

Capitol Highlights

WITH STATE REPRESENTATIVE

*Kristey
Williams*



To my friends and neighbors in the 77th District,

Tis the season for college basketball. It's fun to watch our Kansas teams take on the competition and make predictions on which teams will make it to the finals. Similarly, or not so similarly, the Kansas Legislature must determine which bills to take up in our 'finals' before first adjournment. There's plenty of competition for attention. There are 734 House bills and 560 Senate bills introduced during the 2021-22 biennial.

So where are we... here's the latest of what bills have made it out of committee and onto the House floor for debate and action.

Response to the COVID-19 pandemic; protecting healthcare workers

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Legislature has worked quickly to provide responsive legislation to address concerns in both the healthcare and business industries. This week the House passed **SB 286**, with a vote of 102-17. **SB 286** extends the expiration dates from March 31, 2022 to January 20, 2023 for

certain portions of the governmental response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Those provisions include:

- Expansion of telemedicine
- Use of hospital beds and non-hospital space
- Immunity from civil liability for health care providers related to the COVID-19 public health emergency
- Immunity from civil liability for COVID-19 claims for businesses in substantial compliance with public health directives
- Retroactivity provision regarding immunity from civil liability
- Bed usage by critical access hospitals

The House amended the bill to make adjustments to the healthcare provider civil immunity provisions. The House further amended the bill to add provisions of **HB 2620**, which provides for protections for healthcare workers. The bill creates the crime of interference with the conduct of a hospital and amends the crime of battery to include battery against a healthcare worker. The bill was requested by a bipartisan group of legislators and was passed by the House Judiciary Committee earlier this session

Overwhelming support for ensuring long-term stability of state retirees' plan

This week the House Insurance and Pensions Committee recommended **SB 421** favorably and the House endorsed the bill with a vote of 113-5. **SB 421** contains the contents of **HB 2561**, which uses the budget surplus to stabilize the KPERS system, bringing KPERS above the recommended 80 percent funded level, lowering future costs for taxpayers by reducing the state's share of employer contributions, and saving taxpayers \$429 million over the next five years.

During debate, Rep. Steven Johnson reminded the body about why it is essential to direct stabilization funding to the KPERS Trust Fund. He provided a historical snapshot of the extreme downturn in the economy just over a decade ago and relayed the importance of keeping the fund secure. Johnson referenced the 2009 KPERS Comprehensive Annual Financial Report. In just one year's time the funded ratio plummeted from 70.8 percent to 59 percent, while the Unfunded Actuarial Liability ballooned from \$5.55 billion to \$8.28 billion. KPERS' investment returns declined by 19.6 percent over the previous year.

The Legislature has made strides to ensure that KPERS remains stable and to provide certainty so that it will be there for our teachers, our firefighters, and other

public employees when they need it. **SB 421** is an extremely important piece of legislation to continue that effort.

Legislation considered by the Kansas House this week

HB 2462 Removing the standing committee membership requirements for members of the joint committee on state-tribal relations. Th bill passed 118-0.

HB 2466 Establishing the promoting advancement in computing knowledge act to increase the availability of computer science education in Kansas schools. The bill passed 115-4.

HB 2548 Implementing additional reporting requirements for informational technology projects and state agencies and requiring additional information technology security training and status reports. The bill passed 116-3.

HB 2710 Increasing the percentage of alcohol by volume allowed to not more than 16% for domestic table wine and the domestic fortified wine threshold to more than 16% alcohol by volume. The bill passed 116-3.

HCR 5027 Applying to the Congress of the United States to call a convention of the states. The resolution fell short of the 2/3 vote required, with a vote of 76-43.

SB 2 Allowing consumption of beer, wine or other alcoholic liquor on the Kansas state fairgrounds; increasing the number of temporary permits an applicant may receive from four to 12 permits per year; limiting what cities, counties or townships may charge for a temporary permit to not more than \$25 per day; and crediting a portion of moneys collected from the liquor drink tax and the liquor enforcement tax to the state fair capital improvements fund. The bill passed 87-31. The Senate has non-concurred on House amendments. Differences will be worked out by a conference committee.

SB 286 Continuing the governmental response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Kansas by extending the expanded use of telemedicine, the suspension of certain requirements related to medical care facilities and immunity from civil liability for certain healthcare providers, certain persons conducting business in this state and covered facilities for COVID-19 claims until January 20, 2023. The bill passed 102-17 and goes to the Senate for its consideration of House amendments.

SB 421 concerning the Kansas public employees retirement system; eliminating certain level-dollar employer contribution payments; making and concerning appropriations for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2022; authorizing certain transfers from the state general fund to the Kansas public employees retirement fund; amending K.S.A. 2021 Supp. 74-4920 and repealing the existing section. The bill

passed 113-5. The Senate has non-concurred on House amendments. Differences will be worked out by a conference committee.

Next Week...

Committee activity will be in overdrive next week with the March 18th deadline for non-exempt committees fast approaching. Committees are finishing legislation that will be acted upon during a busy week of floor action the week of March 21.

The Education K-12 Committee will finalize it's work with a combo-bill of education funding and policy. In addition, action will be taken on Parents' Bill of Rights. To understand the components of PBR, check out the bill — House Substitute [HB 2662](#). Much misinformation has circulated relating to the Parents' Bill of Rights and the need for transparency. It's important to debate the pros and cons — so looking forward to lots of discussion on this bill. When we introduced this bill in the House (Senate has several versions of transparency including one from the original proponent — Senator Renee Erickson), I had no idea that 19 other states would also be taking up this issue. Parents have awakened to the need to be more involved and aware of the materials being taught at school. Transparency is a way to bridge the gap between the schools and the family.

Here is an oped written by Senator Erickson and myself discussing transparency: kansas.com

House Appropriations finalizes its work on the budget, with discussion and possible action scheduled for the budget bills, **HB 2588** and **HB 2592**. The Committee has received and acted upon all budget subcommittee recommendations and will be looking at more global issues, like proposed salary increases and setting aside a portion of the budget surplus in the Rainy Day Fund.

House Taxation will take final action on **HB 2711**, the comprehensive tax plan that reduces the state food sales tax rate from 6.5 to 3.5 percent, while creating a path to zero if funds are sufficient in the Budget Stabilization Fund. The plan also lowers the state sales tax rate from 6.5 to 6.3 percent, addressing the totality of sales tax relief, rather than a limited focus like the Governor's proposal. The food sales tax income tax credit becomes a refundable tax credit, effectively taking food sales tax to zero for those that we have heard need it most — families with children, seniors, disabled citizens.

To wrap up the update, please know that there are many important issues to finalize, including taxes, the budget, and education. We may not agree on the solutions, but I welcome your comments and concerns. Many times there are workable and commonsense compromises to be made.

As always, it's my privilege to represent you — the 77th District. Have a great weekend!

Serving you,

Rep. Kristey Williams



Augusta Pages

It was great to have Augusta Middle School students visit the Capitol as pages. A special thank you to Mrs. Mary Smith for bringing the girls.

USD 402

Pages: Jaiden Means & Raegan Stillwell... these brave young ladies went all the way to the top of the Dome! Enjoyed our day together!

Kansas Legislature



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