

First Foreign Exclusive Interview With Senate Candidate Wayne Hodges II

Written by Patricia Turnier
Monday, 06 February 2012 16:08



In 1972, Wayne Hodges was born in the state of Kansas where he grew up in a family of three children. Mr. Hodges is the oldest of his siblings. Wayne Edward Hodges is the Editor-in-Chief of the "Mass Appeal Network" which was founded in 2010. He has written several political/economic/entertainment articles for the *Kansas City Kansan*, *Kansas City Star* and *Kansas City Call*

newspapers. In addition, he is a columnist for the *Topeka Democrat Examiner*

. Hodges attended St. Mary University where he graduated with honors Cum Laude for his MBA with a concentration in Finance. He received his MPA (Master of Public Administration) from the University of Kansas, as well as Academic All-American honors from the "Delta Epsilon Sigma National Honor Society" and "Who's Who Among Students in American Universities." Mr. Hodges' professional background includes over 12 years of experience in real estate appraisals, tax assessment, mortgage lending, income modeling and comparative market analysis. He owns real estate licenses in the states of Kansas and Missouri. He's a

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distinguished member of several prestigious professional organizations which include the *News paper Association of America, Kansas Association of Broadcasters, Mainstream Coalition, National Association of Real Estate Brokers, National Association of Realtors, American Planning Association*

, etc. Mr. Hodges has held many public offices. He served as Johnson County Precinct Committeeman 2nd Ward, Precinct #2 and as Johnson County District Committee Delegate. He is a democrat candidate (more specifically a loyal member of the Johnson County Democratic Party) for Kansas Senate; it is his second bid for the Kansas Senate 7th District seat. The Kansas Senate 7th District includes Fairway, Merriam, Mission, Mission Hills, Mission Woods, Prairie Village, Roeland Park, Westwood, Westwood Hills and part of Leawood and Overland Park.

The Kansas Senate election will be held on November 2nd, 2012 following the August 3rd primary. If elected, Mr. Hodges will become the youngest popular elected African-American Senator in U.S history and the first African-American State Senator in the Kansas State Legislature for the 21st century.

In addition to his political endeavors, Wayne Hodges does periodic radio/TV podcasts for Mass Appeal News and is also an adjunct professor at Park University. *Mega Diversities* spoke to him from Canada last summer. It is his first foreign exclusive interview and the first exclusive interview in his second bid as a U.S. Senate candidate.

PATRICIA TURNIER, LL.M TALKS TO SENATE CANDIDATE WAYNE HODGES, MBA AND MPA:

P.T. Present yourself in a few words to our worldwide readers and tell us how you define yourself as a leader.

W.H. My name is Wayne Hodges. I am the proud father of two children. I am a Senate candidate for district 7 in Kansas with a diverse background mainly in professorship, real estate and business. My leadership skills are polished with a strong work ethic. I know how to communicate my vision by setting principles. My leadership style is expansive, innovative, engaging and creative. I am a team player which is another important part in leadership. We live in an age of cooperative effort by sharing ideas, information and resources. Team work is crucial in politics. I think globally and I am open to listen to different points of view. I have experience in the diversity of opinions and cultures. I possess the capacity to work with various communities, including my own. I believe that our individual differences are our collective strength. My team and I will support and encourage diverse opinions (cultural...) and it will help us to build collective strength which can lead to more powerful and relevant solutions for our challenges. Kansas Democrats are committed to putting the people of Kansas first by promoting the values and policies that advance the common good and expand opportunities for every resident of our state. As a Senator candidate, I will follow these principals in my

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leadership.

P.T. What made you decide to run for office?

W.H. Most importantly, I want to contribute to my community. With my knowledge of economics, among others, I am very confident that I can be instrumental in sharing my competency at the State House for the benefit of the population, especially with the financial crises that we are facing. I have a lot of experience in different realms which make me a multi competent candidate. I also wish to provide leadership to young people from my district. We definitely need the involvement of younger people on the political landscape. I am 39-years-old so, I can bring an element of youth and positive change to the Senate. It is my second bid. I ran two years ago and I received 40% of the votes as a freshman candidate. I gained more experience since then and we will see what happens in 2012.

P.T. Why do you think you are the best Senate candidate for Kansas? In other words, what qualities or attributes must a Senator possess to be a representative of your state and which ones do you have?

W.H. The perspectives that I can bring to the Senate are unique. I have the abilities to use a plurality of approaches. When I operate from that frame, the voices of many people will be reflected. I will exercise my business and teaching backgrounds to become an important asset in the State House. I meet with entrepreneurs and legislators around my town and elsewhere in the country on a regular basis. I also believe that my youth will bring a breath of fresh air into the Senate. I am part of the Generation X recognized in its entirety as ethnically diverse, better educated than the Baby Boomers, resourceful, flexible, technologically adept and so on. Over 60% of us attended college. Younger people are underrepresented in the State House and their voice needs to be heard. If everyone is thinking alike then someone is not thinking.

There are **two** things right now which are killing tax payers. **The first one** is education. There is an education crisis in America mainly in the public sector. As I said earlier, I have solid professorship experience. I understand the struggles, the challenges of the teachers and the students. My long curriculum in education testifies to how I take this realm seriously. My pedagogical background allows me to assess complex matters related to education which I will be able to apply as a senator if elected. In addition, beside education I have working experience in the field of social services as a case worker. In this regards, I am definitely in tune with what's hampering in these respective areas and what's needed, not only to preserve

education and social services, but advance these causes.

The second issue which is killing tax payers is related to real estate. Around 2005, bankers made a lot of profits from subprime lending. However, the housing and finance markets were not the same, but bankers around the country continued to take the kind of risks that created the collapse of the mortgage industry. New strategies are required and with my background in real estate, I will definitely use my knowledge to propose concrete plans. I am a realtor with Reece Nichols in Prairie Village, Kansas. My professional experience also includes over 12 years of experience in property appraisals, county tax assessment (in Kansas), mortgage lending, commercial income modeling, credit card auditing and comparative market analysis. My background in real estate makes me understand what is at stake with the property values, accessible taxes and so on. Throughout my career, I did and conducted administrative tasks, managing budgets and doing financial analysis. I intend to bring these experiences to the State House to help the taxpayers.

I have a clear vision about the needs regarding the citizens of Kansas and I have been an active contributor in the community. My actions speak through my involvement in the community on different levels: as a professor, as the founder of CLIMB, as an administrator and financial expert. I have the competencies and skills to forge partnerships between many constituents: government (the state legislators, etc.), non-profit organizations, education boards, chambers of commerce, corporate sponsorships and so on. I know how to convey my ideas effectively and how to simplify complex subjects.

I also served as legislative intern under Kansas Senator Chris Steineger from January to April 2010. This experience was an important part of my professional development in politics. If elected, I will be open to new ideas and I will listen to the needs of the citizens. My academic and professional curricula taught me how to analyze complicated situations and identify multidimensional solutions. As a college professor, I learned how to develop and hone my communication skills which can definitely be useful in politics.

To finish, I will bring to the State House a diverse point of view. I believe that I am the best qualified given my polyvalent professional experiences to assess major issues with its inefficiencies and provide proactive solutions. As a Senator, I will use the knowledge base I have acquired throughout the years. For me, politics evoke change, the possibility to defend the interests and the projects of the citizens.

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P.T.▯ What will be your primary goals and priorities if elected and why? You talked a little bit about this previously, but can you elaborate on that?

W.H.▯ My primary goal is to focus on the improvement of the public education system. I intend to do that by making sure that our schools get adequate funding through the local authorities and districts. I consider this a main issue in Kansas city and in America as a whole. In the State House, I would make sure that we cut or modify the budget in other areas (after a thorough financial analysis) and use the money for supplementing public education. Most of our children are enrolled in the public education system and we have to ensure that they are equipped intellectually to be competitive in our country and worldwide.

In addition, Kansas Democrats believe in reviewing our state's tax structure to insure it is fair and represents Kansas values. Kansas Democrats will continue to fight to make sure that no single sector of our economy regarding groups or our citizens bears a disproportionate share of our tax burden. Kansas Democrats want to secure an economic safety net for all families. We support the services needed to help families regain their independence. I would also be interested in encouraging the private sector to create good jobs here in Kansas.

In recent years, Kansas Democrats have been proactive in sustaining the development of small businesses and the recruitment of new, high-tech industries to our state. We believe new opportunities in fields such as diverse Bio-Science research and rejuvenated energy hold great promise for our state's workers. We will maintain our efforts to favour the development of these industries in our state, as well as consolidate our existing industries, such as agriculture and manufacturing. In addition, we want to encourage exports of Kansas products.

Kansas Democrats also know that our economy and thousands of jobs depend on our transportation network which is why we support the completion of the Comprehensive Transportation Plan. So, as a senator, if elected I will sustain policies which favor the increase of the minimum wage because Kansas Democrats want employees to receive fair and equitable treatment and compensation for those who have been injured. We know the value of our public employees, and will continue to support market-based compensation for state employees, and sustain strengthened funding for the Kansas Public Employee Retirement System.

If elected as a member of the Senate, I will push to implement the necessary measures to rejuvenate the economy with short-and long-term plans. The policies that I will support will have to be about curtailing job opportunities overseas, providing incentives for domestic

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manufacturers and renewing the college education system to provide graduates with the experience necessary to gain top notch employment after school. Among other tools, I will seek community input, and our staff will use the diverse social media outlets (twitter...).

To conclude, I highly value education and economic development. I will advocate for legislation related to these domains. My vote as a senator will also directly impact funding and policies that will significantly determine services for minorities, young people and the elderly. More specifically, I will participate in the evaluation and revision of social services which benefit the elderly and disabled. Whatever revisions and adjustments are necessary will be made. I will plea for this.

P.T. As an MBA expert and Senate candidate what bills would you support that aim to help small businesses which comprise a huge segment of the U.S economy?

W.H. 70% of all new jobs come from small businesses which represent the backbone of our economy. In fact, the largest companies employ 10% of people who work temporary and part-time. The economic growth comes mostly from small and medium-sized businesses. So, I will definitely advocate for these enterprises. In addition, every time people talk about small businesses, it concerns property taxes. We hear a lot these days in the media about the Obama administration which will cut taxes for corporations. I think it is important to look at the tax rates within their specific districts. Once this is regulated and under control, I believe that small businesses will benefit from that. Many entrepreneurs worry about taxes. In this regard, I will champion policies related to reducing taxes for enterprises, especially small businesses which need support. According to the U.S. Small Business Administration, about roughly 66% of small businesses fail within the first four years. It is imperative to find ways to sustain these enterprises and make sure they remain competitive. This will leverage our global economy.

If elected, it will be also important as a senator to assess the budget to ensure that the money spent is in accordance with the taxpayers' investment. Currently, the U.S. GDP (Gross Domestic Product) grows at a rate of 2.5% or less and other countries such as China have a growth of about 10% annually. I will further support policies which prevent the U.S from having a less purchasing power than other countries.

P.T. In *Topeka Democrat Examiner* last July you penned a very interesting article entitled "College grads stuck with student loan debt and no jobs." What must the federal government and the state of Kansas do to decrease the unemployment and

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underemployment rate among the graduates?

W.H. The situation is like a catch 22. On one hand the society tells people, especially the youth that you have to go to college or university to get a good job. When they leave school, they have debts (the average grad student accumulates approximately \$100,000 in student loan debt). In addition, it is getting more and more difficult to find a job at the level of the degree earned or the area studied. Many studies demonstrate that it is hard to have a decent income. I don't think that it's realistic to say it is possible to decrease the unemployment or underemployment of graduates if the overall economy is not fixed. If there are no jobs to offer, there is no work to get. The consequences are serious because these students cannot reimburse their debts and some even have to move back to their parents' homes. This creates a dysfunctional system. People at every level are affected. There are jurisdictions where teachers are being fired rather being hired. As I said earlier, the education budget is not sufficient at every state level. It is an arduous situation. To finish, I believe that it is important to empower the youth and participate in eliminating the problem that plagues them, especially unemployment and underemployment. To make a long story short, if the economy is fixed, we will have the graduates entering the job market.

P.T. In the past, you mentioned to the media that you believe children deserve nothing less than a high quality education, a very important issue to you. What is your assessment of the educational system in Kansas and how do you intend to develop or support policies related to the protection of this realm as a future senator, if elected?

W.H. I think the quality of education in Kansas is very good so it needs to be maintained, but there is also always room for improvement. I am concerned about ending inequalities in the education system. Unfortunately, this issue still prevails in our nation. It is imperative to invest in pre-school; the younger the child is stimulated, his/her chances to make it as an adult will augment.

I spent my entire academic career at this state in several levels: elementary, middle school, high school and college. To develop or support policies we need the right funding. Nothing can be done to alleviate the problems without money. It is imperative to have the fiscal resources to provide and implement the outlined reforms in the educational system. As a Senator, I would be an advocate for the increase of the school district local option budget authority. Right now, because of a lack of funds, more schools are closing and we are losing programs. We have observed the layoffs or firings of teachers as I said earlier, this means that the sizes of classes are increasing and kids are learning less effectively than they should. This is not specific to Kansas, it is happening elsewhere in the States. In the curricula, the kids need to receive

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higher knowledge, and acquire skills in technological advances, math and other scientific fields. The standards in these realms have to be elevated. The system support in the educational field has to be stronger to help propel children to greater academic achievements. In the future, nearly two-thirds of all the jobs created will require a college degree.

I am in favor of supporting policies which will give incentives to teachers who are the backbone of the educational system. To achieve greatness, it is essential to give them better salaries, as well as generate the revenue necessary to keep our academic institutions competitive. In addition, these expenditures should be monitored very closely to ensure both compliance and fairness of distribution. Some countries have a billion more people than we do (such as China) where they train more engineers annually. We have to take these challenges into consideration and make sure that the future generations will be adequately educated to face the competitive job market. We need to keep in mind that the playing field has to be leveled. So, as a Senator, if elected I will definitely develop, support or reinforce public policies related to these issues which deserve top priority in the State House.

As a Senator if I observe that too much money is being invested in bureaucracy instead of meeting the concrete needs of our children in education, I will support the measures proposed to make cuts. It will be important to work with the constituents, such as the Kansas Board of Regents, to insure the betterment of the educational policies, programs, and services, in an effort to maintain and improve the quality of education in general in Kansas.

P.T. Since 2009, you have been the founder and chairman of Project CLIMB (Community Learning and Improvement through Motivational Building) for underprivileged children in the Kansas City Metro. Why was it important for you to create CLIMB and can you share with us its mission?

W.H. Project CLIMB is a non-profit organization directed towards increasing community awareness in the realms of education and crime prevention. It was important to create this entity to give more options and hope to our youth. CLIMB involves and incorporates different programs: outreach program toward parents to give them tools for improving the learning process of their children, business and leadership courses, community projects and activities for fundraisings, etc. In this regard, we plan to expand it in the State House in other areas of Kansas (Missouri and so on). We advocate for all the children of the district and continue to look for better ways to instruct them so they can reach their full potential and be uplifted. In addition, we want kids to be well-equipped to face the new challenges, such as automation and computerization, with the required structures.

P.T. What are the main achievements so far of Project CLIMB?

W.H. I would say that the first accomplishment is about building hope, motivation and inducement in our children. We encourage them to achievement through perseverance and hard work. We are helping them to believe that it is possible to complete high school and go further with their education in order to gain decent employment afterward. We refer them to tutorial services and internships. We offer services such as SAT/ACT and G.E.D. preparation classes, math and computer courses.

My team and I understand the struggles and challenges in inner-city communities: the chronic poverty which can lead to crimes, parental neglect, etc. We work with the children and the parents. We also collaborate with the people involved in these children's lives, such as the teachers (some of them are licensed at the Project CLIMB), the principals, the social workers, the community leaders, the executive boards. We are involved at the micro and macro levels through the schools' districts. We give community support to local businesses or corporations. It is our way to demolish as much as possible the obstacles that the children encounter. CLIMB believes in the potential and talents of each child by providing guidance.

P.T. You said to the media that social services and programs need to be evaluated to benefit the elderly and the disabled. Can you elaborate on that?

W.H. When you talk about the elderly and disabled it concerns two programs which are at stake: Medicare and Medicaid. These programs need to be rejuvenated. For the elderly, different services are being provided: cooking, cleaning, administration of medication, transportation and so on. The caregivers need support because they are the backbone for providing care to the elderly.

Investments in the home care services (for the elderly) are very important and I will support policies regarding this issue. The work provided by caregivers has to be recognized especially when some of them had to leave the job market to take care of their aging parents. These types of investments will control the costs related to placements in institutions (hospitals and nursing homes) and will limit the financial burden for future generations. The Denmark case is a great example to emulate. This country makes sure that the elderly receive in the community the right funding which help them get adequate services. We need to do the same.

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As a Senator, I would analyse the situation and see with my team how we can implement measures and develop strategies to improve the work of caregivers by for instance sustaining legislation which would give tax deductions to them, etc. These programs need more funding and not less. Unfortunately, we saw cuts right now in Kansas State for HCBS (Home and Community-Based Services) and so on. I would definitely be among the advocates fighting for these programs by going to Washington D.C to get more money. I want to add that Kansas Democrats recognize persons with disabilities as people who have abilities. We support the funding necessary for community-based services to help keep them independent and working as their abilities allow. This would be my contribution as a Senator.

P.T. □ As an expert in public administration, what is your opinion on the health care reform bill? □ Also, tell us what competencies associated with social services and health care would you bring to the table as a future policy maker?

W.H. □ Our health care system represents 1/7 of our economy. I am an advocate for universal health care. The U.S is the only nation among the industrial ones which does not offer universal health care to all citizens. It is not only important for Americans to get it, but also a matter of life and death. There is also definitely a link between health and poverty. Kansas families, seniors and businesses are all struggling with the increasing cost of health care. Kansas Democrats support expanding health insurance coverage for more Kansans and making health care more affordable. Under the leadership of Kansas Democrats, uninsured Kansans now have the opportunity to afford medicines at a significant discount through local pharmacies. This creative public-private partnership is an example of the progress that can be achieved when we work together. Kansas Democrats recognize the burden health insurance expenditures place on employers. We have strongly supported stimuli for small businesses to provide health insurance for their employees and we strongly oppugn efforts to cut these incentives.

As I said earlier, as a future policy maker I would supplement, with the right funding, the HCBS program and other services such as the meals on wheels. Again, we have to go to Washington and push for increases in Medicare, Medicaid and CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program). These three programs accounted for 21 percent of the national budget in 2010, or to be more precise \$732 billion. Regarding Social Security, another 20 percent of the national budget, or \$707 billion, was paid. Right now 42 million Americans have assistance through the food stamps. I would like this number to go down. The economy needs to be stimulated with job creation. This will make the people less dependent on the government. They need full-time jobs, not part-time which would maintain an underemployment status without benefits. Again, everything starts with the economy. It is important to assess the possibility of cost savings in the various operational and administrative functions.

The current economic downturn, in addition of severe budget shortfalls, has forced legislators to make some very difficult decisions. I believe that the Rainy Day Fund (a proposal offered in the Kansas Senate in 2009) could serve as a huge safety net. In other words, I am an advocate of constitutional amendment mandating the Rainy Day Fund. The sales tax increase, in my opinion, is also imperative to reduce the education budget cuts and preserve key social service programs; most notably for the frail, elderly and disabled. I have financial knowledge and related work experience. I would bring these skills to the table at the statehouse. My background would be instrumental in creating the conditions for an economic upturn and an improvement of social services.

P.T. What political icon dead or alive inspires you and why?

W.H. Dr. MLK is my inspiration. I am aware that seems a pretty popular answer [Laughs] but I am certainly a fan of his work through the civil rights movement. He was an apostle for political, legal and social justice. He was also an advocate for entrepreneurship, especially regarding the creation of small businesses. He stood for economic prosperity and financial equality. He was an activist for bringing money into the community. He felt that there was a need to build an economic network. He was a disciple of the principle to be a catalyst for change and social improvement. So, I respect Dr. King as a businessman and a civil rights advocate. I believe Dr. King is one of the greatest philanthropists that the U.S. ever had, and he is internationally recognized for his contribution. His name is linked with dauntlessness and noble character. He blazed a trail to emulate.

In addition, the “I have a Dream” speech is considered one of the most important speeches in history. Always optimistic, Dr. King always had faith in our nation and in humankind. His relentless approach to obtaining justice was lauded by people of all ages and colors. His affection and love were unbiased. He was a visionary and one of the most esteemed orators of all time. I turn to his legacy and intrepidity for inspirations.

P.T. To finish, do you have a message for our worldwide readers?

W.H. Absolutely. I am very excited about the upcoming election. My main message is that once elected, my goal will be about stimulating the economy, improving the public educational system, especially in math and other scientific subjects such as computing (by implementing a

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concrete action plan: one laptop per child, etc.). I will support the right policies related to these issues which will be my top priorities to move forward in our globalization era. I will also sustain other policies that my party endorses, such as the ones related to the environment, natural resources, the promotion of safe neighborhoods, the protection of families, including the elderly, the improvement of urban infrastructure. Kansas Democrats further support many issues like pay equity. Our party also recognizes the valuable contribution that youth make to our state and we support giving young people a voice. If elected, I will be among the youngest senators in the nation and I intend to encourage youth participation in every aspect of political life.

As a future member of the Senate, I will be available for the citizens. As a Democrat Senator, I intend to embrace our beliefs in equal rights for every Kansan regardless of race, color, age, physical abilities, religion, sex, national origin, sexual orientation, or gender identity. I am committed to the furtherance of the citizens of Kansas. I understand the critical issues that our nation and the Kansas State have to confront. As a Senator, I will take my role seriously by providing leadership in vision, measures, strategies and execution. My past and present contributions in the community support my rhetoric.

P.T. Thanks for this very interesting interview. It was great Mr. Hodges speaking to you!

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