



KANSAS RURAL CENTER

FOR THE HEALTH OF THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

Kansas Rural Center Legislative Policy Watch

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Legislative Policy

Watch is a weekly online publication of the Kansas Rural Center (KRC) during the State of Kansas legislative session. KRC is a private, non-profit organization that promotes the long term health of the land and its people, through education, research and advocacy that advance an ecologically sound, economically viable, and socially just agriculture.

Policy Watch is produced by Paul Johnson, KRC Policy Analyst, pdjohnson@centurylink.net



KRC

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Conservation Presentation

While the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee held a January 22, 2024, hearing on House Bill 2541 – establishing a State Conservation Fund, the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee held a February 19 informational hearing on conservation programs and funding. Sean Miller – who lobbies for the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts and Ducks Unlimited – gave the informational overview via written remarks and illustrious slides.

Sean started with a historical slide of the Dust Bowl in 1935 that forced Kansas to consider conservation recovery practices. He continued with definitions of ‘conservation’ from USDA and the existing Kansas statute (K.S.A. 2-1915) that lists permissible conservation practices that qualify for assistance through the Kansas Department of Agriculture’s Division of Conservation (KDA-DOC). Conservation practices provide opportunities for agricultural producers to develop efficiencies through irrigation technology practices, rangeland management and invasive species mitigation. It is important to note that all of these practices are completely voluntary. Nothing in existing conservation practices' statutes can require landowners to change their existing land use. Kansas lands are 97% privately owned, and these conservation practices can assist Kansas farmers and ranchers to remain viable.

There are 35 states that have some type of state-level funding dedicated to conservation. All of Kansas’ neighboring states have robust state conservation funding. In 2022, KDA-DOC and county Conservation Districts had \$86 million in conservation projects that went unfunded. Most of these opportunities require some level of state or local match in order to access outside funds. There is an increasing amount of public-private partnership programs developed by private companies that require matching funds. Kansans for Conservation – currently with 35 diverse members – has started the debate with HB 2541. Without raising any existing taxes, the revenues would come from a portion of existing sales tax on sporting goods, utilizing a portion of lottery funds and dedicating revenues from sports wagering. These funding mechanisms polled exceedingly well with the public. This 2024 session is the starting point for a detailed discussion on conservation practices and dedicated state funding for future legislative sessions.

Sean Miller Testimony

League of Women Voters
of Kansas

www.lwvk.org



Kansas Natural Resource
Council



Climate & Energy
Project

www.climateandenergy.org



Kansas Farmers Union

www.kansasfarmersunion.com



Audubon of Kansas

www.audubonofkansas.org

LAWRENCE
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formerly known as Jayhawk Audubon Society

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<https://www.jayhawkaudubon.org/>

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Kansas Conservation Pt 2

Sean's presentation went 20 minutes with 15 minutes of committee questions. Sean expanded on the details of the slides and the statewide importance of conservation from less soil loss to cleaner water to an improved tourist economy.

Senate Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources - February, 19th

Tax Cut Debate Saga

The Kansas House was unable to override the Governor's veto of the 'flat tax' bill, garnering just 81 votes when 84 were required. While many parts of this tax package (from lowering property taxes, eliminating the grocery sales tax and ending the taxing of Social Security benefits are part of the Governor's tax cut bill), the flat income tax rate of 5.25% went disproportionately to 48,881 filers (\$250,000+ income) out of 1.28 million filers. This flat tax cost \$260.5 million annually and \$136.6 million of that went to these wealthier filers. The Governor's tax reduction bill cost \$1 Billion over 3 years while the Republican cost \$1.6 Billion over 3 years and will continue increasing with cost-of-living riders built in.

The question remains whether another tax cut package will emerge in the 45 days left in this session. Will parts of the tax bill, such as property tax relief, grocery tax elimination in 2024 (instead of 2025), and Social Security Tax relief, be put in separate bills and passed on their own merits? Legislative leaders seem uncertain as to the path forward. House Democrats are ready to find an acceptable compromise. The 2023 session was unable to find that tax reduction compromise. Kansas is projected to end Fiscal Year 2025 (June 30, 2025) with a \$3.5 Billion budget surplus. Every House and Senate district is up for election in November 2024. The Governor said in her veto message that she would call the Legislature back for a special session if it didn't pass a tax reduction bill during the regular session. If the political will is there, and there is ample time to find that compromise.

Carbon Dioxide Pipelines

Kansas News Service reporters – Calen Moore and Celia Llopis-Jepsen – wrote a terrific article on carbon dioxide pipelines in Kansas and plans for future expansion. Two companies have plans to build the first sites in Kansas where carbon dioxide emissions get sequestered deep underground away from the atmosphere.

The carbon sequestration industry is expanding with the increased federal tax credits to trap carbon underground and produce low-emission fuels. Ethanol producers are concerned over losing market share to newer biofuels with smaller carbon footprints. Kansas has three existing carbon dioxide pipelines in southwest and southeast Kansas, primarily using carbon dioxide (CO₂) to force fossil fuels from the ground. PureField Ingredients - which has an ethanol and wheat protein plant in Russell - plans to pipe emissions to a well six miles away.

Another plan is an ethanol plant in Pratt that wants to drill a carbon sequestration well. Details on the three existing CO₂ pipelines in Kansas (used for fossil fuel extraction) are presented in the article along with a map. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) presently regulates CO₂ sequestration wells in Kansas but states can ask to take over regulation as three states have. With so many existing oil and gas wells in Kansas there is the right kind of geology for sequestering carbon. Pipeline safety and construction damages, along with the potential use of eminent domain, worry many farmers.

These ethanol plants want to bury CO₂ in Kansas to cut their carbon footprints

Legislative Notes

Election Legislation: House Bill 2512 would end in-person advance voting at 7pm Sunday before an election - starting January 1, 2025. This bill replaces any in-person voting on the Monday before the election but mandates that counties provide four hours on the Saturday before the election. This amendment would have required the county election officer to add anyone to the permanent advance voting list (while today it is reserved for people with permanent disability or illness). The amendment failed. House Bill 2516 will raise the number of signatures required for nomination petitions for statewide independent candidates from 5,000 to 20,180. The four established political parties – Republican, Democrat, Libertarian and No Labels – will rely on the existing party nomination process. HB 2618 amends state law to require prosecutors to prove ‘intent’ whenever charging a person with falsely representing an election official. This bill was requested by the Attorney General in response to a lawsuit brought on the vagueness of the existing law.

K-12 Education: The House Appropriations Committee has now stripped K-12 funding out of the mega-budget bill for all of the State government. Public education funding and policy will now be in a separate bill to be debated on the House floor. The budget recommendations for K-12 funding have yet to be finalized so it will be mid-March for the House floor debate. There is a brewing fight over the level of funding for special education. The Governor has requested a five-year plan of \$75 million annually to close the existing gap to fully fund special education (which is now coming out of the general funding for the districts). Republicans claim that there is already adequate funding if the ‘local option budget’ funds are counted (even though these locally passed mill increases were never meant for special education). Another battle is over alternative teacher certification, which should be established by the elected State Board of Education, not the Kansas Legislature.

Kansas Corporation Commission (KCC) challenges: Andrew French – the son of long-time

KRC supporters Jim and Lisa French – has now been confirmed by the Kansas Senate (36-2) for a second term on the KCC till January 2028. Andrew joins Annie Keuther (former House Representative) on the three-person commission. While the Kansas House has debated a State Energy Plan for Kansas (one of 8 states without one), so far, nothing has happened, and it is critical for the KCC to develop the plan in-house at the Kansas Energy Office (KEO). Today KEO is understaffed with a part-time director and one other employee. While this office gets an annual federal DOE grant of over \$600,000 (that could write a state energy plan), KEO farms out the funding to KSU for some limited energy efficiency education and programs. KEO will administer hundreds of millions in federal money coming from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) next year.

Kansas Senate confirms KCC chairman to a second term on the energy regulatory board

The KCC needs this independent State Energy Plan (and its analysis of lower-cost energy conservation services) to compare with the energy plan (called an Integrated Resource Plan – IRP) that EVERGY must file with the KCC this summer laying out future power production plans in regards to renewables, transmission and fossil fuel plant retirements. The Kansas Legislature is poised to pass Senate Bill 455 – that sets a higher standard for the KCC to consider fossil fueled plant retirements. The KCC’s State Energy Plan would document the potential savings of energy efficiency savings for all ratepayers and the lower cost of renewables (locked in for 20 years) compared to coal (with unpredictable fuel costs) and gyrating natural gas prices.

Legislative Timeline: While this Friday was a turnaround (the mid-point of the 90-day session), the Kansas Legislature has basically the month of March to the first week in April (April 5) for the end of the regular session. The veto session will begin on April 29 and last a week. The heavy lifting is still in front of lawmakers. A balanced State Budget is constitutionally required. The funding and policy battles over public education will consume many days. Medicaid expansion might be part of a policy compromise. If a tax cut compromise is not reached by the veto session, the Governor will call the Kansas Legislature back into a special session.

Help KHF End Hunger in Kansas!



The Kansas Health Foundation(KHF) is seeking innovative ideas to tackle food insecurity. They acknowledge not having all the answers, and this crowdsourcing initiative will challenge assumptions, help them consider new ideas and allow KHF to hear from as many Kansans as possible.

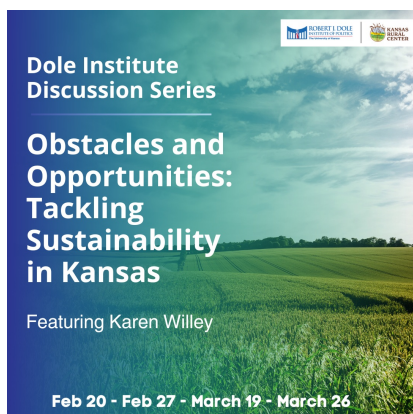
[Learn More Here](#)

Upcoming Events



During the legislative session, the League of Women Voters of Kansas (LWVK) hold weekly zoom calls at **4pm on Fridays** with their policy observers. The League has offered to open up these calls for interested Policy Watch readers. Cille King is the policy coordinator for the League.

You will need to email Cille at advocacy@lwk.org to be added to the notice list. Agendas come out a day or so before the call.



The Dole Institute series, "Obstacles and Opportunities: Tackling Sustainability in Kansas," will be held Tuesdays this spring at the Dole Institute. This four-part series will be moderated by our Spring 2024 Dole Fellow, and KRC board member, Karen Willey.

Some of the most refreshing events are weekly discussion groups at the Dole Institute. Hosted by Dole Fellows, each weekly discussion focuses on a specific topic or issue and features an expert in that field. These events are oriented toward KU students, but are also open to the public. All presentations will be

hybrid. These small discussion groups provide hands-on knowledge and direct interaction with experts.

[Learn more here](#)

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See Previous Editions of Policy Watch

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If you are receiving KRC Policy Watch through one of these organizations and have questions, contact the organization directly.

If you wish to be removed from the KRC list, contact info@kansasruralcenter.org

For questions about Policy Watch content, contact Paul Johnson at pdjohnson@centurylink.net

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