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Reflecting on '11, looking ahead



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With the end of the year upon us, it is a time to reflect on past events and think about the future. Certainly we've had our share of dismal news this year as the economy continues to struggle.

But I was encouraged by information we heard in Frankfort this week, where the state budget director gave a more promising outlook.

Our employment rate continues to make a slow but steady climb. October was a bellwether month of sorts, as the total number of non-farm jobs across the state reached a level last seen in December 2008.

Kentucky's revenues were below the 50-state average in the 2008 fiscal year, but we did not see the tremendous dip that others did in 2009. We matched the average in 2010 and 2011, but are behind as we approach the fiscal year's halfway point at the end of this month.

Our personal income levels did not drop as much as they did in our sister states during the recession. In fact, Kentucky's decline was only half as much as the national average, a trend that is expected to continue through the rest of the fiscal year.

The auto industry is seeing a true resurgence nationally, which is especially good news for Kentucky, since we produce more cars and trucks than all but three states.

Late last month, Forbes magazine noted the progress we've made economically when it ranked us 25th among the states in its annual Best States for Business list. That's up six spots from a year ago and 19 since 2008.

Academically, there are bright spots in the classroom. Earlier this fall, education officials reported our fourth and eighth graders scored at or above the national average in both reading and writing. Some of our best success can be found among those students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch; when measuring just their scores, we're third among the states in reading for both grades

and in the top 20 for math.

We learned earlier this year that no other state saw a faster increase in adult education enrollment from 2005 to 2009, and a July report by the University of Kentucky's Center for Business and Economics Research noted that, over the last 20 years, no state has risen as much as Kentucky did in a nationwide index of education statistics. We moved up 15 spots during that time.

In sports, the past year has seen Kentucky host its first NASCAR race in the modern era, and we set the benchmark again with our record eighth Breeders Cup at Churchill Downs.

Kentucky still has its challenges, but I am encouraged by this information. I believe we will continue to pull together and move our commonwealth to a brighter, more prosperous future in 2012.

Representative Dennis Keene represents the 67th House District including northern Campbell County.