

Legislative Update, June 9, 2020:

The 2020 Session of the Kansas Legislature ended abruptly by the pandemic. We left Topeka before our work was finished that has resulted in several important bills not making it all the way through the process. Because Sine Die (last day) occurred officially on May 21, all bills not worked are now deleted from the system. From this point forward, we start from scratch. Any new ideas for bills will have to be written into bill form and be entered into the system for consideration for the 2021 session.

Sine Die on May 21 was one of our most difficult days in the legislature. The body voted to suspend the midnight rule and continue with debate and voting on legislation. The session finally ended after 24 hours. We were all very tired and not too pleased with the process by the time it ended. Nine bills were passed and presented to the Governor for signature. She vetoed four of the nine bills and promptly called a special session. We returned to Topeka for the special session on June 3 and closed the session on June 4. A listing and review of each bill is as follows:

Legislation Approved on Sine Die

Sen. Sub. for HB 2018: amends the Kansas Video Competition Act, prohibiting municipalities from imposing additional requirements for deployment of micro wireless facilities in the public right-of-way. Allows municipalities to require compliance with certain standards. The House concurred with Senate amendments by a vote of 104-9.
(Signed into law)

Sen. Sub. for HB 2034: amends law related to court orders for restitution by criminal defendants. The House concurred with Senate amendments by a vote of 114-3.
(Signed into law)

Sen. Sub. for HB 2054: creates and amends law and makes appropriations regarding the governmental response to the coronavirus pandemic. The House adopted the conference committee report by a vote of 76-34.
(Vetoed)

Sen. Sub. for HB 2137: continued the exceptions to the Kansas Open Records Act that were set to expire. The bill also eliminates the Scrap Metal Theft Reduction Act photograph requirement. The House concurred with Senate amendments by a vote of 121-0.
(Signed into law)

HB 2246: amends and creates law regarding state agencies. The report contained provisions specific to the Kansas Insurance Department, Kansas Department of Health and Environment (the Healthcare Access Improvement Program); the University of Kansas Medical Center (Cancer Center); and Wichita State University. The House adopted the conference committee report by a vote of 112-2.
(Signed into law)

HB 2510: creates the Kansas Promise Scholarship Act. Also amends law relating to free ACT exams for Kansas high school students, concurrent and dual enrollment for high school students, and authority of healing arts school clinics. Additionally, the bill creates a foster care report card. The bill also authorizes the sale of land by Kansas State University in Saline County. The House adopted the conference committee report by a vote of 110-3.

(Vetoed)

Sen. Sub. for HB 2585: exempts certain public utilities from Kansas income taxation and allows the Kansas Corporation Commission to approve certain contract and reduced electric rates and associated cost recovery from all rate classes. The House concurred with Senate amendments by a vote of 75-25.

(Signed into law)

Sen. Sub. for HB 2619: enacts the Kansas economic recovery loan deposit program. The bill also amends law related to the field of membership requirements for state-chartered credit unions. The bill also permits a deduction from net income for financial institutions subject to the Kansas financial institutions privilege tax. The House concurred with Senate amendments by a vote of 114-3.

(Vetoed)

HB 2702: establishes new notice and public hearing requirements for certain taxing subdivisions, prohibits certain real property valuation increases, and provides a one-time delay in the deadline for payment of property taxes. The bill also enacts the Taxpayer Protection Act, extends certain income and privilege tax filing and payment deadlines, authorizes county treasurers to establish payment plans for all property taxes, and provides for county discretion in handling de minimis property tax penalty charges. The House adopted the conference committee report by a vote of 89-28.

(Vetoed)

Sine Die ended the session for the legislature. We could not come back to vote to override her veto of any of the bills. The Governor called us back for a special session and essentially ordered us to come up with a more favorable plan for managing her emergency powers. Leadership decided to limit the special session to consideration of the contents of HB 2054. A new bill was crafted with much of the language copied into a new bill, HB 2016. Members of leadership and the Governor with her advisors met and came up with compromise language that eventually came before both chambers for debate and final vote. It passed both chambers and was sent to the Governor for signature. **HB 2016 has been signed into law.**

I voted no on the final bill, HB 2016. My reasons for voting no, include: 1. Only a few were involved in the decision process. This is contrary to the normal procedure bills are developed and the appearance of yielding to the Governor's wishes makes the legislature look fatuous. 2. The emergency powers was extended to Sept. 15. Granted there is some oversight of those powers and of the spending of federal monies, but it implies trust the Governor will not go around the legislature again. 3. Required inspections for nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and similar facilities was changed from within 30 days to 90 days. 4. The relaxation of the laws covering health professionals until Dec. 31 concerned the Board of Healing Arts and caused me concern as well.

Session is now over, but I think we may be called back in for another special session later in the year to deal with the approaching financial disaster. This is an election year for everyone in the state legislature, U.S. Congressional seats, and a U.S. Senate seat. Every vote will be critical this year. The deadline for registering for the primary election is July 15. See the county election officer or county clerk for information. Remember, those who you elect in the primary elections will very often represent you following the general election, making the primary a very important election.

It is my honor to serve you in the Kansas legislature. I can be reached at ron.highland@gmail.com

With kind regards,
Ron