

State of Kansas



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**2008 Republican Legislative Vision**  
**Delivered by Speaker Melvin Neufeld**  
**January 14, 2008 on KPTS-TV**

Good evening, I'm Melvin Neufeld, Speaker of the Kansas House of Representatives.

I want to thank Kansas Public Telecommunications Service for this opportunity to share with you tonight the Kansas Republican Vision on the issues facing our great state in the 2008 Legislative Session.

I grew up on a family farm in Gray County. I have been a lifetime farmer and I raised my children on that same farm.

Like many of you, our family decisions were made around the kitchen table. Questions such as: how do we afford health insurance? Can we pay for our children to attend college? Can we afford our taxes this year?

As a parent and a grandparent, I want our state to be the best possible place to live, work, and raise a family.

I believe our republican vision of fiscal responsibility, reduced taxes, and strong economic development will make our great state even better.

Last session, Kansas Republican lawmakers led the charge to provide multi-year funding for K-through-12 education, began health care reform, and cut the tax burden on Kansans by hundreds of millions of dollars.

We will build on those successes during the 2008 legislative session.

## ***Budget***

One of the most important challenges facing the Kansas Legislature this session will be to provide Kansans with a balanced budget that slows government growth and spending.

We have some very important budget issues to consider this session – among them, funding health care reform, natural disaster relief, and continuing multi-year funding for public education at a rate that maintains our commitment to strong schools. It would be wonderful if we could afford everything but the simple fact remains, we cannot.

There will be increased expenses we must cover but state spending should not increase more than taxpayers can afford.

Like you and your family, the state and its many agencies must live within their means.

Current budget projections show that in just a few short years our state will have a negative balance in its checking account.

For agencies and organizations that want increased funding, we must find savings in other parts of the budget.

Republican lawmakers are committed to doing just that. We must show restraint in our new spending and prove to Kansans we can be good stewards of their hard-earned tax dollars.

It will require the legislature to take a hard look at the current budget for possible savings and to do away with programs that are no longer needed or no longer serve the needs of Kansans.

Standing firm against increased spending will not be easy. There will be those who want to increase spending for a variety of programs and issues.

However, Kansas Republicans believe holding the line on spending now will better prepare our state for its financial future and for the future fiscal responsibilities our children and grandchildren will face.

## ***Health Care***

As I travel around the state meeting with many of you, one of the issues always raised is the rising costs of health care.

At the core of this issue is the health of each and every one of you.

Two years ago, the Kansas Legislature created the non-partisan Kansas Health Policy Authority to study and make recommendations to lawmakers on how to improve the health of Kansas. We will consider the authority's first serious set of recommendations this session.

However, talking about health care doesn't solve the problem - we also must find ways to improve access and affordability. That is why last session we passed the Foundations of Health Reform Act to begin reforming the way health care is delivered in our state.

Kansas Republicans want a free-market health system that encourages and supports healthy lifestyles with you in charge of your own health.

One of the keys to achieving this is to reduce costs through tax incentives for self-employed Kansans and small businesses that provide health insurance to their employees.

Also – many of those who don't have health insurance are between jobs or are waiting for their coverage to go into effect at a new job. Improving the portability of health insurance will help those caught

between coverage. That's why House Republicans want to extend the availability of state cobra policy from six to 18 months of optional coverage.

By improving access and affordability, we will lead the nation in health reform and put Kansans in charge of their health care decisions – not the government.

### ***Immigration***

An issue that overlaps many challenges faced by our state is immigration reform and the financial impact of illegal aliens.

Our neighbors in Colorado and Oklahoma have passed legislation addressing this problem and we also must act. I am concerned that if we do nothing, and wait for the federal government, Kansas could spend tens of millions of dollars providing state services for illegal aliens.

Republican Lawmakers are committed to relieving this financial burden on Kansas taxpayers and ensuring state and federal immigration laws are enforced.

We appreciate the majority of Kansas businesses who comply with immigration laws, but those who chose to knowingly violate the law must be held accountable for their actions.

Perhaps most importantly, we must enforce federal law that denies public benefits to illegal aliens and enhance the penalties on those who provide or use fake ids to obtain those benefits.

These are practical and reasonable steps we can take as a state. We must encourage legal immigration and send a strong message to those who come to our country illegally that Kansas is serious about enforcing immigration laws.

### ***Taxes***

One of the major issues facing our state is the exporting of our most valuable resources: outstanding young minds. Each year many of our most talented students leave Kansas to find opportunities that are not available here.

For the past several years our state has ranked near last in private sector job growth. As lawmakers, we must encourage free enterprise and give businesses of all sizes the ability to be successful.

We began that effort last session when House Republicans successfully fought to cut taxes by more than 300-million dollars. Those tax cuts left more money in the cash registers of Kansas businesses to create new jobs and reduced the tax burden of retired and disabled Kansans as well as those on limited incomes.

But - we must do more. As part of our tax-package this session, House Republicans want to establish a back to school sales tax holiday and restructure taxes on businesses to make our state more competitive.

These items, in addition to other tax-cutting measures will keep your hard earned money where it belongs---with you - and help promote economic development across Kansas.

### ***Energy policy***

Another important component of keeping outstanding young minds in this state is to encourage businesses to come to Kansas and to support those that are here to expand. Kansas Republicans believe a strong state energy policy will truly make Kansas open for business and economic development.

Last fall, the governor's administration denied the permit for an energy center and coal-plant in Holcomb.

The denial did not address the real issue –the need for a state energy policy that provides affordable electric rates today - addresses the disparity of rates paid by Kansas homeowners and businesses - and meets our growing energy demands in the future.

Kansas Republicans believe this can be accomplished with a policy that encourages adequate baseload energy, renewable energy, and energy conservation. It also must be based on sound scientific and economic analyses that carefully address costs and benefits.

Alternative energies like wind and solar power can play an important role in our state's energy portfolio, but the simple fact is wind turbines and sunshine alone cannot meet our growing demand for electricity.

Our policy also must ensure our state laws and regulations are applied in a fair and uniform manner. Businesses wanting to build or expand in Kansas must know what is expected of them so they can build plants that meet our needs and requirements.

Together, I am confident we can establish a state energy policy that protects our environment, the security of our state's energy future, Kansas ratepayers, and encourages economic growth.

### ***NBAF***

An additional key economic development issue Kansas lawmakers will continue to focus on this year is our state's attempt to bring the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility to Manhattan.

Also known as NBAF, this facility will employ up to 500 scientists, technicians and other support staff and will spur the growth of other bioscience-related companies.

Kansas is one of five states still in the running – thanks in large part to several pieces of legislation we passed last session.

We are the only remaining state to have a NBAF regulatory working group dedicated to assisting the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in its decision.

NBAF would be a great fit in Kansas. Our state already has established itself as a world-leader in animal and plant bio-sciences. The new center would complement and expand the work of the Biosecurity Research Institute, a state-of-the-art facility at Kansas State University as well as the numerous plant and animal companies already located in our state.

Republican and Democrat Lawmakers will continue to work to bring NBAF to our state.

### ***Closing***

As I leave you tonight, I ask that the next time you gather around your kitchen table and discuss the important issues I covered tonight; you do so not only as concerned parents, grandparents, or taxpayers, but as concerned Kansans.

I challenge each of you to be concerned Kansans and partner with state and local officials to help affect good public policy for our great state. With your help and input, what we accomplish during this upcoming legislative session will have a profound impact on tens of thousands of Kansans and make our state more economically competitive and better prepared financially.

I again want to thank Kansas Public Telecommunications service for this opportunity to share with you the Kansas Republican Vision on the issues facing our great state in the 2008 Legislative Session.

It is a pleasure serving you and the state of Kansas as the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

God bless you, your family and the great state of Kansas.