

STATE REPRESENTATIVE
MARK KAHRS
 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



- Budget
- Economy
- Education
- Welfare
- 2ND Amendment

And more...



➤ **More Jobs for Kansas Families in a Growing Economy**

One of my top priorities while serving you in Topeka has been to do everything possible to grow our state's economy and keep it strong for Kansas families.

And, thanks to the hard work of Kansans all across the state, we are succeeding on this front.

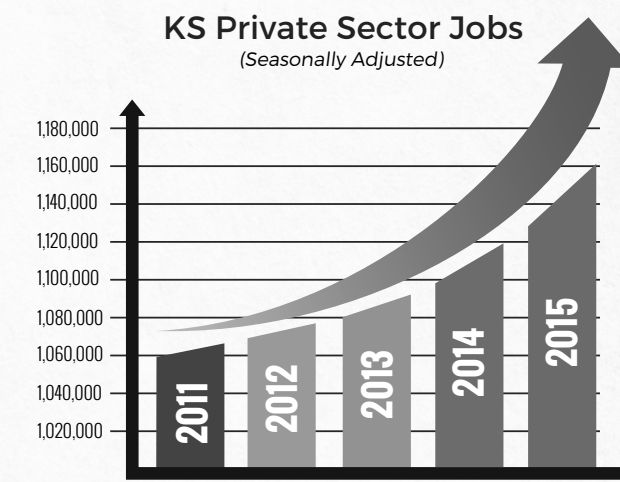
For 18 months in a row, Kansas unemployment has been under 5%. In May, our state unemployment was just 4.4%, 20% lower than the national unemployment rate!

Since January 2011, Kansas has added almost 75,000 private sector jobs, including 16,100 last year alone. One comparison that shows clearly the strides we have made is to look at our neighbors in Missouri. The first two years since the small business tax reform, Kansas experienced a 5.6% increase in job creation compared to Missouri, which experienced only a 2.2% job growth.

Kansas is now in the top half of states in terms of job creation compared to our pre-tax cut ranking which placed us 38th.

Our state's job market is strong. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics recently released data showing that, in 2014, we outperformed all of our neighboring states in private-sector hourly wage growth. In fact, since the small business tax reform took effect in 2012, Kansas hourly wages grew \$1.22 as compared to \$0.61 on the Missouri side.

In short, we have one of the best employment-to-population ratios in America, and wages are rising faster here than elsewhere in the region. This is all great news for our state.



➤ **Kansas Government: Too Big, Too Small, or Just Right?**

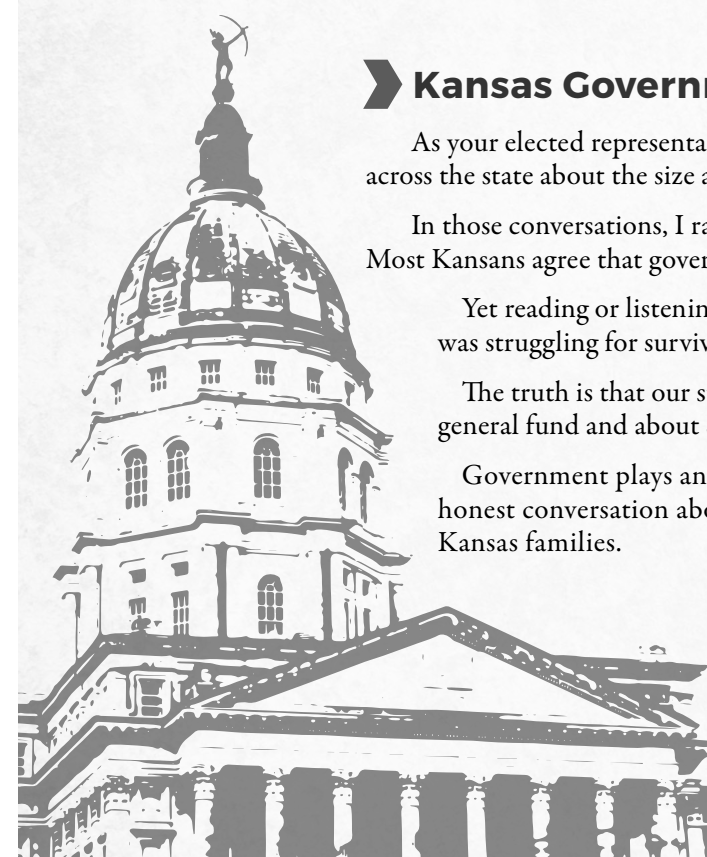
As your elected representative, I regularly get to visit with people in our community and from across the state about the size and scope of government.

In those conversations, I rarely hear that government is too small. In fact, quite the opposite. Most Kansans agree that government should be smaller and run more efficiently.

Yet reading or listening to most news stories in our state, you would think government was struggling for survival.

The truth is that our state government is spending about \$6 billion this year from the general fund and about \$15 billion total from all tax sources. In just one year!

Government plays an important role in our society, but we must be willing to have an honest conversation about the true size of government and the overall tax burden on Kansas families.



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TAX RELIEF FOR KANSAS FAMILIES VS. GOVERNMENT BUDGET PRIORITIES

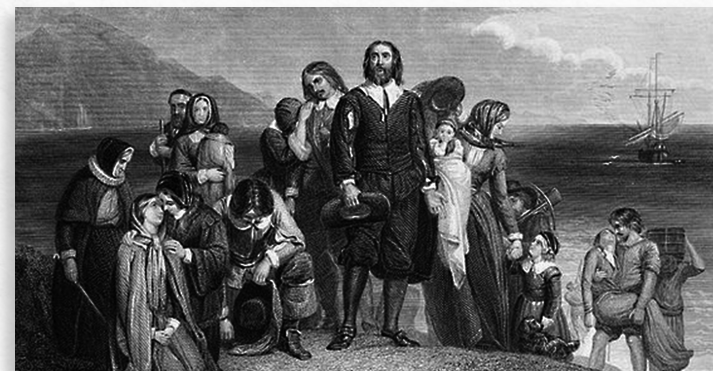
Taxes and government spending are two areas the legislature must address each year. In 2012, the legislature passed historic state income tax relief that has allowed taxpayers to keep \$1.456 billion more of their own money over three years (FY13-15) rather than send it to Topeka. Over 70% of this tax relief went to individual wage earners.

This has meant real tax relief for Kansas families and the small businesses that create most of the jobs in our state.

This year, we had the challenging task of enacting a new two-year budget under the reduced income tax rates.

As part of this work, a majority of my colleagues voted to increase taxes in order to fund budget growth and ultimately balance the budget.

I was the only member of the Wichita Republican delegation to vote against the tax increase. I fought to reduce government spending instead of asking hard-working taxpayers to pay more to fund an already bloated government.



► Protecting Religious Freedom from Judicial Overreach

After a series of recent court rulings in Kansas and Washington, DC, I am troubled, as many in our community are, by the judicial branch's actions to disrupt the democratic process, ignore our state's rights, and rewrite laws unilaterally. They are not respecting the legislative process and the people's elected representatives. This is not the proper balance of power between the three co-equal branches of government.

In response, Governor Brownback issued executive order 15-05, which prohibits state government from taking any "discriminatory action" against Kansas clergy and religious

However, despite the adjustments made to tax policy this session, the net result of tax reforms made since 2011 will be that Kansans continue to pay significantly lower overall state taxes. The state continues to move away from taxing your work and productivity, with the goal of providing a positive environment for job growth and a healthy economy.

It is important to remember that in 2011, Kansas had three state income tax brackets with a top rate of 6.45% and a low rate of 3.5%. We now have just two tax brackets with rates of 4.6% and 2.7%, resulting in income tax rate reductions of at least 23% for all taxpayers.

In our democracy we understand that vigorous debate is a good thing — and a freedom we cherish. While it doesn't always give us the exact result we hope for, it allows for our viewpoints to be heard and for us to have a role in shaping the debate. We must stay engaged to ensure we don't slide back to the unsustainable, anti-growth policies of the past.

organization that chooses not to participate in a marriage that is inconsistent with its sincerely held religious belief that marriage is the union of one man and one woman.

The U.S. Constitution and the Kansas Bill of Rights provide for protection of our religious liberty from government infringement. In these uncertain times, as the federal government and courts continue to overreach their roles and attempt to grab power from the states, it is critical that we have the courage to fight to protect our fundamental rights.

Kansas clergy and faith-based organizations should not be forced to violate their deeply held religious beliefs, and I appreciate the Governor's leadership on this important issue.

► Education Is Our State's Top Priority

Our number one budget priority in Kansas is K-12 education. It is evident by the fact that over 50% of the state general fund budget goes to fund K-12. In fact, Kansas overall education spending ranks in the top five of all states as a percentage of state general funds. We are investing billions of dollars in our schools each year in an effort to achieve the best results for kids across the state.

Further, in 2014, the legislature took a big step forward in education reform by returning more control to local school boards, parents, and teachers. This year we continued that positive trend by allowing local school boards to have more authority and management capabilities over their budgets and the dollars allocated by the state.

The legislature added more than \$300 million to K-12 funding and repealed the critically flawed school finance formula that had been the basis for multiple lawsuits for over 10 years. The outdated, decades-old formula was replaced with block grants, which significantly increase the authority of local school boards to spend funds wisely for the best classroom results in their communities. More local control and less Topeka control should mean better outcomes for our children.



An extraordinary need fund was also created to provide additional money to school districts that see an extraordinary increase in enrollment or an extraordinary decrease in assessed property valuation.

► Safeguarding the Ballot Box & Increasing Voter Turnout

As chairman of the House Committee on Elections, I was honored to help spearhead significant election reform, which will protect the integrity of elections and improve citizen participation in our democracy.

The *Wichita Eagle* earlier this year described voter turnout in spring primaries "abysmally low." Historically, very few voters have participated in spring elections, but by moving spring elections to the fall we expect voter turnout to improve.

After years of legislative gridlock, this critical reform will finally allow voters to cast their ballots at a more convenient time of the year, resulting in more voices being heard at the ballot box and hopefully more candidates filing for local office.

We also are stepping up our efforts to ensure our votes count. This common-sense law paves the way for our elected attorney general and chief election officer to make voter fraud prosecutions a higher priority while allowing local prosecutors to maintain their focus on violent crime.



► Reforming Welfare to Be a Hand Up, Not a Hand Out

Kansans are compassionate, caring people. We believe in helping those families who are truly in need. We also know that common-sense reforms in our welfare system are needed to ensure that tax dollars are used for their intended purpose — in this case, meeting the vital needs of families going through a difficult time until they can get back on their feet.

To that end, Kansas passed a comprehensive welfare reform package that encourages full-time employment to move families from poverty into prosperity.

One change we've made is to stop taxpayer-funded cash assistance from being used to purchase cigarettes, alcohol, lottery tickets, concert tickets, or pornography. Similarly, government cash assistance may no longer be used in a casino, jewelry store, tattoo parlor, spa, or theme park.

A 36-month lifetime limit was instituted to ensure that families are encouraged to move into employment and independence and will no longer languish in poverty.

Taxpayer-funded safety nets are for the essentials, not the extras, and the focus should be on meeting the basic needs of children in particular. The Kansas H.O.P.E. (Hope, Opportunity, and Prosperity for Everyone) Act moves us another step in that direction.

► Safeguarding Our Second Amendment Rights

I was happy to cast my vote this session to repeal the requirement for a law-abiding citizen to obtain a government permit to carry a concealed firearm. Kansans 21 and older now have the right to "constitutional carry," joining citizens in Alaska, Vermont, Arizona, and Arkansas who have this freedom in support of their free exercise of the Second Amendment.

Only law-abiding citizens who are eligible to possess a firearm under federal and state law are able to carry, and real-world data have proven time and again that crime is reduced when gun rights are expanded.

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