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Witless Whining on Social Media Confirms That Kansas Republicans Can't Take 'No' For an Answer

By Clay Wirestone
Kansas Reflector

Four years ago, Kansans said "hell no" to a constitutional amendment clearing the way for extremists to ban abortion.

On Tuesday, Kansans said "hell no" again, this time to a constitutional amendment clearing the way for a conservative revamp of the state Supreme Court — banning abortion and gutting public education.

Somehow, that message hasn't been received.

Browsing social media on Tuesday night and Wednesday turned into a surreal experience for this journalist, as I watched Republicans grappling with a 22-percentage-point rejection of their agenda. Four years ago, the same voices were stunned by the state's solidly pro-choice majority, and I poked good-natured fun at their incomprehension at the time.

These commenters all want you to know that conservative Republicans were the real victims here.

As I wrote yesterday, amazing things happen in Kansas when party labels aren't affixed to elections. Voters were free to make a choice without the baggage of partisanship. This, incidentally, is why the Kansas Legislature will never create a citizen initiative or direct democracy process.

They don't want to deal with what Kansas voters actually want.

I've seen a couple of posts make this point, and they misunderstand the situation completely.

Republicans may have been stupid. But they had a plan. Kansas has nearly twice as many registered Republicans as registered Democrats, according to the Secretary of State's Office. Back in 2022, and this year, they placed constitutional amendments on midterm primary ballots in hopes of rigging the outcomes.

Democrats usually don't face contested primary races. Independents don't have anything to vote for at all.

That means Republicans, and Republicans alone, have been trained to show up for primaries.

GOP leaders thought they could choose those casting ballots, rather than making a case to the entire state. That was the plan.

Finally, Rep. Blake Carpenter, R-Derby, made clear on Facebook that as much as Kansans might want to move on to other issues, Republicans won't be satisfied after Tuesday's walloping.

"I know there will be people who say this debate is over and that those of us who support reform should simply move on," he wrote in a remarkably dyspeptic dispatch. "I disagree. If we believe the current system is unaccountable, then we have a responsibility to continue advocating for something better."

He won't take "no" for an answer.

Clay Wirestone is Kansas Reflector opinion editor.



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The American Dream Is Slipping Away for Black Americans

Urban League's 50th State of Black America report warns of setbacks in jobs, wealth and voting rights.

By Bonita Gooch
Editor-in-Chief

Fifty years after the National Urban League first began measuring the state of Black America, the organization's latest report delivers one of its bleakest assessments yet.

Released late last month, the Urban League's 50th annual **State of Black America** report concludes that Black Americans are farther from achieving the American Dream than at any time since the Civil Rights Movement. The report argues that policy changes under President Donald Trump's administration are reversing decades of



Marc Morial, president and CEO of the National Urban League, speaks alongside civil rights leaders, including the Rev. Al Sharpton, during the release of the organization's 50th annual State of Black America report. The report concludes that Black Americans are losing ground in economic opportunity and political representation while calling for renewed investment in civil rights, voting access and Black economic development.

BY THE NUMBERS

50

Years the Urban League has published the State of Black America report.

44%

Black homeownership rate.

73%

White homeownership rate.

7.8%

Black unemployment rate, more than double its 2023 level.

\$2.1 trillion

Estimated annual Black consumer spending power.

progress in economic opportunity, civil rights and political representation.

While the report focuses on Black Americans, Urban League President and CEO Marc Morial said its findings should concern everyone.

"It may be the focus is us, but the impact is not just us," Morial said. "These attacks are going to impact broadly working Americans, poor Americans and aspirational middle-class Americans."

A report born from being ignored

The National Urban League first published the State of Black America report in 1976 after neither President Gerald Ford's State of the Union address nor the Democratic response mentioned the economic condition of Black Americans.

The report was intended to serve as both a scorecard and a policy blueprint, documenting

racial disparities in employment, housing, education and health while offering recommendations for lawmakers.

Some of its proposals were later adopted during President Jimmy Carter's administration. Now, on its 50th anniversary, the Urban League says many of the gains achieved since the Civil Rights Movement are in danger of being rolled back.

Economic progress losing ground

The report paints a troubling picture of Black economic mobility.

Among its findings:

- Black homeownership stands at **44%**, compared with **73%** for white Americans — a wider gap than existed before passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968.
- The median Black household possesses just **15 cents of wealth for every \$1** held by the median

white household.

- Black unemployment has climbed to **7.8%**, more than doubling since 2023 and costing Black households an estimated **\$87 billion** in lost income.
- Black men have been hit especially hard, with **567,000 jobs lost since late 2025**, a decline Morial compared to recession-level conditions.

The report attributes much of the decline to federal policy changes, including rollbacks of diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives and reductions in federal civil rights enforcement.

Civil rights and voting power under pressure

Beyond economics, the Urban League argues that long-standing civil rights protections are also being weakened.

The report points to changes within the Justice

Department's Civil Rights Division and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, agencies created to combat discrimination in employment and public life.

It also cites President Trump's dismissal of Air Force Gen. CQ Brown Jr., the nation's second Black chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Brown, a decorated four-star general, was widely viewed as a symbol of increased diversity within the military. The report argues that his removal, along with the dismissal of other senior Black military leaders, sends a troubling signal about Black leadership in government institutions.

The report expresses particular concern over the future of Black political representation following the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in **Louisiana v. Callais**.

In that 6-3 ruling, the Court struck down Louisiana's congressional map and significantly limited the use of race in drawing voting districts.

Civil rights advocates argue the decision makes it more difficult to create districts where Black voters have a meaningful opportunity to elect candidates of their choice.

According to the Urban League, the ruling could place **191 state legislative districts currently represented by Black lawmakers** at risk as similar legal challenges move forward across the country. The organization warns the decision could reduce Black political influence in state legislatures and Congress for years to come.

The report also criticizes the proposed Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) Act, arguing that new proof-of-citizenship requirements could make voter registration more difficult for millions of eligible Americans who lack immediate access to documents such as birth certificates or passports.

See **American Dream** Page 14 →

“Black Americans are farther from achieving the American Dream than at any time since the Civil Rights Movement.”

**URBAN LEAGUE
STATE OF BLACK
AMERICA 2026**

Trump Administration Begins Mass Removal of Haitian Immigrants

More than 330,000 Haitians who have legally lived and worked in the United States for as long as 15 years are beginning to feel the real impact of the Trump administration's decision to end Temporary Protected Status (TPS), a humanitarian program that allows people already in the United States to remain and work legally when conditions in their home country make it unsafe to return.

Across the country, Haitians are receiving letters ordering them to report to Immigration and Customs Enforcement offices. In Springfield, Ohio, advocates say some immigrants have left those appointments wearing electronic ankle monitors—a practice they describe as humiliating for people who have lived peacefully in the United States for years. The Department of Homeland

Security says electronic monitoring is one tool used to ensure compliance with immigration proceedings.

DHS is also encouraging immigrants to leave voluntarily, offering eligible participants free airfare and a \$2,600 payment rather than face possible removal later.

The enforcement follows a year-long legal battle. The Trump administration announced plans to end Haiti's TPS designation in 2025. Haitian immigrants sued, and a federal judge temporarily blocked the administration from carrying out the policy. In June, however, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the administration did not have to wait for the lawsuit to be resolved before ending TPS. Last month, the judge lifted the stay that had paused enforcement, allowing the administration to

begin implementing the policy even though the lawsuit itself remains pending.

Congress created TPS in 1990 to temporarily protect people already in the United States when war, natural disasters or other extraordinary conditions make returning home unsafe. After Haiti's devastating 2010 earthquake, the Obama administration designated Haiti for TPS, allowing eligible Haitians already here to apply for temporary protection from deportation and authorization to work legally.

Many Haitians affected by the administration's actions also entered through the Biden administration's Humanitarian Parole program, which allowed approved migrants from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela to enter the United States legally with American

sponsors. The Trump administration has ended that program as well.

Many Haitian families have spent the past 15 years building lives in America. **For many Haitians, losing TPS doesn't just mean facing possible deportation—it also means eventually losing the legal authority to keep the jobs that have allowed them to support their families for years.**

For the hundreds of thousands of Haitians now facing the loss of TPS, what began as a temporary humanitarian response to Haiti's 2010 earthquake has become the foundation of lives built in America. While the courts continue considering the lawsuit, the administration has already begun carrying out the policy that could force many of them to leave.



A Haitian woman living in Springfield (right) was among those who received a “call-in letter” last week to report to an ICE facility in Blue Ash, Ohio, where she was outfitted with an electronic ankle monitor. PHOTO COURTESY OF VILÈS DORSAINVIL/HAITIAN SUPPORT CENTER



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Senior Connect Offers Free Day of Resources, Celebration for Wichita Seniors

The Community Voice and Wichita Council of Elders will host Senior Connect Aug. 14, featuring workshops, resources, entertainment and the inaugural Senior Legacy Award.

Senior Connect 2026 will bring Wichita-area adults 55 and older together for a free day of information, resources, entertainment and celebration Friday, Aug. 14, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Carl Brewer Community Center, 1329 E. 16th St. N.

Hosted by The Community Voice and the Wichita Council of Elders, the event carries the theme "Living My Life Like It's Golden" and is designed to help older adults connect, discover resources and live well.

A highlight will be the presentation of the first Senior

Legacy Award during a free luncheon for registered participants. This award will be presented to Sandra Rankin, 87, a retired Wichita Public Schools teacher whose community involvement has continued long after retirement.

For nearly 20 years, Rankin has chaired the Wichita Branch NAACP

Education Committee, meeting regularly with school board member Diane Albert to discuss issues before the board and concerns affecting children of color. Rankin also coordinates the NAACP's citywide voter empowerment forums, bringing candidates before the community ahead of elections to answer questions and



Sandra Rankin, left, and Olivia Dempsey will be featured at Senior Connect 2026. Rankin, 87, a retired Wichita Public Schools teacher and longtime community advocate, will receive the inaugural Senior Legacy Award. Dempsey, a Wichita native and attorney, will present "Protecting Your Legacy," an estate-planning workshop covering wills, probate, long-term care and protecting the assets you have built.



explain their positions.

She is also active with Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority and St. Paul AME Church.

Another featured presentation is "Protecting Your Legacy," an estate-planning workshop led by Wichita native and attorney Olivia Dempsey. The session will cover wills, probate, long-term care and steps seniors can take to protect what they have built.

Think you don't have enough of an estate to worry about estate planning? That may make planning even more important. When there is less to pass on, protecting those assets and making sure they go where you intend can matter even more.

Senior Connect will also feature health screenings, Connection Sessions, exhibitors and community resources, music, activities, Golden Giveaways and a free Community Legacy Award luncheon. Luncheon seating is limited and advance registration is encouraged.

Admission to Senior Connect is free, but guests are encouraged to register in advance at <https://www.communityvoiceks.com/secnior-connect-registration/>. Lunch space is limited, so register ASAP.

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ACA Health Insurance Premiums Could Jump Again in Kansas and Missouri in 2027

Insurers are seeking double-digit increases for 2027, citing rising medical costs and fewer healthy people remaining in the marketplace

By The Beacon News

People who buy health insurance through the Affordable Care Act marketplace in Kansas and Missouri could be facing another year of sharp premium increases, according to preliminary filings submitted to state insurance regulators.

Every insurance company offering individual marketplace plans in the two states is seeking higher rates for 2027. Requested increases range from just over **10%** to nearly **35%**, following similar increases approved for 2026.

If regulators approve the requests, marketplace premiums will have increased by more than one-third over the past two years for many consumers.

Nationally, insurers are requesting a median premium increase of **15%** for 2027, according to an analysis by Peterson-KFF. Last year, the median requested increase was

18%, with final approved increases averaging about 20%.

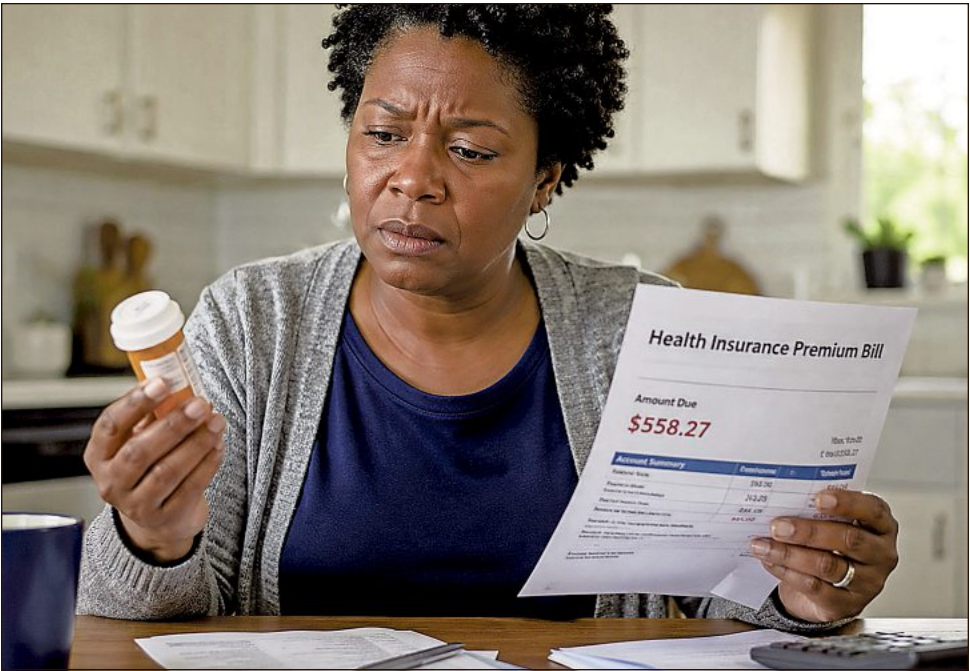
The largest proposed increase comes from **UnitedHealthcare in Kansas**, where the company wants premiums to rise between **29.7% and 36.5%**, depending on the plan.

Why Insurers Say Rates Are Rising

Insurance companies point to several factors driving higher premiums.

Among them are higher payments to hospitals, physicians and drug manufacturers, increasing prescription drug costs, and patients receiving more expensive medical treatments and surgeries than in previous years. Insurers also say advances in medical technology, while improving care, are adding to healthcare spending.

UnitedHealthcare reported that nearly **96 cents of every premium dollar** collected from its Kansas marketplace plans went toward paying medical claims in 2025—well



With Affordable Care Act marketplace premiums expected to rise again in 2027, healthcare advocates warn that more consumers may face difficult financial decisions about maintaining coverage and paying for prescription medications. AI-GENERATED ILLUSTRATION/THE COMMUNITY VOICE

KANSAS REQUESTS INCLUDE NEARLY 35% INCREASE

Kansas insurers are seeking some of the largest increases in the region:

- Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City: **15.4%**
- Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas: **16.0%**
- Ambetter (Celtic Insurance): **16.7%**
- Oscar Health: **20.0%**
- UnitedHealthcare: **34.8%**

Missouri insurers are requesting:

- Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City: **10.3%**
- Ambetter (Celtic Insurance): **10.3%**
- Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield: **12.7%**
- Medica: **25.6%**
- Oscar Health: **15.9%**
- UnitedHealthcare: **16.5%**

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above the Affordable Care Act's required medical loss ratio of 80% to 85%.

Another factor cited by several insurers is a changing customer base in the ACA marketplace.

End of Federal Subsidies Is Affecting Enrollment

At the end of 2025, enhanced federal premium tax credits expired, making marketplace coverage significantly more expensive for many middle-income Americans.

As a result, many healthier people have dropped their ACA coverage, leaving behind a smaller pool of policyholders who generally require more medical care. Insurers say that shift raises overall costs and contributes to higher premiums.

The enrollment decline has already been significant.

Missouri's ACA enrollment fell about **25%**, dropping from **347,424** people to **260,999** by February.

Kansas enrollment declined about **20%**, falling from **179,920** to **143,880**.

Oscar Health's Missouri filing specifically cited "anticipated changes in the underlying health of the marketplace" as one reason for its requested **15.9%** premium increase.

Higher Costs Affect More Than Marketplace Plans

Advocates say rising premiums are causing some people to delay medical care altogether.

Lacey Kennett of the Alliance for a Healthy Kansas said families are postponing routine doctor visits or skipping medications because they cannot afford healthcare costs. Delaying treatment often leads to more serious illnesses that are even more expensive to treat.

The trend is also expected to affect employers.

Insurers are seeking premium increases of roughly **9% to 19%** in the small-group market, which covers businesses with two to 50 employees. Those increases suggest many small businesses could also face substantially higher health insurance costs when they re-new employee coverage next year.

State insurance departments in Kansas and Missouri are reviewing the proposed rates to determine whether they are justified and comply with state and federal law.

Missouri will accept public comments on the proposed increases through **Aug. 31**, with final rates expected to be announced by **Oct. 31**. Kansas regulators are also accepting public comments before making final decisions on 2027 premiums.

Kansas House Primaries Set November Legislative Matchups Across the State

Candidates in Topeka, Bonner Springs, Johnson County, El Dorado and Kansas City advance to the general election

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

While Wichita voters produced two of the night's biggest legislative upsets, contested Kansas House primaries elsewhere across the state largely determined who will advance to the November general election in several closely watched districts.

In Topeka's **House District 55**, incumbent Democratic Rep. **Tobias Schlingensiepen** defeated challenger **Zinaia Armstead** 83% to 17%. Schlingensiepen, a former senior minister and past treasurer of the Kansas Democratic Party, advances to the November ballot, where he will face Republican **Lanell Griffith**.

In **House District 33**, **Emily Blanks** captured the



Zinaia Armstead

Democratic nomination with 78% of the vote over **Romona Smith**. Blanks, who serves on the **Bonner Springs City Council**, advances to face Republican Rep. **Carolyn Caiharr** in November. Caiharr, who was appointed to the Kansas House in 2025, also serves as **mayor of Edwardsville**. If elected,



Javion Napier

Blanks would continue serving on the Bonner Springs City Council while also serving in the Legislature, a dual role permitted under Kansas law and held by a number of local officials.

Another Democratic primary in **House District 78** saw **Tim Lundberg** defeat **KaMesha Bernard** 64% to



Kamesha Bernard

36%. Lundberg advances to the November election, where he will face Republican **Robyn R. Essex**.

Republicans also settled an open-seat race in **House District 75**, centered around El Dorado, where **Tyler Coates** defeated **Javion Napier** 85% to 15%. The seat became available after Rep.



Romona Smith

Will Carpenter chose not to seek reelection. Coates now advances to the general election against Democrat **Randy Quinn**.

In **Kansas City, Kansas**, Republicans selected **Alex Sanchez** as their nominee in **House District 35**, where he defeated **Lisa Walker-Yeager** 56% to 44%. Sanchez advances



Lisa Walker

to face Democratic Rep. **Wanda Paige Brownlee**, who is serving her first term in the Kansas House while also serving on the Kansas City, Kansas, Board of Education.

Tuesday's primaries set the field for November when voters will decide the makeup of the next Kansas House of Representatives.

Two Incumbents Fall as Wichita Voters Reshape House Delegation

Bonita Gooch, Carol Brewer and Brandon Whipple win key Kansas House primaries

Wichita Democratic voters reshaped the city's legislative delegation Tuesday, unseating two incumbent state representatives and selecting a nominee in an open-seat race in three closely watched Kansas House contests that include many of the city's historically Black and racially diverse neighborhoods.

The biggest shakeup came in House District 84, where **Bonita Gooch** defeated incumbent **Ford Carr** with 70% of the vote. Carr, who was appointed to the seat following the death of longtime Rep. Gail Finney in 2022, had never before faced an opponent in either a primary or general election.

Gooch, publisher and owner of The Community Voice, campaigned on her three decades of community leadership,



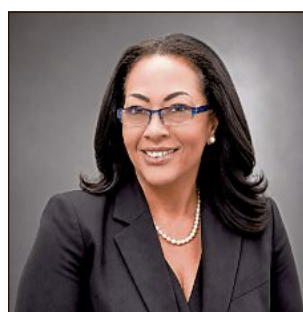
Democratic primary winners Bonita Gooch, Carol Brewer and Brandon Whipple emerged victorious in three closely watched Wichita-area Kansas House races Tuesday. Gooch and Brewer advance to the November ballot without Republican opposition, while Whipple will face Republican **Zachary Werhan** in the general election.



Brandon Whipple

relationships with local and state leaders and a promise to increase constituent engagement through regular district meetings and accessibility. She said her experience working with residents, nonprofits and elected officials has prepared her to advocate effectively for the district in Topeka.

Because no Republican filed for the District 84 seat, Gooch



Carol Brewer

will appear unopposed on the November general election ballot.

An open-seat contest also produced a new Democratic nominee.

In House District 89, **Carol Brewer** defeated **Jalon Britton** 59% to 41% to succeed Rep. KC Ohaebosim, who opted not to seek reelection after joining Sen. Cindy Holscher's gubernatorial

ticket as her running mate for lieutenant governor.

Brewer, founder of Dorothy's Lane, a nonprofit serving Wichita families, campaigned on expanding opportunities and strengthening neighborhoods. Britton, who has worked in education, youth development and family services, was making his second bid for the Legislature.

Like District 84, no Republican filed in District 89, meaning Brewer also advances to the November election without opposition.

The third Wichita-area race featured another incumbent defeat, although it returns a familiar face to the Statehouse.

Former Wichita Mayor **Brandon Whipple** defeated incumbent **Henry Helgersen** 61% to 39% in House District 83. Before serving as mayor from 2020 to 2024, Whipple

represented Wichita in the Kansas House from 2013 to 2020.

Unlike the other two Wichita races, District 83 remains competitive heading into November. Whipple will face Republican **Zachary Werhan** in the general election.

The results made Wichita one of the state's biggest sources of legislative change Tuesday. Contested House primaries are relatively uncommon in Kansas, where incumbents often go years without drawing challengers. This year, however, voters replaced two sitting representatives while selecting a successor in an open seat.

Tuesday's primary set the stage for the November general election, with Gooch and Brewer appearing on the ballot without Republican opposition while Whipple seeks to complete his return to the Legislature.

Holscher, Ohaebosim Advance to November as Kansas Governor's Race Takes Shape

By Voice News Service

Ty Masterson and Cindy Holscher emerged from Tuesday's Kansas gubernatorial primaries with very different paths to victory, setting up a November contest that will test whether Kansas voters want to continue the centrist approach of Gov. Laura Kelly or move the state in a more conservative direction.

Masterson, the Kansas Senate president from Andover, captured the Republican nomination after a crowded and costly seven-candidate primary. Backed by President Donald Trump, Masterson prevailed in a field where candidates competed to establish the



Democratic gubernatorial nominee Cindy Holscher and lieutenant governor nominee K.C. Ohaebosim celebrate after winning their party's primary.

strongest conservative credentials, with millions of dollars spent and outside groups pouring more than \$20 million into the race.

On the Democratic side, state Sen. Cindy Holscher of Overland Park defeated fellow state Sen. Ethan Corson in a closer-than-expected

race, despite Corson receiving the endorsement of Gov. Laura Kelly. While Corson campaigned as a consensus builder, many Democratic voters appeared to conclude Holscher's more aggressive campaign style would make her the stronger challenger against the Republican nominee.

Although Holscher has built a reputation as a pragmatic, middle-of-the-road legislator capable of winning in a Republican-leaning district, she also frequently points to her upbringing on a Kansas farm as shaping her practical approach to governing. Supporters say that combination gives her credibility with both suburban and rural voters.

The primary also sets the stage for a potentially historic ticket. Holscher selected Wichita attorney K.C. Ohaebosim as her running mate. If elected, Ohaebosim would become the first African American elected to statewide executive office in Kansas since Edward P. McCabe, who was elected state auditor in 1882 and remains the only Black Kansan to have won statewide executive office.

Following the primary, Kelly quickly moved to unite Democrats after backing Corson.

"We cannot let Kansas go backwards," Kelly said. "I ask all Kansans, regardless of political party, to unite and move our state forward by

electing Cindy Holscher this November."

Kelly warned that a Masterson administration would return Kansas to "the dark days of Sam Brownback," citing concerns about school funding, fiscal management and infrastructure.

The general election now presents Kansans with two distinctly different governing philosophies. Masterson is expected to campaign on conservative priorities aligned with Trump, while Holscher will argue for continuing a bipartisan, pragmatic approach that she says builds on Kelly's record while standing up to what Democrats describe as political extremism.

Marshall to Face Pastor Adam Hamilton in U.S. Senate Race

Republican U.S. Sen. Roger Marshall easily won renomination Tuesday and will face Democratic nominee Adam Hamilton in November, setting up a race that will test whether Democrats can seriously compete for a Kansas Senate seat Republicans have held since 1939.

Marshall, a physician from Great Bend who is seeking a second six-year term, built his Senate career as a strong ally of President Donald Trump after previously serving two terms representing western Kansas in Congress.

The bigger story emerged on the Democratic side, where Hamilton entered the race only in late April but quickly became the party's front-runner. The founding pastor of the Church of the Resurrection, the nation's largest United



Republican U.S. Sen. Roger Marshall, left, will face Democratic nominee Adam Hamilton, right, in November after both secured their party's nominations in Tuesday's Kansas primary election.

Methodist congregation, shattered fundraising records and separated himself from a crowded field of 11 Democratic candidates.

Hamilton defeated former federal employee Christy Davis and veteran and small business owner Noah Taylor, along with eight other candidates.

"Kansans are tired of a senator who only pretends to live in Kansas," Hamilton's campaign said after his victory. "They're tired of

See SENATE RACE Page 15 →

Katy Tyndell Wins Democratic Primary, Sets Up Challenge to Rep. Ron Estes

By Voice News Service

Wichita attorney and business owner Katy Tyndell overwhelmingly won the Democratic nomination for Kansas' 4th Congressional District on Tuesday, defeating fellow Democrat Chris Carmichael after campaigning on a message of community engagement and independent leadership. Tyndell told supporters voters were looking for a representative who would "show up, listen and deliver," saying her campaign connected with residents across the district who are ready for a different approach.

In November, she'll face six-term Republican U.S. Rep. Ron Estes, who easily secured renomination and is seeking another term representing south-central Kansas.

The general election is expected to highlight two distinctly different styles of representation. Throughout her campaign, Tyndell argued the district deserves a member of Congress who is regularly present in the community, listens to constituents and advocates more aggressively for



Democratic nominee Katy Tyndell, left, will challenge six-term Republican U.S. Rep. Ron Estes in the November election for Kansas' 4th Congressional District.

south-central Kansas. Critics of Estes have long questioned his public visibility, with Democratic opponents frequently reviving the refrain, "Where's Ron?" Estes, meanwhile, points to his work on the influential House Ways and Means Committee, his advocacy for Wichita's aviation industry and his constituent services as evidence that he is delivering results for the district.

Along with Estes and Tyndell, Libertarian candidate Drew Cranmer will also appear on the November ballot.

SUPREME COURT CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT
No: 61% Yes: 39%

Jackson County Voters Usher in New Leadership Across County Government

Stacy Lake's decisive county executive primary win and a wave of new legislators signal sweeping changes ahead for Jackson County.

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

Jackson County voters signaled a major shift in county government Tuesday, choosing new leadership at both the executive and legislative levels after years of political turmoil marked by recalls, lawsuits, property tax disputes and infighting.

Attorney **Stacy Lake** overwhelmingly won the Democratic nomination for county executive, defeating Bill Baird and Dan Tarwater with 20,000 votes, more than Baird and Tarwater combined. Lake prevailed despite Baird earning endorsements from major labor organizations and *The Kansas City Star* editorial board and Tarwater receiving backing from Freedom Inc. and Southland Progress. Her win speaks to a real grassroots effort.

Lake first entered county politics after the county's property tax assessment controversy and came within four percentage points of defeating former County



Stacey Lake

Executive Frank White in the 2022 Democratic primary. She now advances to face Republican Alan Rohlfing in November, but in heavily Democratic Jackson County she enters the general election as the overwhelming favorite.

The County Legislature will also look dramatically different in January. Only three of the current nine legislators sought reelection, ensuring a significant turnover in membership.

One incumbent was defeated. **First District At-Large** Legislator **Jalen Anderson**, first elected in 2018, lost to attorney **Carla Fields** of the Kansas City law firm Fields & Brown. Fields, whose practice



Byron Townsend

has focused on workers' compensation defense for more than 17 years, earned the endorsement of Freedom Inc. Justice Horn finished third in the Democratic primary.

Among the returning members, **Venessa Huskey** won reelection to represent the **2nd District**, defeating **Erik Dickenson**, president of Urban Rangers. Huskey has no Republican opponent in November.

Donna Peyton, the current Legislature chair and **2nd District At-Large** legislator, defeated former Kansas City Council member and former state Rep. Brandon Ellington in the Democratic primary and will face Republican Gresia Cabrera in the



Susan Wilson

general election.

Several new faces have already secured seats. **Susan Wilson**, the retired vice chancellor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, was elected without opposition to replace Meghan Marshall in the 3rd District At-Large seat. **Kelly Thompson** also won election without opposition in the 1st District after incumbent Manny Abarca vacated the seat to run for county executive.

In the **4th District**, Democrat **Byron Townsend** won the Democratic primary to succeed retiring Legislator DaRon McGee and is heavily favored in November.

Three other Jackson County Legislator races remain on



Carla Fields

the November ballot.

In **District 3**, Democrat **Dennis Rowland** will face Republican **Scott Quails** to replace Charlie Franklin, who did not seek reelection. Based on August primary turnout, Democrats appear to hold an advantage in the district.

District 5 could be the Legislature's most competitive contest. Democrat **Antoine Jennings**, who previously ran unsuccessfully for the Missouri Senate and the Blue Springs School Board, will face Republican **Dale Carter**, a former Blue Springs city council member and longtime Kansas City radio personality, for the open seat being vacated by



Antoine Jennings

Jeanie Lauer.

In **District 6**, Democrat **Tony Lawson** will take on Republican **Bill Haley** for the seat currently held by Sean Smith, who also chose not to seek another term. Primary turnout suggests Democrats may enter the general election with an edge.

With Stacy Lake favored to become the next county executive and at least seven new legislators set to take office, Jackson County voters have positioned county government for a dramatically different leadership team beginning in January. The final makeup of the Legislature will likely be determined by three remaining district races in November.

LeVota Indictment, New Leadership Mark Turning Point for Jackson County

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

The federal indictment of Jackson County Executive Phil LeVota on bribery and fraud charges is the latest in a string of political controversies that have overshadowed county government in recent years. LeVota has pleaded not guilty and denies offering a county job in exchange for a political opponent withdrawing from this year's county executive race.

The legal process will determine whether those allegations are true. In the meantime, the facts of the case will play out in federal

court and continue to receive extensive media attention.

But beyond the indictment itself, the case serves as another reminder of how turbulent Jackson County government has become.

Four years ago, many of the candidates who won seats on the Jackson County Legislature campaigned on bringing a new vision to county government. They promised greater accountability, stronger community representation and a fresh approach to governing.

The promise of change gave way to a seemingly endless cycle of political infighting, public controversy and

leadership turmoil. Recalls, disputes over COVID-19 relief spending, the property tax assessment crisis and ongoing battles between elected officials too often overshadowed the work of governing, leaving many residents frustrated by a government consumed by internal disputes rather than public service.

Now, county government is on the verge of an extraordinary transition.

Of the nine current members of the Jackson County Legislature, only three sought another term. One has already been defeated

See **LEVOTA** Page 10 →



Interim Jackson County Executive Phil LeVota speaks during a Thursday news conference after pleading not guilty to federal bribery and fraud charges. The indictment comes as Jackson County prepares for a sweeping transition in county leadership.

inLEVOTA, from Page 9 ↓

the Democratic primary, one faces a November general election and only one is guaranteed to return next year. At the same time, Jackson County voters will elect a new county executive this fall after LeVota chose not to seek a full term.

The next group of county leaders will have an opportunity the last group never fully realized: to move beyond political turmoil and demonstrate that effective government can accomplish more than constant conflict.

Whether they can rebuild public trust and return the focus to responsible, effective governance will determine whether this indictment marks the end of one troubled chapter in Jackson County history—or the beginning of another.



Vanessa Huskey



Donna Peyton

Congressional Races Reflect GOP Advantage After Redistricting

Kansas City's reshaped congressional map leaves Democrats facing steep turnout challenges in the 4th and 5th districts as the general election campaign begins.

By Bonita Gooch
Editor-in-Chief

Missouri's congressional races are taking shape under a dramatically redrawn political map that Republicans crafted during a rare mid-decade redistricting effort backed by President Donald Trump and GOP legislative leaders.

The most significant change came in Kansas City, where longtime Democratic U.S. Rep. Emanuel Cleaver's district was divided along Troost Avenue. Neighborhoods east of Troost remain in Cleaver's 5th Congressional District, while areas west of Troost were shifted into the Republican-leaning 4th District, now represented by former television news

anchor Mark Alford.

The redesign was widely viewed by Democrats as a direct effort to weaken Cleaver's political base while strengthening Republican prospects in western Missouri.

In the new 5th District, Republican state Sen. Rick Brattin of Harrisonville emerged from a crowded primary field with about 45% of the vote. A Marine Corps veteran and small business owner, Brattin has built a reputation as one of the Missouri Senate's leading conservative voices.

Cleaver, who ran unopposed for the Democratic nomination, received about 55,000 votes, while Republicans cast a combined 77,000 ballots in

See **ADVANTAGE**, Page 15 →

Kansas City Voters Approve Entire City Infrastructure

Kansas City voters overwhelmingly approved all five citywide ballot measures Tuesday, giving the city the green light to move forward with a sweeping package of infrastructure, housing and economic development investments. Each measure passed comfortably, with support of roughly three-quarters of voters or more.

The measures include:

- **\$750 million in water system bonds** to finance long-term improvements to Kansas City's drinking water infrastructure, repaid through water utility revenues rather than property taxes.

- **\$750 million in sewer system bonds** to modernize and maintain the city's wastewater system, also funded through sewer revenues.
- **\$100 million in affordable housing bonds** to expand the city's Affordable Housing Trust Fund, providing grants and low-interest loans to help develop affordable housing projects across Kansas City.
- **\$100 million in public facilities bonds** for major repairs and upgrades at Bartle Hall, Municipal Auditorium and City Hall, addressing decades of

deferred maintenance without increasing property tax rates.

- **Renewal of the Central City Economic Development (CCED) sales tax**, extending the existing one-eighth-cent sales tax that supports housing, commercial redevelopment, small-business growth and neighborhood revitalization projects in Kansas City's central core.

With voter approval secured, city leaders can move forward with the projects over the coming years, investing in critical infrastructure while continuing efforts to address housing needs and economic development.

Missouri Voters Deliver Clear Verdicts on Four Constitutional Amendments

Missouri voters made decisive choices on four statewide constitutional amendments during Tuesday's election, overwhelmingly approving measures involving parks funding and county assessors while rejecting proposals that would have made it harder for citizens to amend the state Constitution and eventually eliminate the state income tax. Here's a look at what each measure would have done and how voters decided.

Amendment 1: Parks and Conservation Tax Renewed

Result: Yes 82% | No 18%

Missouri voters overwhelmingly renewed the state's one-tenth-cent sales tax that funds state parks, historic sites, and soil and water conservation programs. The tax, first approved in 1984, will continue for another 10 years, extending a funding source that generates about \$140 million annually.

Amendment 2: Jackson County Assessor Will Be Elected

Result: Yes 77% | No 23%

Voters approved a constitutional amendment requiring all Missouri charter counties to elect their county assessor, a change aimed primarily at Jackson County following the county's controversial 2023 property reassessment. Supporters argued the measure increases accountability by allowing



voters to directly choose the official responsible for determining property values.

Amendment 4: Higher Bar for Citizen Initiatives Rejected

Result: Yes 20% | No 80%

Missouri voters decisively rejected a proposal that would have made it much harder for citizens to amend the state Constitution. The amendment would have required future citizen-led constitutional amendments to win not only a statewide majority but also majority support in each of Missouri's eight congressional districts. Its defeat preserves Missouri's

current initiative petition process.

Amendment 5: Income Tax Proposal Soundly Defeated

Result: Yes 17% | No 83%

Voters overwhelmingly rejected a constitutional amendment that would have authorized lawmakers to phase out Missouri's income tax and replace the lost revenue with expanded sales taxes. Opponents warned the measure could eventually open the door to taxing items and services currently exempt, including healthcare, while supporters argued it could stimulate economic growth through lower income taxes.

Can Two Leagues Build One Stronger Future for Wichita Youth Football?

A city-led restructuring created a school-based feeder system—and a second league—as coaches, parents and city leaders debate the best way to develop young athletes.

By Zachary Ruth and Bonita Gooch

For decades, Wichita youth football was built around neighborhood teams that became gathering places for families, mentors and generations of young athletes.

Today, that tradition is being reshaped.

As the Greater Wichita Junior Football League enters its third season under a partnership with Wichita Public Schools, a school-based feeder system designed to strengthen player development has changed how young athletes are assigned to teams. The restructuring has also led to the creation of a second league, reflecting different views over the best way to develop young players.

While supporters say the changes have brought more structure, safer playing environments and a stronger path to high school football, others believe the traditional community model remains the better fit for elementary-age children. Even so, leaders on both sides agree on one thing: providing opportunities that help Wichita's young people succeed on and off the field.

Why Change Was Necessary

The overhaul didn't happen overnight.

League participation had been declining for years as rising costs, safety concerns and the COVID-19 pandemic took a toll on youth sports. The number of teams dropped from 56 in 2019 to just 35 by 2023, raising concerns about whether the league could continue operating in its traditional form.

City officials believed maintaining the status quo wasn't an option.

"We realized the writing was on the wall," Recreation Supervisor Mickey Lara said. "This league was going to basically dissolve if we didn't make a major change."

The partnership with Wichita Public Schools was designed to do more than stabilize participation. It also sought to create a structured pathway that would connect youth football to middle school and high school programs.

Another goal was creating a more competitive league.

Under the previous system, coaches could recruit players from anywhere in the city, allowing some organizations to assemble powerhouse teams while others struggled to compete.

"We were getting these teams that were basically



Members of Wichita's longtime Trojan youth football organization march in the Wichita Juneteenth Parade. For many families, community football organizations have long served as more than athletic teams, building relationships and neighborhood connections that extend beyond the playing field. The role those organizations should continue to play is at the center of Wichita's ongoing youth football debate.

travel teams," Lara said. "They were going undefeated in the season with the mercy rule every single game, and that's not fun for anybody."

The city also hoped moving games to high school campuses would improve safety by providing better facilities and increasing the presence of Wichita police officers and Board of Education officers.

A New Way to Build Teams

The city's new model organizes players differently than Wichita youth football has for generations.

Instead of joining whichever organization they choose, players are assigned to teams based on the same attendance boundaries used by Wichita Public Schools. A child living in East High School's attendance area, for example, joins the Junior Aces.

The transition is being phased in over several years.

The first year focused primarily on giving the league access to Wichita Public Schools facilities. Seventh- and eighth-grade players were the first to move into the feeder model. This season, first- and second-grade players have begun making the transition, with additional grade levels expected to be added each year.

Supporters say the middle school program has shown the greatest promise.

Cedric Payne, general manager of the Junior Aces, said Wichita lagged behind many surrounding communities by not connecting youth football to its school programs sooner.

Payne said the goal is to familiarize players with the expectations they'll encounter in high school—from how practices are conducted to the way coaches communicate and teach the game.

"We try to implement our high school system through

how we communicate, what's expected at practice and things of that nature," Payne said. "Those are things we lose kids to when they hit high school because they're not used to that."

For Payne, football is only part of the equation. The program also emphasizes education, discipline and personal responsibility, with schoolwork taking priority over athletics.

City Council member Joseph Shepard said that broader vision for youth football is one reason city leaders continue to support the restructuring.

Another Path Forward

Not everyone believed the city's new feeder system was the right fit—particularly for elementary-age players.

As the Greater Wichita Junior Football League rolled out its school-based model, many longtime community

organizations chose not to participate in the elementary feeder system. Instead, they joined the newly formed ICT Youth Football League, founded by longtime coach Corey Akins.

The league now includes 26 teams, many of them familiar names in Wichita youth football, including organizations like the Bulldogs and other community-based programs that chose to remain independent.

Akins said he didn't create ICT Youth Football League to compete with the city. He said he wanted to preserve another option for families while giving young athletes an opportunity to compete in an increasingly competitive youth football landscape.

"We just wanted a different option," Akins said. "The football landscape is changing across the nation. We've got a

See **Youth Football** Page 12 →

Youth Football, from Page 11 ↓

lot more competitive circuits popping up around the country, and our kids want to be able to compete at that level.”

Why Elementary Is Different

Akins isn't opposed to everything the city is trying to accomplish.

In fact, he believes the middle school feeder concept has real potential.

Older students already attend schools within their attendance boundaries, making it easier to practice together, build relationships and prepare for high school competition.

“I think it's improvement,” Akins said of the city's restructuring. “Using the high schools was a great idea. But I just don't think the format they're trying to deliver, as far as how the teams are structured, is working.”

Where Akins believes the city's model breaks down is at the elementary level.

Younger players, he said, often build relationships

around neighborhoods, churches and community organizations rather than school attendance boundaries. In much of northeast Wichita, decades of court-ordered busing followed by expanded school choice have meant many Black children do not attend the neighborhood school closest to where they live. Akins argues that reality makes a neighborhood-based youth football model more practical for elementary-age players than one tied to school attendance boundaries.

Building Better Players

Akins also believes the feeder concept can only reach its full potential if high school coaches become more directly involved.

“If the high school coaches aren't involved, then it's basically just city league football in a high school uniform,” Akins said. He believes players should be learning the same terminology, offensive systems and defensive concepts they will eventually use in high school if the feeder model is going to deliver its promised benefits.



Corey Akins, founder of ICT Youth Football League, believes Wichita's middle school feeder system has merit but says community-based teams remain the better model for elementary-age players, whose connections are often rooted in neighborhoods, churches and community organizations rather than school attendance boundaries.

More Than Football

Those concerns are shared by Ulysses “Pops” DeShazer, director and coach of the Bulldogs, one of Wichita's longest-running youth football organizations.

DeShazer worries that the city's emphasis on building high school feeder programs risks overlooking what many community coaches see as youth football's first responsibility.

“Our goal right now is to raise these youngsters up,” DeShazer said. “They happen to play football when they get to high school, if they're

lucky to do it.”

While he acknowledges the city is trying to strengthen player development, DeShazer believes youth football should first focus on developing young people while preserving the community relationships that have defined Wichita football for generations.

Looking for Common Ground

The creation of ICT Youth Football League initially raised questions about whether two organizations with different philosophies

could coexist.

Akins said many of the concerns he initially had about the city's position toward the new league have eased.

Early on, he believed city officials wanted the Greater Wichita Junior Football League to be Wichita's only youth football option. But after meeting with Shepard, Parks and Recreation Director Reggie Davidson and Recreation Supervisor Angela Buckner, he said he came away with a different understanding.

Shepard said the city has

no interest in preventing other organizations from serving Wichita's young athletes.

“We are never going to stand in the way of creating more opportunities for young people,” Shepard said. “We're not here to compete with anybody. We want to see the opportunities available.”

Shepard said the meeting also gave city leaders a better understanding of the concerns longtime community coaches have raised.

“We've got to know what the concerns are in order to address them,” he said. “The answer isn't to say this isn't an issue and shut it down. It's, ‘How do we get to a yes?’”

While he remains committed to the city's overall direction, Shepard acknowledged the restructuring is still evolving.

“There were some problems, and we have to be honest about that as well,” he said. “We have to course correct.”

He also praised Akins' commitment to young athletes and said community leaders like him should continue helping shape the future of youth football in Wichita.

“Corey's energy and his passion—that's the type of energy and passion that I want every single person who is involved in our football program to have,” Shepard said. “If there's a way to collaborate with organizations that are doing that work and align with our mission, then we need to continue to look at ways in which we can do that.”

What both sides agree on is far more important than what divides them. Every coach, city leader and volunteer interviewed for this story said the goal is to give Wichita's children a safe place to learn, compete and grow. The debate now is not whether youth football should serve young people, but how it can serve them best.



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Prime Fit Combines Mentoring, Learning and Relationships That Last

An evidence-based approach provides students daily academic and social-emotional support — with measurable results.

**By Ty Davis
and Bonita Gooch
By**

The youngest students gathered around their teacher for story time, building vocabulary and listening skills. In another classroom, beginning readers worked through structured phonics lessons, sounding out words and celebrating their successes.

Down the hall, older students pulled random topics from a hat and were asked to defend their positions before their classmates — an exercise designed to teach them to organize their thoughts, think critically, communicate clearly and explain the reasoning behind their opinions.

Those scenes reflect the mission of Prime Fit Youth Foundation, a Wichita-based organization that combines mentoring, academic support, social-emotional learning and youth development to help



Prime Fit co-founder Kim Moody and lead mentor Dexter McGee help lead an evidence-based youth development program that combines mentoring, academic support and relationship building.

young people succeed both inside and outside the classroom.

The students were participating in Prime Fit's recently completed four-week summer program, which served approximately 140 youth from across Wichita. The PALS and Empower camps were held at Holy Savior Catholic Academy, which partnered with Prime Fit to provide space for the program.

For younger students, there was a heavy emphasis on early literacy and the science of reading. For older students, activities increasingly focused on executive functioning, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, communication and leadership.

The summer program is one extension of a much larger effort.

Since 2019, Prime Fit has expanded from primarily serving Wichita Public Schools to working in multiple districts, including Wichita, Derby, Haysville, Maize and Hesston, as well as schools within the Catholic Diocese.

During the 2025-26 school year, Prime Fit served approximately 400 students across 38 sites. Leaders anticipate serving a similar number during the upcoming school year.

More Than Mentoring

At the center of Prime Fit's approach is co-founder Kim Moody, a Wichita State University literacy professor with more than three decades in education.

Moody helps guide Prime Fit's curriculum development, mentor training, program evaluation and strategic planning. She also serves on the Kansas Blueprint for Literacy State Advisory Council, part of a statewide effort to improve literacy instruction and outcomes for Kansas students.

That educational background influences how Prime Fit approaches its work.

"We're evidence-based," Moody

said. "The impact report is based on quantitative data. We can actually measure the difference the program is making."

Prime Fit focuses on six core outcomes: attendance, behavior, academic achievement, self-efficacy, sense of connection and self-regulation.

While final analysis for the 2025-26 school year is still underway, preliminary data indicates that between 88% and 94% of participating students met or exceeded Prime Fit's six core outcome measures.

The organization's approach also differs from mentoring programs built around occasional meetings between adults and students.

"We target specific skills and we do it daily," Moody said. "A lot of mentoring programs are lunch buddies or meet once a month. Our team is there every single day."

Each mentor is assigned to specific schools and works directly with students through daily check-ins, relationship building, goal setting and skill development.

Academic support is another part of the model.

At participating schools, Prime Fit staff can work alongside classroom teachers, providing individual assistance to students during reading, math and other instructional periods.

"We're just a layer of support," Moody said. "We don't replace the teacher or any of the intervention time."

Schools identify students who could benefit from Prime Fit, obtain parental permission and work with the organization to determine where mentors and academic support are most needed.

Support That Follows the Child

Behind the academic measures are young people who may be dealing with challenges that aren't immediately visible.



Students strengthen their reading skills during Prime Fit Youth Foundation's recently completed four-week summer program. Younger students received literacy instruction emphasizing phonics and other science-of-reading practices.

Some face family instability, trauma, behavioral challenges or struggles in school. Others need help learning to manage emotions, resolve conflicts, organize themselves or simply believe they can succeed.

Prime Fit's model is designed to respond to those different needs as children grow.

The summer program offered a glimpse of that progression.

For the youngest students, instruction concentrated heavily on early literacy skills. In the upper grades, the emphasis shifted toward emotional regulation, executive function, conflict resolution and critical thinking.

The debate exercise was one example. Students weren't simply asked what they thought. They had to organize an argument, explain why they believed it and communicate that position to others.

Relationships, however, remain at the center of the work.

Dexter McGee, Prime Fit's lead mentor and project coordinator, was the organization's first mentor and has helped shape the culture that defines Prime Fit today. Recently recognized with a Wichita Business Journal Unsung Hero Award, he continues to mentor students while

See **PRIME FIT** Page 15 →

**American Dream, from
Page 3 ↓**

Trump administration rejects criticism

The White House strongly disputed the report's conclusions.

Administration officials said President Trump was elected with a mandate to eliminate diversity, equity and inclusion programs they say unfairly favored some

groups over others. The administration argues its policies promote equal treatment under the law while improving government efficiency and expanding opportunity for all Americans.

Justice Department officials similarly defended recent changes within the Civil Rights Division, saying the department enforces civil rights laws equally for every American regardless of race.

Resilience despite setbacks

Despite its sobering conclusions, the report highlights several signs of continued strength within Black America.

Black consumer spending now totals approximately **\$2.1 trillion annually**, rivaling the economies of many countries. Nearly **58% of Black consumers** say supporting Black-owned

businesses is a priority, and Black women continue to launch businesses at nearly three times the rate of women-owned businesses overall.

Rather than presenting Black Americans as victims, the report argues these trends demonstrate resilience and a growing commitment to entrepreneurship, community **investment and building wealth despite structural obstacles.**

Looking ahead

Rather than relying solely on federal action, the report urges civil rights organizations to pursue legal challenges while strengthening state and local protections. It also calls for greater investment in historically Black colleges and universities, expanded support for Black-owned businesses, and increased participation in emerging industries such as artificial intelligence,

clean energy and biomedical technology.

"The next economy is being built today," the report concludes. "Who builds it will determine who benefits from it for generations."

For Morial, the report's message is not one of resignation but of renewed engagement.

"We cannot be dejected. We cannot be cynical," he said. "We must act."

816 Day, from Page 16 ↓

downtown. A minor controversy erupted as his loyal following cried foul about taking the event out of a perceived Black neighborhood to a White establishment. Benton said the decision was practical, not cultural. "Relocating to the Power and Light District made it easier to produce the event," explains Benton.

Power & Light already

had stages, lighting, security, parking and other infrastructure in place, dramatically reducing production costs while making it easier to attract corporate sponsors and accommodate larger crowds.

Plus, he has repeatedly emphasized, 816 Day was never intended to be exclusively a Black event. While not positioned as a Black event it has skewed mostly in that direction. However, like many things created under

the umbrella of Black culture, it eventually becomes embraced and often copied by the mainstream.

A Question of Credit

The recent controversy began on July 31 when the Country Club Plaza announced what it described as its inaugural 816 Day event.

The shopping district's announcement wasn't met with resistance due to race, although the area's past

includes a long era of racism and segregation. Instead, the community was vocal about the lack of acknowledgement of Benton as the creator and curator of "816 Day."

Many commenters on social media described the move as cultural appropriation.

Benton responded with only a mild amount of frustration stating that he had trademarked the name 816 Day earlier this year. That trademark covers entertainment and celebration services associated with the event and protects the event's branding. So another organization could hold an 816 Festival or Celebrate the 816"

"816 Festival but not an *816 Day entertainment and celebration type event.

For Benton, with trademark in hand, his concern centered on the word "inaugural," which suggested the Plaza was creating something new rather than joining an existing tradition.

With help from former Kansas City Mayor Sly James, Benton met with Plaza officials.

"The general manager and operations manager aren't from Kansas City," Benton said. "Once the history of the event was explained, they were excited about teaming up with me."

The planned 816 activities on The Plaza, which will primarily feature music and art, will now be marketed as an official part of Benton's overall 816 Day experience. The



A vendor takes part in a previous 816 Day Vendor Fair, one of the activities that has helped turn the annual celebration into a showcase of Kansas City culture, community and local businesses. For the complete 2026 3-day 816 Day schedule of events, go to <https://bit.ly/4hrnvk6>

Plaza also agreed to sponsor and cross promote Benton's event.

Building Something Without Major Sponsors

For years he has produced the celebration without the level of corporate backing many festivals enjoy, relying instead on partnerships and community support to continue expanding. Benton says bringing in partners from other parts of the city, like the Plaza, was always his plan. This year's event was already expanded. It's bigger than it's ever been. It's now a four day event running Thursday, August 13 through Sunday, August 16 at multiple locations including In Good Company, Rock Island Bridge, The Distrkct, Vine Street Brewery and Power and Light District.

He's most proud of the educational component of the

event and donating money to the Kansas City Public Schools Foundation through the event's Generation 816 youth program which provides scholarships to students with help of the Kauffman Foundation.

The future is to turn 816 Day into a full fledged non-profit serving the community year-round.

A Kansas City Tradition

What began as a dance night inside one bar has become a citywide celebration embraced by businesses, artists, neighborhoods and civic leaders.

Perhaps, the recent controversy may have become the clearest measure of the event's success. Nearly a decade after Benton first imagined bringing people together under Kansas City's area code, organizations across the city now want to be part of 816 Day.

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John C. Bias, Jr., 95

Feb 17, 1931 — Aug 2, 2026
Service will be held at 11 am on Sat., Aug 22 at Holy Savior Catholic Church, 3000 E 13th.

Mary McDonald, 84

Apr 30, 1942 — Aug 2, 2026
Service will be held at 11 am on Fri., Aug. 21 at Jackson Mortuary, 1125 E 13th.

Reginald Washington, 56

Nov 27, 1969 — July 31, 2026
Service will be held at 11 am on Tue. Aug. 11 at New Hope Full Gospel Church, 3401 N Park Pl.

Barbara A. Robinson, 90

Aug 19, 1935 — Jul 26, 2026
Service was held Aug. 7 at Calvary Baptist Church

Earl E. Sanders Sr.

Dec 21, 1946 — Jul 25, 2026
Service will be held at 10 am on Fri. Aug. 14 at Calvary Baptist Church, 2653 N. Hillside.

Charles Davis, 75

Mar 31, 1951 — Jul 22, 2026
Service was held Aug 6 at St. Mark United Methodist Church

Diana Earsery, 74

Jan 11, 1952 — Jul 16, 2026
Service was held July 31 at St. Mark United Methodist Church

SENATE RACE,
from Page 8 ↓

skyrocketing prices for gas, groceries and health care.”

National Democratic leaders quickly rallied behind the nominee. Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer and Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee Chair Kirsten Gillibrand called Hamilton “a voice who will show up and bring people together to get things done.”

“As a fifth-generation Kansan and pastor, Adam has dedicated his life to caring for his community and putting people over politics,” they said.

Marshall enters the general election as the favorite, but Democrats are hoping Hamilton’s fundraising strength, statewide profile and message of pragmatic leadership can make the race more competitive than expected.

PRIME FIT, from Page 14 ↓

helping support newer members of the team.

McGee said mentors regularly attend sporting events, school performances, graduations and other activities — often on their own time.

“We’re not paid for that,” McGee said. “But if a student is involved in something important, we want them to know somebody is in the crowd cheering for them.”

For McGee, evidence of those relationships sometimes appears years later.

“I’ll be in the grocery store and kids will run up to me. I’ll be coming out of a movie and hear students calling my name that I haven’t worked with in three or four years,” he said. “Once those connections and relationships are built, that impact is still there.”

Sometimes those relationships come full circle.

One of Prime Fit’s recent summer interns was once a mentee in the program. During a training exercise, participants were asked to identify a

“moment that mattered” in their lives. The young man talked about the mentors who invested in him and the role they played in his development.

Today, he is succeeding academically, developing leadership skills and helping support younger students.

Prime Fit also works to maintain that support as students move from elementary to middle and high school.

“It may not be the same mentor,” Moody said, “but there is often another Prime Fit mentor already there waiting for them.”

Preparing for Another School Year

With the four-week summer program now completed, Prime Fit is turning its attention back to its school-year programming and preparing mentors to return to schools across south-central Kansas.

The organization’s growth has been fueled by partnerships with school districts, educators, churches, community organizations and businesses, but Moody said the demand continues to exceed available resources.

Grant funding is particularly

important. Moody said Prime Fit continually seeks grants and donations to keep programs available to families and to hire enough mentors to meet the need.

“There are times we have to turn students away,” Moody said. “Not because they don’t need support, but because we don’t have enough funding to hire another mentor.”

When asked what she hopes Prime Fit looks like five years from now, Moody’s answer was simple.

“I would like every child who needs a Prime Fit mentor to have one.”

For Prime Fit, that means more than placing an adult in a child’s life.

It means helping a beginning reader sound out a word, teaching an older student to organize and defend an idea, providing extra support when school becomes difficult and making sure someone is in the crowd when that young person looks up.

It’s an approach built around the idea that what a child needs academically, socially and emotionally are not separate things — and that consistently showing up for all of them can change the trajectory of a life.

ADVANTAGE,
from Page 10 ↓

their primary. If those partisan turnout patterns hold through November, Cleaver would need to attract roughly 22,000 additional voters beyond the Democratic primary electorate to secure another term.

The numbers appear even more daunting in the neighboring 4th District.

Incumbent Republican Mark Alford advanced



Rick Brattin

after Republican voters cast a combined 93,000 ballots in a three-candidate primary.



Johdan Herrera

Democrats nominated Jordan Herrera, an Air Force veteran, attorney and assistant

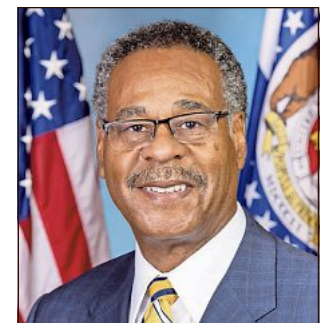


Mark Alford

Missouri attorney general, who narrowly defeated progressive activist and radio host Hartzell Gray III, 19,850 votes to 18,055.

Democrats cast roughly 65,000 combined votes in the 4th District primary, compared with 93,000 Republican votes. Based on those turnout numbers, Herrera would need to find nearly 30,000 additional votes in November — almost one-and-a-half times his primary vote total — to overcome the Republican advantage.

In the St. Louis-based 1st Congressional District,



Emanuel Cleaver

former U.S. Rep. Cori Bush was unsuccessful in her bid to reclaim the seat she lost two years ago. Incumbent Democratic Rep. Wesley Bell defeated Bush by a decisive margin, receiving 59% of the vote to Bush’s 37%, ending her attempt at a political comeback.

While general election turnout often differs significantly from primary participation, the August results underscore the uphill battle Democrats face in Missouri’s congressional races, particularly in districts reshaped to favor Republican candidates.

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Plaza Acknowledges 816 Day's Roots After Community Pushback

By Shawn Edwards

It took nearly a decade for Kansas City's 816 Day celebration to become one of the city's signature annual events. It took only a few hours for social media to remind everyone who started it.

When Country Club Plaza announced its own inaugural "816 Day" celebration last week, many Kansas Citians weren't upset that another organization wanted to celebrate the city. They were upset because the announcement failed to acknowledge Brian "Bizzy" Benton, the party promoter who transformed an idea spawned from Hip Hop, into a citywide tradition.

The backlash wasn't really about a festival. It was about recognition, cultural ownership and remembering where ideas begin.

More Than Just Three Numbers

Long before cities began turning telephone area codes into annual celebrations, those three digits had become symbols of hometown pride in hip-hop culture.

Artists regularly referenced their area codes as shorthand for where they came from and who they represented. Ludacris' 2001 hit Area Codes helped push that idea into mainstream America, turning a telephone routing number into a badge of identity.

Eventually communities began matching their area codes with dates on the calendar.

St. Louis celebrates 314 Day on March 14. Atlanta has 404 Day. Detroit celebrates 313 Day. Chicago embraces 312 Day. Miami has 305 Day,

and Kansas City, Kansas, now celebrates 913 Day.

Kansas City, Missouri's 816 Day joined that growing tradition in 2017 and has since become one of the country's largest area code celebrations.

An Idea Born on Facebook

The idea to create an area code event for Kansas City began in 2015 explains Benton. "It was an idea born from a social media post," he says. "I saw people on Facebook talking about 816 Day. I knew I wanted to do something. I just wasn't sure what or how I was going to do it. So it took a couple of years of planning."

The first event started small and at the Juke House, a popular bar in the 18th and Vine Historic Jazz District. It was basically a two-stepping event, "Two Step Wednesday,"

that Benton piggybacked on and helped attract a couple of hundred people.

The next year Benton moved his idea downtown, utilizing a six story event center as 816 Day's home.

The event that people know today began to take shape in 2019. For the first time Benton maximized an entire neighborhood by going back to the 18th and Vine District and utilizing multiple locations. Not even Covid in 2020 and 2021 could stop the growth of the event. Each year, the crowds grew.

Growing Beyond One Neighborhood

In 2024 Benton struck a deal with the Power and Light Entertainment District to relocate the event

See 816 Day Page 14 →



Brian "Bizzy" Benton, founder of Kansas City's 816 Day celebration, helped transform a grassroots idea into one of the city's signature annual traditions. Following community criticism, the Country Club Plaza agreed to recognize Benton and partner with him on this year's celebration.

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