

March 28, 2021 Legislative Update

The week of March 29 begins the final week of regular session where bills are debated by both chambers. We will be on the floor every day. This is the time of year when the sessions can go well into the evening, depending on the length of debate on each bill. The bills we will debate are those deemed most important to complete this year. Those that do not make the cut will remain active for next year. Monday's schedule has eighteen bills for debate. Just a reminder, the major budget and tax bills are yet to come.

The week of April 5 is when the conference committees meet to either come to a compromise on bills or allow the bills to die. If compromise is reached, the conference committee report (final bill) goes to each chamber for the last up or down vote. Our first adjournment is April 9. We return on May 3 for veto session to consider bills vetoed by the Governor. Normally this is a non-event, but this year could be very different and politically interesting. Stay tuned.

The sausage making has begun in earnest. This is the season of deleting contents (gut and go), additions of similar topic bills into one bill, substitutions, and shells being filled after content deletion. Trying to keep up is difficult for us and I dare say, very difficult for the public. Some changes make some sense, but others are done to "sweeten" a bill with marginal support with contents of another bill with overwhelming support. It is on those bills we rely on the information received from our constituents to guide and gauge our districts needs and preferences.

Recent bills passed of interest:

Senate Bill 40: The Kansas Emergency Management Act (KEMA). This was an update to current law that places limits on the central government while still allowing the Governor to react swiftly in an emergency. Most of last summer, autumn, and the early part of this session were spent working on the final document. It passed overwhelming in both chambers. The Governor signed the bill last week and then promptly announced that she will declare a mask mandate on April 1. This will result in the legislature acting swiftly to stop the order based on the new law. To read the entire bill as signed by the Governor, go to [Senate Bill 40](#).

Senate Bill 13: This bill, signed into law by the Governor last week establishes notice and public hearing requirements prior to approval by a governing body to exceed its revenue neutral rate for property tax purposes and discontinuing the city and county tax lid, prohibiting valuation increase of real property solely as the result of normal repair, replacement or maintenance of existing structure and establishing a payment plan for the payment of delinquent or nondelinquent property taxes. To read the entire bill, go to [Senate Bill 13](#).

Other bill topics to watch this week:

HB 2184: Creating the Medical Marijuana Regulation Act. This bill follows closely the current law in Ohio with severe restrictions and limitations. For me, this is a bad idea.

SB 84: House Substitute for Substitute for SB 84 by Committee on Federal and State Affairs - Authorizing sports wagering under the Kansas expanded lottery act. If you are interested in this bill, a detailed explanation can be found in the forty-three page [SB 84 Supplemental Note](#).

Bills I entered this year and their disposition:

HB 2004: Creating the right to appeal an involuntary discharge or transfer from an adult residential care facility. The need for this legislation was brought to me by Rachel Imthurn and is called Charley's Bill in honor of her late husband. The bill had a hearing in the Children and Seniors Committee. The bill has been blessed, final disposition to be determined this week.

HB 2005: Excluding hot water supply boilers that have a nominal water capacity not exceeding 120 gallons from the provisions of the boiler safety act. This bill has passed the House and the Senate Ways and Means Committee and sits below the line in the Senate. I am hopeful it will be voted on this week.

HB 2087: Limiting the review of certain rules and regulations by the director of the budget. This bill passed the House and is in the Senate Federal and State Committee where a hearing has been held and is awaiting to be worked and sent to the full Senate. Hopefully, this will occur this week.

HB 2023: Changing to an eight-year simple average when determining values of agricultural land for purposes of property taxation. The KSU Ag Economics Department worked with me to come up with the best formulation. This bill is currently in the House Taxation Committee. A hearing was held with no further action taken to date. The Kansas Farm Bureau testified in strong opposition to the bill. The bill would simply change the calculation from a rolling 8 year average (actually a 16 year plus) to a simple 8 year average. This would eliminate the extended periods of higher taxes during periods of declining or no profits.

HB 2042: Enacting the Kansas thrift savings plan act. This bill was assigned to the Insurance and Pensions Committee and no action has been taken to date. The bill would create a defined contribution plan for state employees that is voluntary. They will be given a one time choice between the current KPERs defined benefit plan or the new thrift plan.

HB 2043: Ending legislator participation in KPERs and establishing an annual salary structure for legislators. This bill has been mischaracterized as an increase in salary bill for legislators. It actually saves the state money in the future by not having the obligation of KPERs payments. This bill was assigned to the Insurance and Pensions Committee and no action has been taken to date.

HB 2044: Increasing KPERs employee contribution rate for school district employees and making appropriations for FY 2022 for the department of education for a pay increase for KPERs covered school district employees. This bill was assigned to the Insurance and Pensions Committee. A hearing was held without further action being taken. The school employee's portion of the KPERs unfunded liability is \$5.6 billion of the total KPERs unfunded liability of \$9 billion representing 62%. This bill simply gives the employee an increase in pay equal to the increase in contributions to the plan. The KNEA was in strong opposition during the hearing.

For a listing of all bills in both the House and the Senate, a listing by bill number and topic can be found at the [Senate and House Actions Report](#).

Staying Connected:

Due to Covid and other circumstances the public is not welcome in the Capitol. But because of that the Capitol was rapidly transformed into a broadcasting powerhouse. You are now able to watch any committee meeting live. I consider this a great move forward for transparency and accountability. To get there go to the Kansas Legislative website [www.http://kslegislature.org/li/](http://kslegislature.org/li/). At the Home page is a lower right box labeled "Audio/Video Broadcast" and within the box is the line "House & Senate Video." Simply click on that line and you will find the listings for the committees and House and Senate floor action on YouTube.

My state email address is ron.highland@house.ks.gov, and my phone number is 785-296-7310. I humbly appreciate the opportunity to represent you and keep you informed with my newsletters. At my website, www.ronhighland.com, you can find a syllabus that explains in detail how to get the legislative information you need. As always, it is an honor and privilege to serve you.

With kind regards,

Ron