

“ THE PECK PERSPECTIVE ”

(From the Capitol)

March 11, 2024

All through the year, in session and out of session, legislators receive many reports on many topics. One such recent report came from the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System (KPERs). The report showed good news and bad news. The good news is the KPERs fund had strong earnings during 2023 – with an investment return of 11.1%, which equated to an increase of \$1.9 billion to the trust fund. The bad news was that in the year prior (2022) the investments lost a significant amount of money – to the tune of 9.4%.

Although a couple years ago the KPERs was around 80 percent fully funded, the 2022 losses dropped the funded ratio (assets vs. liabilities) to 73.4 percent at the end of 2023. Still not a bad ratio, especially when compared to a ratio of 57 percent 14 years ago. At the end of 2023, the KPERs had assets totaling \$26.3 billion, up from \$9.8 billion in 2000. The 25-year investment return is 6.9%.

The report also stated that there are 340,637 members of the KPERs, and the oldest living retiree is 112 years of age. The average monthly benefit is \$1,484 and most retirees (88%) still live in Kansas.

Benefit for Military Veterans (SB 462): There is a significant number of current or recently discharged military personnel who have spent many hours driving big trucks. To make it easier for those who wish to transition into a commercial driving job, the Senate unanimously passed SB 462. The bill waives the requirement for military veterans to take the knowledge and skills test as a condition of employment driving a commercial motor vehicle (CMV). To receive the waiver, an applicant must qualify under the military *Even Exchange Program* authorized by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. Additionally, the applicant needs a current CDL, must have, within the previous 12 months, been in a military position requiring operation of a military vehicle equivalent to a CMV, and submit an application for the waiver.

Since the House passed a similar bill, HB 2479, the chance of providing veterans with this benefit is very good.

Safety on Kansas Highways (SB 142): Final passage of SB 142 would require the driver of a vehicle, when approaching a stopped vehicle with its hazard warning lights flashing, displaying road flares, or other caution signals, to proceed with caution and change lanes away from the stopped vehicle if it is possible to safely do so. Failure to take such precautions would result in a fine of \$75 for unlawful passing of a stationary vehicle. SB 142 passed the Senate 38–2 and is now on the House side of the Capitol.

Why an Abortion? (HB 2749): Last week, by an 81–39 vote, the House passed HB 2749, amending reporting requirements for abortions performed in Kansas. No matter which side of the abortion issue a person is on, understanding why a woman is choosing an abortion should be of interest to all. Knowing the reason could help reduce the number of women who find themselves contemplating an abortion.

Passage of HB 2749 would change the abortion reporting requirements by abortion providers to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) from yearly to biannually and require the reports to state the reason for each abortion.

Except in the case of a medical emergency, prior to an abortion, a female would be asked which of the following reasons was the most important factor in causing them to choose abortion: (1) Having a baby would interfere with their education, employment or career; (2) they cannot provide for the child; (3) they already have enough, or too many, children; (4) the woman's husband or partner is abusive to them or their children; (5) the woman's husband or partner wants her to have an abortion; (6) the woman does not have enough support from family or others to raise a child; (7) the pregnancy is the result of rape; (8) the pregnancy is the result of incest; (9) the pregnancy threatens her physical health; (10) the pregnancy threatens her mental or emotional health; or (11) the child would have a disability. If the woman declines to answer, such response, or no response, shall be recorded.

Additionally, abortion providers must include in their report to the KDHE: the female's current age, marital status, state or country of residency, race, highest attained level of education, whether they have reported domestic abuse in the past 12 months, whether they believe their living conditions to be unsafe, and the method of abortion.

HB 2749 was received by the Senate on March 7th and is expected to receive a committee hearing in the next couple weeks, worked in committee, and then put on the calendar for debate and a vote by the full senate.

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

Virgil Peck
State Senator