

# CAMPAIGN BULLET POINTS FOR KANSAS STATE-WIDE ISSUES

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This is an opinionated compendium of various positions that moderate to progressive candidates for the Kansas Statehouse might want to consider taking. This piece is intended as a service to neophyte candidates thinking about how to formulate and articulate their personal platform. It is in the form of bullet points suitable for a campaign flier.

It may go without saying that a candidate would be ill-advised to take on a large number of these issues. Getting out in front on a small number of controversial issues is usually necessary in order to get noticed, but after a certain point each additional issue you take on will drive away old supporters in numbers greater than those of new supporters it attracts.

Instead, candidates should pick and choose a small number of issues that they care about, and which seem likely to be effective in their own district. Also, they should not hesitate to revise their statement in the light of feedback they receive while campaigning. Candidates really do change their minds based on what they learn from their constituents, and it is no disgrace to admit it.

## ENERGY

- Kansas should provide programs and incentives for all forms of renewable energy, subject to effectiveness analysis.
- All incentives and preferences should be removed from all nonrenewable energy sources.
- Kansas should adopt a model high-energy-efficient building code and provide incentives for local governments to adopt it.
- Kansas should adopt full-disclosure laws on energy usage and energy costs for retail goods and buildings, where not covered by federal law.
- Utility companies should be required to invest in consumer energy conservation and net metering (i.e., charging for energy consumed less energy produced by the customer).

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<sup>2</sup> Helpful comments were received from Jeanne Klein, Creed Shepard, Doug Walker, Bev Worster, and Kim Westhusing. Any opinions expressed here are solely the author's and do not represent positions of the reviewers or of Ad Astra Institute.

## THE PROPOSED SUNFLOWER COAL-FIRED COMPLEX NEAR HOLCOMB, KS

Leaving global warming aside, the proposed Holcomb coal complex would be bad for Kansas.

- It would produce dangerous mercury emissions.
- Coal plants are viewed as risky investments by bond markets.
- In the future it would likely lead to excessively high prices for Kansas energy (because coal produces more CO<sub>2</sub> than any other fuel and is likely to be subject to cap and trade).
- Over three-quarters of Kansans oppose the Holcomb development.
- Wind power would produce more jobs and keep more profits in Kansas than coal power.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Kansas economic development programs should be subjected to much tougher outside benefit-cost analysis, and abolished where not positively shown to work.
- Kansas should prioritize growing from within. Kansas should adopt a statewide system of enterprise facilitation. Kansas should supplement Small Business Administration startup loans.
- Kansas and Missouri should encourage cooperative economic development within Greater Kansas City.
- Kansas should enter into no-raiding and non-compete agreements with other states.
- Kansas should enforce no-raiding and non-compete rules between Kansas local governments.
- Economic development incentives are especially costly yet their outputs are especially uncertain.
- Investments in education are likely to be more effective economic development tools than investments in incentives. Unlike incentives, the positive effects of education on economic development have been demonstrated over and over again by solid research. If we are increasing incentives while cutting back on education, something is very wrong.
- All incentives should be transparent. All recipients and amounts should be public records.
- Grants of incentives should be conditioned on binding performance goals.
- Kansas should adopt and enforce uniform transparent clawbacks (i.e. recovery of public costs) for all incentives and subsidies where the recipient fails to meet goals.

## TAXATION

- Taxes are the cost of citizenship. We don't like them but we need them. We also need to keep them fair and reasonable.
- Lotteries and casinos are not and never can be important substitutes for tax revenues. The Kansas lottery currently raises less than half a percent of state and local revenues.
- Many, or even most, tax deductions and exemptions are weakly justified at best. In general it is economically better (though politically tougher) to expand the tax base by removing loopholes than to increase tax rates.
- Over the last two decades Kansas taxes have been largely shifted away from corporations. They can be partly shifted back without harming economic development.
- Unneeded loopholes should be removed from corporate income taxes.
- For example, all forms of corporate income should be required to be localized to particular

states for purposes of state taxation.

- All economic development incentives should sunset after ten years. Rewards that are distant in time do not influence business location decisions.
- The stripper oil well exemption should be replaced by a deduction for costs of oil production.

#### MINIMUM WAGE

- Kansas workers should receive the federal minimum wage. It's the right thing to do.

#### SMALL CLAIMS

- Kansas should raise the small claims limit from \$4,000 to \$10,000.

#### CONSUMER LAW

- Consumer disputes should not be subjected to required arbitration unless it can be shown that the designated arbitrator sides with the consumer at least 40% of the time.
- Payday loan interest should not exceed 35% per year.
- Consumer installment loan and credit card interest and fees should not exceed 20% per year.
- Companies should have an affirmative obligation to help prevent, detect, and correct ID theft.

#### HIGHER EDUCATION

- Kansas has an incredibly good system of higher education, all out of proportion to the level of state support it currently receives. Financial stresses are making it hard or impossible for our universities to maintain that level of quality.
- State tuition is becoming too high for half or more of our families to afford. We need a greatly expanded program of needs-based scholarships.
- Unfortunately, we have too many universities for a state of our size. Some savings could be achieved by requiring the universities to cooperate and be more specialized in their undergraduate and graduate program offerings.

#### PRIMARY-SECONDARY EDUCATION (STATE POLICY)

- We should move towards universal pre-K education programs
- Kansas should support breakfast programs and before school and after school daycare in all willing school districts.
- Time-on-task matters a lot. In the long run, the only assured way of improving student performance across the board is in moving towards longer class days and year-around attendance.
- Small schools educate best. Very large schools are no cheaper than midsized schools and should be discouraged.
- Class sizes should be capped based on recommendations of research.

- State government should take on more responsibility for supporting and managing special education.

#### PRIMARY-SECONDARY EDUCATION (STATE-FEDERAL POLICY)

- Kansas should push for major changes in the No Child Left Behind Act.
- For example, tests should focus on improvement, not level of achievement.
- Kansas should reject federal funds for abstinence-only sex education, which wastes state money and student time and doesn't work.

#### CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

- For the first time in history we're spending more on jails and prisons than on higher education. That's got to change.
- Most prisoners will eventually be released and are unprepared for normal life. A majority of them are rearrested. That's got to change.
- The "war against drugs" is a horribly expensive failure. That's got to change.
- The criminal justice system discriminates against minorities (according to Kansas authorities). That's got to change.
- The police spend too little of their time investigating violent crime. That's got to change.
- Every prisoner should have programs to prepare for civilian life.
- It is in no one's long-term interest to brutalize prisoners or provide inadequate medical treatment.
- Nonviolent felons should not be incarcerated unless they violate terms of parole or fail to work at restitution.
- Felons on probation should not be sent to prison for violations of conditions unless convicted in a court of law.
- Incarceration should consist whenever possible of electronic house arrest.
- The death penalty is a costly and ineffective albatross that should be abolished.

#### TORT REFORM

- Some so-called "tort reform" has actually been a concerted effort to allow big business to profit from dangerous actions without providing adequate recourse for injured parties. Settlements should be high enough to compensate victims and also create an incentive against negligence.
- Reforms that limit truly excessive attorney's fees are legitimate and needed. However fees in winning cases must be high enough to cover the costs of losing cases as well—or else attorneys will refuse to take any cases that are seriously contested by a deep-pockets tortfeasor.
- Fees that take the major part of settlements should not be allowed.
- Substantial pain and suffering awards should be allowed because pain is real and has an economic value—as you can affirm by considering how much you would actually have to pay to induce someone to undergo that amount pain.
- If there are pain and suffering limitations, they should be removed in cases where the tortfeasor

resists a rapid resolution of the case.

- Workers are being inadequately compensated for injuries under worker's compensation. We need to either make the system more fair to workers or else return to a tort model.

## GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

- On average, public and nonprofit employees are more motivated by opportunities to serve the public, and less motivated by material profit, than their private sector counterparts. However, treating employees with respect is essential to improving government effectiveness—and adequate salaries, job security, and fair treatment are important signs of respect.
- Individual incentives in government tend to be overrated, while group incentives are underrated.
- Wherever possible, government activities and services should be carried out by internally competing agencies, with appropriate incentives such as expansion opportunities being directed to the best performing groups.
- Transparency works. Whistleblower, open records, and open meetings protections should be expanded.
- A limited press shield should be enacted to protect the sources of leaks about scandals.
- Privatization always creates new opportunities for corruption. Research shows that privatization is more likely to reduce efficiency than increase it.

## Mixed state-federal issues

## IMMIGRATION

- The US has a right and a duty to control its borders.
- That can't be done without reducing illegal hiring.
- We need to achieve better control with less demagoguery and less bureaucracy and less harm to innocent employers and workers.
- Effective control can only be accomplished at the federal level.
- Punitive efforts at the state level will hurt innocent employers and hurt innocent children and damage local economies, especially in farming.

## HEALTH CARE INSURANCE

- Everyone should have their own doctor, at a cost each can afford.
- Politicians have an obligation to help make it happen.
- Other than politics, the biggest problem is cost.
- Insurance companies are a major cause of high costs. Health costs cannot be controlled without controlling or eliminating medical insurance companies.
- We should adopt a unified public trust fund that comprehensively covers every Kansan's health coverage needs.
- Workers, consumers, and employers should support the trust fund on a sliding scale.
- We can and should make sure most people and most businesses pay less in total than they are

paying now.

- We can and should make sure that most people have as much or more freedom to choose their own doctor than they have now.
- We can and should negotiate lower prices with drug companies.
- Steps towards all of these goals can be accomplished at the state level.

#### ELECTORAL COLLEGE REFORM

- The electoral college unequivocally violates modern notions of democratic fairness. It should be abolished.
- Directly amending the constitution to do so is a practical impossibility.
- Kansas legally can and should pledge its electoral votes to support the popular Presidential winner—provided enough other states agree to make it stick.

#### CIVIL LIBERTIES

- Kansas should firmly resist the federal Real-ID law, which has no demonstrated benefits, imposes unfunded costs on the state, and creates civil liberties nightmares for innocent individuals.
- Kansas should resist the secret spying and databank or “fusion center” operations that federal agencies are quietly setting up jointly with Kansas and other states.
- Kansas should adopt or maintain no impediments to registration or voting unless it is shown that the number of voter frauds prevented would at least equal the number of valid voters discouraged from voting.
- Kansas should require a voter-verified paper trail on all votes.