

KLPG Capitol Highlights

2016 Legislature, Week Eleven

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Friday morning call-in at 8AM during the legislative session.

Call (605) 475-3235 & enter 301599#. Legislative update calls last 30 minutes. Our next call is April 1st.

KLPG is a bipartisan, voluntary, independent, non-profit corporation comprised of elected county commissioners in rural counties interested in preserving & strengthening constitutional government.

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This is a summary of recent Kansas government and other statewide news, gathered and compiled independently by Pinegar, Smith & Associates from news media reports



SCHOOL EQUITY FUNDING PLAN PASSES

Lawmakers fast-tracked their school finance equity plan. The plan that passed the Senate in a 32-5 vote and 93-31 in the House would ensure no district loses state aid next year, and also shifts control of a fund to help districts from lawmakers and the governor to the State Board of Education. A small number of districts would gain funds, with little additional state spending required. Opponents say this is nothing more than a tax increase for local property owners but does not provide more money for classrooms or fix the disproportionate tax burden facing Kansans. Supporters of the bill said the plan would provide predictability to districts while satisfying the court. Brownback doesn't typically say whether he will sign or veto legislation. But he suggested this week he favors the approach taken in the legislation. The equity legislation will apply to the next school year. Additionally, the block grant funding system set up by lawmakers last year will sunset next year. And even if the legislation become law and is upheld, its only one part of the Gannon case. The Kansas Supreme Court has yet to rule if funding for schools is inadequate under the Kansas Constitution.

STAR BONDS SHINING BRIGHT

Republican and Democratic legislators inserted language in a bill to restrict STAR bond usage in response to Governor Brownback's concealed plans to earmark \$42 million annually in sales tax revenue freed up by retiring so-called STAR bonds issued for Village West. That financing would build a Wyandotte County home for the American Royal livestock show, in an attempt to move it from its current home in Kansas City, Missouri. The administration has worked for at least 18 months on the American Royal endeavor, but legislators weren't informed until this session. Brownback had used his line-item veto authority to nix the STAR bond restriction, the Senate voted 30-8 to override that veto, but now the House has voted 97-24 to allow the veto to stand. The campaign to attract the American Royal will proceed, as Jackie McClaskey, secretary of the Kansas Department of Agriculture, said new facilities in Kansas would expand attendance by 25% percent and economic impact by \$20 million.

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Capitol Highlights is a weekly legislative summary prepared by Pinegar, Smith & Associates, Inc.

SESSION OFFICIALLY ON BREAK

Kansas legislators have started their annual spring break and will be out of session for nearly five weeks. They'll reconvene April 27th after state officials and economists issue revised projections for state tax collections through June 2017. Upon their return, they are to review both the budget and their school funding plan.

TAX LID STAYS CLOSED

In 2015 the Legislature passed a property tax lid for local governments, aimed at keeping city and county mill levies from increasing faster than the rate of inflation or population growth. Repeal of that measure was the No. 1 issue on the KLPG and the Kansas Association of Counties' agendas this year, with the League of Kansas Municipalities, Dodge City, Garden City and Newton all voicing opposition as well. New legislation passed the Senate 24-16 and contains some exemptions, including increased spending for law enforcement, fire protection and EMS. The overall lid that requires electorate spending approval is still in place, and now begins a year earlier, in January 2017.

PROFESORS TO SOLVE OGALLALA ISSUES

Researchers from seven universities, including Kansas State University and led by Colorado State, have formed a consortium, funded by the USDA, to answer questions about the sustainability of groundwater supplies in the Ogallala region. The scientists will "find better tools for land managers" and prepare farmers to go from irrigated to limited irrigation, or even dry land. The team will develop transitional strategies and seek to reduce risk and improving water-use efficiency. The multi-state team will develop a website to better communicate findings.

NEW FINANCIAL OVERSIGHT

KU received intense criticism when it formed a third-party, nonprofit corporation to secure \$327 million in bonds instead of seeking funding, and legislative approval. The concern was that the state would ultimately be liable for what would eventually be state-owned property. To address this now highlighted loophole, the Kansas House added a proviso into next year's budget bill limiting KU's ability to spend money from previously unrestricted funds, and limits most state agencies' ability to issuing bonds of any kind, including all state construction. The proviso forms the Public Private Partnership Commission, which will meet over the coming months to make policy recommendations. Meanwhile, after the similar controversy of the Docking Building destruction, the Kansas House voted 114-8 to send the Senate a bill requiring the full Legislature to authorize all bonds for projects costing \$25 million or more.

JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM POSSIBLE

More than a year in the making, a sweeping overhaul of the state's juvenile justice system went to the Governor's desk Thursday with a

unanimous vote in the Senate. Earlier, Senate Bill 367 won approval 118-5 in the House. The bill is designed to shift the juvenile justice system away from incarceration and use some of the cost savings to boost community-based programs intended to help young offenders turn their lives around. To see a piece of legislation strongly supported on both sides was in part thanks to the general appeal of the bill. It is expected to save the state \$72 million over five years while also replacing incarceration with programs to treat underlying issues.

PROTECTING PUBLIC ADVOCATES

House Bill 2054, which passed by a vote of 123-1, is designed to discourage "strategic lawsuits against public participation," legal actions that arise from public comments in government meetings and online. It also makes it easier for those facing a SLAPP suit to have the suit dismissed. Organizations and Institutions will sometimes bring SLAPP suits against people who have criticized them publicly. Supporters say this will help protect Kansans' First Amendment rights. The bill now heads to the Senate.

SOUTHWEST FIRE UPDATE

Gov. Brownback and Kansas Adjutant General Lee Tapanelli addressed the media about the wild fires plaguing Kansas. While the cause of the fire is still unknown, Tapanelli said, we do know it began Tuesday in Oklahoma, but strong winds, up to 50 mph, pushed the blaze into Kansas and have made the blaze difficult to extinguish. Local volunteer fire departments in the area largely have been responsible for handling the fires, while state aid has been focused on coordinating resources via state agencies. As of Thursday, the state hadn't estimated the economic impact, but over 300,000 acres have burned, 10 buildings have been destroyed, yet, fortunately, no one has been injured. The state has contacted the Federal Emergency Management Agency about a fire management assistance grant, but no amount been assigned. Smoke has been seen as far away as St. Louis.