

“ THE PECK PERSPECTIVE ”

(From the Capitol)

January 15, 2024

The Kansas Senate officially began the 2024 Legislative Session on Monday, January 8th, when Senate President Ty Masterson took his chair at the front of the Senate Chamber and struck his gavel on the podium.

Historically, the first day of a session is brief with no floor action. However, 2024 was different. After the roll call, opening invocation, pledge to the American flag, reading in of pre-filed bills and concurrent resolutions, the Senate took the unusual step of considering a substantive issue. A motion was made by the Majority Leader *“to advance to Emergency Final Action, subject to amendment, debate and roll call”* Senate Resolution (SR) 1729.

SR 1729 is a resolution I co-sponsored with 16 other senators *“condemning the October 7 attacks on the State of Israel and reaffirming Kansas’ support and cooperation with the State of Israel”*. There was discussion, debate, and criticism of SR 1729, but in the end, the resolution passed 34–6. Five democrats and one republican voted in opposition. The final vote tally was only accomplished after those of us who supported the resolution used a procedural move to force all members to vote. Initially, 9 senators voted pass. The House passed a similar resolution, HR 6030, by a vote of 106–14, with all 14 no votes coming from democrats.

Passage of the resolutions make it clear that the Kansas Legislature unequivocally supports Israel’s right to exist, defend itself, and protect its citizens from terrorism and harm. We condemn the unprovoked attacks on Israel, demand the unconditional safe return of hostages, and reject all forms of antisemitism, including threats against Jewish people and institutions – some of which has occurred in Kansas.

State of the State speech: Following a day (Tuesday) of no activity in the Capitol, due to inclement weather, on Wednesday Governor Kelly delivered her State of the State speech to a joint session of the legislature. Unfortunately, the speech was filled with election year rhetoric that was in stark contrast to her “middle of the road” campaign ads in 2022. The speech revealed nothing new as she continued her agenda of more government control of healthcare and adopting republican ideas as her own.

The Governor reiterated her push for taxpayer funded healthcare for working age (19-64), able-bodied adults by allowing them to participate in Medicaid – a program established for the disabled, elderly and truly needy. I was pleased that she admitted something many Kansans have known all along. She said, *“They say Medicaid Expansion is not a silver bullet for our rural hospitals. You know what? I agree. Of*

course it's not going to solve every challenge facing rural healthcare." If Medicaid Expansion would save any rural hospital from closure, I believe all rural legislators would be supportive of its passage. However, as the Governor mentioned, it won't. I'll probably write more on the topic of Medicaid Expansion in the future.

Kelly then devoted a large portion of her speech to duplicitous promises about tax relief for Kansans. I'll remind everyone that Kansas would already be benefitting from most of her "proposed tax cuts" had she not been so free with her veto pen over the past five years. Admittedly republicans have the numbers to override her vetoes, but apparently not all who say they're a republican are actually conservative.

The governor mentioned tax cuts most republicans have long supported. She proposed a total elimination of state income taxes on Social Security. Currently only persons with a household income below \$50,000 enjoy the exemption. She asked that the exemption from the statewide residential property tax for schools be raised from the current \$41,700 to \$100,000. Republicans proposed that in 2021 but compromised on a lower amount. She asked that the elimination of sales tax on groceries be moved forward to April. She knows due to notice requirements and system changes, that time frame is not possible – or at least she should. She wants a 4-day back to school sales tax holiday each August. That's something many SEK residents have heard me push for since 2006 – but non-conservatives have historically opposed. "Welcome aboard Governor".

Staying with the topic of taxes. According to a recent study by United Van Lines, Kansas ranks 8th nationally in the number of people moving out of state. That tells us that other states' lower taxes are attracting new residents. Therefore, we must work to establish a tax structure in Kansas that is conducive to sustainable economic growth. With many states moving to a simpler, lower system of income taxation, it is imperative for Kansas to join the trend.

Again, if not for the governor's veto pen and the political gamesmanship of a few, every Kansas taxpayer would have already received a reduction on their income taxes, the state sales tax on food would have been eliminated, and retirees would no longer be paying income tax on their Social Security benefits.

The leadership of the Senate and House tax committees have started meeting to hammer out a tax plan that consists of legislation passed last session by one or both chambers. I expect an agreement to be reached soon.

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

Virgil Peck
State Senator