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KLPG Capitol Highlights

FROM PINEGAR, SMITH & ASSOCIATES, INC.
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2024 LEGISLATURE WEEK SEVEN

February has been a month of deadlines. The 9th marked the deadline for all non-exempt house and senate committees to send the approved bills to their respective chamber floors for debate and votes. Then, the 23rd - informally known as Turnaround Day – was the last day for all legislation passed in its originating chamber to be moved to the other chamber for consideration. Bills that did not meet either of those cut-off dates will likely not move forward in the legislative process this session unless they originated in one of the following House or Senate committees: Appropriations, Assessment and Taxation, Calendar and Printing, Federal and State Affairs, Taxation, and Ways and Means. At their discretion, the House and Senate may authorize additional committees to be exempt.

The Senate Committee on Local Government approved SB 384. It moved to the chamber floor for debate on February 14th, debated on the 19th, unanimously passed on the 20th, and then sent to the House, where it was introduced on the 22nd. The bill would allow the Emergency Medical Services Board to grant permanent variances for ambulances to operate outside state law parameters for minimum personnel in rural communities with populations of 50K or less.

Governor Kelly swore in Calvin Reed as the new Kansas Secretary of Transportation in a ceremony at the State Capitol this week. This was a long time in the making, as he has served in an interim capacity for that role since December 2022 and received unanimous legislative approval for the permanent appointment in July 2023. The governor highlighted his two decades as a member of the KDOT as a testament to his profound understanding of the challenges and opportunities ahead and his dedication to improving Kansas's transportation infrastructure in the years to come.

Governor Kelly has announced that \$16.5 million in Rail Service Improvement Program grants will go toward much-needed rail infrastructure enhancements for 17 short lines across the state. The funds will strengthen agricultural supply chains to help farmers and ranchers connect to regional, national, and international markets. The grants will be matched by 30% from each recipient for enhanced safety, expanded carload capabilities, reduced truck traffic, increased operating speeds, and improved operating efficiencies. Cimarron Valley Railroad in Ford County will receive the highest award, \$2,233,946, for expansion and capacity improvements.

The Kansas Senate Utilities Committee debated SB 457, which would prevent public utilities from using eminent domain to seize private land for solar farms. Eminent domain authority allows governments or utility companies to take private property for public use, including building roads, bridges, and power lines. Property owners are still compensated at market value but can have their land taken if they do not agree to sell. Farm and livestock groups support the bill, arguing it protects their land from being taken without their consent. Renewable energy groups remained neutral, as their projects typically involve willing landowners. The bill passed in committee and moved to the full Senate for further debate and testimony.

House Legislators fell three votes short of the two-thirds majority needed to override Governor Kelly's veto of their tax proposal that included a single-rate income tax. Even if they had pulled off the override, it seemed likely the Senate would not have since its vote was not veto-proof when it went to the Governor's desk.

With a vote of 38-2, the Senate passed SB142 and sent it to the House. The legislation amends a current state law requiring motorists to slow and move over a lane when passing police, fire, medical, tow, or road maintenance vehicles utilizing flashing lights when stopped on the side of a road also to include all motorists stopped, stranded or parked on the roadside and using caution signals, road flares, orange cones, reflector triangles or any other warning sign of distress. Violation of the new standard would result in a \$75 fine. A second infraction within five years would trigger a fine of \$750, and the third within that timeframe would be \$1,000. KDOT, AAA Kansas, Safe Kids Kansas, Kansas Association of Chiefs of Policy, Kansas Peace Officers Association, and Kansas Sheriffs Association supported the bill. No one testified against the bill.

State Director for Rural Development Christy Davids announced that Kansas is receiving a \$997,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Broadband Technical Assistance Program to deliver technical assistance for expanding high-speed internet access for people in rural and Tribal communities. This funding will also develop and expand broadband cooperatives in rural areas. The Kansas Department of Commerce proposes to use the grant to facilitate pre-engineering design and cost studies to determine broadband buildout costs and current barriers to deployment. Then, they will partner with local governments to develop mitigation strategies and identify the next steps for effective broadband deployment.

This week, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced that Kansas would receive a \$56,829,000 allotment from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds that makes grants or principal forgiveness loans available to underserved communities in need of water infrastructure investments. Since 2022, the federal SRF has afforded Kansas over \$218 million for water infrastructure projects across the state, protecting public health, preserving water resources, and creating jobs. Funded projects already underway are:

- The cities of Arkansas City and Winfield are constructing a 200,000-gallon replacement water tower at Strother Field Airport/Industrial Park.
- The city of Lawrence is conducting lead service line inventory activities.
- Water District #1 of Johnson County is replacing the main distribution lines within the county.
- The city of Oketo is rehabilitating its water system infrastructure, a well, and a water storage facility.
- The city of Vermillion is replacing approximately 3 miles of distribution lines, associated valves, fire hydrants, and service lines.
- The city of Portis is replacing water mains, valves, meters, and fire hydrants.
- The city of Sawyer is upgrading well infrastructure, including existing service connections and meters.
- The city of Wichita is rehabilitating two wastewater facilities.

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This is a weekly legislative summary of Kansas government, and other statewide news, gathered and compiled independently from various media reports.

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