

# Schwab lays out ‘kindness and policy’ vision for ’26 gubernatorial run

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*Secretary of State Scott Schwab presides over Kansas' Electoral College count on Dec. 17, 2024. (Credit: Brett Stover)*

Editor's note: This is the first of a series of interviews with candidates.

Kansas gubernatorial candidate Scott Schwab is repulsed by the vitriol permeating the political landscape at the state and national levels.

Possessing peak name-recognition as Kansas’ two-term Secretary of State, Schwab said if he’s elected governor in 2026 he would work to diffuse political discourse running rampant in the Statehouse, while also prioritizing property tax relief.

“During a time of rhetoric where we try to blow each other up on social media — as leaders, we need to go back to the days where we love our brother, love our neighbor, and we express that through kindness and policy,” the Republican told State Affairs in a wide-ranging interview.

Schwab, 52, added that he has a track record unlike any other candidate who has

signaled intentions to run for governor, having won hotly contested elections in both legislative and executive branches.

“I not only have legislative-institutional knowledge, but now I have almost eight years of administrative experience as Secretary of State,” Schwab said. “And those who have announced can’t say that.”

The only other announced candidates for the governor’s seat so far are Republican contenders former Gov. Jeff Colyer, podcaster Doug Billings, and former Johnson County commissioner Charlotte O’Hara.

Senate President Ty Masterson, R-Andover, is expected to run but hasn’t yet announced. Sen. Cindy Holsher, D-Overland Park, has signaled intentions to run for governor or U.S. Senate.

Masterson, who recently told State Affairs that he wants to ensure “all his ducks are in a row” before announcing, would transform the race.

## Property tax relief

In addition to credentials that he says reflects political versatility, Schwab said he has another card to play against any current GOP lawmaker who might enter the race: Republicans’ failure to enact property tax relief during the 2025 session despite campaigning hard on the issue during the 2024 election cycle. After several failed proposals, including one aimed at trimming the mill levy, lawmakers instead enacted a plan to trigger a flat income tax by reaching certain thresholds.

Schwab recently drew the ire of Republican leadership after leveling critical remarks about the lack of property tax relief despite holding supermajorities in both chambers. Schwab said he prefers to remain in his own lane and that it was uncharacteristic of him to criticize the Legislature.

“But when you’re campaigning on property taxes, people are giving money to get that done,” he said. “And if you don’t get it done, you need to be held accountable.”

He also said he found it “interesting” that Democratic leadership weren’t on the same page as Gov. Laura Kelly — who repeatedly urged caution on the property tax relief front.

“It’s the governor who didn’t want to do anything, so I don’t know why the Democrats are up in arms,” he said.

Schwab said he plans to make property tax relief a central tenet of his campaign platform. In addition to any mill levy reductions, Schwab said an audit of the appraisal process is necessary.

“We have to have an appraisal process that is significantly more fair to the taxpayer than it is today,” he said. “And the appeals process needs to be more fair to the taxpayer as well.”

## Fiscally conservative mindset

Schwab said he would bring a fiscally conservative management style to the governor’s office. Consensus revenue estimate projections unveiled in April showed that the state is continually outspending its revenue to the tune of \$800 million annually. The Consensus Revenue Estimating Group projected a negative ending balance of \$730.5 million in fiscal year 2029 with current spending levels.

“We’re on a trajectory where the state government is going to be upside down — so we have to make sure that every agency either does a cut, modernizes, or both.” Schwab said, adding that cutting agencies by 1% “really changes the out-years” in the budget. Modernizing and doing things more efficiently saves government money.”

Schwab pointed to fallout from the 2008 financial crisis that resulted in seismic funding cuts and job loss in the realm of K-12 education — eventually leading to lawsuits centered on the public school system’s funding formula.

## Education

The Kansas Supreme Court in February ended its jurisdiction over the high-profile *Gannon v. Kansas* school funding lawsuit that initially centered on a lack of “adequate and equitable” funding of the K-12 education system via the state’s school finance formula.

Following the court decision, education leaders have expressed renewed concern that legislative decision-making could lead back down a path of inadequate funding. Potential recommendations from the Education Funding Task Force could facilitate tweaks to the finance formula that public schools advocates would not be in favor of.

The Legislature will vote on a new finance formula in 2027, the first year of the new governor’s term. Schwab doesn’t want the state to face another lawsuit, saying the Legislature should find ways to keep the courts out of K-12 funding.

“We had a special session in 2005, and it was unheard of when the court told the Legislature they had to spend money,” Schwab said. “And so that completely destroyed the ongoing conversation to have a good formula that the state can afford.

“... Now, the court puts us in a position where we had to have tax increases to obey

the court. [If elected governor], I would encourage the Legislature to stand up to the court. They are an equal branch and should not have to cave. We have to get the Kansas Supreme Court out of the conversation on K-12, because then we can fund schools in an efficient manner that is fair to all school districts.”

Vouchers, or scholarship programs, would redirect tax dollars earmarked for public K-12 schools to help offset the costs of private education. Critics of vouchers assert that such programs are designed to subsidize private school tuition for individuals who often can already afford it.

Schwab said he is squarely in favor of school choice, adding that he “likes competition.”

“I think schools would be held better accountable if I could use some tax dollars to educate my son in a school that’s more fit for him,” said Schwab. “Some kids just don’t do well in a public setting. It’s just not their environment.

“I grew up in a small public school in Great Bend, Kansas, and it was great for me. When I would go to some of the bigger schools, like in Wichita, I was intimidated. And it was interesting, during COVID, my area private school was open. Public schools were closed. You’re paying a lot in property taxes for your kid not to go to class — and I think [students] should have been able to use that money to go to a school that was willing to do in-class learning.”

## Election security bills

As the state’s elections chief, Schwab distanced himself from consequential “election security” bills passed during the 2025 session, adding that he respects the separation of powers.

Senate Bill 4 abolished the state’s three-day grace period for advance mail-in ballots — meaning that mailed ballots have to be received by 7 p.m. on Election Day.

House Concurrent Resolution 5004, a constitutional amendment, alters language clarifying that noncitizens can’t vote — and House Bill 2020 was another in the bevy of bills aimed at tightening election security. Designed to purge non-U.S. citizens from voter rolls, the bill requires the Kansas Department of Revenue’s vehicles division to supply the Secretary of State’s Office with quarterly reports listing Kansas residents in possession of a temporary driver’s license.

“I didn’t sign or vote for anything,” Schwab said. “The policy makers make the policy and we’re just going to execute on what the Legislature tells us to do. And I think the electorate appreciates that.”

Critics of SB4, including Kelly, contend that the elimination of the grace period will

lead to the disenfranchisement of Kansas voters, while ushering in other unintended consequences.

Schwab signaled that it has its pluses. “I’ve been very vocal about the Post Office and its inefficiencies, and this [bill] solves a lot of those [ballot] problems,” he said.

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