

# THE ADVOCATE

A WEEKLY UPDATE  
FROM THE KANSAS  
LEGISLATURE

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## Intro

The Legislature broke for First Adjournment late last Thursday night. The Senate wrapped around 10:00 PM, while the House finished closer to 11:00 PM, signaling the end of most of the heavy lifting for the 2025 session. The Legislature returns on Thursday, April 10, to attempt to override the vetoes Governor Kelly issues during the break, which are likely to be plentiful. Last year, Governor Kelly issued more vetoes than any other Kansas Governor in the last 30 years, and this year, she could cause a real headache for GOP lawmakers by using her pen extensively on the budget. If the Governor line-item vetoes dozens of items in the budget, along with the bills she plans to veto, the Legislature would have to be selective about which items they override, simply due to the limited time available during the April 10 - 12 veto session.

A shortage of time has been a recurring theme of this year's session, with complaints continuing into Thursday night. Those grievances were amplified after the Senate passed the budget and adjourned, leaving many pieces of legislation still pending. The early adjournment was in response to the House's denial of a constitutional amendment to cap property tax valuations; more on that below. Some lobbyists and activists are upset that their legislation won't be moving this year, while others are elated at having pushed off unfavorable bills; however, most fall somewhere in between, with an overall bittersweet feeling about the session. Some conference committee reports are likely to be worked during the veto session, but once again, progress will be limited by time constraints, and any bills passed will not have an opportunity to override a veto should the Governor issue one.

## **Budget Sent to Governor**

Both chambers passed [SB125](#) last week, which contains the state's \$10.63 billion state general fund budget for fiscal year 2026 and includes a 1.5% across-the-board spending cut for state agencies. This cut, saving \$7.3 million, is more limited than initially proposed and excludes key sectors such as the judicial and legislative branches, corrections, the Kansas Bureau of Investigation, state hospitals, and higher education institutions. Overall, the state will spend \$25.6 billion across all funds, a decrease of \$1.47 billion compared to fiscal year 2025.

This marks the first time that the Legislature has chosen to craft its own budget rather than build upon Governor Laura Kelly's proposal, which this year requested \$10.65 billion in SGF. While the 2026 budget leaves the state with a projected \$424.6 million surplus in fiscal year 2027, future projections show deficits of \$461.5 million by 2028 and \$877.2 million by 2029. Despite this, the state's rainy-day fund is expected to remain robust, with a balance of \$1.85 billion by 2029, easing some concerns.

Some lawmakers, many of whom have never voted to support a budget, particularly conservative Republicans, opposed the budget due to concerns about long-term fiscal sustainability and increased state spending and staffing. Others, including some Democrats, supported it as a compromise, though they acknowledged disappointment over reduced funding in areas such as special education and literacy programs.

Several major investments were maintained: \$40 million for state employee pay raises, \$80 million in bonding for a new KBI headquarters, and \$24 million in federal COVID-relief interest for a Highway Patrol dispatch center in Salina. It also provides \$19 million for Docking Building renovations, \$4 million to promote unmanned aircraft system manufacturing in Kansas, and \$10 million for aircraft maintenance at the Topeka Regional Airport.

Numerous cuts were also made, including \$500,000 in lottery proceeds from the Sunflower Summer Program, \$200,000 from public broadcasting, and \$300,000 from Junior Achievement. A proposed \$10 million for the Kansas Blueprint for Literacy was ultimately rejected. The budget also retains \$10 million in new funding for firearm detection software in public schools and allocates \$1.25 million to support childcare facilities in southwestern Kansas. Funding was maintained for the Kansas Arts Commission, with 60% of matching grants designated for smaller counties and 40% for larger ones. Provisions targeting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs remain, though the budget no longer withholds funds from the Governor's office or Department of Administration. The budget passed 89-36 in the House and 24-16 in the Senate.

Despite leadership's intent, the budget was once again passed on the last day of the regular session, with less time for legislators to review it. Combined with the lack of an omnibus budget bill this session, many feel the new process fell short. However, there has been no word on reverting the calendar or budget process next session.

## **Lackluster Property Tax Agreement**

As Thursday's session drew to a close, property tax policy took center stage with two major developments that sparked passionate debate. The proposed constitutional amendment in [HCR5011](#) would have capped annual property tax appraisal increases at 4%. The bill originally failed to pass the Senate by one vote but was brought up for reconsideration the next day and passed with the needed 2/3 majority vote of 27. The amendment aimed to limit the increase in property values for tax purposes, with supporters arguing that it would curb growing tax burdens and reduce the influence of local appraisers while forcing transparency on local governments. Opponents in the House, including Democratic Rep. Tom Sawyer (Wichita), the ranking member of the Tax Committee, countered that it would create tax inequities, force local governments to raise mill levies, and increase other taxes, such as those on motor vehicles, without providing actual tax relief. Despite the last-minute reversal in the Senate, the measure fell well short of House approval and was criticized for its delayed implementation and potential instability. The resolution received an abysmal vote of 37-88 in the House, and shortly after, the Senate passed the budget and adjourned.

Separately, the Legislature did pass a bill to eliminate the state's 1.5-mill property tax levy, of which one mill funds maintenance and renovations for universities, and the other half mill goes to institutions like veterans homes and schools for the deaf and blind. The Senate approved [SB35](#) unanimously, and the House passed it 96-26, sending it to Governor Kelly's desk. While the bill received bipartisan support, many lawmakers criticized it as inadequate. The savings are modest at just \$25.88 a year for a \$150,000 home, according to House Minority Leader Rep. Brandon Woodard (D-Lenexa), and some lawmakers called the effort an "insult" to constituents. Some Republicans, including Sen. Caryn Tyson (R-Parker), defended the move as part of a broader tax relief package and pointed to other legislative efforts, such as the failed appraisal cap amendment and expanded tax freezes for seniors and veterans. The new law replaces lost revenue with transfers from the state general fund at \$56 million for universities and \$25 million for other state facilities, but critics say Kansans are still waiting for "real, meaningful" property tax relief. Governor Kelly has said she will veto any tax cuts this session, but the Legislature looks to have the votes to override.

## **Move to Single Income Tax Rate**

The Legislature also approved a slow-moving tax overhaul that gradually moves the state toward a single income tax rate, with the Senate voting 30-10 and the House 84-38 to pass [SB269](#). Supported by the Kansas Chamber of Commerce, the legislation sets a threshold of \$5.96 billion in income tax collections plus inflation before triggering income tax cuts. The plan gradually buys down the state's current two personal income tax brackets to a flat 4%, with the lower bracket being reduced first, followed by the upper bracket. Once that is achieved, it would also lower corporate and financial institution tax rates over time. The bill includes a safeguard to prevent tax cuts if the state's rainy-day fund falls below 15% of general fund tax receipts. It currently stands at \$1.7 billion, approximately 18% of the general fund receipts.

Supporters hailed the bill as a responsible, phased approach to tax relief that encourages economic competitiveness while protecting the budget. Senate Tax Chair Sen. Tyson (R-Parker) praised the plan as a way to return money to taxpayers and curb government growth. However, Democratic opponents, such as her ranking member, Rep. Ethan Corson (Prairie Village), criticized the legislation for prioritizing income tax cuts over more urgently needed property tax relief. Sen. Corson argued that the bill locks the Legislature into long-term income tax cuts while offering little immediate benefit to Kansans, pointing out that most constituents are more concerned about soaring property taxes. The bill now heads to Governor Kelly, who has previously vetoed single-rate proposals.

## **Attorney General May Oversee Class-Action Lawsuits**

[HB2228](#) was passed Thursday, giving Attorney General Kris Kobach oversight over local governments that enter into contingency fee contracts for class-action lawsuits, such as those related to vaping, opioid abuse, and targeting oil and gas companies over climate change. The bill, which passed 73-52 in the House and 28-12 in the Senate, requires local entities, such as cities, counties, and school districts, to obtain approval from the attorney general before pursuing certain lawsuits with private law firms under contingency arrangements. While framed as a measure to ensure coordination and prevent legal conflicts, local governments say it encroaches on local authority and limits municipalities' ability to respond to public harms.

Supporters, including the Kansas Chamber and Kobach's office, argue that lawsuits brought by local governments can undermine statewide legal efforts and strain the judicial system. They cited Ford County's lawsuit against oil companies as an example of overreach. Opponents, including city leaders and both the Kansas Association of Counties and the League of Kansas Municipalities, argue that the bill interferes with local control and the attorney-client relationship. Critics also raised concerns about the lack of a hearing in the House and Kobach's handling of prior litigation. Though amended from a more restrictive 2020 version, the bill still gives the Attorney General broad authority to deny contracts unless they are of purely local concern and don't interfere with state legal interests. Governor Kelly will likely veto the bill, and many House members would need to change their stance to override it.

## **Last Week's Highlighted Bills**

### **Taxation & Finance**

[SB35](#): Discontinuing state property tax levies for education and state institutions; funding to be replaced from the state general fund. Passed.

[HB2152](#): Regulating government deposits, investment practices, and bidding processes for financial institutions. Passed.

[HCR5011](#): Proposing a constitutional amendment to limit property tax valuation increases for real and mobile property. Failed in the House 37-88.

### **Local Government, Housing & Infrastructure**

[HB2088](#): Requiring local governments to meet deadlines for building permits and requiring the Department of Health and Environment to respond to stormwater runoff notices within 45 days. Passed.

HB2149: Requiring distributed energy retailers to disclose information, establishing interconnection and operation requirements, and revising capacity limits and sizing formulas for electric utility services. Passed.

HB2040: Extending the timeframe for final orders on transmission line siting applications by the state corporation commission. Passed.

HB2107: Providing claims for economic damages from utility-caused fires and requiring workshops on wildfire risk mitigation. Passed.

HB2160: Enacting whistleblower protections for municipal employees reporting unlawful or dangerous conduct. Passed.

## Public Health, Health Care & Safety

HB2249: Requiring the secretary for aging and disability services to grant waivers for rural emergency hospitals to provide skilled nursing care. Passed.

HB2311: Prohibiting policies conflicting with religious beliefs regarding child placement, custody, and guardianship; creates cause of action for violations. Passed.

HB2075: Mandating that a child's permanency hearing be held within nine months of their removal from the home. Passed.

SB29: Removing local health authority to ban public gatherings to control infectious disease. Passed.

## Elections, Rules & Regulations

HB2134: Amending the Kansas open records act to limit charges and prohibit fees for electronic copies and record existence checks. Passed.

HB2054: Raising campaign contribution limits and eliminating certain candidate contribution limits. Passed.

HB2022: Prohibiting special elections within 45 days before or after a general or primary election. Passed.

HB2291: Creating a regulatory relief division and a regulatory sandbox program to waive regulations for certain participants. Passed.

SB4: Requiring advance voting ballots be returned by 7:00 m. on Election Day. Veto overridden.

## Education & Workforce Development

HB2185: Updating the Kansas national guard educational assistance act to include dependents of national guard members and the EMERGE program to include other advanced degrees. Signed by Governor.

SB78: Requiring postsecondary institutions to review accreditation policies, prohibiting accrediting agencies from enforcing violations of state law, and creating a legal remedy for such violations. Signed by Governor.

SB50: Standardizing interest rates for scholarship repayment and authorizing fees and recovery by the board of regents. Passed.

HB2056: Requiring specific intent for the crime of falsely representing an election official. Passed.

HB2195: Establishing the Kansas technical college operating grant Passed.

SB216: Establishing the Kansas paid sick time act, including accrual rules, employer obligations, and anti-retaliation Motion to withdraw from committee failed the Senate 9-30.

SB218: Increasing the Kansas minimum Motion to withdraw from committee failed the Senate 9-30.

## **Legal & Criminal Justice**

HB2155: Specifying sheriff liability for official acts related to jail charge and Passed.

HB2061: Including underground and aboveground telecom infrastructure in critical infrastructure protections under trespassing and damage laws. Passed.

HB2109: Exempting utilities from liability for law enforcement equipment on utility structures. Passed.

HB2304: Requiring reporting of local economic development incentive programs and public access to the data. Passed.

HB2110: Revising 911 board requirements, transferring 911 funds to the state treasury, and setting new fund establishment dates. Passed.

## **Important Dates**

April 10 – Start of Veto Session

April 12 – 90th day of Session | Sine Die

## **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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