

## 2023 Senate Scene Week 3

### SENATE HAPPENINGS

This week, the Senate standing committees continued to hold hearings and bring forward legislation. The Ways and Means Committee is starting to work the budget bill with subcommittee meetings to report to the full committee in a few weeks. Hearings on bills in committees are continuing with the Senate returning to General Orders where we will see the first committee bills to have a vote from the entire Senate.

### STATE OF THE STATE

On Tuesday, January 24th, Governor Kelly gave her State of the State address, where she outlined her budget and priorities for Kansas which included, tax cuts, increased funding to special education, water supply, Medicaid expansion, and the legalization of medical marijuana. The Governor's agenda for this session had no surprises and several familiar themes. Governor Kelly reiterated her plans to "meet in the middle" with legislative leadership. She reiterated her desire to completely eliminate the food sales tax immediately, create a sales tax holiday for school supplies, and gradually cut taxes on Social Security income. The issue of cutting income tax on Social Security benefits is a positive first step as it has long been supported by legislatures over the years. The budget was released earlier in the month and Ways and Means has begun the process of sorting through the budget proposed by the Governor's office.

### MARCH AND RALLY FOR LIFE

Earlier this week, hundreds of Kansans came out on a cold day for the annual March and Rally for Life at the Statehouse. On January 22, 1974, the first MARCH FOR LIFE was held on the West Steps of the US Capitol. An estimated 20,000 committed prolife Americans rallied this day with attendance numbers rising every year. In addition to the March and Rally, events include workshops, pro-life educational booths, capitol tours, visiting legislators, and attending general legislative sessions and committees.

### SENATE UTILITY COMMITTEE

Two wind energy bills – SB46 and SB49 - received hearings in Senate Utilities this week. The bills are addressing light-mitigating technology systems and in particular **ADLS** (aircraft detection lighting system) which is a technology designed to reduce the impact of night-time lights. The latest radar-based system will only activate the lights when it detects low-flying aircraft nearby. SB49 will be for new construction moving forward and SB46 is retrospective for windfarms which are operating today. The goal of both bills will be to turn off the lights unless the radar system detects an aircraft. Each tower is also regulated by FAA for this technology and has the final approval at each location.

### WILDFIRE TASK FORCE

Secretary of Agriculture Mike Beam announced that the report of the Wildfire Task Force is not complete but will be available soon. He noted that the primary focus areas are: 1. Increased funding for weather monitoring through the MESONET program of Kansas State University; 2. More accurate reporting of wildfires to access federal financial support; 3. Investigate ways to support volunteer firefighters (tax exemptions etc.) and incentivize employers to support volunteer firefighters; 4. Improve communications systems for volunteers; 5. Investigate and mitigate causes of fires; 6. Increase awareness of steps citizens may take to reduce risk of fire (discussion included elimination of plant materials around structures, allow burn mitigation practices on CRP acres etc.). Representative Waymaster and I both serve on The Wildfire Task Force committee.

## **RURAL KANSAS LAWYER SHORTAGE**

Kansas Chief Justice Marla Luckert recently created a new committee to study unmet legal need in rural Kansas. The ratio of attorneys to population in Kansas ranges from two for every 535 residents in urban areas to one for every 808 residents in rural areas. Eighty percent of Kansas attorneys live in six urban counties — Douglas, Johnson, Leavenworth, Sedgwick, Shawnee, and Wyandotte — which make up about half the state's population. Citing American Bar Association data 40% of all counties in the United States — 1,272 of 3,141 — have fewer than one lawyer per 1,000 residents. There are about four lawyers for every 1,000 residents nationally. Forty-three percent of Kansans live in rural areas, but only 20% of Kansas attorneys live in rural communities. This leaves an attorneys-to-population-ratio of one active attorney for every 808 residents. In contrast, Kansans in urban areas have two active attorneys for every 535 residents. This is a select committee I was assigned to and I am looking forward to working with the Judicial branch and others in our 18-month time frame to offer solutions for this problem which also exists in other states across the nation. The next meeting will be held February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

## **KANSAS DAY and Senate District #36**

January 29<sup>th</sup> of 2023 marked the 162<sup>th</sup> anniversary of President James Buchanan signing a bill to make Kansas the 34<sup>th</sup> state of the United States of America. Kansas is named for the Kansa, the Algonquian word for the Kaw. Kansas is full of rich history, beautiful scenes of nature, and notable landmarks. In Kansas Senate District 36, we have remarkable landmarks such as memorial to Pony Express Riders in Marshall County, the Nazareth Motherhouse in Concordia, Rock City outside of Minneapolis, and the "Home on the Range Cabin" in Smith County, birthplace of our state song. "Home on the Range" was adopted by the Kansas State Legislature as the official state song on June 30, 1947. Along with our state song, Kansas has not one, but TWO official state marches, "The Kansas March" and "Here's Kansas." But while the marches are grand, nothing brings as much pride into the hearts of the residents of the Sunflower State as that of seeing our great flag dancing in the breeze. The flag was designed by Hazel Avery of Lincoln County in 1925. Directly in the center on the field of blue is the Great Seal of the State of Kansas with our motto arching near the top: "Ad Astra Per Aspera" to the stars through difficulties. The flag was modified in 1961 by a bill introduced by Senator Ross Doyen of Concordia to add the word "KANSAS."

## **VISIT THE OFFICIAL WEBSITE OF KANSAS - [www.kansas.gov](http://www.kansas.gov)**

You can find a wealth of information at this well-designed website which focuses on Kansas with topics of business, education, government, residents, and services with links to agencies and staff to help answer any question you might have. Webfile will take you directly to the Department of Revenue to file your taxes; Form finder will take you to the Secretary of State's office for all types of forms for businesses; Learning Quest will direct you to the State Treasurer's Office; the three branches of Government; and Plan your Trip to Kansas will open to the Department of Wildlife and Parks.

## **TOLL-FREE LEGISLATIVE HOTLINE**

Kansas residents can access information on legislation, legislative procedure, state government, public policy issues, and more by calling 1-800-432-3924. Calls are answered by experienced reference/research librarians at the State Library of Kansas and kept confidential. Lines are open weekdays 8AM-5PM. Callers can also leave brief messages to be delivered to legislators as well as request copies of bills, journals, and other legislative documents. Questions can also be left at [infodesk@ks.gov](mailto:infodesk@ks.gov) on weekends and evenings. Kansans can now chat with a librarian in real-time through the library's Ask A Librarian service found at [kslib.info/ask](http://kslib.info/ask). You will have the option of installing a mobile app connecting users to all the State Library's services, including chat, texting, and email. Text questions to 785 256-0733. The State Library is located on the 3rd floor, north wing of the Capitol.

Thank you for the honor of serving you!

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