



Stokes' commitment gives Kansas jolt of adrenaline

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Understaffing may delay payments

Kansas congressman wants USDA to address staff shortages

Jason Alatidd
Topeka Capital-Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Understaffing at U.S. Department of Agriculture offices in Kansas has caught the attention of Topeka's congressman, who is asking President Donald Trump's administration to address the issue, which could cause delayed payments to farmers from the trade war

bailout program.

U.S. Rep. Derek Schmidt, R-Kansas, signed onto a letter with 14 other Republican members of Congress that he described as "urging immediate action to address staffing shortages at local Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service offices."

"To deliver on the promises made to American agriculture, USDA must ensure local offices are staffed and

equipped," Schmidt said in a statement. "These programs are essential to managing risk, supporting conservation, and keeping operations running. Reliable, timely service is critical to the success of producers and rural communities across Kansas and the country."

A Schmidt spokesperson told The Capital-Journal, "The Congressman has

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U.S. Rep. Derek Schmidt, R-Kansas, signed onto a letter about understaffing at the USDA.

JASON ALATIDD/TOPEKA CAPITAL-JOURNAL

Kansas governor awards Order of the Sunflower



Michelle Rone wipes a tear away from her eye before accepting the inaugural Order of the Sunflower award by Gov. Laura Kelly inside the Statehouse on April 28. Rone is the wife of Fort Riley Maj. Gen. Monté L. Rone.

PHOTOS BY EVERT NELSON/TOPEKA CAPITAL-JOURNAL

First lady of the U.S. Army 1st Infantry Division recognized

Stacey Saldanha-Olson
Topeka Capital-Journal | USA TODAY NETWORK

Gov. Laura Kelly is hoping to start a new Kansas tradition.

On April 28, Kelly presented the inaugural Order of the Sunflower award to Michelle Rone, first lady of the U.S. Army 1st Infantry Division.

"Today, we're here not just to recognize one extraordinary individual, but to begin a new tradition," Kelly said. "One that reflects the very best of who we are as a state. The Order of the Sunflower was created to honor individuals whose service all happens behind the scenes and whose impact is built across entire communities."

The award will be used to recognize military spouses or family, community leaders and government employees for work that has "a significant impact on the military installation and community where they serve."

Who is Michelle Rone?

Rone is the wife of Maj. Gen. Monté L. Rone and has served as the first lady of the infantry division at Fort Riley for two years.

"I have the absolute pleasure to serve with incredible spouses and families on Fort Riley," Rone said.



Michelle Rone accepts the Order of the Sunflower award by Gov. Laura Kelly during a ceremony at the Statehouse on April 28.

Rone has been a military spouse for 30 years. She said her favorite part has been meeting new people and recommends other military families "blossom where they're planted."

Rone is the first person to receive Kelly's new award. "It is so overwhelming and just humbling, and I'm just incredibly grateful," she said.

In Kelly's speech she said Rone exemplifies what it Kansas represents.

"As the first lady, the 1st Infantry Division in Fort Ri-

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The Kansas Law Enforcement Memorial services are held annually at the Statehouse in Topeka to honor officers who died in the line of duty.

KEISHERA LATELY/TOPEKA CAPITAL-JOURNAL

Services to honor 4 fallen officers

Stacey Saldanha-Olson
Topeka Capital-Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Four Kansas officers who were killed in the line of duty last year are being recognized April 30 and May 1 during the annual Kansas Law Enforcement Memorial services.

Undersheriff Brandon Gaede, of Phillips County; deputy Elijah Ming, of Wyandotte County; officer Hunter Simoncic, of Wyandotte County; and Sgt. Scott Heimann, of Ellis County were killed while working in 2025.

What is the Law Enforcement Memorial Ceremony?

Each year, various Kansas law enforcement agencies collaborate to honor those who died in the line of duty the year prior.

"The memorial honors those people who gave the ultimate sacrifice in performing their law enforcement duties," said Doug Wood, chairman of the Law Enforcement Memorial Advisory Committee.

The events begin with a Memorial Candlelight Vigil, sponsored by the Fraternal Order of Police, Topeka Lodge #3, on April 30 in the first-floor rotunda of the Kansas Statehouse.

At 8 p.m. April 30, there will be a candle-lighting ceremony at the

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