

“THE PECK PERSPECTIVE”

(From the Capitol)

January 30, 2023

The pace of legislative activity continued heating up during the third week (Jan. 23rd–27th) of the session. More bills were introduced – now totaling 322 between the Senate and House – the Governor gave her State of the State speech, I introduced three more bills (SB 94, SB 97 & SB 100) and testified in support of two others.

The State of the State speech, where the Governor outlines her priorities for the session, followed by releasing her budget proposal, was delayed this year because Governor Kelly tested positive for COVID prior to the originally scheduled date. Although the speech was delayed, in press releases she had made her priorities known, and her budget proposal had been released.

During her speech, Governor Kelly talked about the need for securing a sufficient, long-term water supply, proposed a few minor tax cuts, restated her desire to expand Medicaid, urged increased funding for special education and the legalization of marijuana. Additionally, she asked the Legislature to “meet her in the middle” while at the same time suggesting that Republicans should not be pushing an agenda of larger tax reductions or looking for solutions to improving education for Kansas children.

On January 12th, when the governor’s budget was released, it revealed the same message we’ve grown to expect – a wish list of record-breaking spending, at \$9.5 billion. Many see a looming recession, or at a minimum, a downturn in the economy on the horizon. Common sense would tell everyone that state government should exercise fiscal restraint, not go on a spending-spree.

Speaker of the House, Dan Hawkins, summed up the republican agenda, which is significantly different than the Governor’s, by saying our focus is *“to lower your cost of living by providing broad based tax reform and addressing high energy rates ... our commitment to education by focusing on the classroom, supporting quality teachers, removing woke ideology, and ensuring every student truly has the opportunity to excel ... our commitment to advance policies that grow the economy, increases health care access, grow the Kansas workforce, support law and order, and protect life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”*

On the topic of K-12 funding, the Kansas Department of Education (KSDE) estimates that Kansas school districts will spend \$17,358 per student this school year. Of course, different districts spend different amounts, but the \$17,358 per student is \$365 per student higher than the actual spending of \$16,993 per student in the 2022 school year. Extra federal funding is driving some of the increases, but KSDE estimates schools will receive about \$290 million more in state funding this

year. Total funding (federal, state & local) for the current school year is budgeted to be \$8.1 billion.

The bills I introduced last week are: **SB 94**, which will save Kansans \$63 million in property taxes by eliminating the 1.5 mills the State levies for the Kansas educational building fund and the state institutions building fund; **SB 97**, which will provide additional property tax savings by increasing the exemption, as it relates to the 20 mill obligation for K-12 education, from the first \$40,000 of valuation to \$65,000 – with a built-in annual increase to the exemption; and **SB 100**, to disallow foreign ownership (think China) of rural property in Kansas.

Kansas legislators hear nonstop from taxpayers about the high cost of their property taxes. Passage of SB 94 and SB 97 will take steps toward reducing property taxes, while SB 100 is a matter of national security. We cannot continue to have rural/agriculture land in Kansas being gobbled up by foreign countries and individuals that is then taken out of production agriculture. I will appear before the Senate Tax Committee to testify in support of SB 94 and SB 97 on Wednesday, February 1st.

The two bills I testified in favor of last week were SB 46 and SB 49 – both related to the blinking lights on top of wind turbines. If passed, SB 46 would stop the constant blinking red lights on the top of existing wind turbines. This would be done by requiring any developer, owner, or operator of existing turbines to install “light-mitigating technology systems”. These “systems” are radar controlled to detect aircraft in the area. When an aircraft is detected, the red lights would come on and start blinking to let the pilot know of the wind farm. Once the aircraft goes beyond the range of the radar for two minutes, the lights would then turn off. SB 49 is like SB 46 except it would be for future, rather than existing, wind farms.

For persons who live near a wind farm, “near” could be several miles away, the constant blinking lights can and do cause issues for them and their pets or livestock. Not to mention that the lights deny rural residents the tranquility of viewing a star-filled night sky.

The passage of SB 46 and SB 49 appears to be very good. I say that because, to my surprise, a representative of the wind energy joined me in supporting the legislation.

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

Virgil Peck
State Senator