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Legislative Update - 2020 Session - Week #1

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Medicaid/KanCare Expansion Update

The 2020 Session began a few days early with the January 9th press conference by Governor Laura Kelly and Senate Majority Leader Jim Denning. They announced the conclusion of weeks of negotiations and unveiled their bipartisan plan to expand Medicaid/KanCare. The plan extends Medicaid coverage to Kansans at or below the 138% of the poverty level as envisioned by the Affordable Care Act.

The bill, [SB 252](#), was introduced on opening day, January 13th, with 22 co-sponsors, including every Senate Democrat (only 21 votes are required for Senate passage). On Wednesday, it was assigned to the [Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee](#), where 5 of its 9 members are co-sponsors. Chairman Suellentrop has scheduled its first hearing for Thursday, January 23rd. I hope for continued bipartisan cooperation and rapid passage for this most important bill!

Governor Kelly's 2020 State of the State Address

Governor Kelly continued her spirit of bipartisanship in the [2020 State of the State Address](#) Wednesday evening. Governor Kelly presented a realistic picture on the past, present, and future of the Great State of Kansas.

- **Education** - The Governor applauded the work last year of Democrats and Republicans to fully fund our K-12 education system, after years of neglect, underfunding, and lawsuits.
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- **Healthcare** – She continued her determination for 2020 to be the year Kansas finally expands Medicaid and provide healthcare for 150,000 Kansans and potentially lower health insurance costs across the state. This will improve infant and maternal health, reduce the risk of rural hospital closures, and lower opioid overdose death rates.
- **Transportation** - She teased the upcoming release of her comprehensive transportation plan to rebuild and repair our highways and bridges, while pledging to end the decade long process of borrowing from the “Bank of KDOT.”
- **Ag/Trade** - Gov. Kelly made a forceful request for Congress to rapidly pass the new US-Mexico-Canada (USMCA) agreement, with the Consul-General of Canada attending the speech in the gallery. Noting that Kansas is an export driven state and that Canada is our largest trading partner, this legislation is key to our continued economic growth. Adding the impact Trump’s tariff war has had on Kansas farmers, she promised results from the Kansas Department of Commerce’s International Trade division, with or without action from Washington.
- **Finance/Taxes** – The Governor made clear her preference for significantly reducing the state sales tax on food, now the highest in the nation. Yet, she was quick to wield her veto threat for legislation that attaches food tax relief to slashing corporate taxes and risking a return to the previous administration’s budget shortfalls. She also made commitments to paying down the state’s long-term debt and creating a Kansas “rainy day fund.”

Committee Actions

[Appropriations:](#)

As a member of the joint House Appropriations and Senate Ways and Means Committees I received a high-level overview by Budget Director Larry Campbell on the Governor’s FY 2021 budget on Thursday. Initial focus was on:

- **KPERS Re-amortization** – Another attempt will be made to re-amortize the long-term KPERS debt. An action like refinancing a home mortgage (allowing for lower payments over a longer period) it is projected to save more than \$500 million over four years but raises overall interest payments by \$4.4 billion. It will also allow the state greater flexibility in an economically uncertain future. I would like to see much more information, before deciding my stance on this issue that raised so much concern in the 2019 session.
 - **KDOT** – The new budget does borrow \$158.7 million from the state highway fund this year, but that is over \$73 million less than was approved for FY 2020. I remain optimistic that FY 2021 will be the final year needed for such activity, and I look forward to all the details of her new transportation plan.
 - **Food Sales Tax** – The budget calls for reducing revenue from state sales tax on food in the form of an annual tax refund to qualified payers. It was quickly under attack from Republican members as being complicated and forcing a waiting period. I will be examining the pros/cons as more details and alternative plans are introduced.
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- **Long-term Debt** – I was pleased to see the Governor's budget included \$602.5 million in long term debt retirement through early payoffs, saving the state of Kansas over \$200 million in interest payments over the next three years.

Agriculture and Natural Resources Budget:

Wednesday, we received a briefing by the Department of Agriculture's Hemp Program Manager, Jeff Vogel. In 2019, the industrial hemp research program approved over 250 various licenses for 5,700 acres over 70 counties. For the 2020 growing season, the department has already received 340 applications for the commercial program, a 40% increase in new planters. Since 2018, more than 2,900 individuals have participated in KDA/KSRE hemp education and outreach programs across the state. In the coming weeks we will begin reviewing the budgets for the various agencies and departments under our purview. I will be sharing our schedule once it is released.

Agriculture

This week we received updates on the Kansas Open Meetings and Open Records Acts and the Rails to Trails program. The committee will get into full swing next week with updates on Water and Water Conservation programs in Kansas. Thursday, we will hold hearings on labeling requirements for meat substitute products.

Around the Dome

MLK Day Rememberances

The conciliatory approach of Governor Kelly's press conference and State of the State speech was accompanied by events throughout the week. Thursday was the annual Capitol March in remembrance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. The week has been one of displays and speeches on his work and legacy of non-violent resistance, and the pain discriminatory policies have on people.





We had our local Manhattan MLK Day Celebration at Peace Memorial Auditorium at City Hall on Saturday, January 18th. I had a great time seeing all the art and writing award winners, and got a chance to speak with a few. The photos (upper left) show the Spirit of Martin Luther King Jr. Community Service Award winners: Debbie Nuss and Kevin Bryant. And (upper right) the Ogden Elementary School Band.

19th Amendment

There were also numerous occasions for remembering the 100th Anniversary of the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution and women's voting rights. From the Governor's speech, noting for the first time in history all three branches of government have women in leadership: herself, the Chief Justice of the Kansas Supreme Court, and the Kansas Senate. Being in the chamber with numerous female legislators, agency/department heads...I was proud to be one of many elected women officials and glad I remembered to wear my white suit!





The week ended with a visit from members of the Flint Hills Regional Leadership Program who shadowed me for most of the day. To all of you, I appreciated hearing your thoughts over lunch and look forward to hearing your future success stories.

[On a personal note](#), I am always happy to hear from any and all constituents and friends on matters of importance to you! If I could ask one favor, in terms of housekeeping, if it is regarding official state issues please use Sydney.carlin@house.ks.gov. I know many of you have my personal email, but some are sending the same email to both accounts, resulting in duplicate or no response and with the volume of emails coming through, this would greatly assist me in ensuring every single person gets the answer they deserve.

Kansas Works - Hot Jobs Listings

Attached ([here](#)) is the weekly Kansas Works Hot Jobs List for the Manhattan area. Statewide listings may be found [here](#).

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 our community and the state government. Please contact me with your comments and questions.

My office address is Room 451-S, 300 SW 10th Avenue, Topeka, KS 66612.

You can call my office at (785) 296-7657, or the legislative hotline (800) 432-3924 to leave a message.

Email at sydney.carlin@house.ks.gov

Please follow [my legislative activity](#) or the [entire session](#).

Thank you!

Sydney Carlin

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