



# KANSAS RURAL CENTER

FOR THE HEALTH OF THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

## Kansas Rural Center Legislative Policy Watch

Issue No. 9, March 1, 2024

### 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](mailto:pdjohnson@centurylink.net)



## KRC

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[www.kansasruralcenter.org](http://www.kansasruralcenter.org)

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### Medicaid Expansion

The Kansas Health Institute (KHI) unveiled its analysis of the Governor's proposal to expand Medicaid. It would cover an additional 152,000 Kansans at no additional cost to state government. Republican leadership continues to block any full discussion. Legislative committee hearings are tentatively planned while Republicans are increasing provider rates as a way to head off Medicaid expansion. KHI plans to publish its full report later this month and are building a better understanding of the facts and numbers involved. Kansas is one of just 10 states that has not expanded Medicaid since the Affordable Care Act was signed in 2010. Currently those who earn less than 38% of the federal poverty level are eligible for Medicaid in Kansas (known as KanCare). For a family of four the annual income limit is \$11,400. Under expansion, the annual income threshold for that family of four would be \$41,400 and the federal government would cover 90% of the cost of expansion. The Governor's proposal includes a work requirement (with certain groups exempted) and adds a new surcharge for hospitals to cover a portion of cost to Kansas.

KHI predicts this expansion would result in a 151,898 person enrollment increase (106,450 adults and 45,448 children). These numbers include 68,236 adults and 16,377 children who are currently uninsured. KHI calculated the cost to Kansas for expanding KanCare over the first eight years would be fully offset with the \$509 million incentives included in the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 along with the federal government picking up the tab on existing services and the new surcharge on hospitals. The Kansas Sunflower Foundation did two surveys in November showing that 68% of Kansas voters support expansion along with 83% of small business owners. These findings are consistent with a Fort Hays State University poll that was released in October.

### Rally For Medicaid Expansion

**Wednesday, March 6 from 1-2pm at the Statehouse**

Visit <https://www.expandkancare.com/event/2024-rally/> for more information.

League of Women Voters  
of Kansas

[www.lwvk.org](http://www.lwvk.org)

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Kansas Natural Resource  
Council

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Climate & Energy  
Project

[www.climateandenergy.org](http://www.climateandenergy.org)

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Kansas Farmers Union

[www.kansasfarmersunion.com](http://www.kansasfarmersunion.com)

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Audubon of Kansas

[www.audubonofkansas.org](http://www.audubonofkansas.org)

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## Kroger/Albertsons Merger

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is joining Attorney Generals (of Arizona, California, District of Columbia, Illinois, Maryland, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, and Wyoming) in suing to block this merger. The United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW) – which represents 1.2 million essential workers in grocery, meatpacking, food processing and other essential industries across North America – stand in opposition to any merger that would negatively impact hundreds of thousands of hardworking members at Kroger and Albertsons.

Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser filed a lawsuit in Denver District Court to block the \$24.6 billion proposed Kroger/Albertsons merger which are two of the largest supermarket chains in Colorado. Kroger operates 148 King Soopers and City Market stores and Albertsons operates 105 Safeway and Albertsons stores in the state. After a yearlong investigation and 19 town halls across Colorado, residents think this merger would lead to stores closing, higher prices, fewer jobs, worse customer service and less reliant supply chains. This AG lawsuit asks the court to find that the merger violates Colorado antitrust laws and to permanently block it from going into effect.

Kroger argues that it has no choice given the consolidated competitors like Wal-Mart and the food delivery services from companies such as Amazon. This is in keeping with the consolidation (by 4 to 6 corporations) in banking, pharmaceuticals, social media, airlines, and industrial agriculture (seeds, chemicals, meatpacking). The Kansas Attorney General has not joined this suit but that is the norm where Kansas AG's have been missing in action as a few corporations have taken over beef packing and agriculture seeds/chemicals and there has been no concern or comment on enforcing any anti-trust law in agriculture.

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## Legislative Thoughts

The Kansas Legislature has passed the mid-point of this 2024 session and is on the down slide through March and the first week of April to finish the regular session. It is hard to tell what priorities will be highlighted for the remainder of this session beyond the constitutional mandate to pass a balanced State budget, but the script seems predictable. Poll-tested 'culture war issues' are selected from a national list (developed and written by the American Legislative Exchange Council – ALEC) to be introduced into Kansas. Election integrity is a hot topic. The Kansas Legislative interim committee focused on election integrity even though the statewide-elected Kansas Secretary of State vouched for our successful and fair elections. With the script in hand, out-of-state 'hired gun' experts are brought in to tout vindictive generalities of fraud while local election officials are provided no time to testify.

The same script can be seen with lambasting poor people for fraud - by again - well paid out-of-state consultants from the right 'thinktanks'. Now the battles are raging over transgender health care and restricting the procedures by criminal threats to any health care provider. Not far behind is moving taxpayer public education dollars to private schools with few if any standards and the ability to segregate on student selection.

As we get closer to the end of the session, legislative maneuvers increase. Bills of the same subject (that should have passed one chamber) are bundled together to force lawmakers to hold their nose to get some good parts while having to accept less desirable bills. This will certainly play out with election/voting bills this year. As the sausage gets assembled in the waning days, will more fundamental issues be paired? Might there be a compromise on tax cuts if Medicaid expansion was part of the deal? The Governor has vetoed bills overriding local government's ability to ban single use plastic bags. Could this be a tradeable chip for other priorities? Will the threat of being called back for a special session move the Kansas Legislature to find an acceptable tax cut compromise? Defining and funding 'special education' is far from settled. Will the fact that a number of lawmakers are retiring this year give those lawmakers special courage to challenge legislative leadership on, say, Medicaid expansion, as happened by not overriding the Governor's 'flat tax' veto? Most of this bargaining will never see the light of day (as with the Congressional map that plopped Lawrence in the 'Big First' western Kansas district). All of this will happen while fundamental, systemic issues on housing, energy planning, and the future of the Kansas family farms are left in the twilight zone.

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## 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

[Learn](#)

answers, and this crowdsourcing initiative will challenge assumptions, help them consider new ideas and allow KHF to hear from as many Kansans as possible.

[More Here](#)

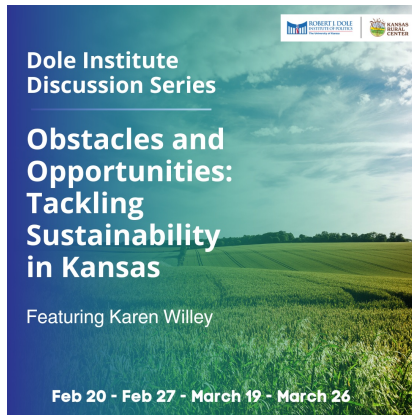
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## Upcoming Events



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

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**For questions about Policy Watch content, contact Paul Johnson at [pdjohnson@centurylink.net](mailto:pdjohnson@centurylink.net)**

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