Kansas Voices, Kansas Solutions Newsletter

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KANSAS BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE

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Civic Highlights 2026

Since its founding in 2022, the Kansas Business Roundtable has focused on hosting discussions of emerging topics in the public policy arena. On top of that in 2026, we hosted Strengthening Our Civic Society and awarded our first Civic Champion awards. What a year!
Special thanks to the members of the Kansas Business Roundtable and to the legislators and guests who participated in our three events this year. Their commitment to our vision of growing the Kansas economy through innovative and data-driven policy made 2026 the organization's best yet.

Strengthening Our Civic Society



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 book **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.



Kansas Business Roundtable Announces Its First Civic Champion Awards

House Majority Leader Chris Croft receives the first individual Civic Champion award. Senate Minority Leader Dinah Sykes and Senate Majority Leader Chase Blasi Receive first Civic Champion Team award.

OVERLAND PARK, Kan. — The Kansas Business Roundtable has named House Majority Leader Chris Croft the first recipient of its 2026 Civic Champion. The award recognizes Kansans who bring dignity and respectful dialogue to public issues, especially when views differ.

Croft, who represents House District 8, has been an active participant in Roundtable discussions. He also identified and recruited Brook Manville, an author of **The Civic Bargain: How Democracy Survives**, to join a Roundtable conversation held in February 2026 about the work of self-government.

The Roundtable honored Croft at its Annual Issues Forum on September 29, 2026 in Overland Park. The Kansas Business Roundtable board is making an award to further civic participation to two local 501(c)(3) charities, Fore the Kids Foundation and Michael's Wonderworld Foundation.

> "Chris does more than call for civil discourse; he practices it. The way he talks about issues and opinions while respecting the dignity of each individual brings others into the conversation and makes the effort more meaningful," said Scott J. Schneider, the Roundtable's executive director. "He has helped us examine difficult questions with curiosity and respect. That is the example we want this award to recognize."

Alongside its recognition of individual civic leadership, the Roundtable also recognized bipartisan teamwork through its first Civic Champion Team award.

The Kansas Business Roundtable has named Senate Majority Leader Chase Blasi and Senate Minority Leader Dinah Sykes the first recipients of its 2026 Civic Champion Team award. The award recognizes Kansans who work across party lines to make progress on an issue important to the state.

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Blasi, a Republican representing Sedgwick County, and Sykes, a Democrat representing Johnson County, worked together on legislation limiting student cellphone use during the school day. Their proposal helped shape the measure enacted this year as HB 2299.

> "Chase and Dinah started with a shared concern for Kansas students and did the work of finding a path forward together," said Bruce Witt, the Roundtable's board chair. "Their partnership shows that leaders can disagree on many issues and still solve a problem in front of them. That is the civic leadership this award was created to recognize."

The Roundtable honored both senators at its Annual Issues Forum on September 29 in Overland Park. The Kansas Business Roundtable board is making an award to further civic participation to two local 501(c)(3) charities, Catholic Charities of Wichita and Dolly Parton's Imagination Library of Kansas. The Kansas Business Roundtable convenes business leaders to develop Kansas solutions through thoughtful public-policy dialogue. Award criteria and photos are available at www.kansasbr.org/awards.

KANSAS BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE

Civic Champion Awards 2026









Surrogate Medical Decision Making

A significant highlight from our convening on June 2, 2026 in Wichita was hearing from David J. Stucky, Senior Attorney at Ascension Legal. David enlightened us about the need to better protect vulnerable patients in Kansas who lack capacity to make their own medical decisions at critical points when time is of the essence.

Kansas is unique in that we don't have a surrogate decision maker statute to promote effective patient advocacy and more certainty in healthcare. Progress was made in the 2026 legislative session when a new Guardianship Act was passed. This new law is helpful for providing long-term guardians and ensuring the rights of patients. However, it lacks a means to enable time-sensitive healthcare decisions and fails to address intermittent capacity. This hampers patient care and discharge planning such as to a skilled nursing facility.

Forty-six states already have both a guardianship and a surrogate decision maker statute. Because guardianships have limitations that can increase costs and may result in decisions being made for patients by people otherwise unknown to the patient, Ascension attorneys are working with the Kansas Hospital Association and key legislators to propose legislation in 2027.

The Surrogate Decision Maker bill aims to



use the best provisions from other states to ensure patients in Kansas are protected. For example, while they still have capacity, patients can appoint a surrogate in writing. Then once the patient lacks capacity, their best interests are served by the people they previously designated.

For incapacitated patients who did not previously designate a surrogate, the bill allows healthcare providers to use a hierarchy of decision makers that seeks to give decision-making authority to the surrogate closest to the patient and most informed of the patient's wishes. The bill creates criteria for hospital ethics committees to consider when disputes arise, and the bill factors in unique matters of conscience such as ethical and religious directives.

Time-sensitive patient decisions must be made promptly for healthcare providers to administer necessary patient care. Founded on thorough research of other states' statutes and extensive input from Kansas stakeholders, the Surrogate Decision Maker bill should provide the 2027 Kansas Legislature with a strong start on this important issue.



How Kansas Can Better Support the U.S. Military

A significant highlight from KBR's convening on September 29, 2026 in Overland Park was our discussion with the panel of three state officials who raised awareness of workforce and economic development issues across the state.

Barry Albrecht, Director of Aerospace and Defense at the Kansas Department of Commerce, informed us that thousands of companies in Kansas do business with the U.S. Department of Defense/War (DOD) resulting in $8 billion of economic impact. Most people know about aircraft manufacturing, but they may not know that our state has one of the strongest defense supply chains in the country.

The Smoky Hill Air National Guard Range (ten miles southwest of Salina) is the largest and busiest ANG bombing and electronic warfare range in the United States. Access to this restricted airspace is crucial to testing new innovations and training the workforce to use them. Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) is a growing industry. The National Institute of Aviation Research (NIAR) at Wichita State University (WSU) is another asset that attracts the attention of international companies.

Albrecht mentioned one role of his team at the Kansas Department of Commerce is to connect with defense contractors to raise awareness of the assets Kansas communities bring to the table, as well as to connect Kansans with DOD grants and programs. Senator Jerry Moran has championed this effort to bring defense contractors to Wichita to see for themselves the innovation and talent in Kansas.

Zach Gearhart, chief of staff and executive director of government relations at WSU, noted that in July the Wichita metro was named #1 in aerospace and defense manufacturing ecosystems. Gearhart said 13,000 of WSU's 18,000 students engage in applied learning opportunities (primarily with the 50 companies physically located on campus) earning a payroll of approximately $40 million, which sparks their job prospects and adds value to the companies. He also noted that 77% of these graduates stay in Kansas.

In terms of workforce, Albrecht noted the thousands of job openings in cyber security and the value of those in the Kansas workforce who have security clearance. He also said employers would do well to realize the high level of skills possessed by many recent veterans.

Perry Wiggins, executive director of the Governor's Military Council, noted the value of welcoming military spouses to continue their careers while stationed in Kansas. Accepting their professional licenses from other states and minimizing fees and red tape are appreciated.



Scott J. Schneider

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Why did you help create the Kansas Business Roundtable in 2022?
Convening people to learn about issues and ask their questions is critical to making progress in the public arena. What sounds like a simple solution usually needs to be examined from all sides.

Being good citizens—and good corporate citizens—means participating in conversations. The Roundtable is here to ask people to come together to listen and discuss.

Is the Roundtable achieving your objectives?
Yes. 2026 was a banner year. We held a new event focus on Strengthening Our Civic Society and created new awards to recognize Civic Champions. It felt really good to focus on civics after having hosted annual events in June and September for the past three years where we discussed emerging issues. Conversations have been bipartisan, civil, and productive.

What type of business or organization should consider joining KBR?
Honestly, one that cares deeply about making progress on difficult issues that affect our state's economy.

Look, everybody wants financial stability for their family. If the Roundtable can help policymakers learn about an emerging issue or consider how a regulation or law is affecting an employer or a community, those policymakers become better prepared to make decisions that make a real difference.

Learn how to get involved in the Kansas Business Roundtable by contacting scott@sjschneider.law or Kathy.Sexton@wichita.edu.

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