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NEWS FROM THE CAPITOL

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Government Transparency

On Thursday, the Democrats in the House and Senate held a news conference outlining several legislative proposals aimed at increasing government transparency and accountability.¹ Four Democrat sponsored bills were presented that would increase government transparency and accountability. In the past certain pitfalls in our own state government transparency have been brought to light such as the Governor and his staff utilizing private emails to conduct government business and claiming those emails were not subject to open record laws. These bills would help maintain transparency in our government, the very foundation of our democracy. The Democrat sponsored bills are:

- House Bill 2300 – Will end the use of private email accounts to conduct state business.
- House Bill 2153 – Makes the process of awarding state contracts more open and adds layers of accountability by creating a database of the contracts and requiring efficiency studies on the contracts impact on Kansas.
- A bill introduced later today in the Senate, sponsored by Sen. Tom Holland caps legislators pay at 90 days during odd years when the biennial budgeting process takes place, and 60 days during even years, to avoid government waste.
- Senate Bill 163 – Prohibits legislators and employees of the governor from becoming a lobbyist for two years following the end of their term or employment.

Kansas Courts Funding Saved

The House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly on Thursday to remove the legislative threat of defunding the entire Kansas court system. In 2014, the legislature made sweeping changes in order to control the local courthouses. Later in 2015, the legislature tied to that 2014 bill what is called a non-severability clause which stated that if any part of the bill is ruled unconstitutional the funding for the entire court system budget would be cut. That 2015 law was challenged and found to be unconstitutional. The new legislation necessary to remove the non-severability clause and prevent the court system from shutting down was thankfully passed in the House 119-0.

Details of the Governor's Budget

A week has passed since the Governor released his proposed budget for the upcoming year, and some details have become more clear. For example, the Governor proposes taking funds allocated specifically for needy families and moving those funds to the Parents as Teachers Program. The Parents as Teachers program is a great service that offers assistance to at-risk youth and their families, especially with childhood poverty and young child education, however taking money away from needy families in order to fund this program cuts services to people who need them.

The Governor has spoken of our Highway Patrol shortages but also does not propose to fill the large vacancies in our State Highway Patrol.² Right now there are over 20 counties that don't have a single Highway Patrol Officer assigned them.³ In his proposal the Governor does not recommend providing resources for the filling of trooper vacancies in these counties. Governor Brownback's proposal also includes a change to prescriptions for Kansans with mental illness. This change would require patients to

¹ <http://cjonline.com/news/2016-01-21/democrats-hail-package-bills-tied-government-transparency>

² Page 127, http://budget.ks.gov/publications/FY2017/FY2017_GBR_Vol1--01-13-2016.pdf

³ <http://ksnt.com/2015/12/15/kansas-highway-patrol-steps-up-recruiting-efforts/>

try less-expensive drugs first, effectively ending a pilot program to improve the health care of the thousands of Kansans living with severe mental illness.

Education

For several weeks the K-12 Student Success Committee has been meeting to discuss changes to public education in Kansas. The committee has heard from superintendents, school board members, teachers and other concerned groups. On Tuesday, that committee issued a report detailing changes it believes should be made to Kansas public education.⁴ Unfortunately, the report ignored the words and testimony of those teachers, superintendents, and board members. Among other things, the report recommends stripping local school boards of their authority to make decisions for their schools, removes authority from the state Board of Education in administering education, and recommends merit pay for teachers. Now we have a regressive block grant system that severely harms our schools ability to finance even basic needs. USD 383 lost more than \$500,000/year under new system. As a result, classroom sizes have shot up, teacher pay has stagnated, and quality teachers are fleeing the state. Our students are suffering.

The Kansas Supreme Court issued an opinion that the block grant funding formula passed during the session, was unconstitutional. At the Regional Chamber of Commerce retreat in Kansas City, we discussed the implications of this “block grant” on Kansas universities.

When I met with Superintendent Bob Shannon and the Manhattan School Board, we discussed how this new block grant plan is impacting our buildings and employees – and the news is not good. I will continue to work for a better formula to meet the unique needs of our community and watch the population shifts we experience from year to year. I would be interested in hearing your comments on this issue and any changes you have seen this year.

Employment

Workforce issues, while low unemployment is 4.5%, our Riley County rate of 2.3% makes it difficult to find qualified candidates for jobs. Lack of workforce is a regional issue that has a serious impact on our communities.

Page Information

If you know of someone who would like to page for me, I have one open date. Please either call my office at 785-296-7657 or email my assistant, Dixie Sypher at dixie.sypher@house.ks.gov for more information.

Library Information

Kansas Day - January 29

On January 29, 1861, Kansas became the 34th state. Explore this period of our history with the Gale Kansas History database, which covers 1854-1865. You'll find everything from personal letters to our first state geological report. Use the browse to go through all topics, search, or click through the green-tabbed homepage presentation for an overview of the Bleeding Kansas years. Educators, this area includes notes on using primary source documents.

<http://kslib.info/kshistory>

If the page above asks for a Kansas Library eCard number, you may get one at any library in Kansas. Most people will be automatically recognized as inside Kansas and will not need this step. Questions: kslc@library.ks.gov or 785-296-3296.

Learn Online with Universal Class

Universal Class is the newest addition to the State Library's online resources, offering over 500 online courses in more than 30 areas of study. Take full courses with instructors to earn Continuing Education Units or just audit a class by viewing its videos. Since Universal Class offers everything from Microsoft Excel to parenting skills, you'll be sure to find something of interest to learn.

<http://kslib.info/uclass>

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⁴ <http://m.cjonline.com/news/2016-01-19/kansas-lawmakers-adopt-report-reforming-k-12-education>

Keep in Touch

It is a special honor to serve as your state representative. I value and need your input on the various issues facing state government. Please feel free to contact me with your comments and questions. My office address is Room 451-S, 300 SW 10th, Topeka, KS 66612. You can reach me at (785) 296-7657 or call the legislative hotline at 1-800-432-3924 to leave a message for me. Additionally, you can e-mail me at sydney.carlin@house.ks.gov. You can also follow the legislative session online at www.kslegislature.org. I'm working on my website, www.sydneycarlin.com. You can connect to my Twitter & Facebook pages through Icons on the site. Even if I haven't posted, there are plenty of interesting news items there.

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