

# BUDGET

Continued from A1

"I think it is an inflated number," Inscore said.

She told the commissioners to find places to cut and make the budget work without increasing taxes.

"The money is there, you don't need extra money," Inscore said. "Figure out what you can cut."

Inscore, who created a satirical Facebook page that criticizes Osawatomie city leaders for overspending and strict codes enforcement, threatened to create a similar page for Miami County if commissioners don't cut the budget.

She also threatened to file Kansas Open Records Act (KORA) requests to sift through the county's financials so she could find what to cut.

"If you guys can't find out where the bloat and waste is, I will," Inscore said.

She added that she believes property taxes are theft by the government.

"We as a free people should never have to pay rent to the government for a house we already paid for," Inscore said.

Courtney Crawford questioned why the commissioners chose not to go revenue neutral this year but instead possibly do it next year. She asked if it had to do with it being an election year next year.

Crawford also questions the salary increases the past three years.

Ron Kalcic said his taxes have gone from \$5,000 to \$9,500 in five years. He said a large portion of his retirement funds are going to pay taxes in Miami County.

"Live with what you have, like I have to," Kalcic said.

Kristin Graue also asked the commissioners to stop increasing taxes.



File photo

Miami County commissioners listened to multiple people speak during budget hearings Wednesday, Aug. 27, at the Miami County Administration Building. The commissioners approved the 2026 budget after cutting an additional \$450,000.

"There are always things that can be done to live within your means," Graue said.

Oliver Tanner of Osawatomie said he is 90 percent disabled from the military, and in 2021 he purchased a half acre of land for \$7,000. He said he hopes to someday have the money to build a small home on the property, but in four years it has jumped in appraised value to more than \$17,000.

"The hopes and dreams of my family are not your piggy bank," Tanner said. "My money is not going to increase because you want more of it."

Michael McCoy of Osawatomie also talked about the skyrocketing appraisals of his property during the past five years.

"It's killing us," he said.

Julie McWilliams was near tears when she stepped up to the podium to speak.

"I don't have a house here anymore, I just have land because you've already run me out," she said. "Please do something and stop spending money because we don't have it anymore."

After the public hearings were closed, Commissioner Jene Vickrey recommended cutting \$200,000 from the Miami County Health Department that was planned to offset a loss of grant funding.

Commissioner Tyler Vaughan also suggested reducing the asphalt increase from \$750,000 to \$500,000, saving another \$250,000.

Vickrey agreed, and so did Commissioner Keith Diediker, even though Diediker pointed out that it's going to put the asphalt budget behind schedule.

Commissioner Paul Scruggs said he pushed for the asphalt increase, and he is not in favor of reducing it.

"Anything that costs this county more money down the road, I'm not in favor of," Scruggs said. "We kick the can down the road until someone else deals with it, and now we're dealing with it."

Vaughan said the \$500,000 increase would help get the asphalt budget back to where it needs to be.

"We're going in the right direction," Vaughan said. "We can't do everything in one year."

Vaughan also addressed the audience members, saying that the commission always strives to not raise taxes, but rising property values have been part of the housing market.

"We pay the same taxes as you," Vaughan said. "We aren't the enemy."

Vaughan also said the timing of an election year has nothing to do with it, as the county has gone



Miami County livestream

Ron Kalcic speaks to Miami County commissioners during a budget hearing Wednesday, Aug. 27. Kalcic asked them to "live with what you have, like I have to."

revenue neutral in years that didn't have an election.

Scruggs countered by saying the county took \$2 million out of cash reserves last year for road and bridge to be revenue neutral, and he thinks it could have been for political purposes.

Pretz disagreed and pointed out that if that was the plan, it didn't work, because Scruggs won his race against former Commissioner Rob Roberts.

Pretz said being revenue neutral is always the goal, but it is not always possible.

"We want to do that every year if we can," Pretz said.

Vickrey suggested reducing the raise for county employees to 3 percent, and Scruggs agreed, but the other commissioners did not agree. Diediker said the road and bridge department just lost a couple of employees due to salary.

The commissioners eventually voted 4-1 to approve the 2026 budget with the \$450,000 reduction from the cuts to the health department and asphalt budget. Scruggs voted against the motion.



Miami County livestream

Julie McWilliams tearfully asks Miami County commissioners to stop spending money because people like her can't afford to pay. "I don't have a house here anymore, I just have land because you've already run me out," she said.



Miami County livestream

Polly Inscore of Osawatomie asks Miami County commissioners to find places to cut the budget so taxes won't continue to increase.

## Soetaert running for U.S. Senate seat

BY BRIAN MCCUALEY  
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Michael Soetaert, a Spring Hill native who currently lives in Wellington, Kan., has filed to run for U.S. Senate in 2026.

Soetaert is running as a Democrat, although he has run as a Republican in the past.

"I am a forward thinking, independent minded, progressive Democrat,"

Soetaert states on his website at [mikeforkansas.my.canva.site/](http://mikeforkansas.my.canva.site/). "In Kansas, we have only two major parties with a ballot line. The choice is between blue or red. Democratic or Republican parties are the only viable choices for serious candidates and voters. The Soetaert family is extremely nonpartisan. So am I."

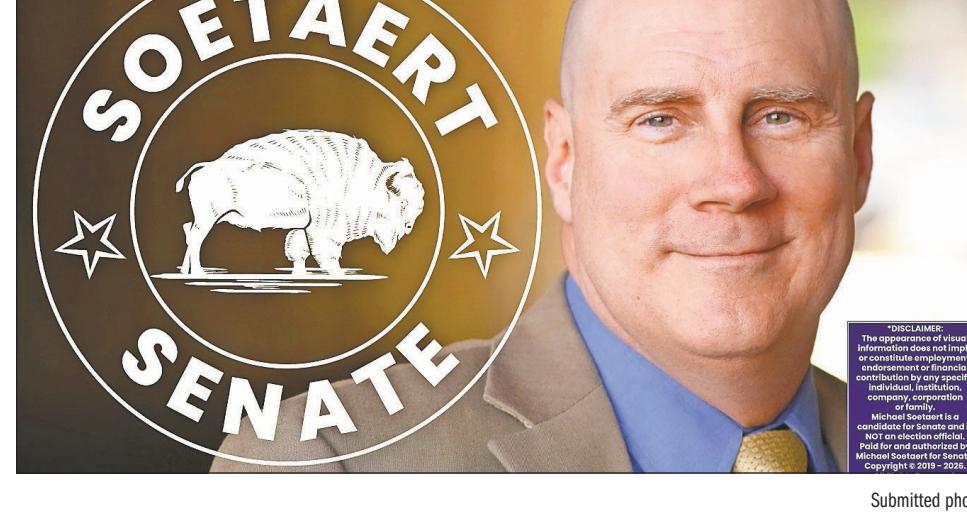
Soetaert, who grew up in Spring Hill and graduated from Spring Hill High

School in 1982, said he was adopted at birth into a Roman Catholic family that has deep Midwestern roots and European origins.

However, he said he has always believed that bodily autonomy is paramount in decisions regarding reproductive freedom.

"I respect reproductive rights because they are essential to women's rights," Soetaert states on his website. "These decisions are very intimate and personal and aren't the purview of politicians. Most Kansans don't want these issues to be legislated or regulated in Topeka or Washington D.C."

Soetaert also is a supporter of the LGBTQ+ community, and he said he is the first openly



Submitted photo

Michael Soetaert is running for U.S. Senate in 2026. He is a Spring Hill native who currently lives in Wellington, Kan.

gay candidate to run for U.S. Senate representing Kansas.

Soetaert is seeking the U.S. Senate seat currently held by Kansas Republican Dr. Roger Marshall. The

2026 primary election is set for Aug. 4, followed by the general election Nov. 3.

Soetaert is currently the only candidate to officially file with the Kansas

Secretary of State, according to the secretary's website.

Soetaert is also running unopposed for a Wellington City Council seat in November.

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