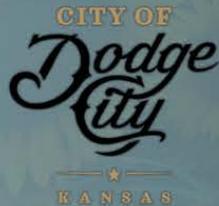


About SKC

The Cities of Dodge City, Garden City, and Liberal formed the Southwest Kansas Coalition to collectively and actively participate in issues impacting the region. SKC was formed to advocate that Southwest Kansas should be consistently and thoughtfully considered in state and federal level decisions, particularly when such decisions regard issues of importance to region residents. The City of Hays joined the organization as an associate member, as many of the issues important to SKC are important to all of western Kansas. SKC is profoundly dedicated to the principle of home rule, which is mostly simply described as local elected officials making local government decisions. The Coalition believes in rigorous discussion and collective agreement, insofar as such discussion and agreement continually result in a workable and attainable core agenda.



2026 SOUTHWEST KANSAS COALITION **LEGISLATIVE AGENDA**

Annexation

The ability of cities to grow is inherent to the ultimate success of annexation powers as they are currently established in state statutes. The current statutory framework was amended in 2011 to balance the interests of cities and those in areas to be annexed. Further amendment would shift this balance in a way that would impede orderly growth. Therefore, SKC opposes any change that limits the authority of cities to grow through annexation.

Health Care and Access to Services

The obstacles faced by health care providers and patients in rural areas are vastly different than those in urban areas. Rural communities face significant health challenges primarily due to access to health services and a severe lack of healthcare providers, meaning residents often have limited access to basic medical care, struggle to reach specialists, and may need to travel long distances to receive treatment.

Rural hospitals strive to provide their patients with the highest quality of care while simultaneously tackling the unique challenges of their often-remote location, small size, limited workforce, and constrained financial resources. Low patient volumes make it difficult for these organizations to manage the high fixed costs associated with operating a hospital, making them financially vulnerable to policy and market changes, and to Medicare and Medicaid payment cuts.

To enhance the health and well-being of individuals and communities, SKC supports eliminating barriers that limit provider capacity and patient access to critical health services and telemedicine technologies. SKC encourages increased funding for mental health programs including funding for community mental health centers and additional bed space for patients with mental health needs. Furthermore, additional training and support services for first responders are key to addressing these challenges on a local level to better support those on the front lines of the crisis.

Education

An adequate and stable workforce is essential to maintaining and growing the economy of southwest Kansas. Therefore, SKC believes in establishing educational opportunities for regional residents. Such opportunities include but are not limited to, specialized training programs and higher educational degree programs. To meet these educational goals, the Coalition wishes to maintain adequate funding to allow for the growth and advancement of educational programs in K- 12 as well as postsecondary and graduate degrees. Additionally, SKC supports adequate funding for all Kansas Board of Regents institutions.

Southwest Kansas is the only quadrant of the state without a four-year public university. In order to bridge this gap and to provide a stronger higher education presence in our region, a University Center has been established to offer bachelor's and master's level programs to meet the demands of the workforce with an initial focus on healthcare services. Students will obtain their first two years of education and their associate's degree through one of the region's community colleges and then have the opportunity to finish their bachelor's or advanced degree through the University Center. Headquartered in Dodge City, students across the region have access to programs through a blended mixed-class format with some face-to-face classroom time in addition to web-based offerings. SKC strongly supports community colleges as they provide the opportunity to "Grow Our Own" which is extremely critical to the long-term success of our regional workforce and the state of Kansas.

Water

SKC cities advocate for all of their citizens to have access to clean, safe, and affordable water. The State of Kansas has recognized that water is protected for the use and benefit of the citizens of Kansas. Water is the preeminent natural resource that provides for the economic growth and viability of our communities. SKC supports policies that expand the use of State Revolving Loan Funds and Debt Forgiveness programs to assist communities in pursuing infrastructure investments to ensure a safe water supply that addresses quality requirements, and resiliency and improves resource conservation.

SKC cities also wish to project a unified voice in water resource use decisions at the State and Federal levels. This engagement also includes involvement with River Advisory Communities (RACs) and Groundwater Management Districts (GMDs) to benefit municipal customers as partners in the rural economy through conservation and use strategies with municipal, agricultural, and industrial partners supporting the long-term social and economic health of Southwest Kansas.

Immigration

Immigrant and refugee labor is vital to the southwest Kansas economy. SKC believes in legal immigration. Therefore, SKC believes the Kansas Legislature and the United States Congress should approach the immigration issue in a sensible way. For SKC, a sensible approach is an approach built on three essential foundations: 1) all immigration legislation is tempered with an understanding of such legislation's economic impact for companies employing immigrants; 2) a recognition that immigrants living in SKC member cities require a reduction in time and distance barriers between the individual and his or her pursuance of legal status; and 3) a recognition that SKC member-cities require additional resources to integrate immigrants into the community.

In addition, the SKC requests that the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) give serious consideration to opening a field office in Southwest Kansas where services are desperately needed. To help address this issue in the meantime, we request an increase in the frequency of USCIS mobile services in

Southwest Kansas as follows:

- Provide at least monthly mobile service visits to SKC member cities.
- Provide full services (biometrics, interviews, etc.) during each visit.
- SKC member cities will continue to provide support staff, designated space (rent-free), and technology.
- Increased frequency of naturalization ceremonies.

Lastly, the SKC strongly believes that the United States Congress should engage to deliver bipartisan legislation that provides a permanent solution for recipients of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Such legislation should include a pathway to citizenship within a reasonable time frame.

Childcare

The current childcare system is failing both families and communities across Kansas. The supply of childcare has been on the decline for years, disproportionately affecting certain families, including those who work nontraditional hours; live in rural communities; have an infant or toddler, or child with special needs; or are immigrants. SKC supports creating a regulatory environment that supports rather than impedes the creation of more childcare facilities. In addition, to adapt to the regulatory environment, SKC supports additional funding to those facilities attempting to meet the requirements and close the gap between children without childcare. This issue impacts economic development, employers, and the future of our region.

Taxes

The collection of sales and use of tax legislation should not preempt state and local sales and use tax authority. Should federal legislation allow for the state imposition of such taxes, we support the distribution of those funds to cities and counties using an equitable formula. Kansas should continue to participate in the Streamlined Sales Tax Project. Cities are important partners in creating jobs, reviving the economy, delivering vital services, and providing quality of life. City leaders should be included in legislative discussions about restructuring the Kansas tax system and any modifications must avoid shifting additional financial burdens to local governments. SKC opposes the removal of sales exemptions for Kansas Municipalities. Additionally, SKC cities realize there is a large reliance on property taxes to fund local and state government. All property taxing authorities should be equally transparent and have to abide by the same limitations, restrictions, and requirements. Any additional transparency measures should not be burdensome or costly.

Historic Preservation

The State Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit Program and the Heritage Trust Fund assist communities in maintaining and/or preserving their historic buildings. It also serves as a critical resource for economic development and provides valuable private investment that preserves our history and heritage not only for today but for future generations.

SKC supports maintaining and enhancing the State Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit program and Historic Preservation Grants. Such programs assist communities in restoring their historic buildings and serve as a critical resource for economic development and job creation. Without such gap assistance, many if not all redevelopment plans would be impossible to fulfill. These credits and grants provide valuable private investment that preserves our history and heritage not only for today but for future generations.

Heritage Trust Fund:The Heritage Trust Fund grant program is a state-funded grant program awarded annually since 1990 to Register-listed properties statewide. Heritage Trust Fund funding is collected by county Registers of Deed from document filing fees and transmitted to the state quarterly. Approximately \$1 million is available annually, but it is typically 3 to 4 times that amount requested. SKC advocates supplementing the Heritage Trust Fund to provide more funding for historic downtowns and commercial properties.

Transportation

Transportation infrastructure is critical to the safety of regional residents and travelers. Transportation infrastructure is also vital to the regional economy’s maintenance and growth. Therefore, SKC believes in the continued advocacy and funding for transportation infrastructure and maintenance in southwest Kansas.

Air Transportation

Federal funding for passenger air service is vital to Southwest Kansas. The Essential Air Service Program is critical to providing the region with access to multiple major international airports. SKC encourages continued support from the Congressional Delegation. SKC supports increased FAA safety regulations; however, the qualifier of seat time has drastically reduced the number of qualified pilots under FAA regulations for Essential Air Service, thus resulting in canceled flights. SKC supports incorporating qualified classroom training for commercial pilot certification in order to meet the increasing demand for passenger air transportation service in Southwest Kansas communities. SKC also supports continued and uninterrupted funding of the Federal Aviation Administration and expansion of the Airport Improvement Projects for airports. Federal funding through the Airport Improvement Program is critical to maintaining the infrastructure of airports.

Rail Transportation

SKC supports enhanced passenger and freight rail service in Kansas. In particular, the Coalition strongly supports the improvement, preservation, and reinvestment of Amtrak passenger rail service along the Southwest Chief line, which operates between Chicago and Los Angeles. SKC encourages State and Federal funding to preserve this needed transportation link to access the southwestern region of the State. Passenger ridership along this section of the Southwest Chief steadily increases as more Kansans take advantage of the convenience of passenger rail transportation.

Highway Transportation

State and Federal transportation dollars should be spent on adequate and equitable transportation infrastructure in all of Kansas. Transportation infrastructure is vital to our local, state, and country’s economy, individuals’ safety, and our nation’s defense The City-County Highway Fund is essential to maintaining local roads and bridges and should be fully funded and not be diverted for other purposes. SKC also advocates for the planning of dividing Highways 54, 50/400, and 83, as IKE projects.

Home Rule

Consistent with the Home Rule Amendment of the Kansas Constitution approved by voters, SKC supports local elected officials making decisions for their communities, particularly tax and revenue decisions. Self-governance by locally elected officials must be preserved to ensure that local issues are handled at the level of government closest to the citizens that they represent.

Building and Fire Codes

Longstanding practice in Kansas has allowed cities to administer and approve internationally accepted building and fire safety codes and conduct plan reviews and inspections based on those adopted codes. SKC opposes any measure to preempt local building codes and opposes any deviation from this practice or any legislative changes that would erode local boards and governing bodies from making amendments to these adopted codes.

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Southwest Kansas Coalition

