

2014 LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF KANSAS E-REPORT #6

Paul Johnson – February 21, 2014

LEGISLATIVE NOTES & ISSUES

The 2014 Kansas Legislative session is approaching the midway point. By the end of next week, the first half of the session will be over and the number of bills to be considered will narrow. On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of the coming week, committees will take final action on several bills and move them to full debate on the House and Senate floor. Extended floor debates will start on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday before the Legislature recesses for a spring break until the following Tuesday or Wednesday. Key decisions will be made in committees as to which bills have reached consensus and which bills deserve a full debate on the floor. Most committees have deadlines that a bill must move to the other body by the end of next week. Some committees are exempt from deadlines such as House Appropriations and Senate Ways & Means. Any leadership priority bill can be moved to an exempt committee to keep the bill alive for the session.

There are several issues that are sparking debate and controversy. One issue is whether the mortgage registration fee will be eliminated thus costing the counties over \$47 million in income. A second issue is moving local elections from the spring to the fall. What is not settled is whether all elections will be made partisan, will the local elections be in odd-numbered years or bundled into even-numbered years with statewide races, will the selection of school board members be limited in terms of district and at-large voting? A third issue is whether to change existing liquor laws to allow supermarkets and convenience stores to sell wine, liquor and strong beer? A fourth issue is over classifying business property as real property that is subject to property taxes by counties or as personal property that would be exempt from property taxes. A fifth issue will be over allowing 'political party authorized' committees to solicit funds from any group during the legislative session. A sixth issue is the Governor's proposal to fund all-day kindergarten with additional state dollars. A seventh issue is whether classified state employees will receive a 1.5% salary increase. The debate over abortion and 'open carry' gun laws will consume time as well.

The regular session will end on April 4 with the veto session scheduled to start on April 30th. In March, committees will consider and debate legislation that has been sent over from the other chamber. Amendments will be made to many of these bills so the differences between the House and Senate version will be sent to a conference committee to find an acceptable version for both chambers. Unfortunately, some conference committees take popular 'will pass' bills and attach other related bills that

are not as popular. It is almost impossible for the public to follow such a non-transparent, 'inside game' process.

WATER WATCH

In debating the Kansas Water Office (KWO) budget, there was a spirited discussion in House Appropriations committee over the dredging of John Redmond reservoir. Given that the Governor is developing a 50 year water vision that will be completed by November, is the timing of this project appropriate at this point? The House Agriculture and Natural Resources Budget committee - that worked the KWO budget - pared back the dredging project from a \$25 million 15-Year project to a \$20 million 15-Year project by spending \$3.5 million less on landowner compensation for disposal sites and \$1.5 million less on Neosho/Cottonwood river bank stabilization. Bond interest and fees will also decline \$1.3 million with this \$20 million bond issuance. Senate Bill 412 has been filed to move the issuance of water project bonds from the Kansas Water Office to the Kansas Development Finance Authority (KDFA) with approval by the State Finance Council. As far as I know, the bill to give Kansas certain water appropriation rights over water in the Missouri river has not been filed yet.

NET METERING UPDATE

The Kansas Senate Utilities committee has not finished its work on SB 280 but plans to next Tuesday. The House Energy and Environment committee did pass an amended version of HB 2458 out on Thursday. For residential and commercial customers with solar panels or wind systems, you get full retail credit for any power you generate for your own needs. If you produce more power than you use, you will be paid a 150% rate based on avoided fuel costs of the utility. This will be computed monthly with no annual true-up of the extra power. The Kansas Corporation Commission will not develop a special tariff for these renewable power customers. (Important to note that the 200 existing net metered customers would be grandfathered in so this bill applies to new renewable customers.) The Senate bill may be more restrictive by not allowing any payment for excess generation and putting a cap on the size of the solar system.

SENATE BILL 380 – ESTABLISHING THE LOCAL FOOD AND FARM TASK FORCE

The testimony before the Senate Agriculture committee went well last Wednesday. Eileen Horn – Sustainability Coordinator for Lawrence/Douglas County – staffs the Douglas County Food Policy Council that mirrors what SB 380 will do statewide. This Food Policy Council is composed of a diversity of voices and perspectives including experts from agriculture, health, social services, universities, small businesses and agricultural producers. Though this Food Policy council is the first of its kind in Kansas,

Eileen has been working closely with Sedgwick, Riley, Reno and Crawford counties – all looking to establish local food policy councils in 2014. Kansas Rural Center’s Executive Director Julie Mettenburg testified ‘ In other states, such as Iowa, North Carolina and Oregon, statewide farm to fork task forces... found that farms were critical to these food access solutions. To further understand the challenges that stand between our farmers and local customers, we (KRC) have partnered with the Kansas Health Foundation on a three-year initiative to help communities work with their local farms to solve these food access challenges....we will continue to advance our understanding of the challenges standing in the way of our farms’ ability to provide food directly to our people, and we look forward to participating in this important Task Force to advance some of these solutions’. The hope is that SB 380 will pass out of the Senate Agriculture committee early next week and pass the full Senate by the end of the week.

WEEK OF FEBRUARY 24 – 28

Senate Ethics and Elections on Wednesday Feb 26 at 9:30 a.m. in Room 159-S: Possible final action on bills previously heard.

Senate Ways & Means on Monday Feb. 24 at 10:30 a.m. in Room 548-S: Budget reports on the Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services.

Senate Utilities on Monday and Tuesday Feb. 24 & 25 at 1:30 p.m. in Room 548-S: Possible action on bills previously heard.

House Appropriations on Monday Feb. 24 at 9:00 a.m. in Room 112-N: Budget reports on Board of Regents and universities.

House Agriculture and Natural Resources Budget on Monday Feb 24 at 1:30 p.m. in Room 142-S: HB 2417 – Expansion of rural opportunity zone counties.

House Elections on Monday Feb 24 at 1:30 p.m. in Room 282-N: HB 2726 – Campaign finance; HB 2594 - Election law: action on bills previously heard.

House Taxation on Monday Feb. 24 at 3:30 p.m. in Room 582-N: HB 2643 Classification of commercial and industrial machinery and equipment as personal property.