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Probst defeats Sweely in rematch

Matt Resnick
Special to The Capital-Journal



Probst

The clock will soon strike midnight on Hutchinson Rep. Kyler Sweely's brief tenure in the Kansas Statehouse, after the freshman lawmaker was dispatched by rival Jason Probst in a tightly contested election rematch.

Sweely, a Republican, saw his two-year term marred by controversy, including an incident on the House floor in which he play-acted a tank commander opening fire on Probst.

Probst, D-Hutchinson, was unable to parlay his incumbency status into re-election to the House in 2024, falling in a bruising campaign to Sweely, a political newcomer and U.S. Army veteran.

But Probst returned to the campaign trail this year, recapturing his seat after bouncing Sweely in the Nov. 3 election rematch. Despite ample financial backing that enabled Sweely to outspend Probst by a wide margin, he was still dealt a stinging defeat.

'Wanted to remember the emotion'

In a social media post, Probst reminisced on the emotional roller coaster he experienced in 2024, describing his thoughts as he surveyed the room during his election night gathering after losing to Sweely.

"I wanted to remember the emotion of two years ago," he said. "I was so alone, looking out at the room of people who had put so much time and energy

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Seniors push for Medicaid expansion

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ABOVE: Kansas Silver Haired Legislature delegates, from left, are Mary Penrose and Mary Calhoun, who represent Johnson County, and Harvey County delegate Arnita Haury. PROVIDED BY CINDY TANNEHILL

TOP: Advocates of Medicaid expansion hold a rally in the Kansas Statehouse in 2023. The subject will be the Kansas Silver Haired Legislature's top priority going into the 2027 session. TOPEKA CAPITAL-JOURNAL FILE

For the Kansas Silver Haired Legislature, an entity composed of people 60 and older who work to identify issues important to seniors, Medicaid expansion is at the very top of its wishlist as the 2027 legislative session rapidly approaches. • A seismic political shift that upended the Kansas House GOP's supermajority could provide a crucial opening for the state to finally opt into full Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act. • "There is such a strong feeling right now about health care for seniors," Chuck Schmidt, who serves as the Silver Haired Legislature's speaker pro tem, told The Capital-Journal.

Schmidt added that the issues the Silver Haired Legislature is advocating for "are what Kansans want," citing Fort Hays State's annual Kansas Speaks survey showing that nearly seven in 10 respondents were in favor of Medicare expansion.

If enacted, expanded Medicaid would increase reimbursement rates for medical providers. Currently, Kansas is one of 10 remaining states holding out on the pivotal health care measure.

Roughly 150,000 Kansans, including more than 16,000 seniors in their early to mid-60s, fall into an insurance coverage gap. Those individuals typically earn too much to qualify for the state's KanCare program, which administers Medicare, but are also unable to afford private insurance coverage.

"I think (lawmakers) are listening and willing to work on some of our senior citizen items," said Leroy Burton, who serves as speaker for the Silver Haired Legislature.

Burton added that things "just feel positive" to him as legislators gear up for the upcoming session.

Medicaid expansion, a Democratic-led issue in the Sunflower State, has been fervently pushed by Gov. Laura Kelly. During Kelly's eight years in office, the state's GOP supermajorities have held tight in blocking the measure at every turn.

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Nuclear power future in Kansas

Cost is prohibitive, but AI firms could foot bill

Jason Alatidd
Topeka Capital-Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

It is not currently economically viable for an electric utility to build new nuclear power plants in Kansas, a state regulatory official told lawmakers last month.

But it could happen anyway, especially if artificial intelligence companies foot the bill as part of AI data center developments.

"A new nuclear unit in the state of Kansas today is not economically viable, given the other alternatives that we have to produce electricity in our state," said Justin Grady, director of utilities at Kansas Corporation Commission.

"But there's a caveat in that if there was a hyperscaler large tech company that has very aggressive carbon-free energy production goals, and one of those entities wanted to backstop and underwrite the construction cost risk and the financing risk associated with the new nuclear unit, we do have the tools that can make that possible in the state of Kansas."

Grady's comments to lawmakers at an Oct. 27 meeting of a special committee on energy came during a day-long hearing dedicated to hearing multiple expert perspectives on nuclear energy. Among the other people to testify were federal government officials and company leaders.

Utility regulator explains cost difference between nuclear and natural gas

Grady said, based on investment research reports, the levelized cost of energy for a new nuclear plant is estimated at around $150 per megawatt-hour — after taking tax subsidies into consideration. The unsubsidized cost would be even higher.

"Large nuclear reactors and small modular nuclear reactors have about the same estimated economics actually right now," he said. "The math that goes into $150 a megawatt-hour for a large nuclear unit is that's going to be

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