

“ THE PECK PERSPECTIVE ”

(From the Capitol)

May 13, 2024

Now, this borders on the ridiculous – maybe it’s already past the “border point” to being just plain ridiculous. Kansas’ Governor, Laura Kelly, has once again used her veto pen (some 30 times in 2024) on good legislation; legislation designed to make Kansas a better state.

Vetoed Just Keep Coming: The most recent Kelly vetoes are SB 172, the Kansas Land and Military Installation Protection Act, and SB 232, legislation requiring all costs be considered when holding deadbeat dads responsible for their children.

For more than two years I’ve communicated the need to pass legislation to protect Kansas from having its land gobbled up by America’s adversaries – China, Russia, Iran, Cuba, North Korea, and Venezuela. The task of crafting legislation, capable of receiving sufficient support by legislators, took much longer than necessary. For me, and an overwhelming majority of SEK voters who responded to my 2024 Pre-Session Survey, it was a no-brainer. As a reminder, I received 508 responses to the survey. Of those respondents, 92% (467) said Kansas should pass a law that prohibits America’s adversaries from purchasing rural land in Kansas.

The task was finally accomplished late in the session when SB 172 passed the Senate 24–14. Since it had previously passed the House 86–39, the bill was sent to the Governor. However, even with all the time invested tweaking the language to secure sufficient votes for its passage, SB 172 will not become law, due to the veto.

In a few words. SB 172 bans foreign principals from “countries of concern” from acquiring an interest in real estate located within 100 miles of the boundary of a military installation in Kansas or an adjacent state. That covers most of Kansas.

The veto of SB 172 is shameful, but despite the Governor’s apathy, this is an issue too important to not continue working on. We must protect Kansas and its citizens from those with evil intentions toward America.

Governor Kelly also vetoed SB 232, a bill to require courts to consider a woman’s out-of-pocket costs for medical and other pregnancy-related expenses when determining child support. The child support expenses could not exceed the actual cost for the prenatal care of the mother and unborn child – excluding any costs associated with an elective abortion. SB 232 passed 25–12 in the Senate and 82–38 in the House.

Since the 2024 session has adjourned, there can be no chance of a veto override for SB 173 and SB 232.

Axing Another Good Tax Plan (SB 37): Although as I write this, Governor Kelly has not officially vetoed SB 37. However, during a radio interview on KCUR (PBS), she clearly stated her intention to do so. If she does, she will again (for the 6th time) deny tax relief for Kansas families and senior citizens. During the interview, she further stated she would “call the legislature back into a special session to pass a good tax cut bill”. Governor, take a close look at SB 37. It is “a good tax cut bill”. It cuts property taxes for homeowners, income taxes for workers and senior citizens, and sales tax for everyone.

SB 37 passed with a super, bipartisan majority, 108–11, in the House and 25–9 in the Senate, with five members absent. That means 133 out of 153 legislators from across the state voted for this tax relief plan. Although I wanted and pushed for greater tax cuts, SB 37 is truly a testament to the work of reaching across party lines, and the concessions made to get to this place of compromise.

The governor says SB 37 is not affordable. That’s only if we adopt all her proposed spending. The Consensus Revenue Estimating Group, university economists and heads of a few state agencies, forecasted in April that the state’s tax revenue would provide for an ending balance (money in the state’s checking account) at the end of the current fiscal year, June 30th, with a surplus of \$2.6 billion and an additional \$1.7 billion in the budget stabilization (rainy-day) fund. If tax revenue was reduced by \$530 million next year, we would still end fiscal year 2025 with a \$1.95 billion general fund surplus and \$1.8 billion in the rainy-day account. With the state’s anticipated surplus, there’s no legitimate reason for Kelly to veto SB 37.

Kansas Taxes Too High?: Is Kansas really a high-tax state? According to a report released last month by WalletHub, a personal finance company that empowers consumers to lead financially healthy lives, we are. Their research was based on the amount paid as a share of total personal income toward state and local taxes. They ranked each state’s sales and excise, property, and income taxes and combined the three into an overall ranking – with 1 being the worst and 50 being the best.

Kansas’ ranking was twelfth (12th) worst. Our neighboring states all ranked higher. Nebraska was #15, Colorado #24, while Missouri and Oklahoma ranked even better at #35 and #42 respectively. This report and many others tell us it is way past time for taxes and spending in Kansas to be reduced.

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

Virgil Peck
State Senator