

“ THE PECK PERSPECTIVE ”

(From the Capitol)

April 1, 2024

Sometimes we fail to understand how an event that happens many miles away – like the collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore – can have an impact on Kansans and possibly the Kansas economy. As a State Senator, and Chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I try to take notice of issues affecting Kansas’ leading industry – agriculture.

We’ve all seen, heard, or read accounts of the cargo ship striking the bridge, causing it to collapse and closing the Port of Baltimore. The U.S. Secretary of Transportation said a “major and protracted impact to supply chains” is imminent. Since Baltimore is the largest entry point in the U.S. for large agriculture equipment like tractors, combines and other pieces of equipment that are necessary components of planting, growing, and harvesting, the Secretary’s statement tells us that the supply chain interruption could have a negative impact on Kansas farming.

Other U.S. ports can pick up some of the reduction of goods generally delivered in Baltimore. However, since there’s a small number of American ports, like Baltimore’s, capable of processing roll-on/roll-off cargo (wheeled and/or driven), the broader economic repercussions of the bridge collapse are substantial. A recent transportation statistics report showed the Port of Baltimore ranked 10th in dry bulk tonnage and handled a record 1.3 million tons of large equipment in 2023.

Additionally, an interruption in the normal delivery of roll-on/roll-off cargo into the U.S. will likely increase shipping costs as major equipment is diverted to other ports. Particularly in the south, congestion may inflate transit times, which equates to inflated costs. Even ports nearer to the Midwest may be unable to efficiently distribute goods to adequately provide for the needs of farmers, especially since demand for agricultural equipment peaks in early Spring.

Although in 2024 we have better construction equipment than we did 50 years ago, since the Francis Scott Key Bridge took five years to construct in the mid-1970s, the delay in the delivery of goods could last a while.

Signing Bills: As of the last day in March, Governor Kelly had signed eight Senate bills into law. I didn’t check how many House bills have been signed, but I would guess the number to be close to the same as the Senate bills. Although all legislation has a certain level of importance, none of the already signed bills are particularly newsworthy. However, that will change as the Legislature finalizes several bills during the week leading up to the April break.

Forbidding Abusive Child Transitions Act (SB 233): One such newsworthy bill recently passed by both chambers, sending it to the governor's desk, is SB 233. The vote in the Senate was a veto-proof majority 27-13, and the House passed it 82-39, with two yes votes absent, making that vote veto-proof as well.

Every Kansan is aware of the push by the extremists on the left to allow (even encourage) children to be subjected to life-altering gender change surgeries. Therefore, I won't write much about *The Forbidding Abusive Child Transitions Act* (Act). The Act simply says, in Kansas we care about protecting minors from radical medical "treatment" used to attempt to change one's gender from either male or female to the other gender – which every thinking person knows is scientifically impossible. SB 233 makes it clear that the radical transgender ideology and the mutilation of minors is not legal nor welcome in Kansas. We'll soon know if Governor Kelly will stand with the extremist on the left or do the right thing and sign SB 233.

Protecting Taxpayer Dollars from Fraud (SB 488): Most taxpayers agree that government programs are not ran efficiently and are often fraught with fraud and abuse. Passage of SB 488 is designed to protect tax dollars by expanding the scope of the Inspector General (IG) within the Office of the Attorney General to include the audit, investigation, and performance review of taxpayer funded, welfare-type programs like SNAP (food stamps) and "health assistance programs", like Medicaid and the state Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

The bill grants expanded power to the IG to subpoena, administer oaths, and execute search warrants. To assist in the endeavor, SB 488 gives the IG the authority to hire additional staff, up to a maximum of five, to perform the expanded duties. To make certain the program is working as intended, the provisions in SB 488 will sunset on July 1, 2028. Establishing a sunset date forces the legislature to review the effectiveness of legislation and either let it expire, tweak it or, if it is saving tax dollars, expand it. I supported SB 488, and it passed the Senate 22-18. The language in SB 488 will now be considered during the Conference Committee process.

It's getting to the time of year when there are far too many bills for me to write about, so feel free to contact me with thoughts or questions on legislation being considered in Topeka. My email is: virgil@virgil4senate.com

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

Virgil Peck
State Senator