

HIGHLIGHTS

FROM

2015 LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF KANSAS E-REPORT #5

February 6, 2015 -- Paul Johnson

BUDGET

FY 2015: Revenue shortfall requires across the board cuts including Education.

FY 2016 and FY 2017: House and Senate Budget Committees work is underway. Expect differences to be resolved during March with passage of the biennial budgets in April.

K-12 FUNDING

House Sub for SB4: Delay payment- 2015 Equalization Funds (\$ 54 million) until June 15.

SB 32: Audit 276 School Districts once/ 4 years at a cost/year: \$ 700,000. Who pays: not known

HB 2034: Limit mandatory collective bargaining topics to compensation, hours and work load.

SB 136: Collective bargaining compromise work of several groups

HB 2185: Schools as Polling places: 60 day notice; closed for students; teacher training day

ELECTIONS

HB 2108: Straight Party voting only testimony given by Secretary of State.

HB 2104: Candidate withdrawal from ballot only on death. Only testimony given by Secretary of State.

Legislation being developed in House: Move spring local elections to the fall (even years) and make them partisan.

SB 42: Lobbyists required to report all public funds received from state agencies and local units of government.

WATER

State Water Fund decreased by \$ 4.3 millions (FY 2016) and restore \$700 thousand in (FY 2017). See report for impact on specific projects.

SB 52: Amendment limits of Senior versus junior water rights to Rattlesnake Creek and voluntary.

SB 118: Conservation easement for watershed dam construction.

2015 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE WEEK OF FEBRUARY 9-13.

Bills filed: Senate 169 House 265

Committee Hearings: Environment (see report); Budget Hearings: Kansas State University, Kansas Dept Aging and Disability Services, Kansas Dept Health & Environment

Vision 2020: Medicaid Expansion

House Elections: Campaign Finance

This highlight feature written by Dolores Furtado, President, League of Women Voters of Kansas.

2015 LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF KANSAS E-REPORT #5

Paul Johnson – February 6, 2015

SPEED BUDGETING

The revenue crisis continues to darken as January revenues were down another \$47 million. The scramble is on for the Kansas Legislature to pass legislation that allows transferring funds from highways, the children's trust fund and drug rebate savings to solve a \$300 million dollar deficit over the next four months. By mid-February, the Kansas checking account could start bouncing checks without these internal transfers. The Governor had already cut most state agencies 2% for the final six months of the fiscal year and that netted \$60 million. Now the Governor announces that universities and the public schools will be dinged 2% and 1.5% respectively after being spared in the first round of allotments. With the January decline, the ending balance for June 30 has dropped from a projected \$70 million to under \$10 million at best. We still have February, March and April revenues to come that may further darken the revenue picture. The consensus revenue experts come to town in mid-April to project the next 30 months of revenue. All final budgetary decisions dictated by these projections.

As this scramble goes on to handle the 2015 budget, attention is turning to writing a combined 2016 & 2017 State budget. The Governor's budget is the starting point for discussion. The agencies had their day with the Governor to make a case for needed enhancements. With the Kansas budget in the hole over \$700 million for 2015 and 2016, there was little chance any needed enhancements would be granted. After slashing budgets for five years due to the Great recession and income tax cuts, the options for further reductions have narrowed. A few thousand state employee positions have already been eliminated. So now the appropriation subcommittees of the Legislature get a chance at further damage to social service, public safety, natural resource and general government budgets. Legislative staff explains the Governor's budget and the state agencies testify on their budgets. For the environment budgets I have been watching, there is no provision for any public testimony. The budgets are done in one or two days so no time or interest to inquire if specific programs on air or water quality for example are adequately staffed. The Governor has spoken so state agencies are muted in regards to detailing their actual needs. Very seldom do the media attend these subcommittees - thus no reporting on the degradation of vital, state services.

The House and the Senate are simultaneously working the Governor's budget. Much of this hurried work will be done by early March. These are two year budgets so more time should be given to the actual needs of these agencies. Much less time will be given next year to review the 2017 budget. The House and Senate will have their review of the Governor's budget done by mid-March and the two versions will be reconciled by the end of March. More than likely - the final mega-budget bill will wait for the April consensus revenue estimate to see what changes might be necessary. Like speed dating, this budgeting process gets a first blush impression without devoting thoughtful and deliberative time to the impact on the lives and safety of the Kansans being served.

SCHOOL LEGISLATION UPDATE

School legislation is a hot topic this year. As the revenue crisis deepens, school funding is now on the front burner. The transfer bill (**House Sub for SB 4**) to help balance the State's checkbook delays \$54 million in equalization funds to schools till June 15. The Governor's 1.5% cut to public schools equals \$28.3 Million. **SB 71** would cut supplemental state aid by \$39 million over the next four months. This bill brings into debate the equalization formula where richer, urban school districts qualify but several poorer rural school districts do not. Next week, the Governor's plan to block grant school funding for two years will finally be unveiled.

Senate Bill 32 establishes a state efficiency school task force and mandates audits of all 276 school districts. The debate now is over who pays for these audits – school districts or the state? An amendment was adopted to audit each school district every four years thus reducing the cost to \$700,000. Still undecided is who will pay?

House Bill 2034 is legislation that would limit the mandatory topics of bargaining between teachers and school districts to compensation and hours and amounts of work. **Senate Bill 136** is a bargaining bill compromise between the Kansas Association of School Boards, the Kansas National Education Association, the superintendents and school administrators concerning the topics to be discussed.

House Bill 2185 requires school districts to make school buildings available as polling places if 60 days of notice is given. There is discussion of coordinating 'training days for teachers' on these election days at schools.

ELECTION LEGISLATION UPDATE

Senator Mitch Holmes has introduced legislation to move local, spring elections for school boards and city elections to the fall in even numbered years and make these elections partisan. To this point the bill does not have a number but will probably be heard next week or the following week in Senate Ethics and Elections committee.

House Bill 2108 applies to straight party ticket voting. The Secretary of State requested this legislation and was the only person to testify on this bill. This bill only applies to general election ballots. The three parties who now qualify for straight ticket voting are Republicans, Democrats and Libertarians. The bill passed the committee. There was no fiscal note computed for costs to the counties.

House Bill 2104 amends existing campaign law for national, state, county or township elections that only 'contingency of death' is allowable as a reason to withdraw a candidate's name from the ballot. The bill also amends some time lines to place another candidate on the ballot. The Secretary of State sponsored this bill with no one else testifying. The House Elections committee passed this bill favorably.

Senate Bill 42 mandates that every lobbyist shall file with the Secretary of State a detailed report of all public funds received by such lobbyist from a governmental entity. Governmental entity means all state agencies and local units of governments. The Secretary of State will develop a website for these reports.

Americans for Prosperity testified in favor of this bill. The Kansas Association of Counties was neutral. There were no opponents testifying.

WATER

The funding for the State Water Plan through 2017 has been released. The Governor did not recommend the transfer of \$6 million from the State General Fund for either 2016 or 2017. While in 2015, there was \$800,000 transferred from the lottery funds. For 2016 and 2017 no lottery funds are transferred. Total expenditures drop from \$16.7 million in 2015 to \$12.4 million in 2016 and \$13.1 million in 2017. Ending balances drop from \$3.7 million in 2014 to \$284,000 in 2017. Dredging costs for John Redmond Reservoir is \$916,550 in 2017 while technical assistance to water users declines \$160,000, aid to conservation districts declines \$230,000 from 2014, the Wichita Aquifer Recharge Project is zeroed out from \$449,000 and streamgaging declines \$38,000. The Kansas Water Authority pleaded for full SGF and lottery funding.

Senate Bill 52 amends the Kansas Water Appropriations Act to allow augmentation as an additional method to satisfy a senior water right during water short periods. This bill came about over the senior water rights held by the Quivera National Wildlife Refuge – owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – and the limiting in summer months of junior irrigation water rights upstream on Rattlesnake Creek. As written, the bill applied statewide but by amendment it will only apply to Rattlesnake Creek and water rights must be offered voluntarily. This bill passed the Senate Natural Resources committee.

Senate Bill 118 was requested by the Conservation Division within the Kansas Department of Agriculture and watershed districts across Kansas. The Conservation Division will be a third party capable of holding conservation easements and contracting with the landowner, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and watershed districts. These conservation easements are only for mitigation to construct watershed dams that can hold soil sediment thus lessening the impact on the federal reservoirs. These easements are held in perpetuity not for just the life of the project.

Week of February 9 – 13, 2015

Senate Agriculture – Tuesday February 10 at 8:30 am in Rm 159-S: Hearings and possible action on SB 134 – Amendments to the Kansas Noxious Weed Law. This bill takes regulation of noxious weeds out of statute and replaces it with an administrative process. A noxious weed advisory council is established to make recommendations to the Kansas Secretary of Agriculture to administratively list noxious weeds that are then treated by county weed departments.

Senate Natural Resources – Wednesday February 11 at 8:30 am in Rm 159-S: Hearing on SB 124 – Eliminating the sunset on landspreading of oil and gas waste

Senate Ways and Means – Wednesday February 11 at 10:30 am in Rm 548-S: Subcommittee report on the Kansas Water Office, KDHE-Environment, Kansas Corporation Commission – Thursday – Kansas Department of Children & Families

Senate Ways and Means Agriculture and Natural Resources Subcommittee – Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday at 7:00 am in Rm 159-S: Kansas Department of Agriculture budget.

Senate Ways and Means Education Subcommittee – Thursday February 12 at 7:00 am in Rm 152-S: Kansas State University budget

Senate Ways and Means Social Services Subcommittee – Wednesday and Thursday at 3:30 pm in Rm 548-S: Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services budget – Friday at 9:00 am – Kansas Department of Health and Environment – Division of Health budget

House Appropriations – Friday February 13 at 9:00 am in Rm 112-N: Budget committee report on the Kansas Department for Aging and Disabilities.

House Vision 2020 – Monday February 9 at 9:00 am in Rm 218-N: Vision 2020's proposed Medicaid expansion bill - Wednesday February 11 at 9:00 am in Rm 218-N: Discussion on: State Water Plan Funding and Program Needs

House Elections – Monday February 9 at 1:30 pm in Rm 218-N: Hearing on HB 2182 – Campaign finance solicitations; legislative session – HB 2211 Campaign finance; soliciting campaign funds – HB 2212 City political committees – HB 2214 Procedure of appointment when certain vacancies of office or nomination occur

Note: There have now been 265 House bills and 169 Senate bills introduced. As bills are heard by committees, Kansas Legislative Research Department staff will write explainer notes.

http://www.kslegislature.org/li/b2015_16/measures/bills/ This site lists all the bills filed. By clicking on a particular bill, you can read the bill and any informational notes if available will be listed right next to the bill. Committee schedules do change so checking daily calendars is wise or calling the committee's assistant listed in the calendar.