

2021 Senate Scene – Week 1 and 2

Senate Highlights

As we get settled into the first and second week of the 2021 legislative session, most of our work is concentrated in committees where bills are being prioritized and vetted. The Senate has 17 standing committees which cover many different topics, including education, agriculture, judiciary, budget and utilities—to name a few. Once a committee completes hearings and votes on a bill, if passed, it will then make its way to the Senate floor and the full body will begin to debate and vote on the measure. Floor debates and votes will begin in the coming weeks. If you're interested in tracking our work, you can follow us at our website at <http://www.kslegislature.org>

Committee Assignments

My committees this year have changed a bit - the Ethics, Elections and Local Government committee is now two committees renamed Transparency and Ethics and Local Government. I will Chair Transparency and Ethics and will serve as the Vice-Chair of Local Government. I continue to serve on the Transportation, Judiciary and Utility committees and remain on the Historical Preservation Committee. I was also assigned to a new committee, the Joint Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice Oversight.

State of the State

On Wednesday, January 13th, Governor Kelly delivered her State of the State address virtually this year due to limited large group gatherings which has been the tradition in the House Chambers. Her address is the starting point for the budget process in Senate Ways and Means and House Appropriations and sets the tone for the upcoming session. Both committees are currently reviewing her budget proposals for 2021.

Senate Floor Action

Senate Bill 14 – extending KEMA (Kansas Emergency Management Act) deadlines - many of the provisions in HB 2016 which the Kansas Legislature passed last June will expire on January 26, 2021. The dates were extended in SB 14 to March 31st to allow for additional hearings to look at the sections of the current law from last year.

Senate Bill 13 - Truth in Taxation – this bill would repeal the property tax lid, establish notice and public hearing requirements for any taxing subdivision seeking to collect property taxes in excess of the subdivision's revenue-neutral rate, prohibit valuation increases resulting solely from normal maintenance of existing structures, and expand the allowed acceptance of partial payments or payment plans for property taxes.

Both bills were sent to the House for their consideration as a body.

Senate Confirmation

State law in Kansas requires that certain appointments by the Governor or other state officials be confirmed by the Senate prior to the appointee exercising any power, duty, or function of the office. On Thursday, January 21st, the Senate confirmed twenty-nine individuals to boards

or agency heads and one Judicial post. Irv Mitchell of Russell County and Leonard Wolfe of Marshall County were both confirmed to serve another term on the State Banking Board.

Committee Action

Judiciary Committee

The Value Them Both Amendment to the Constitution, SCR 1602 & HCR 5003, were introduced in both the House and Senate and have both been passed out of their respective committees. This is the Legislative response to the recent ruling by the Kansas Supreme Court in Hodes & Nauser v Schmidt determining a woman has a constitutional right to an abortion. The proposed Constitutional Amendment allows elected officials regulation and oversight over abortions which has been the case for years. Some of these bills passed and signed by Governors are parental consent for minors, 24 hour waiting period and clinic sanitation and safety standards. The Amendment does not allow Kansas to over-rule federal law and will reinstate the role of the Legislature to regulate this industry like any other. The Amendment will require a 2/3rd majority in each Chamber to move forward and then the question will be placed on the ballot for the public to vote on in 2022.

Transportation

Memorial Highway – Marshall County -SB19

Due to the shortened 2020 session, our Marshall County highway renaming bill failed to pass through the process to the Governor's desk. I introduced a new bill in Senate Transportation committee – SB19 and a hearing will be scheduled next week. The bill will rename a five-mile portion of US Highway 77 from the western limit of the City of Blue Rapids to the eastern limit of the City of Waterville. This legislation would rename this highway section the "Corporal Allen Oatney and SP4 Gene Myers Memorial Highway." This bill is in honor of Corporal Allen E. Oatney and Specialist Fourth Class Gene A. Myers, Waterville residents, who both were killed by hostile fire while serving their country during the Vietnam War. The memorial highway is a proposal from the American Legion Posts in Blue Rapids and Waterville. Funding for the project will be provided by Posts 169 & 332 through private donations. After it passes out of the Senate, Representative Lisa Moser (House District will #106) will continue the process through the House of Representatives.

Following the Kansas Legislature

You can view video streaming of both chambers via the Kansas Legislature YouTube page. In addition, many committees are now audio streamed and can also be viewed on the Kansas Legislature YouTube page. The Kansas Legislature website is easy to use with Senate and House calendars and journals as well as the rosters of both chambers. Here are the relevant links:

Website: <http://www.kslegislature.org>

YouTube Streaming: <http://bit.ly/2CZj9O0>

Committee Hearings: <http://sg001-harmony.sliq.net/00287/Harmony/en/View/Calendar/>

Office Information

My office remains in the same suite, 223E (East wing second floor) next to the cage elevator. Randi Walters who has worked in the Capitol for 18 years as an assistant and a committee assistant is in our office.

As session progresses, not every bill introduced will make it to the Governor's desk, but that doesn't mean opinions, facts and testimony wasn't heard. Your participation in the state legislature is vital. As we continue to weed through the different bills, I hope to hear from you. I want to know how legislation will impact you and our district, or the ideas you have to improve a bill. A personal email with your thoughts is the best way to reach us as we sit in committees for most of the day and seldom get to stay at our desks for long periods.

Thank you for the honor of serving you!

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