogallala Aquifer for years to come. The future of Kansas depends on it.

Thank you for your shared commitment to that work.

I'll now hand it back over to Susan Metzger.