

# THE VOICE

A Trusted Voice From the Community's Perspective



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# THE VOICE

VOLUME 33, NUMBER 5  
FRIDAY, MARCH 6, 2026

## MORE WAYS TO CONNECT

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If you're only reading The Community Voice in print, you're only seeing part of the story.

While we remain proud of our bi-weekly print edition, The Community Voice is a multi-platform newsroom delivering news to you all week long — online, through social media and directly to your inbox through our

newsletters.

Each week, we publish four, **FREE**, targeted newsletters designed to keep you informed and connected. **Monday Voice Wichita** and **Monday Voice KC** feature top stories curated specifically for each community, along with local event calendars so you never miss what's happening. On Wednesdays,

**Health Wednesday** highlights stories focused on the health and well-being of our community. And on Fridays, our **Friday Top Five** delivers the five biggest stories of the week in a quick, easy read.

These short newsletters help you stay up to date before you even visit our website — and they're delivered straight to your inbox.



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## After Wichita's Sales Tax Defeat, It's Time To Start With The Community

If Wichita city council wants support next time, they must start by listening.

By **Bonita Gooch**  
Editor-in-Chief

Wichita voters delivered a clear and unmistakable message when they rejected the proposed 1-cent sales tax — and they delivered it loudly.

With one of the largest voter turnouts in recent city history, nearly 80% of voters said no. That kind of result rarely happens in public policy debates. It wasn't a narrow coalition that rejected the proposal. Voters across political parties, neighborhoods and demographic groups came together on this one.

I'll be candid: I opposed the sales tax proposal. But I didn't start there.

At first, I was intrigued by the idea. I've seen how targeted sales taxes can help communities. In Kansas City, for example, the Central City Economic Development sales tax directs investment to neighborhoods east of Troost Avenue. For decades, segregation policies limited where Black residents could live, concentrating them east of that dividing line. The result was generations of disinvestment. Today, that tax helps those neighborhoods recover by funding economic development and revitalization where it's needed most.

Summary Results Report 2026 City of Wichita Sales Tax Election March 3, 2026	
City-Wide Retailers' Sales Tax Vote For 1	
	TOTAL
Yes	9,143
No	41,097
Total Votes Cast	50,240
Overvotes	8
Undervotes	86
Contest Totals	50,334

More than 50,000 voters participated in Wichita's special election on the proposed sales tax — about 20% turnout, far higher than typical special elections.

That's the kind of creative thinking I hoped to see in Wichita.

Instead, the proposal felt like a collection of unrelated projects bundled together in hopes that everyone would find something they liked. Instead of thinking creatively about addressing some of our communities toughest problems and needs. For example, Wichita is facing real affordable housing challenges, and the proposal's commitment

to addressing them was minimal at best.

I wasn't concerned about the "regressive" nature of a sales tax. The additional outlay members of our community would pay was estimated at about \$50 per year. I believe members of our community would gladly pay that amount for projects they really feel help our community.

But that connection wasn't there. For many northeast Wichita residents, there simply wasn't much in the proposal that felt was truly for them.

What was missing was real community input. Even city leaders later acknowledged the problem. Mayor Lily Wu said the proposal was "big, broad and fast" and asked voters for a level of trust many weren't ready to give.

The campaign itself didn't help. Even though the advertising campaign that labeled "No" voters as communists was quickly pulled — the damage was too much to overcome.

But the overwhelming defeat of this proposal should not end the conversation about Wichita's future.

If anything, it should begin a better one — starting in neighborhoods, listening first, and building solutions from the ground up that reflect what Wichita residents actually want and need.

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# Kansas Bathroom Law Now In Effect, Lawsuit Filed And Boycott Calls Grow

By Voice News Service

A new Kansas law requiring restroom use based on sex assigned at birth is now in effect — and already facing a lawsuit, questions about how it will be enforced and calls for a boycott of the state.

The measure, Senate Bill 244, passed during the 2026 legislative session after Republican supermajorities in the Kansas House and Senate overrode Gov. Laura Kelly's veto.

Supporters say the law protects privacy in bathrooms and locker rooms. But Democrats warned during debate that it could produce the very situation Republicans said they were trying to prevent — men being required to enter women's bathrooms.

"He is going to sit down at the stall next to your

granddaughter," said Rep. John Carmichael, a Sedgwick County Democrat.

"That hairy-faced man will be standing naked, showering next to your daughter," Carmichael continued. "That's what this bill requires."

The law requires multi-occupancy bathrooms, locker rooms and similar facilities in government buildings — including schools and universities — to be used according to sex assigned at birth.

That means transgender men, who were born female but present as male, must use women's restrooms. Transgender women, who were born male, must use men's facilities.

## Questions About Enforcement

Even supporters acknowledge the law leaves questions

about how it will be enforced.

Kansas adopted language similar to a law that recently took effect in Texas, where officials are still determining how complaints will be investigated.

Just this week, the Texas law is expected to face its first real test after the parent of a student in Austin's school district filed a complaint alleging a male student was using the girls' restroom.

## IDs Invalidated Immediately

The law also immediately invalidated driver's licenses and birth certificates where the gender marker had previously been changed to reflect a person's gender identity.

State officials estimate more than 1,000 Kansans may be affected.



Matthew Neumann, a transgender man from Larned, must use women's restrooms in government

## Lawsuit Filed

The American Civil Liberties Union of Kansas has filed a lawsuit in Douglas County District Court challenging the law.

The case, filed on behalf of two transgender Kansans, argues the law violates the Kansas Constitution's protections for privacy, equality and due process.

"This legislation is a direct attack on the dignity and



A group of trans activists pose for pictures on Feb. 6, 2026, at the Kansas Statehouse, advocating against a bathroom bill that eventually passed.

humanity of transgender Kansans," said Monica Bennett, legal director of the ACLU of Kansas.

## Calls For Boycott

Meanwhile, LGBTQ advocacy groups across the country are urging economic pressure on Kansas.

San Francisco Pride Executive Director Suzanne

Ford is calling for a national boycott of the state over the law.

"That's really the only way people outside of Kansas can register their displeasure," Ford said.

Advocates say the effort mirrors the backlash against North Carolina's 2016 "bathroom bill," which led to canceled concerts, sporting events and conventions.

## Don't delay getting a colon cancer screening

As you approach age 45, you should be talking with your doctor about regular colorectal screenings. If you are having symptoms or have any questions or family history, talk with your doctor sooner.

Colon and rectal cancers are among the most common types of cancer for both men and women. And the colon screening isn't just for finding cancer but, more importantly, for finding signs and symptoms before it starts.



Find a doctor at  
[ascension.org/ViaChristi](https://ascension.org/ViaChristi)



Ascension  
Via Christi

# As Costs Rise, Movement to “Tax the Rich” Gains Momentum



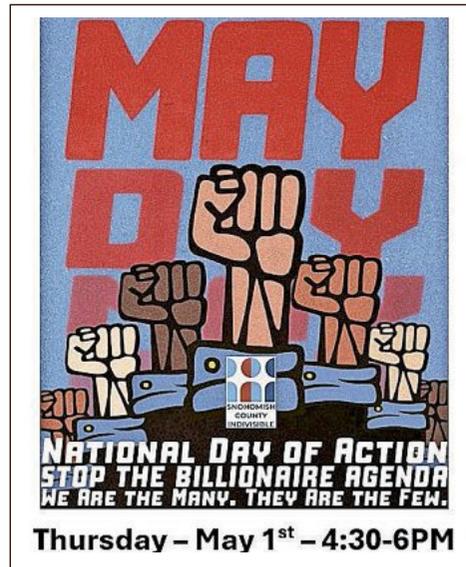
**By Bonita Gooch**  
Editor-in-Chief

As the cost of housing, child care, health care and education continues to climb, a growing movement across the United States is calling for higher taxes on billionaires and the ultra-wealthy as a way to help ease the financial pressure on working families.

Once considered a fringe political idea, proposals to tax extreme wealth are increasingly showing up in state legislatures, ballot initiatives and public demonstrations. Supporters argue that while the economy has produced enormous wealth in recent decades, much of it has flowed to the very top — leaving many workers struggling to afford basic necessities.

Across the country, lawmakers and advocacy groups have introduced **more than 100 state-level bills** aimed at increasing taxes on high incomes, large fortunes or corporate windfall profits. The proposals are part of what advocates call a **“Real Affordability Agenda,”** a set of policy ideas designed to fund public services such as affordable housing, healthcare, groceries and household essentials, energy, schools, transportation, and child care.

Some proposals focus not only on wealthy individuals but also on large corporate profits. Advocates argue that many companies have reported strong profits in recent years even as workers face rising housing, food and health-care costs. Because much of those profits ultimately flow to wealthy shareholders and executives, supporters say taxing windfall corporate profits is another way to redirect some of that wealth toward public investments that benefit workers



Organizers are planning nationwide May Day Strong demonstrations on May 1, calling for “No Work, No School, No Shopping” to highlight workers’ economic power.

and communities.

At the heart of the argument is a simple claim often repeated by labor groups and economic justice advocates: that workers help create the wealth in the economy but receive a shrinking share of its benefits.

Some organizers describe the goal as **“retrieving the wealth that working people created”** and reinvesting it in public programs that lower the cost of living.

“Affordability is about dignity — the dignity of knowing that if you work hard, you can care for your family and build a stable life,” said Care Economy Task Force Chair Sarah McBride.

## A Test Case in Massachusetts

One of the most closely watched examples of this approach comes from Massachusetts.

In 2022, voters approved the **Fair Share Amendment**, which created a **4% surtax on annual income above \$1 million**. The tax applies only to income earned above that threshold and affects a relatively small percentage of the state’s highest earners.

Despite impacting only a small share of taxpayers, the measure has generated **billions of dollars in new revenue** for the state. Under the amendment, the money must be used for **education and transportation investments**.

Lawmakers have already directed the funds toward programs including **free school meals for public school students, expanded financial aid for college students, tuition-free community college programs for many adult learners, child-care workforce support and improvements to public transportation systems**.

Supporters say the results demonstrate how targeted taxes on very high incomes can generate substantial revenue without affecting most residents.

## Why Wealth Is Taxed Differently

Part of the debate centers on how the wealthiest Americans accumulate and use money.

Most workers pay taxes directly on wages. Billionaires, however, often build wealth through investments such as stocks, real estate or business ownership.

Under current tax rules, gains on those assets typically are not taxed until they are sold. Some wealthy investors also use a strategy often described by tax experts as **“buy, borrow, die.”**

The idea is simple: buy assets that increase in value, borrow money against those assets rather than selling them, and pass the assets to heirs when you die. Because loans are not considered income, borrowing against assets can allow wealthy individuals to access large sums of money without triggering income taxes.

Advocates for higher taxes on the wealthy say this system allows enormous fortunes to grow with relatively little taxation compared with wages earned by workers.

Critics argue that changing the system could discourage investment, slow economic growth or encourage wealthy individuals to move assets or residency to lower-tax states.

Some economists also warn that very high tax rates can increase tax avoidance and may not always generate the expected revenue.

## Growing Public Support

Public opinion appears to be shifting as concerns about inequality and rising costs grow.

A recent survey national survey found Kansans’ most popular proposed new tax was a **“Billionaires Tax.”** The survey also found strong support for taxes on corporate windfall profits and price gouging during economic disruptions.

Respondents cited rising prices, **wealth inequality and housing affordability** as major issues they believe new tax policies should address.

## A Movement Linked to Labor

The push to tax extreme wealth has increasingly become tied to a broader labor movement focused on rising costs and

See **TAX THE RICH** Page 7 →

# Less Than A Week After Filing Opens, Jackson County Races Begin To Take Shape

By Bonita Gooch  
Editor-in-Chief

Less than a week after candidate filing opened for the 2026 election cycle, a crowded and consequential field has already emerged for both the Jackson County Executive position and multiple seats on the nine-member Jackson County Legislature.

Filing opened Feb. 24 and runs through March 31. The primary election is scheduled for Aug. 4.

With open seats, legal controversies, and shifting alliances on the Legislature, voters are likely to see significant change in county leadership this year.

## County Executive Race

Three Democrats have filed for County Executive.

**DaRon McGee**, who currently represents District 4 on the Legislature and previously served as its chair, is giving up his seat to run countywide. McGee is a former Missouri state representative and former member of the Hickman Mills C-1 School Board.

He is being challenged by attorney **Stacy Lake**, who ran once against former County Executive Frank White Jr. in the 2022 Democratic primary, earning 47% of the vote. Lake operates a private law practice and is seeking the office again following White's recall.

**Ryan Meyer** ran for the Jackson County Legislature at Large District 2 seat in 2022 and for the Missouri House in 2014

No Republican has filed for the executive position.

Unlike members of the Legislature, the Jackson



DaRon McGee



Stacy Lake



Jalen Anderson



Carla Fields Johnson



Justice Horn



Donna Peyton



Susan Wilson



Manny Abarca



Venessa Huskey



Byron Townsend

County Executive position does not have term limits.

## Legislature: Majority Faces Turnover

In 2022, **Freedom Inc.** endorsed a six-member slate for the Legislature — and all six won, giving the group an apparent majority on the nine-member board.

Those legislators were:

**At-Large:** **Jalen Anderson, Donna Peyton, Meghan (Marshall) Smith**

**District:** **Manny Abarca (District 1), Venessa Huskey (District 2), DaRon McGee (District 4)**

Although they held the numbers, the coalition did not remain unified over the past three years. Divisions emerged, and much of the term was marked by public conflict with then-County Executive Frank White Jr., culminating in his recall.

Now, several of those seats are either open or drawing challengers.

## Term Limits And Why Some 2018 Winners Can Run Again

Jackson County legislators are limited to two consecutive full four-year terms beginning Jan. 1, 2019.

That effective date matters.

Because the charter amendment was not retroactive, terms that began before Jan. 1, 2019 do not count toward the two-term limit. That is why legislators first elected in 2018 — including Jalen Anderson and Charlie Franklin — are eligible to run again in 2026 even though they have already served two terms.

## At-Large Seats

Jackson County voters elect six district legislators and three at-large legislators. The at-large seats are elected countywide but correspond geographically to pairs of districts.

## At-Large 1 (covering Districts 3 and 5)

Incumbent **Jalen Anderson** has filed for reelection and is eligible under the charter's effective-date language.

He faces two Democratic challengers:

**Carla Fields**, an Independence attorney with Fields & Brown, and is a past president of the Jackson County Bar Association.

**Justice Horn**, who previously ran for the Legislature and has been actively campaigning for months. Horn, who is openly gay, has been knocking doors across the district.

Republican **Leon Weatherby** has filed for this seat.

## At-Large 2 (covering Districts 1 and 2)

Incumbent **Donna Peyton**, a retired postal worker and retired Hickman Mills C-1

School District employee, has filed for reelection and currently has no opponent.

## At-Large 3 (covering Districts 4 and 6)

Incumbent **Meghan Smith** has announced she will not seek reelection. **Susan Wilson**, a former UMKC Vice Chancellor, has entered the race. Republican **Leon Weatherby** has also filed for the seat.

## District Races District 1

**Legislature President Manny Abarca** has not yet filed for reelection.

Abarca is facing multiple legal cases, including:

One misdemeanor domestic battery charge in Johnson County, Kansas

Two misdemeanor counts of harassment by telecommunications device in Reno County, Kansas

A Kansas City municipal

case tied to an alleged protection-order violation

Despite the pending cases, Abarca was recently elected president of the Legislature.

Two Democrats have filed to run against him. :

**Kelly Thompson**, a former journalist and single mother who has described being raised in a household shaped by both Hispanic and Polish traditions.

**Branden Haralson**, former director of public policy and government relations for ArtsKC and an openly gay performer.

## District 2

Incumbent **Venessa Huskey** has filed for reelection and currently has no opponent.

Before serving on the Legislature, Huskey worked eight years as a neighborhood and community liaison

See **RACES** Page 7 →

# Black Lawmakers Across Missouri Begin 2026 Re-Election Bids

By **Bonita Gooch**  
Editor-in-Chief

With filing now open for the 2026 election cycle, African American lawmakers across Missouri are preparing for what could bring notable changes to Black representation in the state legislature.

Candidate filing opened Feb. 24 and runs through March 31. Missouri's primary election will be held Aug. 4, followed by the general election in November.

The Missouri Senate includes 38 members elected to four-year terms, with half the chamber on the ballot every two years. The Missouri House of Representatives has 163 members who serve two-year terms and stand for election every two years.

Under Missouri's term limits, lawmakers may serve a maximum of eight years in the House and eight years in the Senate. The limit applies to total years served in each chamber, though legislators may serve the maximum in both chambers.

## Senate: Two Black Senators Termed Out

Currently, five African

Americans serve in the Missouri Senate. Four represent districts in the St. Louis area. The only Black senator representing the Kansas City region is **Barbara Washington**, who serves the 9th District.

Of the five Black senators, only two are up for election this cycle — both from the St. Louis area — and both have reached their term limits and cannot run again.

Washington is not on the ballot this year. First elected to the Senate in 2020, she is serving her second and final term and will be term-limited in 2028.

The departures in St. Louis mean at least two new Black senators could be elected in 2026, depending on primary and general election outcomes.

## House: Seven Black Lawmakers In Kansas City Metro

There are reportedly 20 African Americans serving in the Missouri House, with seven representing districts in the Kansas City metro area. We've attached a map of the Kansas City area districts. If you want to know what district you live in, go to [https://](https://modistrictmaps.org/)



Yolanda Young



Michael Johnson



Tiffany Price



Melissa Douglas

[modistrictmaps.org/](https://modistrictmaps.org/) and enter your address.

Here is where those seats stand:

**Yolanda Young**, who represents the 22nd District began serving in 2019, when she was elected during a special election.. She is running again for what would be her final term under House term limits. As of now, she has no opposition. Her wide district is near the top of KCMO running mostly east of 71 and across the upper part of what has been KC's historic Black community, sometimes running north of I70.

**Michael Johnson**, representing the 23rd District in the northernmost central Kansas City area, began serving in 2020 and is eligible for



Donna Barnes



Anthony Ealy



Mark Sharp

one more term. The district is one of the northernmost in KCMO and includes portions of downtown. KCMO.

As of this reporting, he has not filed for reelection and we've been told that he instead plans to run for the 3rd District Kansas City Council seat currently held by **Melissa Robinson**, who can't run again due to term limits. Democrat Atty. **Tony L. Van Trece** has filed to run for the seat.

**Tiffany Price**, who represents the 26th District, was first elected in 2024 and has filed for reelection. No challengers have filed. This district fits below the 27th district and similarly runs east of 71 to west of 435 and picks up Bannister road and

**Melissa Douglas**,

representing the 27th District, was also first elected in 2024 and has filed for reelection. No opponents have filed. This district is just below the 26th and runs east of 71 to west of 435 and goes far enough south to pick up Swope Park.

**Donna Barnes** represents the 28th District, which includes much of Raytown. She was first elected in 2024, succeeding her husband, former Rep. Jerome Barnes, who served eight years before reaching his term limit. Barnes faces a Democratic primary challenge from Mike Sager, who served in the house during the 2003 legislative session and lost to Barnes in the 2024 primary.

**Anthony Ealy**, representing the 36th District covering

the Grandview area, was elected in 2022. As of now, he has not filed for reelection, and no other candidates have filed for the seat.

**Mark Sharp**, who represents the 37th District covering much of southern Kansas City below Banister Road, was first elected in a 2019 special election. He informs us he's choosing not to run, but will instead file for the 5th District seat on the Kansas City Council that will be vacated by Mayor Protem Ryana Parks Shaw who will not be able to seek reelection to that seat due to term limits.

Sharp is endorsing **Karissa Varga**, an active Democrat, who has filed for the seat..

We'll keep you updated on candidate filings online at [www.communityvoiceks.com](http://www.communityvoiceks.com).

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# Justice Horn Runs Countywide Campaign Built On Visibility And Transit Reform

By **Bonita Gooch**  
Voice Editor-in-Chief

Justice Horn has become one of the most visible young political voices in Jackson County — and now he's taking that visibility into a campaign for an at-large seat on the county legislature.

The 27-year-old activist, policy advocate and student leader is running countywide after previously seeking the District 1 legislative seat in 2022, where he lost the Democratic primary to Manny Abarca.

Since then, Horn has remained active in civic debates and local government issues while building his profile across the Kansas City region.

A former chair of Kansas City's LGBTQ Commission under Mayor Quinton Lucas, Horn has been an outspoken advocate for LGBTQ

rights and inclusion. During his time on the commission, he helped push initiatives that included expanding protections for LGBTQ residents, incorporating all-gender bathrooms at Kansas City International Airport, and advocating for stronger responses to crimes targeting LGBTQ people.

Horn, who identifies as both Black and Indigenous and is a member of the Blackfeet Nation, has also framed his campaign as part of a broader effort to bring younger voices into local government. As a Gen Z candidate, he has said his generation deserves a stronger voice in decisions that shape the region's future.

Horn has also been active in student leadership. He served twice as student body president at the University of Missouri-Kansas City before stepping down from that role to focus on his campaign and continued community work.

He also stepped down from his role on the

Mayor's LGBTQ Commission in 2024 when he moved back to his hometown of Blue Springs, saying he wanted to focus more on his roots in eastern Jackson County.

"I want to fight the good fight in my hometown," he said when announcing the move. Much of Horn's campaign centers on improving public transportation across Jackson County — an issue he says he understands firsthand as a regular bus rider.

## He Remains Visible

One of the earliest individuals to announce his run for the Jackson County Legislature, He didn't enter the race empty handed. He immediately unfolded his public transit plan, calling for expanded rapid bus routes, new transit hubs, and better coordination between municipal transit systems across the county.



Justice Horn, a candidate for the Jackson County Legislature, shakes hands with former President Bill Clinton at the Clinton Global Initiative annual meeting in New York. Horn spoke during a session titled "Putting People First," focused on strengthening democracy and amplifying voices often left out of policy decisions.

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## TAX THE RICH, from Page 4 ↓

economic inequality.

Labor leaders argue that while productivity and corporate profits have grown significantly over time, wages for many workers have not kept pace. That gap, they say, helps explain why both billionaire wealth and large corporate profits have become targets in the growing campaign to tax the ultra-wealthy and redirect revenue toward public services.

Although the United States officially celebrates **Labor**

**Day in September, May 1 — known internationally as May Day — has long been associated with the global labor movement** and campaigns for workers' rights. For that reason, organizers have chosen May Day for their "**May Day Strong**" demonstration, which they describe as a planned nationwide day of disruption.

Participants are being encouraged to take part in "**No Work. No School. No Shopping.**" The action is intended to demonstrate the **collective economic power of workers and consumers by temporarily withdrawing labor and spending.**

Organizers say the effort is part of a **growing worker movement** and an attempt to **create one of the largest May Day**

**mobilizations in recent years**, highlighting the role workers play in an economy they believe increasingly benefits billionaires and large corporations.

## A Debate That Is Intensifying

Whether through new state tax proposals or demonstrations planned for May Day, the movement to tax the ultra-wealthy is gaining visibility across the country. Supporters say it could help fund the services working families rely on, while critics warn higher taxes could discourage investment. Either way, the debate over who should bear the cost of addressing the nation's affordability crisis is moving quickly from the political margins into the mainstream.

## RACES, from Page 5 ↓

for the City of Kansas City, Missouri.

### District 3

Current District 3 legislator **Charlie Franklin**, first elected in 2018, is eligible to run again under the term-limit effective date but has not filed for reelection.

**Dennis Rowland**, identified as a 71-year-old practicing attorney in Raytown, has filed as a Democrat.

**Tony Miller** has filed as a Republican.

### District 4

The District 4 seat is currently held by **DaRon McGee**, who is vacating it to run for County Executive.

Democrat **Byron Townsend** has filed for the seat and currently faces one Republican opponent.

Townsend previously served on the Hickman Mills School Board alongside

McGee and is considered a close political ally. Reporting has identified Townsend as the treasurer of three organizations associated with McGee that received funds from the Royals for get-out-the-vote efforts ahead of the stadium sales tax election.

### District 5

Republican incumbent **Jeanie Lauer**, first elected in 2018 and eligible to run again under the charter's effective-date language, has not filed for reelection.

Filed candidates:

**Antoine D. Jennings** (Democrat) ran unsuccessfully for the State Senate District 8 seat in 2022 and the Blue Spring School Board in 2015.

**Dale Carter** (Republican)

### District 6

Republican **Sean Smith** is not seeking reelection. He is instead running for

Missouri's 5th Congressional District seat currently held by U.S. Rep. Emanuel Cleaver II.

With newly drawn congressional district boundaries, Republicans have expressed optimism about their chances in the reshaped district.

For the county legislative seat, one Republican — **Bill Haley** — has filed. No Democrat has entered the race so far.

## Filing Continues

With several open seats, incumbents still weighing decisions, and more than a month remaining before the filing deadline, the field could grow even more crowded.

What is already clear is that Jackson County voters will decide not only who leads the executive branch, but what the next version of the Legislature will look like after one of the most turbulent chapters in recent county history.



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# Entrepreneurs Compete For \$60,000 At Kansas City Pitch Event

**By Voice News Service**

Entrepreneurs, business owners and community leaders will gather in Kansas City later this month for a day of learning, networking and investment opportunities at the Vision of Equity Business Summit & Pitch Competition.

Hosted by Kansas City G.I.F.T. (Generating Income For Tomorrow), the one-day event will take place Saturday, March 28, from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at 900 Linwood Blvd. in Kansas City, Missouri.

The summit features two key parts: a daytime business summit with workshops and a vendor marketplace, followed by a live pitch competition awarding \$60,000 in funding to local businesses.

Throughout the day, entrepreneurs attending the summit can participate in breakout workshops focused on practical business growth strategies, explore a curated vendor marketplace, and connect with other business owners and community leaders.

Organizers say the summit is designed to help entrepreneurs gain practical tools and relationships that support long-term success.

“The Vision of Equity is about making opportunity real—through practical training, powerful connections, and direct access to capital,” said Karis Harrington, chief operating officer of Kansas City G.I.F.T.

The day culminates with a pitch competition featuring 10 pre-selected businesses, each presenting their ideas

before judges and attendees for a chance to win \$10,000, \$20,000 or \$30,000 in funding. The awards are intended to help businesses expand operations, hire employees and scale their ventures.

Organizers say the event aims to strengthen the region’s entrepreneurial ecosystem while creating greater access to capital and resources — particularly for business owners who may have faced barriers entering traditional funding networks.

Tickets for the event are \$10, a price organizers say is intended to keep the summit accessible while still offering a full day of programming and networking opportunities.

Kansas City G.I.F.T. supports entrepreneurs through training, consulting and



Brandon Calloway, Kansas City GIFT; Alan Kneeland, The Combine; Godfrey Riddle, Civic Saint; William Fondren, Hive + Harvest; and Karris Harrington, KC GIFT; stand in the winners circle at the Pitch Black Business Summit 2025. PHOTO BY NIKKI OVERFELT CHIFALU, STARTLAND NEWS

resource connections designed to help businesses launch, stabilize and grow.

Tickets for the Vision of Equity Business Summit & Pitch Competition are available through the organization’s website.

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# Americans Still Don't Know How — Or When — To Wash Their Hands

## By Voice Health News

Despite the hygiene lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic, many Americans still are not washing their hands as often as they should — or doing it the right way.

A recent survey released on **World Hand Hygiene**



About 80% of infectious diseases are spread by dirty hands.

NATIONAL FOUNDATION  
FOR INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Day found that nearly half of respondents admitted they sometimes forget or choose not to wash their hands after visiting places like grocery stores, restaurants, coffee shops or health care facilities.

That's concerning because about **80% of infectious diseases are spread by dirty hands**, according to the **National Foundation for Infectious Diseases**.

Proper handwashing can dramatically reduce illness. Health experts say routine handwashing can help prevent **one in three cases of diarrhea and one in five respiratory infections**.

### Soap Matters More Than Water Temperature

Many people believe hot water is necessary to kill germs. But research shows the **temperature of the**

**water matters far less than using soap and scrubbing properly.**

A study from **Rutgers University** found that washing hands with cold water removes bacteria just as effectively as hot water. Researchers tested volunteers using water temperatures ranging from about **61°F to 100°F** and found **no significant difference in how many bacteria were removed**.

Instead, the key factors were **using soap and washing long enough**.

Soap works by breaking down oils and dirt on the skin where germs hide. The friction created while scrubbing helps lift germs off the hands so they can be rinsed away.

### When People Wash Their Hands

The survey found most people wash their hands after

using the bathroom or handling food. But fewer people remember to wash their hands after coughing, sneezing or touching high-traffic public surfaces.

Health experts say those moments are especially important because respiratory viruses spread easily through contaminated hands.

### How To Wash Your Hands Properly

Health experts recommend these steps:

- 1. Wet your hands** with clean running water (warm or cold).
- 2. Apply soap** and lather well.
- 3. Scrub for at least 20 seconds**, including backs of hands, between fingers and under fingernails.
- 4. Rinse thoroughly** under running water.
- 5. Dry your hands**



Washing hands with soap for at least 20 seconds is one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of germs and infectious diseases.

**completely** with a clean towel or paper towel.

If soap and water aren't available, alcohol-based hand sanitizer can help — but it doesn't kill all germs and should not replace

regular handwashing.

The takeaway from health experts is simple: **it's not the temperature of the water that matters most — it's using soap and washing your hands thoroughly and often.**

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# New Leadership Team Aims To Reconnect Boys & Girls Club With Community

By Ty Davis and Bonita Gooch

More than 20 years ago, when the Boys & Girls Club moved from its aging site at 21st and Grove to the modern facility at 2400 N. Opportunity Drive, it was more than a relocation.

It was a statement.

The new building — with its full gym, mirrored dance studio, open commons area and dedicated classrooms — represented investment in northeast Wichita's youth. After years in a cramped, worn space where children were quite literally bouncing off the walls, the Opportunity Drive facility offered room to grow.

For the community, it was a point of pride.

Today, the infrastructure remains intact. The gym still hosts organized sports and instruction. The commons area still provides space for mentoring conversations and supervised recreation. The dance studio still reflects possibility.

What has changed over the past two decades is the relationship between the Club and the community it was built to serve.

## When Visibility Faded

There was a time when Club directors were known by name throughout the community. They were visible, present and connected beyond the building's walls. Club activities were shared, milestones were celebrated and the Club felt woven into the fabric of northeast Wichita.

Over time, that connection thinned.

The community's attention shifted. Fewer events were held there. Fewer families enrolled their children, and the building became less central to neighborhood life.

No headlines suggested a crisis. The building remained open, but participation declined.

With a capacity of 80 to 100 students, today regular attendance at the Opportunity Drive unit is between 30 to 40 students per day.

The building did not shrink.

The connection did.

## A Leadership Team Focused On Reconnection

Today, a new leadership team is focused on restoring visibility and rebuilding engagement.

Unit Director Aaron Roberts, Area Director Bobby Bell and Chief Operations



From left, Kyle Ellison, Bobby Bell and Aaron Roberts are focused on rebuilding community engagement and expanding youth participation at the Boys & Girls Club Opportunity Drive unit.

Officer Kyle Ellison describe this moment as one of renewed presence — ensuring families understand not only that the building exists, but what it offers inside.

“There was a period where we weren't as visible,” Roberts said. “We're being intentional about changing that.”

Their approach includes stronger neighborhood presence, deeper partnerships with schools and organizations, and clearer communication about programs and opportunities.

“This shouldn't be a hidden asset,” Ellison said. “It should be a community anchor.”

The goal is not simply to increase numbers. It is to rebuild connection.

## Structure That Supports Growth

The Club operates on the USD 259 school calendar and provides transportation from area schools to the Opportunity Drive unit. All staff are bus-trained, and the organization continues to seek additional drivers with the appropriate CDL credentials to expand service.

Membership remains intentionally affordable. Families pay a \$50 annual registration fee and \$30 per month for after-school programming — roughly one dollar per day.

Scholarships are available, reducing that cost to \$15 per month for qualifying families.

A typical after-school day begins with students arriving around 2:30 p.m. Youth are given time to decompress before transitioning into “Power Hour,” a structured homework and study block that runs until 4 p.m.

From there, students rotate through programming that may include STEM projects, financial literacy through Money Matters, leadership development, health and wellness activities, art and organized sports. Dinner is served around 4:30 p.m., and

programming continues until 6:30 p.m., closing with supervised recreation.

Staff-to-student ratios average about 20 to 1, allowing for consistent oversight and engagement.

## The Power Of Showing Up

In many young lives, stability can be fragile — shifting environments, fractured relationships and unpredictable routines. What the Club offers, leaders say, is steady presence.

Staff show up the same way every day. Expectations are clear. Encouragement is consistent. Accountability is balanced with empathy.

Roberts understands that personally.

As a teenager, he worked in this very building in one of his first jobs. Now he returns as Unit Director, carrying both professional responsibility and lived experience.

“I know what it means when adults show up consistently,” he said. “That consistency can change a kid's direction.”

Bell shares that perspective. Though he was not a Club member growing up, he credits youth mentors who invested in him and shaped his adulthood. The mission now, he says, is to provide that same dependable influence for the next generation.

That reliability builds trust. Trust builds confidence. Confidence builds trajectory.

## Summer Programming: Planning Ahead

While school-year attendance remains steady, summer is traditionally the Club's strongest season.

Full-day summer programming includes

See **CLUB** Page 15 →



Students gather inside the Opportunity Drive unit of the Boys & Girls Club of South Central Kansas, where after-school programming includes academic support, mentorship and structured activities.

# Checkmate Against Cycles Of Violence And Poverty

## After 26 Years In Prison, Tony Ballard Is Helping Young People Make Better Moves In Life

By Ty Davis  
Wichita Reporter

Across Wichita and Sedgwick County, organizations are working to interrupt cycles of poverty, violence, and disconnection before they become permanent outcomes.

One local nonprofit, Masters and Mentors: Youth Enrichment Strategies (YES), Inc., is addressing that challenge through a model rooted in mentorship, cognitive development, and lived experience.

Founded by Tony Ballard, Masters and Mentors was created to reach youth often described as “at-risk” or justice-involved—young people navigating school challenges, unstable environments, or

early contact with the juvenile system. Rather than focusing solely on punishment or remediation, the organization centers on decision-making skills, critical thinking, and relationship-based mentorship.

### A Framework Born Behind Bars

Ballard’s personal journey shapes the program’s design. He spent much of his early life cycling through juvenile facilities, foster homes, jails, and prisons, ultimately serving 26 years incarcerated. During long stretches of 23-hour-a-day lockdown, he encountered the game of chess.

“Chess was not just a game—it became a way to slow down, think ahead, and realize that every move in life has consequences.”

Over time, Ballard says, chess helped him organize his thinking, develop patience and planning skills, and confront the reality of consequences. What began as recreation became a framework for rehabilitation. He began applying that discipline beyond the board, studying personal development, addressing anger, and becoming what he describes as a lifelong learner.

### Teaching Youth How to Think

Today, chess remains central to the Masters and Mentors model. Youth are taught to think ahead, evaluate risks, and understand that decisions carry weight. The structure of the game becomes a practical tool for impulse control and intentional thinking.

Ballard sees a gap in many youth services.

“What’s missing isn’t programs that tell kids what to do. What’s missing are opportunities that teach them how to think.”

In chess, no two games are ever the same. Players must adapt, analyze, and respond in real time. That process mirrors real-life problem-solving far more closely than rote instruction, requiring creativity, foresight, and accountability for every move made.

Mentorship from individuals with lived experience also plays a critical role. Ballard emphasizes that youth often respond differently when guided by someone who has faced similar struggles.

“When a young person sees someone who has lived what they’re living and still found a way forward, that’s when hope becomes real.”

### From the Board to Real Life

The program operates in schools, community spaces,



Students gather around as two peers face off in a chess match during a mentoring session.

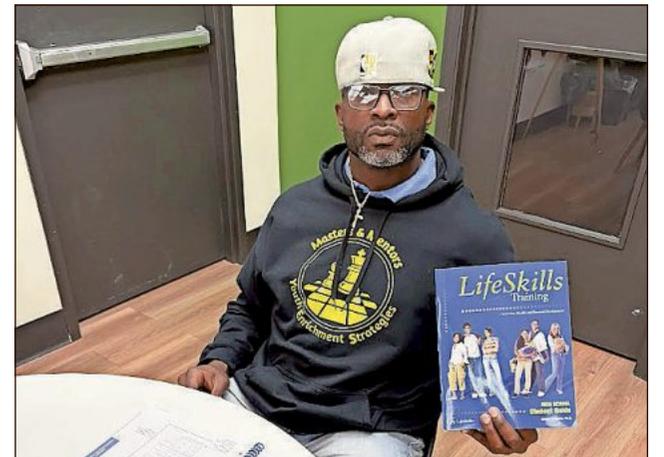
and during weekly visits to the Juvenile Detention Facility, where mentors teach chess and connect lessons from the board to real-world decisions.

Evidence of impact can be seen in small but meaningful shifts. Ballard recalls working with a student diagnosed with ADHD who struggled to focus for more than a few minutes. After engaging with chess and entering a tournament, the same student sat for over an hour analyzing moves—demonstrating focus that once seemed out of reach.

### Strengthening the Model With Research

In addition to mentorship and chess-based cognitive skill-building, Masters and Mentors integrates Botvin LifeSkills Training (LST), an evidence-based prevention curriculum recognized by Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development. The curriculum builds self-management, responsible decision-making, communication skills, and resistance to peer pressure.

Research shows participation in LST can reduce drug use by up to 80%, alcohol use



Tony Ballard says chess helped transform his thinking during incarceration — a lesson he now passes on to Wichita youth.

by 60%, violence by 50%, and tobacco use by 87%.

By combining research-backed curriculum with relationship-based mentorship and cognitive development strategies, Masters and Mentors connect theory to lived experience—equipping youth with practical tools they can apply in daily life.

Like many grassroots initiatives, the organization faces ongoing challenges related to staffing, funding, and volunteer support. It is actively

seeking mentors, educators, and community partners to help expand its reach.

Ballard envisions a Wichita where early mentorship contributes to measurable declines in incarceration and substance abuse, alongside increases in graduation rates and long-term stability. For Ballard, lasting change is built through consistent mentorship, intentional thinking, and the belief that a young person’s path can always be redirected toward hope and success.



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# Wichita Students Tell Their Stories In 'Weapons Of Choice' Photo Contest

By Bonita Gooch  
Voice Editor-in-Chief

Young photographers from Wichita schools will showcase their work this month as part of the **third annual "Weapons of Choice" youth photography competition**, a program designed to introduce students to the legacy of legendary photographer **Gordon Parks** while encouraging them to use photography to tell their own stories.

Organized by the **Wichita Chapter of The Links, Incorporated**, the contest invites middle- and high-school students to submit photographs that reflect themes connected to family, community and social awareness. The program takes its name from Parks' well-known phrase describing his camera as his "weapon of choice" — a tool he used to document injustice and highlight the everyday lives of Black Americans.

"We talk with students about



Mei Castro, a 12th-grade student, holds her first-place photograph from last year's "Weapons of Choice" student photography contest at the Ulrich Museum of Art at Wichita State University.

how they can use their camera as a weapon — a tool to show what's happening in their communities," said LaTonia Kennedy, one of the event's organizers and a member of the Wichita Links.

This year's theme, "**Roots to Rise**," challenges students to submit **black-and-white photographs that depict their heritage and family roots**, with an emphasis on resilience and community.

Students also provide short written narratives explaining the stories behind their images.

The competition continues to grow. **Eighty-five students entered this year's contest**, with judges selecting the **top 60 photographs** to be included in the public exhibit.

Those selected works will be displayed at **Wichita State University's Ulrich Museum of Art** from **March 10 through March 29**, where visitors can vote for the People's Choice Award. The contest will conclude with a **final awards ceremony March 28 at 1:30 p.m. at the Ulrich**, where students will receive **cash prizes for first, second and third place in both middle- and high-school divisions**, along with Director's and People's Choice awards.

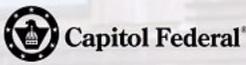
An **opening reception will be held March 14 at 2 p.m. at The Kansas African American Museum**, featuring a digital presentation of the photos and

remarks from **professional photographer Jaden Powell**, a Wichita native and Wichita High School graduate who will speak about building a career in photography.

The competition began three years ago as a smaller program for students at **Gordon Parks Academy**, drawing **28 entries in its first year**. The exhibit was held at Wichita State University's **Rhatigan Student Center** and paid tribute to Wichita architect and activist **Charles McAfee**.

By its second year, the program expanded through partnerships with the **Ulrich Museum of Art and The Kansas African American Museum**, opening the competition to students across **Wichita Public Schools** and drawing nearly **100 entries**.

Organizers say the contest continues to grow as more students discover photography as both an artistic outlet and a powerful storytelling tool.



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# Keys to My Heart on stage at KC's Gem Theater

Producers Deontae Hayden and Daley Gunter turn real struggles of love, betrayal, and redemption into a faith-based drama for the stage.

By Ty Davis  
The Community Voice

How do two Black producers from Kansas take real struggles—broken families, forgiveness, and redemption—and turn them into something audiences can enjoy on stage?

Their answer is *Keys to My Heart*, a new faith-based stage production created by longtime friends **Deontae Hayden** and **Daley Gunter**. The play, produced by their company **Films From Within**, is heading to Kansas City for two performances on March 17 and 18.

The show blends drama, humor, and faith-centered storytelling, exploring the emotional terrain of love, betrayal, and forgiveness.

## A Drama That Unlocks More Than Love

At the center of *Keys to My Heart* is a young couple whose relationship is tested when hidden truths come to light. What begins as devotion becomes a journey through heartbreak, the struggle for trust, and the possibility

of redemption.

The story asks difficult questions: What happens when love collides with secrets? Can trust be rebuilt after deception? And how do people move forward when the pain is still fresh?

Along the way, the production mixes humor and tension with heartfelt moments that mirror the realities many families and relationships face.

"It's not just a feel-good story where everyone hugs at the end," Hayden said. "There are consequences for our actions. But there's also redemption. That's what makes it real."

## Funny Veterans, Fresh Voices

The cast of 12 blends experienced performers with emerging talent, creating a mix of polished stage presence and new energy.

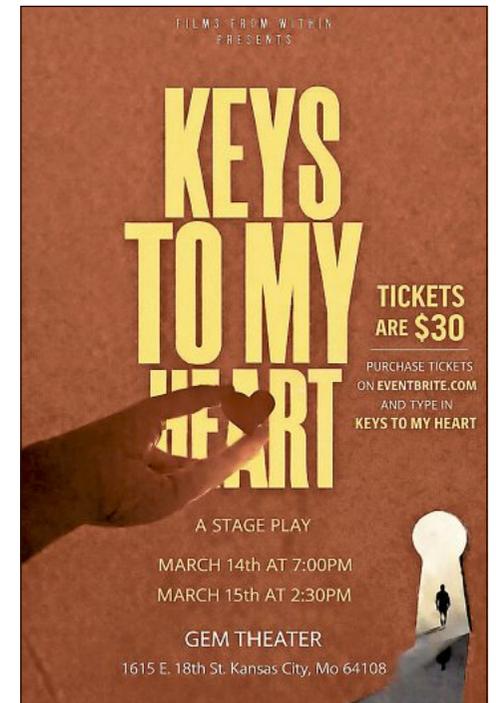
Veteran comedic actors **Kaela Kincheon** and **Michael Webber** anchor the production with sharp timing and strong audience connection. Around them, newer performers bring fresh emotion and perspective to the story.

"We prayed over every role," Gunter said.



Longtime friends and creative partners, Deontae Hayden and Daley Gunter, are the force behind Wichita's new stage play *Keys to My Heart*.

"Some actors are playing outside their comfort zones, but that's where growth happens. The goal was to bring together people who not only act well but who could live out the heart of this story."



## Friends Turned Producers

Hayden and Gunter's partnership grew from a long friendship and a shared passion for storytelling.

See **KEYS** Page 15 →

## ROOTS TO RISE

Inspired by Gordon Parks

Student Photography  
Exhibition

March 10 - March 28  
Ulrich Museum of Art  
Collection Study Center  
at Wichita State University



## Honoring Roots to Rise Student Photographers

Saturday, March 14  
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the parking garage.



Ulrich  
Museum  
of Art

# KC Melting Pot Theatre Stages 'Long Time Since Yesterday'

By Bonita Gooch  
Voice Editor-in-Chief

KC Melting Pot Theatre will present *Long Time Since Yesterday*, a powerful drama by playwright P.J. Gibson that explores friendship, grief and the complicated bonds between women navigating life's challenges.

The production, directed by Kansas City theater veteran Lynn King, runs March 12 - 21 on Wednesdays through Sundays at the Just Off Broadway Theatre, 3051 Penn Valley Drive, Kansas City, MO.

First produced in the late 1970s, Gibson's play centers on a group of women who reunite after the death of their friend Janet. What begins as a gathering to mourn quickly becomes an emotional reckoning as long-buried tensions resurface. Former lovers, rivals and confidantes must confront the choices they made, the dreams they pursued and the wounds that never fully healed.

Through sharp dialogue and moments of humor and vulnerability, the play examines

friendship, ambition and the pressures facing Black women as they balance strength with personal struggles.

King brings extensive experience to the production. She has spent more than three decades performing and directing on local stages and is a founding member of KC Melting Pot Theatre. She currently serves as the company's artistic director for education.

The cast features a mix of established and emerging performers, including standout performances from Aalayah Norwood as Thelma Carlson and Kim Crane as Panzi Lew McVain, along with Jordan Nevels and Zaria Redick portraying the younger versions of two of the characters, helping illuminate the friendships and tensions that shaped the group years earlier.

KC Melting Pot Theatre is known for producing plays that highlight diverse voices and stories often underrepresented on stage.

Select performances will include talkbacks with the cast and creative team.

For the full schedule of performances and ticket information, visit [kcmeltingpot.com](http://kcmeltingpot.com).



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**Edward Brown, III, 65**

March 13, 1960 - February 23, 2026  
Service was held on Mar. 4 at Jackson Mortuary Chapel

**Melody Caprice Miller, 69**

November 18, 1956 - February 21, 2026  
Service was held on Mar. 7 at Southeast High School.

**Gregory "Greg" L. Williams, 64**

November 4, 1961 - February 21, 2026  
Service will be held at 11 am on Sat., Mar. 14 at Calvary Baptist Church, 2653 N. Hillside.

**Rev. Rose Mary Booker-Jones, 73**

August 21, 1952 - February 19, 2026  
Service was held on Mar. 7 at St. Mark United Methodist Church.

**HORN, from Page 7 ↓**

Horn argues that improving transit in the metro area would expand economic opportunity while connecting communities across the region.

Horn has also been visible in county government through his role on the Jackson County Plan Commission, where he served as vice chair before his term expired and he was not reappointed by Interim County Executive Phil LeVota.

LeVota said Horn had been appointed during the administration of former County Executive Frank White Jr. and that his term had simply ended. Horn argued the decision was political retaliation tied to his criticism of the county's handling of its property tax crisis.

Horn has also drawn attention in the campaign through his highly visible outreach strategy.

Rather than relying primarily on mailers

or advertising, Horn says he spends much of his time knocking on doors across Jackson County and meeting voters directly.

"I go out almost every day," Horn has said of his door-to-door efforts, even during winter months.

He also maintains an active social media presence and regularly distributes press releases to local media — making him, in the words of some observers, a one-person publicity team determined to keep his campaign and policy ideas in the public conversation.

The attention has not always been positive. Horn says some of his campaign signs have been vandalized with anti-gay slurs, and he recently reported a website circulating false claims about him that police confirmed were fabricated.

Despite the attacks, Horn continues to campaign aggressively, saying visibility and direct contact with voters are key to building support in a countywide race.

With endorsements from several



Justice Horn walks through a Jackson County neighborhood while canvassing for his campaign. Horn says he knocks on doors almost every day — even in the winter — to meet voters across the county.

progressive organizations and growing recognition across the region, Horn is betting that persistence — and a steady presence in the public eye — can help carry his campaign forward.

**CLUB, from Page 11 ↓**

academic enrichment, recreation, leadership activities, field trips and meals. At peak, the Opportunity Drive unit can serve close to 200 youth.

Summer enrollment fills quickly. "We want families planning early," Roberts said, noting that available spots can reach capacity before summer begins.

Summer program rates are \$350 per month. Enrollment for both school-year and summer programming is handled through the organization's parent portal, with staff available to assist families with pricing, scholarships and registration questions.

**A Community Asset With Purpose**

The Opportunity Drive facility was built as an investment in northeast Wichita's youth. The structure remains. The programming is in place. The cost is accessible. Transportation is available.

The building has the capacity to serve more young people. The opportunity is there for the Club to once again play a central role in strengthening youth and the community it serves.

**KEYS, from Page 14 ↓**

Hayden discovered his love for performing while growing up and later developed it further at Kansas State University, where he acted in multiple campus productions.

"I acted every semester at K-State," he said. "By the time I graduated, I had done eight plays and even some professional theater. My gift is coaching people—taking their shyness or nervousness and helping them look like

seasoned actors."

Gunter's path began in Washington, D.C., where he studied electrical engineering and played football at **Howard University**. But community theater introduced him to a new creative outlet.

"I found theater, and it gave me a way to express myself,"

he said. "It taught me discipline and opened a door I didn't even know existed."

**Starting Regional, Thinking National**

For the producers, bringing *Keys to My Heart* to Kansas City is part of a larger vision. Their goal is to build a regional audience before eventually

taking the production to stages across the country.

Hayden and Gunter agree, the story resonates because it reflects real struggles many families experience.

"In our community, too often we don't talk about things until funerals," he said. "We want this play to open those conversations now—while

there's still time to heal."

For the two friends turned producers, the Kansas City performances represent another step forward—and proof that stories rooted in faith and community can travel far beyond where they begin.

Tickets are \$30 and can be purchased on Eventbrite. Type in Keys to My Heart.

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Barry L. Gainey, Minister

**LUTHER, from Page 16 ↓**

but the fan vote helps build up buzz, and the fan favorite has been among the selected inductees **every year except two.**

Fan voting closes **April 3, 2026.** The **2026 induction class is expected to be announced later in April**, along with the ceremony's location and date. The event typically takes place

in the fall.

As of tour press time, the fan-vote leaderboard has Luther as number four.

- Phil Collins — 231,068 votes
- New Edition — 192,184
- P!nk — 172,984
- Luther Vandross — 169,124

**A Long-Awaited Recognition**

For many fans, Vandross' nomination

represents recognition that should have come years ago.

With a career spanning more than four decades, millions of records sold and a voice that helped define modern R&B, his legacy is already secure.

The question now is whether Rock Hall voters — and fans — will decide that Luther Vandross belongs in the Hall of Fame the very first time his name appears on the ballot.



## Groundwater, Health, and You.

*A Clear Way Forward: Free Health Testing*

These tests look for health effects that may be linked to contaminated groundwater exposure.



**FREE Health testing events provided by the Wichita Black Nurses Association for those in the 29th & Grove Area**

- **Saturday, March 7, 2026** 10am–2pm  
Shadyway Plaza  
1421 N Spruce Ave, Wichita, KS
- **Saturday, March 14, 2026** 10am–2pm  
Holy Savior Church  
1457 N Chautauqua St, Wichita, KS
- **Saturday, March 21, 2026** 10am–2pm  
Black Family Wellness Expo  
*Sponsored by The Wichita Links*  
Saint Mark UMC Church  
1525 N Lorraine Ave, Wichita, KS
- **Saturday, March 28, 2026**  
Homebound Visits  
If you are homebound, please call  
316-882-1778 between 9 AM to 3 PM,  
Mon-Fri, to schedule a home testing  
appointment.



# Long Overdue: Luther Vandross Gets First Rock Hall Nomination

Despite decades of success and eligibility since 2006, the R&B icon is only now on the ballot.

By **Bonita Gooch**  
Voice Editor-in-Chief

Despite selling more than 40 million records, winning eight Grammy Awards, Luther Vandross is only now receiving his first nomination for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. And, a nomination doesn't guarantee he'll get in.

The late singer, songwriter and producer spent more than three decades shaping the sound of romantic R&B, producing a run of 11 platinum albums and chart-topping hits — achievements that many fans and music historians say should have put him on the Hall's ballot years ago.

Under the Hall's rules, artists become eligible **25 years after the release of their first commercial recording**. Vandross' solo debut album, *Never Too Much*, arrived in **1981**, meaning he became eligible in **2006**. Yet his first nomination didn't come until nearly two decades later — even though his solo success now stretches back **about 45 years**.

Let's not forget he was a successful songwriter and a producer, beyond his own recordings. He won the 2004 Grammy for **Song of the Year** for *"Dance With My Father."* He produced the album *"Jump to It"* for soul legend Aretha Franklin, helping deliver one of her biggest R&B hits of

### Other Nominees This Year

Vandross is part of a **17-artist ballot** the Hall released on **Feb. 25**, but the Hall typically selects **about five to seven artists** for induction each year in the performer category.

A rare few artists enter the Hall the first time they appear on the ballot. Among those who achieved that distinction are Elvis Presley, Aretha Franklin, James Brown,



**Luther Vandross**

Madonna and U2.

His fellow nominees span multiple genres and generations, but are any of them more deserving than Luther.

Among them are **New Edition**, the Boston group helped shape the modern R&B boy-band formula with hits like *"Candy Girl," "Cool It Now,"* and *"Mr. Telephone Man."* The group has sold more than **20 million** records but has never won a Grammy.

Also nominated is **Lauryn Hill**, whose 1998 album *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* **won five Grammys in one night** and remains one of the most celebrated albums of the modern era.

**Sade**, whose sophisticated blend of soul, jazz and quiet-storm R&B has sold more than **50 million records worldwide**, is on the ballot for the **second year in a row**.

**Mariah Carey**, one of the most successful pop and R&B singers of all time, with **19 No. 1 hits on the Billboard Hot 100** and more than **200 million records sold worldwide**. This year marks Carey's **third consecutive nomination** for the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

Other nominees include Phil Collins, P!nk, Billy Idol and several others.

### How Fans Can Vote

Final inductees are chosen by a voting body of more than **1,000 artists, historians and music industry professionals**. Fans can cast ballots online at [vote.rockhall.com](http://vote.rockhall.com) but fans have a vote.

Voters may select **up to seven nominees per ballot and vote once per day**. The **top five artists in the fan vote** are combined into one ballot that counts alongside the other votes. Yes, that's just one of 1000 votes,

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