



Don Coover, Jim Porter, Gail Harshaw talk at a local political gathering.

- Photo by Rob Morgan

Congressional candidate Coover, BOE member Porter are guests at local political gathering

A mixed group of Republicans, Democrats and Independents met Oct. 21 in Neodesha to hear from two local candidates, and the future of Wilson County and Southeast Kansas.

The audience of about 25 people ranged from high school students to retirees, some in their 80s; the group welcomed Jim Porter, a member of the State Board of Education, who has served District 9 since 2015. Porter, the former Fredonia USD 484 Superintendent, has served in education for nearly 60 years, and shared the history of his position, as well as upcoming changes to the board, which re-elects half its members every 2 years. Porter fielded questions about virtual learning, state testing standards, concerns over Artificial Intelligence and leadership on the Board of Education.

Porter's district spans nearly 250 miles and 21 counties, representing more than 50,000 students; he continues to make this home in Fredonia.

A farm boy from Southeast Kansas, Don Coover also attended the meeting to speak about his background and announced run for Congress next Fall. After attending the United States Military Academy at West Point and serving in the military — where he flew planes, helicopters and served in military intelligence — Coover retired and began his second career after graduating veterinary

school. Coover took questions about the non-partisan role of military officials, a "chaotic, stupid and inexcusable immigration policy" and how tariffs were killing the Kansas economy.

Coover went on to develop a feed manufacturing business, with his brother, in southeast Kansas. Coover now runs a beef cattle genetics company, which provides advanced reproductive technologies for cattle, sheep, and goats, along with a working ranch operation of several hundred head of cattle and a veterinary practice for local and regional livestock producers. He has the experience of working with farmers and shared with the group his insights on Argentinian beef and their recent outbreak of the highly contagious hoof and mouth disease, the current beef price bubble and how farmers are balancing sales and breeding programs and the danger to newer Kansas farmers.

Coover addressed affordability, rural healthcare, the national debt and the current government shutdown, and frankly presented his concerns and opinions on those topics.

Hosted by the Wilson County Democratic Party, these informal "Politics and Potluck" events will continue in 2026. The next meeting will be a holiday party in early December. Watch the Citizen and the Derrick for details.

Kansas seeks federal waiver to create single accountability system, improve clarity for schools

TOPEKA, Kan. — The Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) has submitted a waiver request to the U.S. Department of Education to align state and federal school accountability systems into a single, coherent model focused on student achievement and school improvement.

Kansas districts and schools currently operate under two separate systems: the Kansas Education Systems Accreditation framework and the federal Every Student Succeeds Act identification process. Both systems have the same goal of improving student outcomes, but the duplication increases administrative burden and creates confusion for districts. KSDE is seeking to streamline requirements so educators can focus their time and resources on student learning.

In a July 29, 2025, Dear Colleague letter, the Education Department encouraged states to request "creative and effective waivers" that align federal programs with state priorities, maximize the impact of federal funds, and improve outcomes for students.

The waiver request submitted by Kansas would:

Delay new identification of Comprehensive Support and Improvement, Targeted Support and Improvement, and Additional Targeted Support and Improvement schools until the 2028-29 school year.

Delay the exit of currently identified schools until no later than the 2027-28 school year.

Allow schools currently identified to continue receiving federal 1003(a) school improvement funds each year they remain identified.

The waiver would provide the time necessary to bring state and federal accountability systems into alignment and create a single model of support that is clear, efficient, and focused on proven strategies for improving student outcomes.

"This is about coherence and stability," said KSDE Deputy Commissioner Dr. Renee Nugent. "By aligning our state and federal systems, we are removing barriers and ensuring every Kansas school is working from the same set of goals. This unified approach allows educators to focus on what

truly matters, supporting students and accelerating academic achievement."

Schools currently identified under ESSA would:

Remain identified during the waiver period.

Continue receiving support from the Kansas Learning Network, professional development, and technical assistance.

Remain eligible for 1003(a) federal school improvement funds.

Schools that meet exit criteria during the waiver period may exit identification. However, KSDE encourages schools to remain voluntarily to retain support and funding.

Schools that would have been newly identified will be invited to participate in a pilot program that aligns their existing KESA action plans with the new unified accountability system, without adding another federal designation during the transition.

KSDE believes this waiver will benefit students and educators by:

Reducing complexity: One set of goals, one plan, one system. Improving alignment: Systems support each other rather than overlap.

Maximizing resources: Schools maintain access to federal funds during the transition.

Supporting student success: Time and resources are directed toward evidence-based improvement practices.

The waiver request is open for public comment. Kansans are encouraged to review the proposal and submit feedback at: <https://www.ksde.gov/Agency/Division-of-Learning-Services/Special-Education-and-Title-Services/Announcements-Special-Education-and-Title-Services>

The U.S. Department of Education has 120 days from the date of submission to review the request and issue a decision.

If the waiver is not approved, KSDE will continue to meet all federal statutory requirements, including identifying schools under ESSA, while continuing its work to build a single accountability and improvement system that strengthens support for every Kansas school.



Soup season

By Greg Doering, Kansas Farm Bureau

It seems to have taken longer than usual for fall to arrive this year. Finally, the predominate winds have shifted to the north, bringing the cooler temperatures with them. Soon those winds will carry a killing frost with them sending much of the natural world into dormancy.

This all seems delayed in part because of the 80-plus degree days in mid-October. Also because the cottonwood trees in the yard are still clinging to a significant portion of their leaves, which are usually gone by now. The oak and sycamore leaves are just starting to turn so they're on track to fall by Thanksgiving.

While most plants will stop growing soon and crickets will cease chirping, there will still be plenty of work around the house these next few weeks. The lawnmower will be put away for the season, replaced by the leaf blower and rake. Eventually I'll have to set up the ladder to clean out the gutters and string Christmas lights.

Hoses will be disconnected, drained and stowed away to prevent the cold winter winds from freezing faucets. There are flowerbeds that need a good once over as well, taking care not to disturb any seed heads that can feed the birds that don't fly south.

After a summer of heavy use, I'll give the grill a good cleaning, but it won't be put away. There's no temperature that's too cold for cooking over a direct flame, but the grill does lose some of its luster to the expanded menu that arrives with the north winds.

Still, as much as I enjoy cooking outdoors, there are just certain meals that are more appropriate when the air conditioner is turned off and you welcome a kitchen warmed by an oven baking throughout the day. From casseroles and pot roasts to stews and fresh-baked bread, comfort foods are a bright spot as the days grow shorter.

While my family will enjoy all of those, I most enjoy this season for the soups. While you can create a beef stew or chicken noodle soup rather quickly from canned ingredients, they're better if time isn't a concern. There's nothing like the aroma of a simmering stock and knowing that as each hour goes by, the flavors are increasing.

Gumbos, bisques, chowders, consommé and more are all on the menu during soup season. No matter the variety, soup can be economical and versatile from a thin broth to a hearty chili. While I personally prefer thick, savory soups, especially if they begin with a roux, broth-based ones are best for getting over the flu.

Soup is also a great way to use up what's left from other meals, whether it's creating stock from the marrow in chicken and beef bones or using up any vegetables on hand before they spoil.

Toasted bread, chips or crackers can also add bulk to a thin soup or replace spoons for thicker stews. While every soup has its basics, there are countless ways to personalize your bowl, whether it's extra bacon in a potato soup or adding several dashes of hot sauce to your chili.

Like fall itself, soup season is a reminder that slowing down isn't a terrible thing. Patience offers rewards for those who stir occasionally, taste often and let time work quietly.

"Insight" is a weekly column published by Kansas Farm Bureau, the state's largest farm organization whose mission is to strengthen agriculture and the lives of Kansans through advocacy, education and service.

The key to boosting immunity

By Kelly Evans Hullinger, MD FACP

It's hard to look at your television or social media and not see a headline about some "superfood," supplement, or other product promising to "boost immunity." And who doesn't want to boost immunity, especially in a year in which measles outbreaks are becoming routine? Genuinely, there is one entity available to us that, more than any other fad, will help our immunity and protect us against infection: vaccines.

Vaccines are one of the great miracles in the history of science serving humanity. Whereas in centuries before, seeing children and young people die of infectious diseases was a universal experience, vaccines have truly changed the world in that regard. Diseases like smallpox and polio have been wiped out after being something parents feared throughout human existence.

With the huge successes of vaccines, in some ways we as a society have forgotten their wonderful impact. Measles, up until the 1960's a disease that was commonplace and resulted in unfortunate deaths of infants and children, was rarely seen after widespread vaccination in the late 20th century and early 2000's. Unfortunately, because of declining rates of childhood vaccination, that is no longer true. Various misinformation campaigns and, probably, a general sense of insignificance (no new parents remember anyone having measles), are to blame.

Measles is a highly contagious disease that statistically requires about 95% vaccination rate in a population to achieve herd immunity. Herd immunity status gives protection to vulnerable individuals including those too young to vaccinate (infants under one year of age). We have seen



large outbreaks of measles in numerous states this year, generally in communities where that herd immunity is not being achieved. And because measles is so highly contagious, kids who have not been vaccinated may have to miss school for weeks to stay safe. Most sadly, we have seen deaths this year in the US from a disease which was considered eliminated as recently as 2020. Let's hope this isn't a sign of other preventable infectious diseases making a comeback.

So, if you're looking to boost your immunity this season, of course I recommend a healthy diet, regular exercise, and adequate sleep. But if you want to make the biggest impact, talk to your doctor about vaccines and get caught up with evidence-based recommendations. Your immune system will thank you.

Dr. Kelly Evans Hullinger practices internal medicine at Avera Medical Group in Brookings, SD. She serves as one of the Prairie Doc Volunteer Hosts during its 24th Season providing Health Education Based on Science, Built on Trust. Follow The Prairie Doc@ at www.prairiedoc.org, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Tik Tok. Prairie Doc Programming includes On Call with the Prairie Doc®, a medical Q&A show (most Thursdays at 7pm, YouTube and streaming on Facebook), 2 podcasts, and a Radio program (on SDPB, Sundays at 6am and 1pm).

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