

“ THE PECK PERSPECTIVE ”

(From the Capitol)

February 27, 2023

A Busy Week: Last week, the Senate debated and voted on some 45 bills, plus numerous amendments. Although several of the proposed amendments failed, only one bill failed to receive the 21 votes required for passage. That bill, SB 210, failed on a 16–24 vote. Had it passed, it would have allowed, not mandated, candidates for local office – city commission, school board, college trustee, etc. – to list their political party affiliation beside their name on the ballot. I voted yes.

Cutting Taxes: When the Legislature votes on a significant number of bills in a short time frame, several are of little interest to most Kansans. However, some are of great interest to many. I wrote about one such bill of interest in last week’s *Peck Perspective*, SB 169. If it makes it through the entire process, SB 169 will establish a single income tax rate of 4.75%. Thereby reducing income taxes on all employed Kansans. The bill passed 22-17, with no democrat support. I voted yes. We’ll now see if the House supports the measure.

Two other tax cutting bills, SB 33 and SB 248, also passed. SB 33 hit the floor as a bill to exempt social security from state income tax but was amended to exempt all retirement income from the state tax. SB 33 passed with bipartisan support 36–3.

As vice-chair of the tax committee I was given the responsibility of leading the floor discussion/debate on SB 248, the final tax cutting bill for the week. As written, SB 248 would have exempted healthy food, as defined by the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for *Women, Infants, and Children* (WIC), from all sales tax. However, through conversations with other Senators, I knew it would be amended from WIC defined healthy food to all groceries. To my surprise, the amendment garnered only 20 yes votes to 14 no votes. There were four Senators passing and two absent. My surprise came because most Kansans want the tax rate on groceries to be zero, so I thought legislators would vote accordingly. After the first amendment changed the bill, there were failed attempts to further amend the bill – including elimination of the sales tax on clothing, diapers and feminine hygiene products. In the end, SB 248 passed 22–16. Three democrats voted yes, while eight republicans voted no. I voted yes.

As a small-government, low-tax conservative, I understand taxes in Kansas are too high and tax cuts are warranted. But the reality is if all of the tax cuts passed by the Senate last week became law it would be a significant hit to the state budget, which is affordable now, but probably not sustainable.

Space does not allow for reporting on every bill passed last week, so I’ll end by briefly mentioning three pro-life bills.

Denying Abortion Providers Taxpayer Subsidies: Pro-life Senators passed SB 219 by a 26–12 vote. SB 219 adds facilities where elective abortions are performed

to the list of entities that are not healthcare providers, denying them access to the Healthcare Stabilization Fund. This fund helps healthcare providers get professional liability insurance. If legislators cannot place restrictions on abortion, due to the Kansas Supreme Court misinterpreting the State Constitution to say there is a guaranteed right to abortion, we can at least make certain that abortion clinics do not receive benefit of the Healthcare Stabilization Fund. I voted yes on SB 219.

More Pro-Life Legislation: On a 27–12 vote, the Senate passed SB 5 prohibiting medical providers from using telemedicine to prescribe drugs intended to cause an abortion. The bill also restricts the governor’s power during a state of emergency to alter such prohibitions. I voted yes.

Pregnancy Resource Tax Credit: I was pleased by the passage of SB 96, a bill designed to promote a culture of life in Kansas by providing tax credits for donors to nonprofit pregnancy resource centers. For a pregnancy care center to be eligible for funds that qualify for the tax credit, they must maintain a dedicated phone number for clients, offer services free of charge with the express purpose of assisting women carry their pregnancy to term, promote healthy childbirths and utilize trained and licensed medical professionals in the performance of available medical procedures. The tax credit funds will help Pregnancy Care Centers continue to serve women and their babies. Sadly, pro-abortion legislators verbally attacked the Pregnancy Care Centers, saying women would be better served by places like Planned Parenthood. We know Planned Parenthood is bad for babies (they die), but they are also bad for mothers. Unlike Planned Parenthood, Pregnancy Care Centers show love and kindness to women, no matter what they choose as it relates to the birth of their child. SB passed 28–11. I vote yes.

Until next time, may the blessings of God be yours.

Virgil Peck
State Senator