

Candidate Questionnaire – Allen County:

*All candidates who returned questionnaires for Allen County elections are included in this document. Kansas Appleseed certifies that no responses have been modified.

Candidate: Jonathan P. Wells

City and County: Iola, Allen County

Office sought: Mayor, City of Iola (incumbent)

- 1) Would you support the creation of a food security, food policy, or other similar citizen advisory board to the City Commission if elected? Why or why not?**

Currently several groups have begun/created a food council in the county. I fully support their efforts to coordinate food policy. Food insecurity is not just an issue for the City of Iola and to effectively combat the problem, I believe coordination across city, county, and state organizations is necessary (economy of scale).

- 2) City leaders have an important role to play in ensuring that children in their communities have access to nutritious meals when they are out of school. Cities across Kansas are already utilizing federal meal programs, like the Summer Food Service Program and Afterschool Meal Program, to make meals available at city locations like community centers, parks, and libraries. (See Kansas Appleseed's 2019 Childhood Hunger Reduction Report and 2018 Summer Meal Report available at: <https://www.kansasappleseed.org/thriving.html>). Do you support your city government taking advantage of these programs? If not, what other actions do you feel your city should take to address hunger and access to healthy food?**

Currently, most of the direct coordination of food programming is done through the USD's and private charitable organizations. The city works well with both types of groups allowing the USD to use city facilities for its summer food programs and donating water and land to the community garden and a new community orchard. I believe fostering positive relationships across public/private groups is crucial to any successful program. I also understand that there is more the city could do to address issues of hunger and am always willing to listen to new approaches.

- 3) Community gardens are becoming increasingly popular across both rural and urban centers. If elected to city government, would you be in favor of allocating city resources to support these projects if given the opportunity?**

I have and will continue to support our local community garden and new community orchard. Currently the city provides land and water to the garden. Unfortunately, a flood resulted in contaminating the current year's crop. I actively sought to help the community garden by offering other unused/uncontaminated plots, and even a portion of my personal yard. Further, I support the closing of Jefferson Ave (in the city's business district) during the farmers market to encourage healthy choices and bringing the market closer to consumers.

- 4) Food pantries and soup kitchens are often the "front lines" in addressing hunger. Should city government do more in your community to support programs like these? If so, how?**

To digress from your question a bit, I am personally passionate about making sure food pantries have sufficient resources. I have personally written a grants that combined a local food drive with a purchase of \$2,000 of food. The grant allowed us to spread the donation over several months and supply fresh meat and produce at the food pantry's need. I have also worked with several colleagues at the local community college and supported the creation of a local food pantry that serves struggling college students.

Local food pantries and soup kitchens needs often vary from season to season and year to year. While direct support from the city has been limited, as a government we have always listened to the food pantry's need and have obliged them. Fostering healthy communication allows the pantry and other organization to explain their issues and allows us the flexibility to come up with a solution.

- 5) The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) helps 234,000 Kansas residents (or 1 in 12 Kansans) put food on the table for them and their families. If elected, how would you increase SNAP outreach in your city to ensure your eligible neighbors receive the food assistance they need?**

The SNAP program in Allen County and Iola is much higher than the state average. I firmly support the program, but am unsure about what as a city we could do to increase the outreach to our local citizens. Currently I know information is places in city and county offices, along with the public housing authority as conveyor of information. Further, I know the farmers' market

offers SNAP incentives to double purchasing power and the city's social media accounts promote both the market and the SNAP benefit. In years past, we have created a "master list" of community organizations and contacts. I would be interested in learning more about ways we can help spread the word.

6) What role should city government play in creating a more thriving, inclusive, and just community?

As the son of a Cuban immigrant, I firmly believe governments must work to create an inclusive and just community. We must lead by example and rebuke ignorance and racism wherever it may be, diversity and inclusion are a platform for my reelection. For more information you can check out www.votejonwells.com. However, these are more than words, platitudes, or niceties, I actively use my skills as an historian and a teacher to further this mission in daily life.

- a. As a professor of history and political science, I am keenly aware that voting is fundamental to our democracy and a critical element in creating a just society. Over the past years, I have encouraged my students to register, and helped organize and run registration drives around the city. I am currently working with a student to bring a registration drive to campus again. While I could simply run the drive myself, I believe empowering young adults and having them lead the process provides two benefits. Firstly, young adults are more likely to respond to peers and actually register. Secondly, having them lead the process/drive engages them in the system and empowers them change the system.
- b. In my American government courses, one of my key assignments is about problems within the judicial system, and how to fix the flaws that lead to false incarcerations. To that end, I have also brought speakers to campus that have been falsely imprisoned (some of them for decades) who have dedicated their lives to creating a more just and equitable society.
- c. City policies should focus on inclusive hiring and diversity of backgrounds. We should work closely with the other government bodies in helping new members to our communities feel welcome. As an example in recent years the community college's international student population has ballooned from 8 to 60 students in the past three years.
- d. As a public official, one of the ways I can support inclusiveness and justice is by supporting local groups and their efforts to reform and establish programs for the betterment of our community.

7) The 2020 census is quickly approaching. For every Kansas resident not counted, the state will lose up to \$20,820 in federal funding for local projects. If elected, would you see promoting participation in the census as a priority? If so, how would you use your office to increase participation?

We have already begun to work with the county government to become a “full count” city/county. On 9/9/2019, I issued a proclamation stating the city and our employees will fully cooperate and participate in helping the make the city a full count. City staff has looked into and is currently filling out grant forms through the Kansas League of Municipalities to fund a census count advertisement/media campaign. The county government and the municipal governments across the county agree in the importance of an accurate census.