

THE PECK PERSPECTIVE

(From the Capitol)

February 24, 2025

Veto Override (SB 63): Last week I wrote that a veto override of SB 63, the Help Not Harm Act, was coming. The veto override vote took place on Tuesday, February 18th, with the Senate voting 31–9 and the House 85–34, with two yes votes absent. No democrats were willing to vote yes and only one republican House member jumped ship to side with Governor Kelly.

Because this had been a three-year battle with Governor Kelly, the law became effective just two days (Feb. 20th) after the successful override. Now, children in Kansas are protected from the harmful and irreversible effects of puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones, and transgender surgery. I supported the veto override.

It's Halftime – Last week was “Turnaround”, the first major deadline of the 2025 session. Turnaround means bills that originate in one chamber must pass and make their way to the other chamber in order to have a chance at becoming law this year. However, a few bills introduced in exempt committees – Tax, Ways & Means, and Federal & State Affairs – are exempt from the deadline. Deadlines like Turnaround truly help the session stay on track so we finish in 90 days.

At Turnaround, the Senate had passed 79 bills and the House 113. Only the aforementioned SB 63 has passed both chambers. Although Turnaround is behind us, there is still a lot of work to accomplish. With only about six weeks remaining, I'm particularly focused on property tax relief and a budget that spends less taxpayer money.

Given Name Act (SB 76): Legislation like SB 76 would have been hard to imagine being necessary just a few years ago, it is now. Clearly, the landslide victory for republicans in 2024 communicates a desire by voters to stop the assault of woke nonsense, including its impact in some schools. Therefore, by a vote of 26–14 the Senate passed commonsense legislation, The Given Name Act (SB 76), to prohibit school district employees from referring to a child by a pronoun or name inconsistent with their biological sex or birth certificate without written parental permission. Additionally, SB 76 provides protections for public school employees by prohibiting a school district or postsecondary education institution from taking adverse employment actions toward an employee for declining to address an individual by a name or pronoun inconsistent with the individual's birth certificate or biological sex. I voted yes.

Protecting Vulnerable Kansans (SB 71): The Senate took a stand against prostitution and sex trafficking in Kansas by unanimously passing SB 71, legislation

to increase criminal penalties for buying sexual relations. The bill also requires offenders to complete an educational or treatment program regarding commercial sexual exploitation.

Currently, a violation of buying sexual relations is a misdemeanor on a first offense and a felony on subsequent offenses. SB 71 removes the misdemeanor classification and makes all violations of buying sexual relations a felony, as well as increases the minimum fine from \$1,200 to \$2,000.

Protecting a First Amendment Right (SB 29): By a vote of 28–12, the Senate passed SB 29, a simple and straightforward protection of our First Amendment right to assemble – a right that was often restricted during COVID. SB 29 removes the ability of the government to restrict or prohibit public gatherings. The bill still allows public health officials to make recommendations against public gatherings; they just can't prohibit them.

Of the bill, I think Senate President Ty Masterson stated it very well when he said: *"The First Amendment states that no law should be passed abridging the right of the people to assemble, yet that's exactly what occurred (in 2020 & 2021), as families couldn't even gather for funerals or weddings due to edicts from health officials. This bill is a common-sense solution that still appropriately allows public health officials to issue strong recommendations but ultimately trusts the people of Kansas with their constitutional rights".* I voted yes on SB 29.

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

Virgil Peck
State Senator