

THE ADVOCATE

A WEEKLY UPDATE FROM THE KANSAS LEGISLATURE

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Intro

Monday marks completion of one-third of the 2025 legislative session as we hit day 30. Friday was the last day for non-exempt committee bill introductions, and Monday, Feb. 17 is the last day for non-exempt committees to meet before Turn Around. Turn Around is Feb. 20, and both chambers are scheduled to be on the floor all day next Tuesday through Thursday. Turn Around is typically marked by late floor sessions extending into the night and a flurry of bills being passed, but we may not see quite that level of activity as there simply have not been a lot of bills moved out of committee. This hasn't been due to lack of effort, but with the start of a new biennium, catching up freshman lawmakers on the process, and revisors being behind in part because of new software, the shortened schedule has meant fewer bills passed in committee. This week is full of hearings and plans to work bills but the volume does seem lighter.

Several legislators have complained about the new pace of the session while also expressing worry about what they will do after Turn Around if an influx of bills are not passed to keep them occupied after the Turn Around break.

House Appropriations Finishing Budget

The House Appropriations Committee is pushing to finalize the state budget by the end of this week. The 23-member committee has formally reviewed and approved all budgets but will meet this week to review the budget as a whole and consider amendments to add or eliminate funding. This is the final review of the budget before it goes on the House floor. Amendments on the House floor are still possible at that point, but they're subject to pay-go, meaning you have to find the money to fund an addition to the budget, you can't simply propose an amendment to add money.

Last week, the committee completed its review and passed the Department of Commerce's roughly \$183 million budget for fiscal year 2026. During deliberations, Rep. Kristey Williams (R-Augusta), Vice Chair of the committee, introduced a motion to withhold \$1 million from the Commerce Department until the agency provides more transparency regarding its spending on development incentives. Rep. Williams specifically requested detailed information on how much is being paid out for these incentives and how they affect the state's general fund, emphasizing the need for fiscal accountability.

The committee adjusted other programs in the Commerce budget, including a \$2 million reduction in funding for the Sunflower Summer Program, which promotes educational summer activities. Despite the cut, \$1 million remains allocated to the popular program, with the committee stating that the agency had found ways to operate it more efficiently on a reduced budget and shorter operational timeline (July 15 – August 15, not May – Aug). Other cuts included the Kansas Arts Commission, public broadcasting, the Kansas Main Street Program, and the elimination of \$1.5 million for Love, Kansas, which seeks to lure former residents back to Kansas.

They also reviewed the Social Services Budget recommendations for Department of Children and Families, Kansas Department of Environment – Health, and Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services (KDADs). These are typically budgets where increases are made to support nursing homes, hospitals, child welfare, and other social services funding needs. Time constraints prevented the full deliberation of the KDADs budget, leaving scrutiny of it to the coming days when the committee meets for its final review.

Continuous Budget Bill Passed

The Senate passed [SB14](#) on Thursday with a [31-8](#) vote, aiming to prevent state government shutdowns when the Legislature and governor fail to agree on a new budget. The bill allows the existing budget to continue beyond the current fiscal year if a new spending plan isn't passed.

Republicans argue this change will stop governors from leveraging veto power to force legislative compromises on the budget. At the same time, Democrats criticize the measure as unnecessary and a way to sidestep the Legislature's responsibility to craft a new budget annually.

House Drafting New Tax Plan

House Republicans are drafting a response to the constitutional amendment [SCR1603](#) passed by the Senate [28-11](#) on Thursday. SCR1603 caps property tax appraisals at 3 percent annually, based on 2022 property values. While the Senate's proposal imposes a hard cap, the House is considering a softer approach, limiting residential property appraisal increases to either the current fair market value or a rolling six-year average of property values across the state, whichever is lower.

House Tax Committee Chair Adam Smith (R-Weskan) argues this method would smooth out valuation spikes, ensuring more predictable property taxes and avoiding disparities between fair market values and taxable values over time. The House plan would cap new constructions and significant remodels while gradually phasing in the average market value over six years for new builds.

The House's proposal has drawn mixed reactions from Senate leaders. Senate President Ty Masterson (R-Andover) welcomed the House's involvement but expressed skepticism, arguing that without a firm cap like the Senate's, excessive valuations and rising property taxes might persist. Currently, the House proposal applies only to residential properties, though discussions continue about whether commercial properties should be included.

Film Tax Credits Return

House Tax heard testimony exploring efforts to attract film and digital media production to the state, but the argument was hampered due to concerns over the effectiveness of proposed incentives. The committee heard [HB2038](#) on Tuesday, which would offer up to \$10 million annually in income tax credits to production companies, with a 30 percent credit on production and postproduction expenses for those approved by the Department of Commerce. Skepticism remains among lawmakers about the bill's potential impact. Committee Vice Chair Rep. Carl Turner (R-Leawood) pointed out that similar film incentive programs in other states have often failed to generate significant economic growth or meet revenue expectations. Chairman Smith also suggested that the bill faces an uphill battle as legislators prioritize property tax relief over new film industry incentives.

Election Bills & Non-citizens

The House passed [HB2020](#) on Thursday to prevent non-U.S. citizens from voting by requiring the Department of Revenue's Division of Vehicles to send quarterly reports to the Secretary of State listing non-citizens with temporary driver's licenses. Proponents argue this will help identify noncitizens on voter rolls, codifying a process that has occurred six times in the past 15 years. The bill passed [83-34](#) along party lines. The debate included six failed amendments focused on data handling and security, with concerns raised about potential identity theft and misuse of sensitive information. Despite these concerns, supporters emphasized the bill's role in safeguarding election integrity. As of December, about 38,000 Kansans held temporary licenses, with 202 potential matches to voter registrations under investigation, though officials expect the final number of noncitizen voters to decrease as reviews continue.

HCR5004 was passed on Wednesday and also involves non-citizens. The constitutional amendment explicitly states that non-citizens cannot vote in elections. The measure passed 90-28, securing the two-thirds majority needed, and may appear on the November 2026 ballot if it clears the Senate. Supporter and Elections Chair Rep. Pat Proctor (R-Leavenworth) argued that the current Constitution leaves room for ambiguity, pointing to states like California, where noncitizens can vote in local elections. Democrats opposed the amendment, calling it unnecessary and politically motivated, with Rep. John Carmichael (D-Wichita) criticizing out-of-state influences driving the issue. Attorney General Kris Kobach did not issue an opinion, and Secretary of State Scott Schwab remained neutral, leaving the matter to voters and the Legislature. Despite mostly party-line voting, three Democrats supported the amendment.

Also on Wednesday, the Senate voted to eliminate the three-day grace period for counting mail-in ballots. Republicans are optimistic that this attempt will bypass a veto from Gov. Laura Kelly (D) after similar efforts failed in recent years. SB4 passed with a 29-10 vote, with Sen. Brenda Dietrich (R-Topeka) siding with the nine opposing Democrats. Democrats emphasized that the grace period had strong bipartisan support when it was introduced in 2017. Sen. Cindy Holscher (D-Overland Park) argued that the bill would unfairly penalize voters for postal delays, noting that 2,110 ballots would have been rejected in last November's election under the proposed changes. Republicans defended the bill, citing issues with missing postmarks and ballots arriving after the deadline, leading to discarded ballots. The Senate also approved SB6, which would ban ranked choice voting in Kansas. That bill also passed 29-10, with Sen. Kenny Titus (R-Wamego) joining the Democrats in opposition.

Hearing to Eliminate Affordable Housing Tax Credits

HB2119 had a hearing in the House Commerce Committee on Thursday, proposing to eliminate the Kansas Affordable Housing Tax Credit Act effective July 1, 2025. Committee Chairman Sean Tarwater (R-Stilwell) expressed concerns that the tax credit program has been inefficient and has not effectively increased affordable housing, a concern heightened by a recent report showing the program will cost the state around \$250 million annually. While Rep. Tarwater clarified he does not intend to cancel projects that have already received allocations, he emphasized the need for action due to the program's high cost despite no conferees testifying in favor of the bill. Opponents cited the act as a major incentive to build housing in the state and testified that thousands of apartments and houses would have never been built without the credits. Opponents suggested alternatives, such as implementing a cap on the state's funding of the tax credits. Although he dislikes the program's cost, the Chairman has said he is willing to negotiate a solution rather than cancel the program as a whole.

STAR Bond Extension

SB197 is set to receive a hearing today in Senate Commerce. The bill would extend the sunset date of the STAR Bonds Financing Act to July 1, 2030. There is to be a healthy amount of support for the bill, as many communities have used the tool to develop key areas into attractions that bring in money from across the state and outside its borders. Reviews of the efficiency of STAR bonds have put some legislators off of the idea, but the Department of Commerce has largely corrected early misapplications of the bonds, and many cities and counties with plans for the bonds are wishing to see the sunset extended.

Electric Rates Linked to ROI

Two groups advocating for lower electric rates, the Kansas Industrial Consumers Group and Kansans for Lower Electric Rates, are supporting a bill that would allow the Kansas Corporation Commission (KCC) to adjust Evergy's return on equity based on annual fluctuations in electric rates. The proposal, [HB2032](#), aims to incentivize the utility to keep rate increases below 1% by offering a potential 0.5% increase in return on equity while authorizing a decrease of up to 0.5% if rates rise above 1%. The lobbyist for the groups argued that Evergy's frequent rate hikes, including a recent \$196 million increase request and plans for two new natural gas plants, are making Kansas electric rates uncompetitive compared to neighboring states. They framed the bill as a tool to control rates and prevent unchecked capital spending that burdens consumers for decades.

Evergy opposed the bill, with Chief Customer Officer Chuck Caisley dismissing it as a "solution in search of a problem." Caisley argued that Evergy's rates have risen modestly - 5.6% over seven years in its central service area and under 2% in the Johnson County area, which he claimed is the lowest increase nationwide. He contended that the KCC already has the authority to adjust returns during rate cases and warned the bill would discourage vital investments in Kansas' electrical grid. Caisley said this could jeopardize the construction of two planned natural gas plants and hinder efforts to modernize aging infrastructure, reducing Kansas' competitiveness in reliability and economic development. Proponents countered with data showing Kansas electric rates remain significantly higher than in neighboring states, particularly for commercial users.

Child Welfare Addresses “Neglect” Definition

Testimony on [HB2132](#), which seeks to redefine "neglect" in Kansas' child welfare system, highlighted a divide between social workers and law enforcement. The bill aims to prevent the removal of children from homes solely due to poverty, shifting the language in state policies from "failure" to "refusal" to care, and prohibiting removal based solely on factors like parental age, crowded housing, mental health, or truancy. In the House Child Welfare Committee, supporters, including child welfare advocates, argued that poverty is often mistaken for neglect, contributing to Kansas' high foster care rates, with over half of the 6,000 children in care attributed to neglect. Opponents, including law enforcement officials and prosecutors, worry that the bill could leave children in unsafe conditions by limiting intervention before harm occurs.

Other critics argued the bill doesn't address the lack of support services, particularly in rural areas, to ensure child safety at home. The committee is set to consider amendments and decide on advancing the bill on February 12th.

Important Dates

Important Dates:

February 17th – Last day for committees to meet before Turnaround Day

February 20th – (Turnaround) Last day for non-exempt bills to pass original chamber

March 18th – Last day for non-exempt committees to meet and consider bills

March 21st – Last day for non-exempt bills in either House

March 24th – Conference Committees begin to meet

The Week Ahead

Monday, February 3

1:30 PM House Commerce, Labor and Economic Development

Hearing on HB2291: Creating the regulatory relief division within the office of the attorney general and establishing the general regulatory sandbox program to waive or suspend rules and regulations for program participants.

1:30 PM House Commerce, Labor and Economic Development

Hearing on HB2304: Requiring local governments to report certain local economic development incentive program information to the secretary of commerce, defining such programs, requiring the secretary of commerce to post such information on the economic development incentive program database maintained by the secretary, and requiring certain search result presentation and report formats.

1:30 PM House Corrections and Juvenile Justice

Hearing on HB2192: Limiting or prohibiting work release for people convicted of a second or third offense of domestic battery.

1:30 PM Senate Commerce

Hearing on SB197: Extending the sunset date of the STAR Bonds Financing Act to July 1, 2030.

1:30 PM Senate Education

Hearing on SB76: Requiring employees of school districts and postsecondary educational institutions to use the name and pronouns consistent with a student's biological sex and birth certificate and authorizing a cause of action for violations.

3:30 PM House Insurance

Hearing on HB2244: Modifying the composition of the board of pharmacy and prohibiting the board of pharmacy from adopting rules and regulations that would limit or condition the use of telepharmacy.

3:30 PM House Insurance

Hearing on HB2245: Transferring officers, employees, powers, duties, and functions relating to the state healthcare benefits program from the division of the state employee health benefits plan of the Department of Administration to the Insurance Department, establishing the commissioner of insurance as the chairperson of the Kansas state employees healthcare commission, and eliminating a pilot program regarding employer contributions for certain children.

3:30 PM House Insurance

Hearing on HB2246: Enacting the consumer protection related to hospital price transparency act.

3:30 PM House Taxation

Hearing on SB10: Providing property tax exemptions for certain personal property including watercraft, marine equipment, off-road vehicles, motorized bicycles, and certain trailers.

Tuesday, February 11

8:30 AM Senate Public Health and Welfare

Hearing on SB82: Requiring the secretary for aging and disability services to grant physical environment waivers for certain rural emergency hospitals to provide skilled nursing facility care.

8:30 AM Senate Transportation

Hearing on SB119: Increasing the amount of fees retained by the county treasurer, the division of vehicles, or a contractor for processing motor vehicle license applications and certificate of titles.

9:00 AM House Energy, Utilities and Telecommunications

Hearing on HB2107: Providing for claims to recover damages from fire events caused by electric public utilities, specifying recovery for such damages, and requiring the state corporation commission to provide trainings on wildfire risk and mitigation.

9:00 AM House Energy, Utilities and Telecommunications

Hearing on HB2225: Prohibiting mobile home park landlords from limiting a tenant's access to communications and video services.

9:00 AM House Federal and State Affairs

Hearing on HB2094: Authorizing the sale of electronic cigarettes in cigarette vending machines.

9:00 AM House Veterans and Military

Hearing on HB2274: Removing the active requirement from military servicemembers for occupational licensure.

9:30 AM Senate Assessment and Taxation

Hearing on HB2004: Providing countywide retailers' sales tax authority for Seward County for the purpose of financing the costs of roadway and bridge construction, maintenance, and improvement in the county.

10:30 AM Senate Federal and State Affairs

Hearing on SB178: Requiring certain law enforcement agencies to apply for and enter into agreements with United States immigration and customs enforcement for the enforcement of federal immigration laws.

10:30 AM Senate Judiciary

Hearing on SB128: Creating an exception to certain mandatory reporting obligations for licensed social workers when working under the supervision of an attorney and permitting an attorney to require a licensed social worker to keep ethical obligations of attorney-client privilege while working under the supervision of such attorney.

1:30 PM House Corrections and Juvenile Justice

Hearing on HB2179: Prohibiting fines and fees from being assessed against a juvenile or a juvenile's parent, guardian, or custodian in a case pursuant to the revised Kansas juvenile justice code.

1:30 PM House Education

Hearing on HB2299: Prohibiting discriminatory practices on the basis of religion at public educational institutions and authorizing the attorney general to investigate violations and assess civil penalties under the Kansas Act against discrimination.

1:30 PM Senate Utilities

Hearing on SB81: Prohibiting large facilities receiving certain tariffs or failing to meet workforce and electric demand requirements from qualifying for economic development electric rates.

1:30 PM Senate Utilities

Hearing on SB92: Extending the time in which the state corporation commission shall make a final order on a transmission line siting application.

1:30 PM Senate Utilities

Hearing on SB167: Prohibiting electric public utilities from recovering from ratepayers the costs associated with electric vehicle charging stations and requiring electric public utilities to establish electric vehicle charging service rate schedules.

3:30 PM House Social Services Budget

Hearing on HB2184: Providing for the regulation of supplemental nursing services agencies and healthcare workers platforms by the secretary for aging and disability services.

Wednesday, February 12

9:00 AM House Local Government

Hearing on HB2160: Enacting the municipal employee whistleblower act to provide statutory protections for municipal employees who report or disclose unlawful or dangerous conduct.

9:30 AM Senate Local Government, Transparency and Ethics

Hearing on SB66: Requiring certain local governmental officials to disclose substantial interests in the construction and operation of major development projects and to abstain from voting on governmental actions relating to such matters.

1:30 PM House Health and Human Services

Hearing on HB2249: Requiring the secretary for aging and disability services to grant physical environment waivers for certain rural emergency hospitals to provide skilled nursing facility care.

1:30 PM House Higher Education Budget

Hearing on HB2195: Establishing the Kansas technical college operating grant fund administered by the state board of regents.

11:30 PM House Higher Education Budget

Hearing on HB2248: Establishing the Kansas nursing initiative grant program and authorizing the state board of regents to approve need-based or competitive grants for the expansion of nursing faculty, laboratory supplies, and tools for student success at postsecondary educational institutions.

1:30 PM House Transportation

Hearing on HB2220: Permitting local authorities with jurisdiction over city residence districts to reduce the maximum speed limit to 25 miles per hour without an engineering and traffic investigation.

1:30 PM Senate Utilities

Hearing on SB170: Authorizing the state corporation commission to make recommendations regarding energy efficiency standards for buildings.

1:30 PM Senate Utilities

Hearing on SB171: Authorizing the secretary of health and environment to license nuclear fusion systems, establishing such licensure fee, and authorizing the secretary to impose late fees for any expired radiation protection and control license.

3:30 PM House Agriculture and Natural Resources

Hearing on HB2012: Providing an income tax credit for the sale and distribution of ethanol blends for motor vehicle fuels.

3:30 PM House Taxation

Hearing on HB2154: Imposing property tax on rental and leased vehicles and discontinuing the excise tax on the rental and lease of such vehicles.

Thursday, February 13

8:30 AM Senate Public Health and Welfare

Hearing on SB67: Authorizing registered nurse anesthetists to engage in independent practice and prescribe drugs and prohibiting registered nurse anesthetists from performing an abortion or prescribing drugs to induce an abortion.

9:30 AM Senate Local Government, Transparency and Ethics

Hearing on SB120: Enacting the municipal employee whistleblower act to provide statutory protections for municipal employees who report or disclose unlawful or dangerous conduct.

1:30 PM House Commerce, Labor and Economic Development

Hearing on HB2239: Requiring every employer to provide each employee with meal periods and rest periods.

1:30 PM House Health and Human Services

Hearing on HB2266: Enacting the advanced practice registered nurse licensure compact to provide interstate practice privileges for advanced practice registered nurses.

3:30 PM House Elections

Hearing on HB2022: Clarifying that a special election shall not be held within 45 days before or after a general or primary election.

3:30 PM House Elections

Hearing on HB2056: Specifying the procedures and restrictions on accepting a nomination for an elected office based on the form of nomination used.

Helpful Links to Monitor the Action

[Listen](#) live to committee hearings or playback past hearings.

[Watch](#) the House and Senate floor debates via YouTube.

[Find](#) the daily calendars.

[Search](#) for a bill.

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