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## Local legislator eyes major tax reform

BY KELLY BRECKUNITCH  
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*Editor's note: This is the third in a series of stories on the continuing rise of property taxes and avenues pursued to provide relief.*

While the Kansas Legislature may be adjourned for another year, before the closing of the most recent session, House Speaker Pro Tempore and local representative Blake Carpenter – of Derby's 81st District – planted the seeds to consider some massive change in 2026.

Back in March, Carpenter introduced a constitutional amendment to end both property and income taxes collected by the state. Being brought up late in the session, Carpenter did not expect action. Rather, the amendment was proposed to begin talks toward real change starting in 2026.

The Freedom from Taxes Fund Carpenter pitched would establish a protected financial reserve where the principal would be untouched while interest generated would eliminate state property and income taxes over a number of years. The system would operate similar to a retirement or endowed fund and akin to Norway's Sovereign Wealth Fund.

"It was a bunch of ideas that I'd had over the last two or three years, and they all just kind of meshed together to make



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**State representative Blake Carpenter (R-Derby) is shown speaking during a previous legislative session. During the latest session, Carpenter introduced a constitutional amendment that would drastically change tax policy in Kansas – change he is looking to set into motion next year.**

this policy," Carpenter said. "I was trying to figure out a way to where we don't just have \$1 billion or \$2 billion come back into the state general fund because that money's going to get spent like that. This is just a way for us to actually use that money to benefit all Kansans as we move forward."

How the Freedom from Taxes Fund would operate is a citizen-

led board would be established to review a full list of existing tax exemptions – amounting to \$9 billion currently – granted by the state, with the board determining which exemptions no longer serve their original purpose and should be eliminated.

Revenue from the repealed exemptions would then be deposited into the Freedom from Taxes Fund, which would

be invested – allowing interest to compound and increase over time. Based on the rate at which exemptions are repealed and interest is accrued, Carpenter estimated state property taxes could be eliminated in six to eight years once the constitutional amendment goes into effect. State income taxes could be eliminated in approximately 20 years. Like many legislators,

Carpenter heard the call to reduce property taxes the last two election cycles. This plan, he noted, would not replace immediate efforts to realize property tax relief – like the 1.5 mills cut during the 2025 session – but complement that action while looking at the bigger picture.

"I felt like this plan was a good parallel, long-term plan because we can still have all those debates that

we're having with short-term cuts to the budget, to taxes or whatever it is," Carpenter said, "and this thing [Freedom from Taxes Fund] is just growing and operating in the background until the day it's mature enough to actually replace and supplant those tax revenues."

While the 1.5 mills were eliminated this year, Carpenter's proposed fund would also look to replace the 20 mills of property taxes – administered at the local level – that go towards public education in Kansas, along with the state income taxes. Another tax the new policy would look to eliminate is the state vehicle property tax (generating \$450 million per year), which Carpenter said would likely be addressed first since it could be eliminated quickly – as soon as three years.

Once the initial goals are realized, "the world's our oyster" and Carpenter said other cuts could be identified to bring even more tax relief to Kansans.

For now, Carpenter is asking the tax committees in both the Kansas House and Senate to study his proposal before returning to session in January 2026 – hoping to have an interim committee day sometime over the summer. Ideally, the constitutional amendment regarding the Freedom

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## Panther eSports thriving on state level

BY CODY FRIESEN  
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The Derby High School eSports team has been building on success in every season and now holds some state bragging rights. The Panthers took home the Class 6A championship in a pair of video games at the end of April and are in the heat of competition in a statewide, all-class tournament to be crowned grand champion. Even though eSports is not a KSHSAA-sanctioned activity, its future is trending in the right direction.

There is a wide array of games to choose from for eSports competition, and the Derby eSports team focused on Overwatch 2 and Marvel Rivals this season. Overwatch has been a mainstay game for the Panthers over the last few seasons, while Marvel Rivals was added this season. The games task two opposing teams with completing objectives, like controlling and defending areas of the game map, using a wide array of characters.

The Panthers have worked hard across the school year to develop the right strategies and proper character lineup for



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**Derby High School eSports won the Class 6A tournament in Marvel Rivals and Overwatch 2 at the state championships at Pratt Community College on April 25. The Panthers took second in the all-class grand championships in Overwatch and are competing in the grand champion finals of Marvel Rivals. Pictured left to right: Coach Caitlin Hendrix, Ambrosio Aguayo, Jovany Guzman Alvarado, Conner Jones, David Royer, Cam Whitener and Dustin Anderson.**

success. Communication has been the biggest area of growth throughout the season.

"Communication is the hardest part," Overwatch 2 team captain David Royer said. "You have to focus on getting everyone on the same page and make sure we stay focused, even if things are not always going well."

In the past, Derby has competed in more regional

competitions against high school teams across the Midwest, but this year the team decided to focus on the competition among Kansas high schools, which has been rapidly growing. Last year, several eSports coaches around the state formed the Sunflower Showdown. At the time, the Panthers were already involved with a regional league, but chose to join in the 2024-

2025 school year.

"It is really fun to be playing other teams across the state," eSports coach Caitlin Hendrix said. "I like being a part of the bigger leagues because you go against a bunch of teams, but it is fun to go up against the Kansas teams to see where we stack up in the state."

Throughout the season, the Derby eSports team has faced teams from

across the state, such as El Dorado, Wellington, Liberal and Pratt. The matches are played online, and the Panthers typically use their setup at Derby High School.

On April 25, Derby traveled to Pratt Community College for the in-person state championships in Overwatch and Marvel Rivals. The Panthers got to Pratt at about 8 a.m. and did not leave until 1 a.m. the next morning, but the team left victorious with a pair of 6A state titles.

It was a unique experience for the team, as most competitions are played online. The team enjoyed getting to meet other teams. Derby High School alums Dmitryy Peebler and Joshua Packard are currently on the Pratt Community College eSports team, so the Derby players played video games while waiting for their matches to start.

"It was neat. We had some Pratt kids recognize us, and we got to play games with them while we waited for our matches to start," Dustin Anderson said. "We got to talk with some other schools that we don't always get to interact with, which was cool."

"It was really cool to

have the freedom to talk around and meet a lot of different players," Royer said. "It was a late night, but it was really fun to compete in that environment."

The grand championship tournaments needed to be postponed due to the late night, and are currently wrapping up. The Panthers took second in the Overwatch grand championships, losing to Wellington in the finals on April 30. The Panthers have had a strong season in Marvel Rivals and are in the grand champion finals in the game.

Hendrix has seen the team improve throughout the season in several different ways, with communication and teamwork being two key areas. In the last few years, she has seen young players join the eSports team and start to grow with their teammates.

"It is neat seeing eSports grow and seeing the players that have joined develop into leaders and great teammates," Hendrix said. "Everyone has grown in ability, communication and teamwork, and it is fun to see that growth."



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