

# THE PECK PERSPECTIVE

(From the Capitol)

March 24, 2025

When legislators vacated the Capitol on Friday, March 21<sup>st</sup>, a total of 26 bills had been passed by both chambers and sent to the Governor. Twenty of the bills are not controversial – of course, “controversial” is subject to opinion – while six are considered controversial and may see a gubernatorial veto, followed by a veto override. Time will reveal the outcome of each bill.

Three of the controversial bills, SB 4, SB 5, and SB 6 deal with elections, SB 14 provides for a continuing budget if one is not passed prior to the start of a new fiscal year, SB 105 deals with the authority to replace a statewide officeholder and HB 2027 tightens up the guidelines for people receiving taxpayer funded benefits like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Many more issues/bills will be settled this week. Although all have a level of importance, the issues of interest to most Kansans are the state budget and property tax reform. Both should be addressed over the next few days.

**Letting Voters Decide (SCR 1611):** A couple weeks ago I wrote that SCR 1611, a proposed constitutional amendment regarding judicial section, had passed the Senate and was headed to the House. Last week, by a vote of 84–40, the House agreed it would be good to let voters determine how supreme court justices in Kansas are selected.

The simple, straight-forward yes or no question will be on the ballot in August of 2026. However, between now and then, we can expect an all-out blitz by liberal special interest groups to confuse voters as they attempt to sway the outcome of the vote.

As a quick reminder, Kansas currently has a complicated, and quite frankly biased, way of selecting Supreme Court justices. A nine-member “Supreme Court Nominating Commission”, dominated by five lawyers, select nominees from a list provided by the Bar Association. Those nominees are then sent to the Governor who has the final say on the court appointment.

The current process involves an election – an election that only lawyers can vote in it. Fair or transparent? Hardly. Think of it in these terms. The NCAA basketball tournament is taking place. The current judicial selection in Kansas is like letting the players determine who will referee their game.

**Filling Vacancies in Office (SB 105):** One of the “controversial” bills mentioned above is SB 105. Under current law, if the office for a US Senator, the Insurance Commissioner, or the State Treasurer becomes vacant, the person to fill the position is selected entirely by the Governor. No one else has a say in the replacement – one individual holds all the power. SB 105 requires the legislature to nominate three individuals from the political party of the previous office holder and send them to the Governor. The Governor must choose one of the three as the replacement. SB 105 passed the Senate 31–9 and the House 84–39, meaning there’s plenty of votes to override an expected veto.

**Working on the State Budget (HB 2007):** The only issue the Legislature is required by the constitution to address each year is a state budget. Both chambers have passed a budget, but there are significant differences that will be worked out by the conference committee.

This is the first year of a reformed budget process, in which the legislature takes primary control of crafting the budget, rather than merely considering the governor's recommendations. There’s been a few bumps along the way, but overall, the process is working. The Senate’s version of the budget for FY 2026 is about \$235 million less than what was approved for fiscal year 2025, while the House plan is some \$245 million less than their spending for 2025.

In addition to other provisions, the Senate put in a 3% across-the-board spending cut (saving \$70M), and withholds \$4 million from the governor and Dept. of Administration until they certify that programs, mandates, training requirements and positions for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) have been eliminated. Additionally, “gender identifying pronouns or gender ideology” must be removed from email signature blocks on state worker’s email accounts and any other types of communication.

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

Virgil Peck  
State Senator