

“ THE PECK PERSPECTIVE ”

(From the Capitol)

March 4, 2024

At this point in the 2024 session only two bills have passed both chambers. One is HB 2284, the tax cuts Governor Kelly vetoed and SB 15. HB 2284 would have allowed all Kansans to keep more of their hard-earned money through property, sales and income tax reductions, while SB 15 provided tax credits for businesses making purchases from vendors employing persons with disabilities.

Even though not much has been finalized, March is historically the month when the bulk of the legislature’s work is completed – bills are either passed or killed. That means as we get into March, legislators will be spending extra time in committee and long hours in their respective chambers debating bills deemed important. This week I’ll mention three bills that have passed the Senate and are expected to receive a stamp of approval in the House.

Protecting Kansas Kids from Pornography (SB 394): In 2018, the Kansas Senate voted 35-4 to adopt SR 1762, a resolution identifying pornography as a public health hazard, leading to a broad spectrum of societal harms. The resolution identified consequences of access to pornography, particularly when viewed at a young age. Included in SR 1762 was language urging the Kansas Senate and other governing bodies to take steps in fighting the very real public health impacts of pornography.

The need for policy change took a huge step forward last month when the Senate unanimously adopted SB 394. A core function of government is to protect our children from harm – passage of SB 394 does exactly that. The bill requires the use of age verification software on websites when 25% or more of the content is pornographic. I personally wanted a bill that took greater measures to protect children from pornography, but sometimes we must take what we can get and move forward from there.

In addition to protecting children, SB 394 may cause some notorious porn websites to shut down access to their sites, rather than comply with the law to protect children. This has happened in other states. Although SB 394 will likely face a court challenge, similar legislation has been upheld in Louisiana, Virginia, and Utah.

Much like other controlled products (tobacco, alcohol, etc.) pornography’s negative impacts are even more harmful on young minds and should be regulated accordingly. Statistics show that 80% of children have been exposed to pornography by the age of 17, and that the average age of first exposure is age 12. More than half of these exposures occurred when a child stumbled on pornography by accident.

I had the responsibility to serve as Chairman of the Committee of the Whole (oversee floor debate) on the day we debated SB 394. I was surprised by the objections raised by the democrats during the debate, especially when the vote was taken and the bill passed unanimously, 40-0. SB 394 is now in the House where it is expected that they will act quickly so we can get this important bill signed into law. SB 394 is an example of how fighting for what is right does not need to be controversial.

Assisting with Rural Ambulance Services (SB 384): Ambulance services in Kansas are governed by the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Board. Current rules and regulations adopted by the EMS Board require a minimum of two certified medical staff on an ambulance, and many rural communities face a shortage of having such certified staff. Although the EMS Board has been willing to offer a 12-month waiver from the requirement, for many rural areas of Kansas, that is only a short-term fix.

SB 384 amends the law to grant a permanent variance to any rule and regulation regarding minimum staffing on an ambulance. That will help rural areas continue to provide ambulance services, as one person, generally the driver, will not be required to hold a medical certificate. The bill passed the Senate 39-0.

Exempting Sugaring from the Definition of Cosmetology (SB 434): Sometimes legislators learn about things they have little to no interest in learning. Such was the case for me when it came to the practice of "sugaring" for hair removal. But apparently it matters to some, so, SB 434 was debated and passed.

Passage of SB 434 will define and exempt the practice of hair removal by sugaring from the definition of cosmetology. In the bill, "sugaring" is defined as *"a method of temporary hair removal from the body by use of a paste made from sugar, lemon and water, or its equivalent, to pull hair from follicles. Sugaring may include the use of over-the-counter sugaring pastes or astringents, gels, powders, instruments used to spread or remove sugaring pastes, tweezers or scissors incidental to sugaring, but does not include the use of chemicals, electric needles or any type of wax."* Aren't you glad you read this *Peck Perspective*? 😊 SB 434 passed the Senate 38-1. I voted yes.

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

Virgil Peck
State Senator