



2012 Legislative Program

**Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kansas
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2012 Priority Issues

Redistricting

The Kansas Legislature should make keeping “communities of interest” together a top priority when redrawing Congressional and State legislative district boundaries. Wyandotte and Johnson Counties are strong “communities of interest” and both should remain in the 3rd Congressional District.

The Unified Government opposes any reduction in the number of State Senate or House legislative districts in Wyandotte County because population numbers have stabilized in the past decade and all signs point to population growth over the coming decade.

Immigration

Immigration policy and enforcement is the responsibility of the Federal Government. The Kansas Legislature should not impose State immigration enforcement provisions on businesses or local government. If the Kansas Legislature does impose immigration enforcement provisions, the full cost of carrying out such mandates should be fully paid for by the State of Kansas and should not damage the Kansas economy.

Kansas Tax System

Cities are important partners in creating jobs, reviving the economy, delivering vital services and fostering quality of life for the 82% of all Kansans who live in cities. The Governor and Kansas Legislature should include city leaders in discussions about restructuring the Kansas tax system and any changes must avoid shifting additional financial burdens to local governments.

Casino Revenues and Property Tax Reduction

The Unified Government urges the Legislature to restore its commitment to reducing city and county property taxes by following the state law which designates State casino revenues be used for property tax reduction. The new casino revenues should be used to restart the now cancelled Local Ad Valorem Tax Reduction Fund (LAVTR).

Under LAVTR, dollars sent from the State of Kansas to local governments are directly applied to lowering property tax levies. This time-tested partnership—cancelled in 2003—provides dollar for dollar reductions in property tax bills. This partnership is a far better way to influence property tax rates than artificial and arbitrary controls such as caps on assessed valuations or tax and spending lids on local governments.

Casino Gaming

The Unified Government opposes changing provisions in the expanded gaming statute, including banning smoking on casino gaming floors.

The Unified Government supports greyhound and horse racing operations with the addition of slot machines at The Woodlands under current gaming law.

STAR Bonds

We support the ability of cities to utilize STAR bonds in order to promote economic development in their communities and encourage the Kansas Legislature to renew STAR Bond legislation which is set to expire in July 2012.

Municipal Finance and Tax Issues

Protecting Local Government Revenues

2011 will be another difficult financial year for the State of Kansas and all of its local governments. The Kansas Legislature should not continue solving its budget shortfalls by taking revenues belonging to or promised to city and county governments. Taking established revenues away from local governments to balance the state budget only shifts the financial burden to local elected officials and the citizens they represent. Local government revenues which need to be protected include: local alcoholic liquor funds; special city-county highway fund; motor fuel taxes; community mental health; and community corrections funding.

Municipal Court Debt

The Unified Government supports a legislative solution that facilitates more effective collection of unpaid municipal court debts.

Tax/Spending Lid

The Unified Government opposes any state-imposed limits on the taxing and spending authority of cities. Local spending and taxing decisions are best left to locally elected officials and the citizens they serve.

Property Appraisal and Valuation

The Unified Government supports property appraisals based on fair market value and opposes caps on property valuations as inequitable and unconstitutional.

City-County Highway Funds

The City-County Highway Fund is critical to maintaining local roads and should not be diverted for other purposes. The Legislature should also maintain and enhance funding for the connecting link program.

Alcoholic Liquor Taxes

Revenues from alcoholic liquor taxes are crucial for funding parks and recreation programs, substance abuse programs and general government. These revenues belong to local government and should not be confiscated by the Legislature to balance state budget shortfalls. The current statutory framework with regard to the collection and distribution of alcoholic liquor taxes should remain in place.

KPERS

Achieving a fully funded public employee retirement system within a reasonable time period is an important goal, but should be done in a way which does not place a sudden undue financial burden on local government employers or employees.

Alternative Revenue Sources

Locally elected officials and the citizens they represent should be allowed authority to structure and implement taxes and revenues which best suit the individual community without prohibitions and restrictions imposed by the Kansas Legislature. This includes local earnings/income taxes, development excise taxes, and other local taxes and fees now prohibited by state law.

Streamlined Sales Tax

The Unified Government believes sales taxes should be applied equally and fairly regardless how a product is sold. Exempting products sold over the Internet, by catalog or over the telephone from sales tax is unfair. The Unified Government supports the Streamlined Sales Tax Project including the local compensating use tax component.

Community and Economic Development

Public Education

Quality schools are the foundation for the future economic success of Kansas. A public education system which helps create a well-educated and trained workforce is crucial to successful communities. The Unified Government urges the Kansas Legislature to ensure that all children have the opportunity to attend equally funded public schools regardless where they live, and that Kansas schools are funded at a level which meets and exceeds the needs of our children.

Economic Development

The Unified Government encourages the Kansas Legislature to work with local governments in developing innovative new economic development tools to help highly distressed urban and rural areas attain economic success and build quality communities. The Unified Government also supports continuation of economic development funding and will work for increased investment in Wyandotte County through the Economic Development Initiative Fund.

Tourism

Wyandotte County offers destination attractions which draw millions of visitors a year to Kansas. The Unified Government urges the State of Kansas to enact a comprehensive tourism plan and increase funding of tourism promotion and marketing.

Public Transit

The Unified Government supports increased state funding of public transit. Funding formulas should be based on ridership levels, not population. The Unified Government also supports regional partnerships to improve and expand public transit options for Kansas City area residents. The Kansas Legislature should help, not hinder, efforts to fund regional public transit in the metropolitan Kansas City area.

Infrastructure Funding

The Unified Government supports increased federal and state funding to assist local communities with their water, wastewater, dam and levee infrastructure and associated security needs.

University of Kansas Medical Center and Hospital

Wyandotte County is home to a world-class medical center and academic hospital. The Unified Government recognizes the unique and vital role played by the University of Kansas Medical Center and University of Kansas Hospital and strongly supports efforts to create and promote the region as a nationally recognized center for life sciences and cancer research and treatment. The Unified Government supports actions and efforts which will increase the presence and impact of both institutions in Wyandotte County.

Abandoned Housing

The Unified Government supports legislation which streamlines and expedites the process for local governments and neighborhood organizations to deal with the growing blight of abandoned, nuisance and foreclosed housing, including the collection of delinquent taxes on such properties.

Eminent Domain

The Unified Government supports the use of eminent domain for economic development projects which eliminate blight and allow revitalization and rebirth in urban areas. The Unified Government also believes the requirement that the Legislature approve every use of eminent domain for economic development projects is unworkable and will harm the Kansas economy. If the Legislature insists on retaining that authority, procedures and rules for handling such requests from local communities in an efficient and timely manner need to be established.

Public Safety

RICO Tools

We support legislation to allow the use of law enforcement tools similar to the federal Racketeering Influence and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act in order to allow communities to utilize these procedures to combat repeat offenders.

Guns in Public Buildings

The Unified Government opposes expansion of concealed carry gun laws which would allow people to bring guns into public buildings.

Rainbow Mental Health Center

The Unified Government opposes closure of the Rainbow Mental Health Facility. Closure will harm the mentally ill citizens who need the services provided at Rainbow. The Kansas City Kansas Police Department and Wyandotte County Sheriff's Department will be adversely affected, and the region's healthcare providers will be overwhelmed by the new flood of patients needing help.

Juvenile Justice Authority Funding

The Unified Government supports increased funding for the Juvenile Justice Authority.

Adult Community Corrections

Citizens are threatened when offenders living in their communities cannot receive minimal services and supervision is inadequate to meet public safety issues. The Unified Government urges full state funding to local communities for mandated Community Corrections Act programs. For state aid to be adequate and consistent to cover the actual costs for services, a formula is recommended which would multiply the projected average daily population by a unit cost that is adjusted annually for inflation.

Local Control and Police Powers

The Unified Government opposes all legislation which restricts the regulatory authority of cities to protect the health, safety and welfare of the public.

Public Health and Environment

Community Mental Health Funding

The state's reduction in mental health dollars has strained the ability of community mental health centers to provide services to the uninsured and underinsured. Further cuts could result in services for the most vulnerable populations being reduced or eliminated..

Local Health Department Funding

County health departments have many mandated, but unfunded duties which compete for limited resources. Increased funding for public health, especially for the purchase of vaccines, would help ease the demand on public health dollars and allow better protection of citizens.

Serving Senior Populations and Area Agency on Aging Issues

The Unified Government supports legislation to provide improved support for aging populations in local communities, including full funding of Home and Community Based Services for the Frail Elderly waiver; funding Access to Core Services; and legislation to allow unused prescription drugs from nursing homes, hospice and other health care agencies to be distributed for use by medically indigent seniors.

Local Environmental Protection Program

The Unified Government supports continued funding of the Local Environmental Protection Program from the Kansas Water Office in order to continue support established for local public health and county water quality programs. State officials are urged to re-evaluate the way funds are distributed to ensure communities are getting a proportionate and equitable share of what their citizens have paid in and demand of services.

Energy Efficiency

The Unified Government supports energy efficiency and the development of a statewide energy policy which enables local governments to act individually or in cooperation with others to address energy efficiency. Funding for the Efficiency Kansas program which assists homeowners in improving their homes should be restored.

Energy and Environmental Mandates

The Unified Government opposes federal and state mandates which regulate the operations of municipal electric, water, solid waste, storm water and telecommunications utility services. Any mandates imposed on cities should come with adequate funding to address the mandate.

Storm water Management

The Unified Government encourages the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and the Environmental Protection Agency to work with cities and provide technical support in the implementation of reasonable regulations related to storm water management. We endorse cooperative solutions to storm water quality and quantity challenges.

Alternative Energy

The Unified Government encourages the State of Kansas to adopt an energy plan which includes state tax credits for the installation of solar and wind systems in residential and business applications.

Local Government Operations

Budget Timing

The Unified Government supports increased flexibility regarding the statutory requirements for filing city budgets.

Home Rule and Local Control

The Home Rule Amendment of the Kansas Constitution is the foundation of local government, the bedrock of our belief in independence and the benchmark of the right to determine our own destiny.

The Unified Government urges the Kansas Legislature to defend and protect the Home Rule Rights and authority guaranteed in the Kansas Constitution to citizens and their local governments.

Public Land

Local government and the citizens they represent should be allowed to control and manage public lands and right-of-way as they see fit. This includes collecting franchise fees and other revenues from private companies and individuals which use public lands for personal benefit or profit.

Open Meetings

The Unified Government believes openness in government is essential to building public confidence. But, there are times when privacy or other legitimate reasons require executive sessions. Requiring executive sessions to be tape recorded would impose unreasonable demands on elected and appointed officials and raise questions as to the custody of tapes. All levels of government should be subject to the same open meetings requirements. These laws should not be unduly burdensome.

Open Records

Open records laws should balance the public's right to know with the necessity of protecting private individuals and the ability of public agencies to conduct the essential business of the public. The statutorily required sunset for all exemptions to the Kansas Open Records Act is impractical and should be removed. All levels of government should be subject to the same open records requirements.

Unfunded Mandates

The Unified Government believes the State Legislature should not impose mandated functions, activities, or regulations on local governments without providing financial resources to meet the costs of carrying out those mandates.

Publications and Notices

The undeniable right of the public to be informed about the actions of its government should not be compromised. At the same time, government officials have a responsibility to ensure the tax money required to keep citizens informed through legal notices and publications is spent in an effective and efficient way.

The Legislature should allow local governments the option to publish legal notices on the Internet where there is an increased opportunity for citizens to locate and read them, while at the same time, significantly reducing the costly publication burden imposed on taxpayers by local newspapers.