

PRESS RELEASE

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THE PECK PERSPECTIVE

(From the Capitol)

Hosting Students: On March 10th, 11th, and 12th, I had the privilege of hosting students from three different schools in the Capitol. On Tuesday, some young Crusaders, 5th and 6th grade students, from Ft. Scott Christian Heights (my alma mater) traveled to Topeka, followed on Wednesday by Falcons from Meadow View Grade School in Labette County visiting the State House, and then on Thursday it was fun meeting with the Patriots from West Elk High School. And, three weeks prior to that, February 19th, I was pleased to have some Grizzlies from Labette County High School in the Capitol to spend time learning about the legislative process. Crusaders, Falcons, Patriots, and Grizzlies are each school's mascot.

I encourage schools, parents, grandparents and others to bring students to Topeka to witness the Legislature in action. Not only is the State House an impressive building with significant Kansas history, but it helps young people better understand the process of how and why laws come about.

Obnoxious Protestors: I understand not everyone agrees with every bill passed in Topeka – I know I don't. But as I've previously written, yelling and cursing in the Capitol does nothing to advance a cause. On Tuesday, March 10th, protestors of SB 244, the commonsense bill affirming biological sex and protecting females' privacy and safety in public buildings, blocked Senators from entering the Senate Chambers through the main entrance. If their goal was to show how out of step the left is with the values of the supermajority of Kansans ... well ... they accomplished their mission.

As expected, the ACLU filed a lawsuit against SB 244 on behalf of two confused persons and asked a judge for a temporary injunction blocking its implementation. To his credit, Douglas County District Court Judge James McCabria denied the request, allowing the law to remain in effect while the case continues.

Cell Phones in Schools (HB 2299): A topic put in front of legislators early in the session was dealing with cell phones in schools. Finally, on March 13th legislation addressing the issue, HB 2299, reached the governor's desk.

HB 2299 requires public schools and nonpublic schools accredited by the State Board of Education to adopt policies and procedures regarding the use of “personal electronic communication devices” during the school day – from bell to bell. Language in the bill requires all personal devices be turned off and securely stored in a location that is not on the student’s person and inaccessible to the student.

If a student is on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), a 504 plan or a licensed physician states the personal device is a medical necessity to support the health of the student (i.e. a student with diabetes), HB 2299 allows for those students to use personal devices during the school day. [Note: A “504 plan” is a document required under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 regarding accommodations for students with disabilities.]

The bill also allows a school to adopt policies and procedures to limit or prohibit student use of personal devices during school sponsored events occurring outside of the school day.

Some may question HB 2299, and I understand the concern. The entire purpose of HB 2299 is to improve the educational experience of Kansas children by giving teachers a distraction-free environment where students can focus on learning and recover from the anxiety-inducing effects of constantly being online. HB 2299 passed the Senate 36–4 (*I voted yes*) and the House 84–39.

Property Tax Relief? (SCR 1616 & HB 2745): I struggle to understand why there appears to be a hesitancy by some lawmakers to support legislation that will bring transparency and accountability to entities authorized to levy property taxes. Last week, after significant floor debate the House failed to advance SCR 1616, a proposal to allow voters to weigh in on a constitutional amendment to cap assessed valuation increases. As a reminder, SCR 1616 passed the Senate with bipartisan support 30–10.

The Senate is working on a property tax bill (HB 2745) sent over from the House. However, without some adjustments (amendments), it won’t receive sufficient votes to clear the Senate. HB 2745 passed the House 76–45 with bipartisan support and bipartisan opposition. I remain optimistic that a respectable compromise can still be reached, but it will certainly take some give-and-take in both chambers.

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