



Open for Business

An Interview with
The Honorable Kay Ivey, Governor of Alabama

EDITORS' NOTE After graduating from Auburn University in 1967, Kay Ivey worked as a high school teacher and a bank officer. She served as Reading Clerk of the Alabama House of Representatives under Speaker Joseph C. McCorquodale and was Assistant Director of the Alabama Development Office. In 2002, Ivey became the first Republican elected State Treasurer since Reconstruction and was re-elected in 2006. She was elected Lieutenant Governor in 2010, becoming the first Republican woman to hold the office in Alabama's history. She again made history on November 4, 2014, by becoming the first Republican Lieutenant Governor re-elected to the office. Ivey has been honored to receive numerous awards for her service to the State of Alabama, including the 2015 ALFA Service to Agriculture Award, Newmax's 50 Most Influential Female Republicans in the country and, most recently, the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA) 2016 Public Service Award. On April 10, 2017, Ivey was sworn in as the 54th Governor of the State of Alabama.



The Hon. Kay Ivey

Will you discuss the strength of Alabama's economy and your Administration's efforts to create jobs?

The Alabama economy is doing well. In each of the months I've been in office, it has grown, which means that more people in Alabama are working today than have worked at any other time over the past 10 years.

Additionally, we have had \$2.3 billion in new investments into our state and the addition of some 5,000 jobs.

We have more people going back to work and good quality jobs coming in, so the economy is now doing well.

How critical is the Strong Start, Strong Finish education initiative for the state?

As a former teacher, I have a high passion for quality student learning and high standards. The Strong Start, Strong Finish program is my first educational policy initiative that deals with the three core phases of a student's learning journey: Pre-K through Third, Computer Science for Alabama, and Advanced Learning, Better Jobs.

We need to implement this policy so we can have a continuum of learning and not have people operating in silos as teachers and administrators – we need collaboration, not separation.

Alabama is recognized globally for a quality workforce, so we need to gear up for 21st century jobs because everything centers around technology and the expansion of that.

In computer science in Alabama today, we have some 4,000 unfilled positions starting at \$82,000 per year because we don't have enough people trained in computer science.

We also know that by 2020, 62 percent of the jobs that will be available in Alabama are going to require a post-secondary certificate or degree and, today, only 37 percent of our current workforce holds those credentials.

We're also committed to providing ongoing learning through our public/private partnership with Apple in our community colleges, all of which offer technology programs.

I was recently at the groundbreaking for the D.S. Davidson Invention to Innovation Center. When it's completed, it's going to appeal to students and also provide businesses the opportunity to learn advanced technologies to apply to their current businesses.

What is the state of healthcare in Alabama today, and are you optimistic that the right changes will be made to positively influence the healthcare system?

This is an ongoing problem and we all need a resolution to it. I want to see a plan that puts power back into the hands of the states and still reduces the cost. If we are given flexibility at the state level, we can ensure that the needs of our people are met. It will still be a challenge, but sometimes it's better to have states making the decisions rather than the federal government.

How important is investment in infrastructure for Alabama?

When I took office, I immediately declared I was for investment in infrastructure, and I'm still for it. The state has not yet passed a particular bill for this, but we're going to continue working on it in 2018. It's a business decision and we need to have strong infrastructure.

Is the broader market aware of the strength Alabama provides from a business perspective?

I recently met with 21 global CEOs, 18 of whom are already doing business in Alabama. After I had heard each one of those 18 describe their experience doing business in Alabama, I realized there was a common theme they were all expressing; their success in Alabama had to do with the quality and productivity of our workforce. That speaks volumes, as does the fact that we have a high rate of business expansions in our state. Alabama has a great business climate with a strong workforce and a strong support of the right to work.

Alabama is open for business and we are making great strides in that as we speak.

How important has it been to continue to strengthen the public/private partnership to further your initiatives within the state?

The business community has been receptive and responsive to our administration. They know I'm pro-business because I have been for a while. They see the value in public/private partnerships as well.

In addition to working with private business in Alabama, we are working with the Alabama Power Company to develop an HVAC center to train folks to work on air-conditioners and heating systems.

The value of a public/private partnership is well-recognized in our state and, more and more, businesses are going to encourage this.

Did you know early on that public service was something you were attracted to?

I grew up in a small town in Alabama knowing that we were supposed to help our neighbors and do what we could to make situations better for folks in the neighborhood, and I carried that on with me. Of course, there are a lot of ways to engage in public service – it doesn't have to just be through an elected position.

Does the real stimulus for change today need to take place at the Governor level?

It does. Governors are closer to the people than those in D.C., and we don't see any results from D.C. To get results, we need to act at the state level.

Do you take time to celebrate the wins or is there too much more to do?

We take time to celebrate the wins, because the more wins we get, the more momentum we build up, and the easier it is to go farther. ●