

# “ THE PECK PERSPECTIVE ”

(From the Capitol)

May 8, 2023

**Deadline to File for Office:** Every August and November, voters in Kansas make decisions on who will be their representative in a variety of offices. In odd numbered years, like 2023, the City/School elections take place. The deadline to file as a candidate, June 1<sup>st</sup> at 12:00 (noon), is fast approaching. A person with a desire to serve their local community needs to file with the County Clerk’s office, and either pay a fee or gather the required signatures on a nomination petition.

Several positions, including city commission/council, school board, and college trustee, will be on the ballot in 2023. Since the people elected to these offices are a part of an entity with taxing authority, it is important for good candidates to step up and run for the positions. Sadly, too often local offices are not thought of as that important, but they are. Not only do the decisions made by local office holders affect the level of taxes we pay, but they are frequently the “bench” for higher office.

**Passing a State Budget:** One of the last votes taken prior to final adjournment of the 2023 legislative session was SB 25, the omnibus (final) state budget. Although an argument can be made about why legislators should vote yes for the budget, and there were certainly some good things in the bill, I voted no. SB 25 greatly expands the number of government workers (by more than 50) and significantly increases government spending. Additionally, SB 25 was only made available to legislators a couple hours before the vote was taken. The bill passed the Senate 29–10 (the no votes were all republicans) and the House 91–29.

The approved spending in SB 25 for fiscal year (FY) 2024, which starts July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023, is \$9.423 billion. Since we’re still in FY ’23, the final spending is not yet known, but in FY ’22, the actual spending was \$8.196 billion. SB 25 is an increase in spending of \$1.227 billion in just two years – an average of \$613 million per year.

I realize the State is currently flush with money, and the ending balance (money in the state’s checking account) is projected to be \$2.59 billion, but the money came from taxpayers and the 2023 session yielded no significant tax cuts. Additionally, each year’s spending becomes the baseline as spending is established for the next fiscal year. During my 20-plus years of watching state spending, there were very few years when spending was reduced. Those decreases followed a major economic downturn, like after the 2001 terrorist attacks or the deep recession that started in 2008.

Kansans have been told that government spending saw huge cuts during the Brownback era, however, the numbers reveal something different. Brownback

became governor in January 2011, so his first budget was FY '12. Spending that year was \$6.1 billion. Seven budget years later, FY '18, when he left office, spending was at \$6.65 billion – \$550 million higher.

There are plenty of places of where state spending could be reduced, but I'll just mention one. In SB 25 the Kansas Department of Corrections receives a funding increase of \$1,124 million and 12.5 new employees to screen inmate mail. I realize with some 8,700 inmates there can be a lot of mail, and it needs screened for contraband, but over a million more dollars and 12 new employees is excessive. Screening inmate mail is not a new thing. Why not have all the mail go to one (or two) location(s), screened, contraband removed and then shipped to the different facilities? That would save taxpayer money. If that causes a delay in mail getting to inmates, well ..... join the rest of us in delayed mail delivery.

**More Vetoes Coming?:** At the time of this writing, legislators are monitoring legislation that passed the final week of the session to see if Governor Kelly continues the excessive use of her veto pen. There are two tax bills, HB 2002 and SB 8, a K-12 education finance bill, SB 113, and a health care freedom bill, HB 2285, that some believe face a possible veto. Three of the bills, HB 2002, SB 8 and HB 2285 hit her desk on May 5<sup>th</sup>, while SB 113 did not get to her until May 8<sup>th</sup>. The Governor has 10 days from the time a bill reaches her desk to make a decision regarding its future. I'll keep you posted.

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

Virgil Peck  
State Senator