

THE PECK PERSPECTIVE

(From the Capitol)

January 27, 2025

Although the 13 new senators are still learning everything about the legislative process, a senator's schedule, and their way around the Capitol, they bring a new energy and fresh perspective that will help advance conservative policies that are good for Kansas families and businesses. I'm glad they're here and look forward to working with them.

As I mentioned last week, the first week of a new term is somewhat slow, due to all the pomp and circumstance. However, during the shortened second week (due to the MLK holiday), the number of bills and concurrent resolutions introduced in the Senate increased to 80 and committee hearings got into full swing.

In the Senate Tax Committee, we debated, amended and then passed three bills out of committee. Passing a bill out of the committee is the first step in the process and tells Leadership the bill is ready for debate by the full Senate.

The first bill, SB 10, exempts watercraft, certain small trailers, motorized bicycles and wheelchairs, and other equipment not manufactured for operating on a highway, from all property or ad valorem taxes.

The next bill, SB 35, is specifically designed to provide property tax relief by eliminating the 1.5 mills levied by the State. This 1.5 mills funds maintenance and renovations of state buildings. One mill is allocated for higher education, with the remaining half mill going to help maintain other government buildings. The bill does not eliminate the funding for the buildings, it simply shifts it from onerous property taxes to other revenue sources – like sales and income taxes. The property tax savings is not huge, an average of around \$30, but it is one way the Legislature can reduce property taxes by an estimated \$81 million, starting in 2026.

The final tax bill the Tax Committee put its stamp of approval on is a proposed constitutional amendment, SCR 1603. If passed by a two-thirds majority in both chambers, it will then go to Kansas voters in November for them to make the final decision. If ratified by the voters, starting in 2026, Kansas will have a three percent annual cap on property valuation increases. The cap is designed to save money for property owners and place an additional level of transparency in how property taxes are levied.

Especially early in a session, a variety of reports are given to legislators. A KDHE report shows that Kansans are delaying marriage until they are older. In 2004, 8.9% of the brides and 3.4% of the grooms were under 20 years of age. By 2023, the percentages dropped to 3% of the brides and 0.9% of the grooms being under 20. The average age of all brides in 2023 was 32.4 yrs. and for grooms the average age was 34.2 years. In 2023, the age of first-time marriages for women was 27.6 yrs. and men 29.2 yrs. For a second (or more) marriage, women were 43.5 yrs. of age and while for men it was 46.4 yrs. of age. The total number of marriages in Kansas in 2023 was 15,626, down 375 from 2022. There has been a steady decline in the number of marriages in Kansas since 2000. Interestingly, the 2023 report showed more marriages occur in October than in any other month.

Another report (from the Attorney General's Office) showed Kansas saw a 27% increase in the number of concealed-carry permits issued from 2023 to 2024. There were 4795 permits issued in 2024 as compared to 3783 permits in 2023. One reason for the increase is likely due to the 2023 legislation that eliminated the \$100 permit fee for concealed-carry permits, the \$25 renewal fee and the \$16 fee paid to the Kansas Dept. of Revenue. A permit applicant must still pay the \$32.50 fee to county sheriffs to cover the cost of fingerprints.

The final thing I'll mention this week is the additional responsibilities I was given by being reappointed to the Joint Committee on Kansas Security and a new appointment to the Joint Committee on Home and Community Based Services and KanCare.

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

Virgil Peck
State Senator