

THE PECK PERSPECTIVE

(From the Capitol)

February 23, 2026

When the Legislature reached Turnaround, the “half-way point” of the session, the Senate had passed 75 bills and voted one down. Two bills have gone to the Governor – one was signed and the other vetoed. The remainder of the session will see an increase in the number of votes taken and the number of bills headed to the governor’s desk.

A personal note: During my first year as a state senator, on February 17, 2021, a conservative icon with “*talent on loan from God*” passed away—Rush Limbaugh. Rush was loved by many conservatives and despised by some non-conservatives, but no one can deny that Rush catapulted the modern conservative movement forward in the United States. During his three-plus decades on the airwaves, this conservative pioneer helped embolden Americans to step up and stop the radical left from destroying a great nation.

Yes, Rush was a showboat with a unique style of communicating a point, but he was also a Great American with a heart of gold who said and believed, “*I want anyone who believes in life, liberty, pursuit of happiness to succeed. And I want any force, any person, any element of an overarching Big Government that would stop your success, I want that organization, that element or that person to fail. I want you to succeed.*” Rest in peace Rush.

First Veto Override (SB 244): Last week I wrote that a vote to override Governor Kelly’s veto of SB 244 would “take place soon and Kansas Republicans will continue to protect females from males intruding into their spaces.” The override vote in the Senate was 31-9 and in the House 87-37. Therefore, SB 244 will soon become law and strengthen Kansas’ Women’s Bill of Rights. The bill makes it clear that multiple-occupancy private spaces in public buildings will be designated for a single sex. SB 244 also ensures drivers’ licenses and birth certificates will once again accurately reflect the individual’s gender/sex at birth.

Preserving the Integrity of Public Assistance Programs (HB 2004): It’s baffling that any elected official would not want to ensure that public assistance programs are only going to those who truly need them. However, Senate Substitute for HB 2004 passed the Senate along party lines 28-9.

S. Sub for HB 2004 will ensure Kansas fully complies with federal requests to combat fraud, waste, and abuse in programs such as SNAP (food stamps) and

Medicaid by requiring the Kansas Secretary of DCF and the Secretary of KDHE to provide requested information within 30 days to the USDA and HHS.

The central goal of S. Sub for HB 2004 is to implement stronger oversight and accountability of public assistance programs in Kansas by mandating timely, unconditional data sharing of who is receiving SNAP and Medicaid with the federal government—where the bulk of funding for such programs comes from. The bill is necessary due to the Kelly Administration's refusal to cooperate in providing necessary data that will help ensure these benefits only go to those whom the programs are intended to help. Withholding the requested information is costing the State \$10 million quarterly (\$40 million annually). Since the Senate significantly amended the bill, it is now in a conference committee to work out the final language.

Improving Access to Health Care (SB 368 & HB 2223): Prior to Turnaround, the Senate passed SB 368 and HB 2223. Two bills that help promote health care access and affordability.

With Obamacare, continuing to make health insurance extremely expensive, many Americans are turning to health care sharing ministry plans—which are considerably less expensive and make access to health coverage more affordable. SB 368, a bill I introduced, creates the Health Care Sharing Ministries Tax Deduction Act to provide a subtraction modification when members file their state income taxes for qualified health care sharing expenses. The bill passed 33-7 and now goes to the House.

Improving access to health care for many includes access to eye care. HB 2223 enhances Kansans' ability to receive comprehensive eye care from trusted professionals where they live by empowering a Doctor of Optometry to deliver the full range of in-office procedures, appropriately using injectable medications along with expanded prescribing and dispensing of medications. For many years, other states have allowed optometrists to perform these procedures for which they have been trained to provide.

HB 2223 will reduce unnecessary referrals, ease burdens on patients (especially in rural areas), and enhance overall efficiency in eye care, while incorporating strong safeguards to guarantee a high level of care. The amended bill passed 34-6 and now goes back to the House for consideration.

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

Virgil Peck
State Senator