

THE PECK PERSPECTIVE

(From the Capitol)

February 10, 2025

I've been an avid fan of the Kansas City Chiefs fan since 1968 (yes before many of you were born), so the final score of Super Bowl LIX is disappointing. In football, and in life, we win some and lose some. What we choose to learn from adversity (losses) is up to us. We can let it shape our character positively or negatively. I'm certain my Chiefs will be back at the top soon.

Activity in the Capitol has reached the point in the session when legislative updates can't cover everything. That means I must determine what topics/bills to write about and let voters learn about other topics from another source.

Help Not Harm Act (SB 63) (update): After passing both chambers with strong majorities, SB 63, a bill to protect minors – who think they can change their gender – from permanent, life-altering surgeries and treatments, was enrolled and presented to Governor Kelly on Wednesday, February 5th. From that date, she has 10 days to decide whether to sign, veto or let the bill become law without her signature. Should she make the wrong choice and veto the bill, she'll likely see her first veto override of the 2025 session.

Continuing to Work on Property Tax Relief (SCR 1603): Kansas voters sent a clear message in the 2024 election demanding action be taken to control property tax increases. That's why the Senate passed SCR 1603, a proposed constitutional amendment to limit the growth of the taxable value of real property to 3% per year. SCR 1603 was approved by a bi-partisan vote of 28-12. I voted yes.

If passed by the House, and then Kansas voters, SCR 1603 would reform a portion of the property tax system. Many Kansans agree that the appraisal process is broken, with property valuations significantly exceeding the rate of inflation and pushing property taxes higher and higher, to the point of pricing some out of the market. I understand there are many components to property tax reform and SCR 1603 only addresses the valuation process.

Shutting Down Government Shutdowns (SB 14): The State's fiscal year ends each June 30th, so if for some reason a budget is not adopted by that date, the state government would shut down. Although a government shutdown would save taxpayer money, it could cause havoc for important state agencies, and others, who rely on funding from the state.

In past years, we've seen budget negotiations drag into June. The threat of a government shutdown creates a potential for politicians to use the June 30th

deadline as a weapon for them to get their way on issues that otherwise would not be adopted – like the gamesmanship we’ve seen all too often in Washington. To eliminate that possibility, SB 14 was introduced and ultimately passed by the Senate on a party line vote of 31–8. I voted yes.

Under the current process, if the governor and legislature fail to agree on a budget, appropriations would end starting with the new fiscal year on July 1. Passage of SB 14 would continue the previous fiscal year’s funding level until a new budget was adopted, thereby ensuring state operations continue past July 1. The bill is now in the House Appropriations Committee where I trust it will continue working through the process.

Dealing With Kansas Elections (SB 4 & SB 6): The Senate passed two common sense bills to bring certainty to Kansas elections, SB 4 and SB 6.

Currently, if a ballot is postmarked on or before election day and received in the county clerk’s office by the close of business the following Friday, the ballot is counted. SB 4 would simply set the cut off for receipt of advance ballots at 7:00 p.m. on Election Day, the same deadline as other ballots. One reason for the change is last year a federal appeals court ruled that such “grace periods” are unconstitutional. The bill passed 29–10. I was among the yes votes.

The other bill, SB 6, also passed 29-10 and would ban ranked choice voting in Kansas. While not used at the state level, some localities have discussed the possibility of using rank choice voting in local elections. Ranked choice voting has proven to be a disaster where it has been tried, causing delayed results and even some voters’ legitimate ballots being trashed to get to a “forced majority.” I voted yes on SB 6.

Both SB 4 and SB 6 are now on the House side of the Capitol.

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

Virgil Peck
State Senator