

# THE ADVOCATE

A WEEKLY UPDATE  
FROM THE KANSAS  
LEGISLATURE

ADVOCACY THAT WORKS



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WICHITA REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

## 2026 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA



## Intro

The 2026 Legislative Session began in earnest last Monday. This is the second year of the biennium, so many bills from last year have been carried over, with even more being pre-filed and introduced last week. While last year was not an election year, there were several resignations in the interim, with some moving on to jobs in the federal Administration, leaving their districts, or retiring. Two House Representatives, Scott Hill (R-Abeline) and Silas Miller (D-Wichita), moved up to fill the vacant seats in the Senate left by outgoing Senators J.R. Claeys (R-Salina) and Mary Ware (D-Wichita). Rep. Abi Boatman (D-Wichita) replaced Miller, and Greg Wilson (R-Abilene) replaced Hill in the House. Including those replacements, there are five new Representatives, including former Rep. Steve Brunk (R-Wichita), who served previously from 2003-2016, and replaces Patrick Penn (R-Wichita). Courtney Sappington (R-Baldwin City) replaced Carrie Barth (R-Baldwin City), and Carolyn Caiharr (R-Edwardsville) replaced Mike Thompson (R-Bonner Springs).

In the second year of both the new legislative budget process and 90-day calendar, the House got a head start on the budgets, with multiple subcommittees meeting the week before the session started, holding hearings on several state agencies funded primarily by fees. The schedule is even more aggressive than last year, with only 51 working days before adjournment. The final day for non-exempt bills to be passed by their original chamber, turnaround day, is on February 19th, while the deadline for individuals to request bill drafts is approaching quickly on January 26th.

With the tight schedule, committees have already begun holding hearings. Notably, [SCR1616](#), a constitutional amendment to cap assessed valuation increases to 3%, has already had multiple days of hearings in the Senate Assessment and Taxation Committee. Bill introductions, hearings, and other significant actions will be listed below.

The legislature is off today in celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day

## **State of the State**

Governor Laura Kelly delivered a short State of the State address on Tuesday, her 8th and final address to the Legislature. Earlier in the day, the new Chief Justice Eric Rosen delivered his State of the Judiciary address. The speech came at a critical point for the Kansas Supreme Court, as a constitutional amendment to provide for the election of justices will be on Kansans' ballots in August, though he also addressed other issues. Primarily, Rosen discussed the severe shortage of legal professionals in rural areas, as well as the court's modernization and stabilization efforts in recent years. He praised the former Chief Justice, Marla Luckert, who stepped down after suffering a stroke in October. She plans to retire from the court in February.

In her last State of the State address, Governor Laura Kelly decried the divisiveness of national politics. She strayed from previous addresses, omitting Medicaid expansion and former Republican Governor Sam Brownback. She voiced her support for a bipartisan Senate proposal to ban cellphones in schools. Water was one of her top priorities, and she requested that the legislature create a dedicated funding stream to address what she deemed a "water crisis" facing the state. While she didn't discuss Medicaid, Gov. Kelly addressed several topics that have long been priorities of her administration, including increasing funding for both special education and mental health care, as well as making school lunches free for more students.

Speaker Dan Hawkins (R-Wichita) delivered the Republican response, also in his last year in his current role. He joined the governor in endorsing a school cellphone ban to reverse the decline in K-12 test scores. He reiterated his previously announced goal to cut \$200 million from the state budget and touted the legislature's success in reducing both the state income and property tax in recent years. He outlined goals for what he called the Republican-led legislature's "People-first agenda," including reforming tort law and a series of healthcare policy proposals such as hospital reimbursements, enhancing telemedicine, improving hospital pricing transparency, lowering prescription costs, and creating oversight for the Rural Health Transformation Fund.

# Gubernatorial Race

Candidates turned in their campaign finance reports last week, after the Public Disclosure Commission granted them an extra day because the deadline fell on the weekend.

The crowded Republican primary is filled with high-dollar campaigns, with six candidates nearing \$1m raised:

## **Businessman Philip Sarnecki (Johnson County)**

- Raised \$500 thousand in individual contributions
- Contributed \$2 million of his own money
- Total raised in 2025: \$2.5 million
- Cash on hand: approximately \$2.3 million

With the highest net worth of the candidates and a \$2m self-loan, Sarnecki finds himself at the top of the race financially. Sarnecki also has a political action committee called “Kansas Comeback” with a reported \$246k raised.

## **Former Governor Jeff Colyer (Overland Park)**

- Raised \$1.01 million in individual contributions
- Contributed \$1 million of his own money
- Total raised in 2025: \$2.07 million
- Cash on hand: approximately \$1.88 million

Colyer has the highest dollar amount raised in individual contributions so far in the primary field.

## **Senate President Ty Masterson (Andover)**

- Raised approximately \$700,000 in 2025
- Masterson has contributed none of his own money to his campaign
- Cash on hand: approximately \$687,000

If you include State Sen. Masterson’s approximately \$750k raised through affiliated entities, a social welfare non-profit and PAC both called “Take Back Kansas,” he sits at over \$1.4m in cash, putting himself in the upper echelon of contenders in the race.

## **Secretary of State Scott Schwab (Olathe)**

- Raised approximately \$1.4 million in 2025
- Contributed \$1 million of his own money
- Cash on hand: approximately \$1.05m

## **Insurance Commissioner Vicki Schmidt (Topeka)**

- Raised approximately \$980,000 in 2025
- Includes about \$81,500 in loans
- Cash on hand: approximately \$928,000
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## **Former Wichita school board member Joy Eakins (Wichita)**

- Raised approximately \$1.14 million
- Includes a \$1 million self-loan
- Cash on hand: approximately \$1.04 million

The Democratic primary is shaping up to be a two-horse race between State Senator Ethan Corson, who recently secured the endorsements of the current governor and lieutenant governor, as well as major trade unions, and fellow State Senator Cindy Holscher. Holscher, despite not securing the endorsements her opponent boasts, recently released polling done by a North Carolina Democratic Pollster showing her beating Corson 33% to 9%, with the majority, 57%, of the electorate undecided at this early stage in the race.

- State Senator Ethan Corson (Fairway)
- Raised approximately \$902,000 in 2025
- Cash on hand: approximately \$526,000
- State Senator Cindy Holscher (Overland Park)
- Raised approximately \$400,000 in 2025
- Cash on hand: approximately \$180,000

Historically, raising more than \$800,000 in the year before an election has been considered a strong showing in Kansas politics. This cycle, however, fundraising is running significantly higher across the board after the Legislature doubled contribution limits from \$2,000 to \$4,000 for statewide elections. For context, at this point in the 2018 cycle, Governor Laura Kelly had raised just \$155,786 after entering the race in December 2017.

## Budget

The Governor introduced her budget proposal on Wednesday to a joint meeting of the House Appropriations and Senate Ways and Means committees, totaling \$10.9 billion. This represents a \$600 million increase from the FY2025 actuals. The budget emphasized long-term water planning, increased funding for special education, and making more reduced-price school lunches free meals. The Governor's budget was introduced as SB337 on the Senate side and HB2082 in the House, but will largely be disregarded in favor of the legislature-crafted budget.

The legislature has now entered the second year of its new budget format, with some changes to the process intended to give more time to evaluate agency requests. Last year, the House worked through the budget before sending it to the Senate; however, both chambers are working on the budget simultaneously this year, as there was a significant time crunch at the back-end of last session. The House has been tasked to cut \$200 million as estimates predict a deficit in the coming years. As part of this initiative, for the second year in a row, House Appropriations Chairman Rep. Troy Waymaster (R-Bunker Hill) made several motions in the interim Special Committee on State Budget to remove all FTE, reappropriation, and enhancement requests from the agency budget proposals, with the intention to force the agencies to come back and face subcommittee scrutiny to justify their requests.

Senate Ways and Means heard an update on ARPA expenditures on Thursday, which indicated that ARPA projects are still on track. The Office of Early Childhood also gave a presentation to the committee on its transition, giving the Senators a chance to meet the new director, Christi Smith. House and Senate budget subcommittees are off to a quick start, meeting through Friday to get a head start on their processes. Both have already passed out several agency budgets with the goal of finishing subcommittee work by January 27th and passing out the final budgets by Feb 12th.

## Tax

The main story in Tax this week is [SCR1616](#), the proposed constitutional amendment to cap the assessed value of real property at 3% per year. Designed as practical property tax relief, the proposed amendment would appear on the 2026 primary ballot were it to pass through the legislature. The proposed amendment is a continuation of efforts from 2024 and 2025, which have passed the Senate but, in both cases, died in the House.

The Senate hearing on the proposal revealed strong interest among the committee and certain doubts among conferees about whether a cap on a property's assessed value necessarily translates into lower taxes. Although there was wide agreement that property taxes are a problem, the proposal's opponents, including the KS Farm Bureau and KS Livestock Association, note that it does not prevent mill levy increases, and could shift the burden to agricultural land. Chairwoman Caryn Tyson (R-Parker), who is sponsoring the proposal, has planned to work it on the 27th of January.

The House side, in comparison, focused predominantly on agency updates, laying the foundation for the rest of the session. The committee heard an overview from the Department of Revenue and the Consensus Revenue estimates for 2026 and 2027. The revised estimates predict modest real growth for the Kansas economy and a continued return to normal inflation over the next two years. A revised estimate of \$10.23 billion for the State General Fund was presented for fiscal year 2026, and \$10.13 billion for fiscal year 2027. Although he did not elaborate on any details, Chairman Adam Smith (R-Weskan) mentioned property tax relief as a possibility later in the session, as well as reconvening the Sales Tax Commission from the 2025 session. The state is largely out of the property tax business, and any relief the legislature could provide would come from limiting local taxing authorities.

Introduced bills of note:

[SCR1616](#) - Proposing to amend section 1 of article 11 of the constitution of the state of Kansas to limit property tax assessed value increases for real property in any subclass and personal property classified as mobile homes.

[SB319](#) - Providing for a property tax rebate for certain real property used for residential or commercial and industrial purposes when such property sells in a qualifying sale for less than 97% of the county appraised value.

[HB2443](#) - Providing that certain natural gas storage facilities shall not be classified as public utilities for property tax purposes.

[HB2440](#) - Excluding owners of oil leases from having to file request for exemption with the board of tax appeals for property tax exemptions.

## Health

The health committees started the session with updates from KDHE and KDADS. In the KDADS update, they discussed the SNAP error rate and its potential cost to the state, as well as the high cost of contract nursing for Larned and the potential for the South Central Regional Mental Health Hospital to "stem the bleeding" on that budget item. Secretary Laura Howard also said they were "in a good place" with the state's application to CMS for the Community Support Waiver.

Both KDHE and DCF provided positive updates on the Rural Health Transformation Fund, a \$50 billion federal fund established by the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, of which Kansas was awarded a whopping \$221 million in the first year. The legislature has expressed concern about the lack of oversight of those dollars and would like to intervene.

Introduced bills of note:

HB2463 - Creating the rural health transformation fund, prescribing powers and duties of the state finance council concerning such fund and the rural health transformation program, crediting all federal moneys for the rural health transformation program to such fund and making and concerning appropriations for the fiscal years ending June 30, 2026, and June 30, 2027, for the state finance council and other state agencies.

## **Economic Development**

Our firm introduced HB2464 in the House Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development last week to extend Kansas' Aviation Tax Credits, which were scheduled to expire in December of this year. These incentives are a cornerstone of the state's economic development strategy and are essential to keeping Kansas competitive in attracting and retaining aviation manufacturing, maintenance, and engineering jobs, particularly in Wichita and South Central Kansas. HB2464 extends the sunset date to 2036, providing long-term certainty for companies making major capital and workforce investments, and we will continue working with policymakers and stakeholders to ultimately make these aviation tax credits permanent, so Kansas remains the Air Capital of the World for generations to come.

Introduced bills of note:

HB2465 - Enacting the professionals' freedom of expression act to provide protection for professionals and businesses against adverse action as a result of an expression of beliefs of such professional or business that is unrelated to such profession or business.

HB2466 - Extending the sunset for the angel investor tax credit to 2031.

## **Local Government**

The Local Government committees started off slow in both chambers, simply introducing committee members and taking bill introductions

Introduced bills of note:

HB2419 - Providing an exception to KORA that authorizes certain retired KPERS members to have identifying information restricted from public access on public websites that identify home addresses or home ownership

HB2451 - Prohibiting the use of public assets by government officers and employees to advocate for or against proposed amendments to the constitution of the state of Kansas and ballot questions submitted to qualified electors.

HB2452 - Changing the timing of city, school, community college and certain other municipality elections to fall in even-numbered years and requiring the term of office of municipal elected officials to be either two years or four years.

## Utilities

The Senate Committee on Utilities heard a detailed presentation on Telecommunicator CPR (T-CPR) and Emergency Medical Dispatch (EMD) services for Kansas 911 centers on Wednesday. Testimony from the SB11 Exploratory Committee emphasized that early CPR instruction delivered by trained telecommunicators significantly improves survival outcomes for cardiac arrest and other medical emergencies, yet thousands of Kansans currently lack access to pre-arrival medical guidance. Recommendations include creating a dedicated T-CPR/EMD fund, providing liability protections for participating PSAPs, and authorizing statewide contracting for medical directors, protocols, and QA services.

On Thursday, both the House and Senate Utilities received updates from Kansas Corporation Commission Utilities Director Justin Grady. Grady reported that Kansas electric rates remain among the most affordable in the country, with all-in rates now 15 percent below the national average. However, Kansas falls behind in a regional comparison, coming in 7.5% above the regional average. He outlined recent KCC dockets, including approval of Evergy's Large Load Power Services Tariff aimed at protecting existing customers while encouraging data-center and advanced-manufacturing investment through long-term, demand-heavy contracts. He also highlighted approval of new generation facilities, and load projections which show a 33-99% increase over the next decade.

Kansans for Lower Electric Rates introduced a sweeping bill in committee last week, the exact details of which have yet to be seen, and a bill number has not been assigned. The Transparency and Reform of Utility Expenditures, or the TRUE Act, seeks to shake up the status quo, and according to KLER's website, would:

- Eliminate annual updates to the Transmission Delivery Charge (TDC)
- Improve transparency for Southwest Power Pool (SPP) and Kansas Corporation Commission (KCC) transmission-related actions
- Provide cost controls for SPP projects
- Improve transparency and awareness of KCC meetings with electric utilities and other others
- Strengthen KCC and CURB ethics standards
- Allow CURB to intervene in SPP and Federal Energy Regulatory Commission issues
- Improve makeup of CURB board
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- Provide energy independence options through 3rd Party Purchased Power Agreements (PPA)
- Provide a clear path for nuclear development

Introduced bills of note:

[HB2435](#) - Enacting the natural gas infrastructure availability act to authorize natural gas public utilities to defer to a regulatory asset all depreciation expense and carrying cost for any new plant, facilities or equipment that such utility has put into service and authorizing recovery of such regulatory asset via an interim rate adjustment mechanism.

## Important Dates

January 26th - Last day for individuals to introduce bills

February 6th - Last day for non-exempt committees to introduce bills

February 16th - Last day for committees to meet before Turnaround Day

February 19th - (Turnaround) Last day for non-exempt bills to pass original chamber

# The Week Ahead

The following bills are scheduled to receive hearings this week.

## **Tuesday, January 20**

3:30PM – House Committee on Taxation

Hearing on HB2443 - Providing that certain natural gas storage facilities shall not be classified as public utilities for property tax purposes.

3:30PM – House Committee on Elections

Hearing on HB2452 - Changing the timing of city, school, community college and certain other municipality elections to fall in even-numbered years and requiring the term of office of municipal elected officials to be either two years or four years.

## **Wednesday, January 21**

9:30AM – Senate Committee on Assessment and Taxation

Hearing on SB319 - Providing for a property tax rebate for certain real property used for residential or commercial and industrial purposes when such property sells in a qualifying sale for less than 97% of the county appraised value.

3:30PM – House Local Government

Hearing on HB2419 - Providing an exception to KORA that authorizes certain retired KPERS members to have identifying information restricted from public access on public websites that identify home addresses or home ownership

## **Thursday, January 22**

9AM – House Committee on Water

Hearing on HB2424 - Establishing a pump installation contractor license and requiring additional examination, qualification and record-keeping requirements for licensed pump installation contractor and water well contractors.

10:30AM – Senate Committee on Judiciary

Hearing on HB2329 - Increasing the cumulative detention limit for juvenile offenders and criminal penalties for juvenile offenders who use a firearm in the commission of an offense or who are repeat offenders, providing for increased placement of offenders in non-foster home beds in youth residential facilities, requiring the secretary of corrections to pay for the costs associated with such placements and authorizing the secretary to make expenditures from the evidence-based programs account of the state general fund moneys to contract for such beds.

1:30PM – House Committee on Education

Hearing on HB2420 - Requiring school districts to obtain parental consent prior to providing certain school-based mental health services to a student.

3:30PM – House Committee on Elections

Hearing on HB2451 - Prohibiting the use of public assets by government officers and employees to advocate for or against proposed amendments to the constitution of the state of Kansas and ballot questions submitted to qualified electors.

## **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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# GOVERNMENT RELATIONS INVESTORS

## PINNACLE



## VISIONARY



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## OPPORTUNITY

Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas