

# Pratt Tribune

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## Former legislator on quest for common sense

Kansans will vote for a governor and state representatives in the November 2014 general election. Already, a group of people are out campaigning – not for election; they've "been there and done that" – but for an educated electorate.

Traditional Republicans for Common Sense is a group of around 80 Republicans who have served the state as U.S. senators, lieutenant governors, state senators, state representatives and Kansas GOP leaders, with more than 700 years of collective experience.

"We're not pleased with the direction the party and the state are going," said Jim Yonally, Overland Park, a former representative. "We decided to get up out of our rocking chairs and do something about it."

They've been meeting since April 2012 and are working to establish a non-profit organization and a political action committee. They testified on a few bills in the last session of the Kansas Legislature, and plan to do more lobbying and testifying in the next session. A website, [www.kscommonsense.com](http://www.kscommonsense.com), provides information about the group and its stand on issues, and offers an opportunity for Kansans to donate to further the mission of Traditional Republicans for Common Sense.

A primary goal is "looking for good candidates we can support for the House and for governor," according to Fred Kerr of Pratt, who served in the Kansas Senate for 16 years and is a former Senate majority leader.

All Senate positions were elected in 2012 for four years.

The former legislators have established three priorities: strong schools, a fair tax system and judicial transparency.

Kerr is most concerned about Gov. Sam Brownback's plan to phase out state income tax.

People with higher incomes pay most of the income tax, and when they are relieved of that obligation, the burden shifts to middle and lower income people, he said. As a farmer, he stands to benefit, because beginning in 2013, income from farms is exempt from state tax. Financial gain aside, "it's wrong," Kerr asserted.

The governor's tax plan will create a \$362.5 million deficit in 2014, according to the Kansas Legislative Research Department, reported in a Traditional Republicans for Common Sense news release in May. The release also states that, according to the Kansas Economic Progress Council, Kansas will have to create 53,222 new jobs that pay \$50,000 over the next two years to fill the shortfall.

Effects of the loss of revenue are felt first by public schools, Kerr said. Higher income people have the option of sending their children to private schools, so again, it is the middle and lower income people who are most affected.

Kerr said about 60 percent of the state's general fund supports education.

When state funds to education are reduced, the burden shifts to property tax. About 30 years ago, the Kansas Legislature commissioned a study in which the experts concluded that a mix of one-third income tax, one-third property tax and one-third sales tax — the so-called three-legged stool — was most fair and equitable.

"Different kinds of taxes affect people differently," Yonally said. "A mix is most equitable."

"The path to zero state income tax is just wrong," Kerr said. "It helps the billionaires, and billionaires do fund campaigns."

The Traditional Republicans maintain that in 2012, "deep-pocketed special interest groups flooded our state elections with millions of dollars and back-handed Washington-style tactics, successfully hijacking the legislative process from the hard-working people of Kansas."

"Some excellent candidates lost in 2012 because of negative campaigning by wealthy people pouring money into campaigns," Kerr said.

The former legislators also object to changes made in the way in which judges for the Kansas Court of Appeals are selected. Previously, a nominating committee of nine people interviewed all applicants, released the names of applicants to the public, and recommended three candidates to the governor. That process is still in effect for the state Supreme Court, as set by the constitution.

The Court of Appeals procedure was set by statute, not constitution, and in 2013, the legislature, at the urging of Brownback, made changes that allow the governor to appoint judges, subject to confirmation by the Senate.

That replaced the process from a merit-based system to a political model that gives the governor full control of the process, according to the group's brochure.

Yonally has been on the campaign trail, hitting seven cities this week and more next week, to let Kansans know they're there and that there are Republicans who are concerned about the current situation.