



# WEALTH Policy, Civic Engagement, and You!

## with Paul Johnson

### Kansas Rural Center

*Excerpts from a series of CEP LIVE on Facebook events that highlight policies impacting Kansas WEALTH and outline effective civic engagement strategies*  
**WATER – ENERGY – AIR – LAND – TRANSPORTATION – HEALTH = KANSAS WEALTH**

## OVERVIEW

Paul Johnson of the Kansas Rural Center joined the Climate + Energy Project on February 6, 2018, to discuss policy priorities for the 2018 legislative session. The Kansas Rural Center advocates for independent and family farms and for a diversified farm system in the state.

## TOP WEALTH POLICY ISSUES FOR THE KANSAS RURAL CENTER

- The Kansas Rural Center’s immediate concern is what will happen with the **regulation and eradication of noxious weeds** in Kansas. [House Bill 2583](#) would move it out of statute, away from the Kansas Legislature, and into administration rule and regulation. Our Secretary of Agriculture would be what we would call a “weed czar,” and would have a noxious weed advisory committee that would make recommendations to the weed czar. Fundamentally, if you move it from statute to rule and regulation—out of the Legislature to the executive branch—the executive branch takes control. That means the Legislature is out of the loop, and that concerns us. We are trying to fight that change.
- Three years ago, we worked on a bill that established a statewide panel of seven members to [study local food and farming issues in Kansas](#). That followed establishment of the first **local food council** in Douglas County. Now, 31 of our 105 counties have adopted a local food council, so we’ve seen some progress—but we can do better. Kansas imports 95% of the fruits and vegetables we eat—\$800 million a year on fruits and vegetables—and we grow \$40 million of it locally. Every dollar that we would grow locally would probably turn over a couple times in our economy. We need to look at past campaigns when we promote locally grown foods. What we saw in Kansas with renewable energy was setting a goal and saying by 2020 we want 20% of our electricity from renewable energy sources, and we got it by 2016. Is it comparable to say that **by 2025 we are at 15% of our produce grown locally?** We have the land, the water, the expertise. My political interests gravitate toward setting out an umbrella for that kind of focus, getting lawmakers to think about a broader and better goal: to eat better.
- Another issue we are concerned about is the **funding of the state water plan** in Kansas. We have incredible problems in our state with pumping too much underground out of our aquifers. In the eastern half of the state, we are dealing with surface water and federal reservoirs that hold the public water storage for the vast number of Kansans, and those reservoirs are silting in, and it’s very costly to dredge these reservoirs. The question is, where do we come up with the money to fund our state water plan? The state has been unable to contribute its annual \$8 million share.



The Climate + Energy Project seeks to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions in America's Heartland through the ambitious deployment of energy efficiency and renewable energy, in policy and practice.

Join the Conversation at [climateandenergy.org](http://climateandenergy.org), on Facebook & Twitter @CEPHeartland

- This leads me to my last top issue. The reality is that **Kansas is still very broke** after we cut income taxes in 2012 and 2013 by over \$900 million a year. Last year legislators passed an income bill to try to rectify some of that damage. But we didn't get back up to \$900 million—we got \$600 million, about two thirds of that cut. Our state has gone through 10 years of budget cuts. We have cut state employees and essential staff. How do we stop the hemorrhaging? We are still trying to think through it. Things like the water plan, things like foster care—it's a long list of problems, and the state is still trying to figure out the revenue mess.

## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY TIPS

- The comfort level is much higher with your state lawmaker or representative in the home district. These are public servants, they ran to represent you, they are your voice up here. You shouldn't abuse the right to talk to your lawmaker, but you should expect that you have the space with that person. Meeting up with them at a public event and **talking face to face** is probably the best. If they are here in Topeka, **personal letters are far more effective** than electronic at this point. If they get five letters on a given issue you are worried about, that would be a landslide for a lot of these lawmakers. **Plan a trip to Topeka**, come see the "people's house" here, call ahead, find the best time for that representative or senator to fit into their schedule, and ask for that 15 or 20 minutes to sit down. If you have concerns about what we are doing with renewable energy, or how do we improve affordable housing, or get more local foods, that's where you **engage these legislators one on one**.
- It's an election year, and governor's races really count for something. We are going to have a new governor, and that will set a new course for Kansas. We need to be engaged in that. All 125 House members are up for re-election, plus races for secretary of state, attorney general, four Congress. This is the basics of civics. **You get what you vote for**. If you don't vote, don't complain. Now is the time to **ask the campaigners** why they are doing it. What are their priorities? What are your priorities? This is the civic engagement that Kansas needs.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

Learn about and advocate for Water, Energy, Air, Land, Transportation, and Health (WEALTH) in Kansas with the Climate + Energy Project and other sponsor organizations at WEALTH Day on March 15, 2018, at the Kansas Statehouse.

- Get up-to-date on current environmental advocacy
- Visit the Solutions Showcase
- Participate in WEALTH Forums throughout the day
- Enjoy the Local Foods Luncheon
- Sample new ideas at the Cookies and Conservation Conversation
- Meet with your legislators

Connect with CEP on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) and sign up for our [email updates](#).

**Join us for WEALTH Day on March 15<sup>th</sup> at the Kansas Statehouse!**

RSVP: <http://bit.ly.2018WEALTHDay>



The Climate + Energy Project seeks to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions in America's Heartland through the ambitious deployment of energy efficiency and renewable energy, in policy and practice.

Join the Conversation at [climateandenergy.org](http://climateandenergy.org), on Facebook & Twitter @CEPHeartland