

Event Summary

Strengthening Our Civic Society
Convened by the Kansas Business Roundtable

On Feb. 10, 2026, legislators and business leaders stepped away from their busy schedules to learn about the current state of civility in Kansas and discuss the roles their organizations could play in strengthening civic society at the local and state levels.

The 44 participants heard Brook Manville, co-author of *The Civic Bargain: How Democracy Survives*, describe lessons to be learned not only from our country's founders but also from much older democracies that endured for hundreds of years in Athens, Rome, and Britain. He relied on Aristotle's definition of democracy as "self-governance by citizens."

Manville noted the duty and value of citizens not just to vote but also to get involved in governance, commit to civic friendships, and pass along to the next generation the skills and habits required to sustain our democracy. He described the civic bargain as the foundational norms and practices among citizens needed for them to manage the tensions inherent in governing themselves (since democracy has no "boss").

- **Civic education** occurs in individual behaviors (like listening to all perspectives, volunteering, or inviting others to participate) and institutional traditions (like community parades/celebrations and competitions like a civics bee or blood drive).
- **Civic friendship** occurs when citizens can debate and disagree but not demonize the other side. Examples: respect for the dignity of a neighbor with a different perspective; appreciation for someone who tackles a complex/divisive issue.

What's Next?

Because the civic bargain must constantly be renewed, event participants had three opportunities to engage in table discussions about how to practice civic friendship. Going forward, the Kansas Business Roundtable will find ways to better participate in civic friendships and will share resources to help others across the state to foster renewal of the civic bargain.

The strength of our democracy literally depends on the actions we all take.

