

“ THE PECK PERSPECTIVE ”

(From the Capitol)

January 26, 2022

Prior to last week’s e-newsletter, I truly expected to write this week about several tax related issues. Sadly, that won’t happen. The Committee Assistant (Secretary) had some serious health issues arise (not COVID) that will keep her away from the legislature for a while. Her difficulties required the Senate Tax Committee to postpone several hearings – including legislation to consider elimination of the sales tax on groceries. We’ll soon be working on tax relief for Kansas families and businesses, but the delay has set us back a bit.

Although the tax committee didn’t meet, legislation was making its way through the process. One such piece of legislation was HB 2477; a bill to temporarily address some of the health care staffing shortages in Kansas.

HB 2477 would, until January 20, 2023, adjust requirements relating to health care professionals in response to COVID-19. Passage of HB 2477 allows: nursing staff with an inactive or lapsed license to provide medical services appropriate to their education; students who are enrolled in medical programs and members of the military, who are emergency medical personnel, to volunteer at healthcare facilities; Physician Assistants, APRNs, RPNs, LPNs, Nurse Anesthetists, and Licensed Pharmacists to provide additional services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic; and finally, health care providers from other states could practice in Kansas.

HB 2477, as amended, passed the Senate 36-2 (I voted yes). The House concurred with the senate amendments, 96-4, sending it to the governor, who signed the legislation into law.

During the debate in the Senate on HB 2477, there was an amendment offered that would have been a huge win for Kansans in protecting our health care freedoms. I voted for the amendment, but it failed 17-19.

The amendment said that no medical care facility, or person licensed, certified or authorized to practice medicine in Kansas, *“shall decline to render healthcare services or otherwise discriminate in rendering healthcare services to a person based on such person’s COVID-19 vaccination status or whether such person has a COVID-19 immunity passport”*. Any medical facility or aforementioned provider who engaged in such discrimination would have their license suspended for a period of six months.

Although it is already against the law, legislators have heard far too many stories of health care services being denied to persons who, for a variety of reasons, have not taken the COVID shot.

It is truly sad that we, as a nation, have allowed personal healthcare decisions to cause such division. If a person desires the shot and/or to wear a mask, they should have the freedom to do so. And those who choose to handle the pandemic in a different way, should have the same freedom to decide. Imagine if the government said those who wish to receive a shot or wear a mask could not do so, and if they did, they would face consequences.....

Another piece of legislation the Senate worked on last week was SB 318; legislation designed to aid property owners whose property is destroyed by natural disasters. SB 318 does so in two ways: It expands the ability of county commissions to abate property taxes on homes and outbuildings destroyed by natural disasters; and it creates a sales tax exemption for supplies used to repair or replace a fence on agricultural land that was damaged or destroyed by a wildfire or other natural disaster occurring after January 1, 2021.

During the debate, I offered an amendment to, beginning July 1, 2022, exempt from sales tax all supplies necessary to construct, reconstruct, repair or replace a fence used to enclose agricultural land. I proposed the amendment for two reasons: provide our farmers some tax relief; and, since a couple of our neighboring states provide such an exemption, I want to incentivize these purchases to stay in Kansas. Doing so helps Kansas businesses and the Kansas economy. When a purchase is made out of state, there is no benefit to Kansas. My amendment was adopted and SB 318 passed the Senate 35-0. It is now ready for action in the House Tax Committee.

If you wish to track specific legislation (a bill) and/or votes by members of the Legislature, you can do so at: www.kslegislature.org. Additionally, if you would like to watch a legislative session, or committee meetings, go to: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_0NO-Pb96CFABvxDwXAq8A

As always, if you have thoughts or questions regarding legislation, please feel free to contact me. 785-296-7742 or virgil@virgil4senate.com.

Until next time, may the blessings of God be yours

Virgil Peck
State Senator