

“ THE PECK PERSPECTIVE ”

(From the Capitol)

February 13, 2023

On Thursday, February 9th, the 2023 Senate debated and voted on the first pieces of legislation to hit the senate floor – nine bills and one resolution. Six of the bills were insurance related with five passing unanimously. The one that wasn't unanimous drew one dissenting vote. The other three bills, SB 11, SB 39 and SB 42, also passed unanimously, but are more interesting.

Authorizing a new Plaza near the Statehouse: SB 11 authorizes the Capitol Preservation Committee to develop and approve placement of the Ad Astra Plaza on the grounds of the Statehouse. The Plaza will be funded entirely with private funds (no tax dollars) and will include a life-sized sculpture of the Ad Astra statue – a replica of the one that sits atop the Capitol Building – bronze plaques, and donor bricks. There's an interesting history to the Kansa Indian Warrior, called Ad Astra, on top of the Capitol few are aware of.

In 1889 a commission was appointed to determine the finishing touches for the Capitol. A competition was held to determine just what would be the crown of the dome. Initially, in 1901, a sculpture of Ceres, the Roman goddess of agriculture, was selected. However, the estimated cost of \$6,950 was thought to be too high for a non-essential item – equivalent to \$242,675 today – and public outcry against having an immoral, pagan goddess sit atop the Capitol tabled the idea. More than 80 years later, in 1984, the legislature appropriated funding for a yet-to-be-determined statue, stipulating that it could not be a god or goddess. Ultimately, a bronze sculpture of a Kansa warrior, created by Richard Bergen, was approved for display.

In October 2002, the Ad Astra statue, a hollow cast consisting of 95% brass with traces of silica, tin, manganese, and iron, was hoisted to the top of the Capitol, finally completing the work some 113 years later. Although it doesn't appear very tall when looking up from the ground, Ad Astra is 22 feet 2 inches tall and weighs 4,420 pounds.

A new mural and more Kansas history: SB 39 provides for the development of a mural in the Statehouse to honor a unique aspect of Kansas' Civil War history – the 1st Kansas Colored Voluntary Infantry Regiment. Like the Ad Astra Plaza, the mural will be funded entirely by private funds.

Without federal authorization, Kansas became the first state to recruit, train and send black soldiers into combat during the Civil War. Based in Ft. Scott and organized in October 1862, prior to the Emancipation Proclamation, the 1st Kansas Colored Voluntary Infantry served in the Union Army and was the first black unit to see combat alongside white soldiers.

Paying persons the State owes: SB 42 authorizes various state agencies to make payment of claims against the state. The bill spends \$22,982.54 for 26 claims. Twelve claims are from persons incarcerated in state penitentiaries, while five are property damage claims and nine are motor vehicle fuel tax refunds not filed within the statutory filing period. The inmate claims are generally low-dollar amounts (most less than \$50) for items determined to have been lost or wrongly destroyed by prison staff.

Urging President Biden to Restore Energy Independence: On a straight party-line vote, 28–10, the Senate adopted a non-binding resolution, SCR 1603, urging the President to change course on much of his energy policies. Specifically, SCR 1603 urges President Biden to: *“reject unscientific environmental mandates that restrict domestic energy production; support policies that ensure America’s long-term energy affordability, security, leadership and progress; to expand domestic energy production and ensure energy reliability and affordability for consumers”*.

SCR 1603 was the second concurrent resolution passed this session. The other resolution, SCR 1602, passed the Senate on a voice vote in January and then the House 83–35 last week. SCR 1602 is the official position of the Kansas Legislature and disapproves *“the designation of the Lesser Prairie Chicken as a threatened species in Kansas by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.”*

More Testimony in Support of Legislation: This week, for the 7th and 8th times this session, I will be providing testimony in support of legislation. I’ll appear before the Education Committee to support SB 123, legislation allowing out-of-state military veterans who served in Kansas for at least 11 months and their families to pay the discounted in-state tuition at state colleges and universities. My other testimony will be in front of the Financial Institutions and Insurance Committee on SB 76; to exempt long-time insurance agents from the state’s continuing education requirement.

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

Virgil Peck
State Senator