Kansas Has a Cost Problem—And It's Driving People Away

By Vance Ginn|April 20, 2026|Kansas Policy Institute

Kansas isn't collapsing. That would at least get attention. What's happening is quieter and more dangerous: the state is becoming too expensive, too fragmented, and too average to compete, while other states pull ahead.

The new 2026 Kansas Green Book lays it out clearly. Kansas is not leading where it matters. It is lagging, and the reason comes down to cost.

Start with outcomes. Since 1998, Kansas ranks 41st in private-sector job growth at 11.9% increase, 37th in private-sector wage growth at 160%, and 32nd in GDP growth at 201%. Since 2000, Kansas ranks 39th in domestic migration at -7%. Pages 4, 6, 8, and 10, respectively, in the PDF below.

Meanwhile, competitor states like Texas and Tennessee are consistently near the top. Texas ranks 4th in job growth at 63.5% and 3rd in GDP growth at 338%, while Tennessee ranks 9th in migration at 11%. These aren't random differences. They reflect different policy choices.

People are responding to those differences. When Kansas ranks near the bottom in migration, it means more people are leaving than arriving. And when they leave, they take their income, spending, and future investment with them.

So what's driving it?

Start with taxes and spending. Kansas collects about $6,597 per resident in state and local taxes, ranking 27th nationally, and spends $5,584 per resident, ranking 23rd (Pages 12 and 14). That is not a low-tax, lean-government model. It is a middle-of-the-pack approach with below-average results.

Now compare that to the states that are actually winning. The Green Book shows that no-income-tax states average just $3,826 per resident in spending, far below Kansas's $5,584 per resident (Pages 14 and 15). That gap matters. States that spend less can tax less. States that tax less tend to grow more.

Kansas is choosing a different path.

Property taxes are where Kansans feel it most. And this is not just a mill rate issue—it is a structural problem. The report shows 40 of 105 counties saw property tax collections more than triple between 1997 and 2025, even while some populations declined (Pages 25, 26, and 27). That is not growth. That is a system where the government keeps expanding regardless of demand.

The burden shows up in real comparisons. Wichita ranks 31st-highest nationally in urban homestead property taxes and 11th-highest in urban commercial property taxes, while Iola ranks 5th-highest in rural homestead property taxes and 1st-highest in rural commercial property taxes (Pages 28 to 39). Those are not outliers. They are signals that Kansas is overloading property owners relative to other states.

Why is this happening? Too much government at too many levels.

Kansas ranks 48th in residents per general-purpose government unit, with just 1,493 residents per unit compared to a national average of 8,806 (Page 16). That means more overlapping jurisdictions, more administrative overhead, and more duplication. And all of it has to be funded by taxpayers.

In some counties, the report shows that government jobs account for more than a third, and sometimes more than half, of total employment. That is not a private-sector growth strategy. That is a sign the public sector has crowded out productive activity.

Put it all together, and the pattern is clear. Kansas is not losing because of one bad policy. It is losing because of a system that costs too much and delivers too little in terms of growth.

And here is where the argument needs to be clear. This is not about chasing the lowest taxes for their own sake. It is about recognizing that cost matters in a competitive economy.

When states like Texas, Florida, and Tennessee keep their costs lower—especially by avoiding income taxes and controlling spending—they attract more people, more investment, and more opportunity. Kansas does not have to guess what works. The evidence is already there.

The Green Book makes another critical point: reducing state taxes alone is not enough if local government continues to expand. The benefits of state-level reform are diluted by a fragmented local system that keeps pushing property taxes higher. That is why real reform has to address both state spending and local government structure simultaneously.

So what needs to change?

Kansas needs fewer layers of government, not more. This requires spending that grows more slowly than the average taxpayer's ability to pay for it. Property tax relief comes from controlling spending, not shifting burdens around. And there is a need for a tax system that rewards work and investment instead of penalizing them. Most of all, it needs to stop settling.

Kansas is not failing overnight. It is falling behind year by year, ranking by ranking, decision by decision. In a world where people and businesses can move, that kind of slow drift is exactly how states lose.

The good news is that it is fixable. But only if lawmakers stop confusing average with acceptable—and start making Kansas competitive again.

Legal Notice
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NOTICE OF PRIMARY ELECTION

To the County Election Officer of **Sumner County, Kansas**:

A Primary Election will be held August 4, 2026. Candidates for the following offices will be nominated by each political party which has qualified to participate in the Primary Election:

- One candidate for United States Senate
- One candidate for United States House of Representatives, 4th District
- One candidate for Governor / Lt. Governor
- One candidate for Secretary of State
- One candidate for Attorney General
- One candidate for State Treasurer
- One candidate for Commissioner of Insurance
- One candidate for State Representative, 79th, 80th, 82nd & 116th Districts
- One candidate for County Commissioner District No. 1
- One candidate for County Commissioner District No. 3
- One candidate for Township Clerk in the following Townships: Avon, Belle Plaine, Bluff, Caldwell, Chikaskia, Conway, Creek, Dixon, Downs, Eden, Falls, Gore, Greene, Guelph, Harmon, Illinois, Jackson, London, Morris, Osborne, Oxford, Palestine, Ryan, Seventy-Six, South Haven, Springdale, Sumner, Valverde, Walton, Wellington

The following officers will be elected in each political party which has qualified to participate in the Primary Election:

- One Precinct Committeeman in each Precinct.
- One Precinct Committeewoman in each Precinct.

Avon, Belle Plaine H79, Belle Plaine Part A, Belle Plaine Part B, Bluff, Caldwell City Ward 1, Caldwell City Ward 2, Caldwell, Chikaskia, Creek, Dixon, Falls, Greene, Guelph, Harmon, Illinois, London, Morris, Mulvane City, Osborne, Oxford, Palestine, Ryan, Seventy - Six, South Haven, Springdale, Sumner, Walton, Belle Plaine H82, Belle Plaine H82 Part A, Gore H82-32, Seventy-Six H80, Wellington H80, Wellington H80 A, Conway H116, Conway H79, Downs H79, Downs H80, Eden H116, Eden H79, Gore H79, Gore H82, Jackson H79, Jackson H80, Valverde H79, Valverde H80, Wellington H79, Wellington Part A H80, Wellington Part B H80, Wellington Part C H80, Wellington Part B, Wellington City Airport, Wellington Lake Exclave, Gore Township Enclave, Mulvane City Exclave A, Mulvane City Exclave B, Wellington 1, Wellington 2

NOTE: For publication of this notice as it applies to your county, refer to K.S.A. 25-204.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I hereto set my hand and cause to be affixed my official seal. Done at the City of Wellington, Sumner County, State of Kansas this 30th day of March, 2026.

SEAL
Debra A Norris, County Clerk
Sumner County Election Officer

Consumer Alert: Sunday's storm damage could attract unregistered contractors

TOPEKA – (April 27, 2026) – Kansas Attorney General Kris Kobach is urging Kansas residents to use caution to avoid scams by unregistered contractors following yesterday evening's storms. Kansas experienced hail damage in Allen, Bourbon, Butler, Coffey, Dickinson, Elk, Ellsworth, Greenwood, Marion, McPherson, Montgomery, Morris, Neosho, Rice, Russell, Saline, and Woodson counties, as well as damaging winds in Anderson, Cherokee, Labette, Linn, Marion, McPherson, Miami, Montgomery, Osage and Woodson counties. There was also tornado activity in Labette, Montgomery, and Wilson counties.

"After a storm, our instinct is to clean up and make repairs as quickly as possible," Kobach said. "When considering roofing work on a home or business, it is important that consumers make sure their roofing contractor is properly registered before signing any contract or having any work done."

Consumers should request a copy of their roofing contractor's registration certificate or the company's registration number. Consumers may confirm the company's registration has an "In Good Standing" status at https://www.ag.ks.gov/divisions/public-protection/resources/roofing-registration-directory#!/.

Working with a roofer that is registered is a bare minimum to help prevent problems. The attorney general's office also recommends the following tips in dealing with any unregistered contractors, including roofers:

Get recommendations and references.

Get at least three written estimates from different contractors.

Check contractor complaint records with the Better Business Bureau.

Understand your payment options and right to cancel.

Staff from the attorney general's Roofing Registration Unit have been in contact with local officials to assist in responding to roofing contractors and consumers. The requirement to register with the attorney general's office is in addition to any other local requirements that may be imposed by cities or counties.

With few exceptions, the Kansas Roofing Contractor Registration Act requires roofing contractors to obtain a registration certificate from the Kansas Attorney General in order to legally solicit or provide commercial or residential roofing services for a fee in Kansas. It is designed to ensure that legitimate roofing contractors are complying with state requirements, such as carrying appropriate insurance, and to help prevent fly-by-night operators from taking advantage of Kansas consumers.

The attorney general requests that Kansans promptly report any unregistered person or company attempting to sell roofing services. Any Kansans, who have problems with unregistered roofing contractors, may report the occurrence to the attorney general's Civil Division, Licensing and Inspections Unit on the website at https://www.ag.ks.gov/file-a-complaint/report-an-unregistered-roofer#!/ or by calling 785.368.6644.

Answer to Puzzle on page 9

Answer to Sudoku Puzzle on page 9

2	5	8	9	7	4	6	1	3
3	1	4	2	8	6	7	9	5
7	9	6	3	1	5	2	8	4
6	8	2	5	9	7	4	3	1
1	4	9	6	3	8	5	7	2
5	7	3	1	4	2	9	6	8
9	3	7	4	2	1	8	5	6
4	6	1	8	5	9	3	2	7
8	2	5	7	6	3	1	4	9

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