

From The Statehouse
Sydney Carlin, Dist 66
Week 3

Kansas celebrated its 149th birthday this week. As we reflect on the history of our state, I am reminded of all the things that make Kansas the best place to live, work, and raise a family. I hope we will protect all of those priorities as we work our way through this budget crisis.

Budget Update

The House Appropriations Committee continued to hear briefings from state agencies this week regarding individual agency budgets. Unfortunately, the chairman of the committee has yet to work a budget bill. Legislators and constituents alike are growing increasingly frustrated with the slow pace. Given the extended working period, it seems reasonable to expect some type of concrete proposal 20 days into the 90-day session. If the majority leadership plans to make additional cuts to the FY 2011 budget, they have a responsibility to begin specifically identifying what they feel can go to the chopping block.

Before we can begin work on FY 2011, we must first pass an FY 2010 rescission bill (which is necessary to officially enact cuts made by Governor Parkinson during the interim. The rescission bill ensures that Kansas meets its constitutional requirement to end the fiscal year with a positive ending balance). We have yet to do any work on this, but since the Senate passed its rescission bill on Wednesday, the House will hopefully follow suit and begin their work next week.

Medicaid cuts have devastating impact

There have been hearings in multiple committees for the last three weeks regarding the impact of the recently imposed 10% Medicaid cut. Kansas has cut more from Medicaid than almost any state in the union. Because the state receives 50-90% in matching funds from the federal government for this program, the total loss in revenue for health care providers who serve Medicaid patients is three times greater than the savings to the state. Cuts of this magnitude force providers to cut staff, salaries, and critical health services for our most vulnerable citizens. If funding is not restored in FY 2011 the impact will be twice as damaging, with a \$130 million cut to providers in exchange for only a \$70 million savings to the state.

Although KHPA has been able to maintain its current Medicaid caseload, claims cannot be processed because there is literally no one to do it. In fact, the growth in the backlog of applications is expected to reach 33,000 by June, resulting in delayed or foregone medical care for Kansans and even more revenue loss for providers.

Veterans services offices to close

At a time when soldiers are returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan with major injuries and severe post traumatic stress, Kansas is being forced to close down offices that provide assistance to veterans needing benefits and assistance. Last week in the Veterans, Military and Homeland Security Committee, the Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs (KCVA) gave an update on how budget cuts have affected our state's veterans.

Since the 2009 state budget bill passed, funding for the KCVA service centers have been cut to less than the initial funding it was allotted when the program started 3 years ago. Even before these cuts, Kansas was last among all U.S. states in the number of veteran service offices and Veteran Service Representatives (VSR) per veteran in the state (1 VSR to 11,000 veterans). Of 15 service offices in Kansas, 3 offices have already been closed and 7 more are at risk of closure.

Cutting services to veterans might save the state money in this fiscal year, but there is a heavy price tag for its long-term implications. Veteran service representatives (whose salaries are funded by the KCVA and have been frozen because of cuts) help veterans navigate the complex VA system in order to receive compensation. Those veterans who do not receive the federal benefits they need are then forced to rely on state-funded assistance. In Kansas, only 13% of our vets are receiving the benefits they are owed.

Our veterans are heroes who leave their homes and risk their lives to defend our way of life. Often times their experience at war profoundly affects their emotional and physical health. These men and women deserve our deepest gratitude, respect, and access to the first-rate care they have earned for their service and sacrifice.

Hearings continue on Governor's sales tax proposal

After hearing testimony last week in support of Governor Parkinson's proposed sales tax increase, opponents got their say on Tuesday. Overall, opponents argue that a sales tax increase would have a negative impact on small businesses in the state and decrease economic activity. Discussion also focused on maintaining competitiveness with our border states, especially Missouri, noting that some business owners may consider moving their business out of the state if the sales tax increased.

Some suggested that the problem was with excessive spending and that deeper cuts are the solution to the budget crisis. Others emphasized that an increase in sales tax would be regressive, harming those on the lowest end of the income scale the most because they have the least disposable income to spend, especially on consumable goods like groceries.

The committee passed the bill out of committee unfavorably on Wednesday. It has not been heard on the House floor, but I felt the move was both premature and irresponsible.

Once we have had a healthy debate of the options available, I will consider all sides with a singular focus on what is best for our district and state. It is important to point out that Governor Parkinson's budget proposal does not increase state spending. If his revenue package passes, it will only maintain current funding levels. After five rounds of cuts, those funding levels have been reduced by over \$1 billion. Ultimately, state government can't keep you safe, educate your children, or help you through this difficult economic time unless it has the funds to operate.

I am interested in your honest feedback on these discussions. Please contact me and tell me what you think.

KNI, Parsons to remain open

On Tuesday, Governor Mark Parkinson announced that he has refused to accept the recommendations of a legislative closure commission concerning the Kansas Neurological Institute (KNI) in Topeka and Parsons State Hospital.

The Governor has issued an executive order to begin a phased reduction of KNI and Parsons, with the possibility that one of the institutions will be closed in three or four years. SRS will also begin profiling residents who can successfully transition into community services. Consolidation of the facilities is contingent upon successfully moving and keeping individuals in community service programs.

I believe that the phased reduction was the best solution for KNI and Parsons residents, their family members, caretakers, and our community. To view the Governor's executive order regarding KNI and Parsons, please visit <http://governor.ks.gov/issues-a-initiatives/executive-orders/568-executive-order-10-1>.

School for the Deaf and School for the Blind

The Facilities Realignment and Closure Commission also recommended that the School for the Blind in Kansas City, Kansas and the School for the Deaf in Olathe work together to combine administrative and operational activities resulting in a savings of \$400,000 per year. The Governor endorsed that proposal. In

addition, The School for the Blind in Topeka will be closed and services for the clients will be delivered in the client's home and community

Kansas Bioscience Authority visits Capitol, announces new investments

The Kansas Bioscience Authority visited the Capitol this week to announce \$4.4 million in new investments to advance the state's national leadership in animal health, human health, and bioenergy. Some of the new investments include:

- \$1.8 million to the University of Kansas over five years to support research to develop novel drugs that treat and prevent cancers.
- TVAX Biomedical of Lenexa was awarded \$600,000 to support an FDA approved study for a patented brain cancer treatment that uses a patient's own immune cells to fight the disease.
- Lawrence-based ReLive for Kids will receive \$50,000 as a partial match to a \$106,000 Small Business Innovation Research grant from the National Institutes of Health to further develop a cognitive-behavioral headache management system for teens.
- A research team at Kansas State University's was approved for \$500,000 to develop novel vaccines to combat a serious viral disease threatening swine and swine production globally.

These investments have brought a lot to Kansas. Through December 2009, the realized outcomes of KBA investments have had a cumulative impact of 1,170 new jobs, \$112 million in capital investment, \$46.6 million in research funding, \$30.8 million in equity investments in bioscience companies, and an estimated \$76.7 million in new wages.

Ethanol update received in Agriculture Committee

On Monday, the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee received an update on ethanol production in Kansas. Twelve ethanol factories exist in the state currently, and Kansas ethanol plants have led the country in performance and recovery in the past. Grain prices have risen due to the increased need in the surrounding areas of ethanol manufacturing. Kansas has potential for increasing production of ethanol and producing grain sorghum, an advanced biofuel.

The use of ethanol as a major source of energy is beneficial not only to the United States by lessening dependence on foreign oil, but also for Kansans economically. Environmentally, ethanol is a cleaner burning fuel resulting in lower amounts of harmful greenhouse gases. Production plants have the potential to become self sufficient by using heat produced in the fermentation process, which could significantly reduce the industry's carbon footprint.

Keep in Touch

It is a special honor to serve as your state representative. I value and need your input on the various issues facing state government. Please feel free to contact me with your comments and questions. My office address is Room 451-S, State Capitol, Topeka, KS 66612. You can reach me at (785) 296-7657 or call the legislative hotline at 1-800-432-3924 to leave a message for me. Additionally, you can e-mail me at Sydney.Carlin@house.ks.gov. You can also follow the legislative session online at www.kslegislature.org, or review newsletters @ www.Sydney.Carlin.com

Useful Numbers and Resources:

The following is a list of the numbers I receive the most requests for during the legislative session. You can find these as well as many others online at <http://da.state.ks.us/phonebook>. I hope you will find this information helpful.

Adjutant General:

Department on Aging:

Attorney General:

785.274.1001

800.432.3535

785.296.2215

Better Business Bureau:

785.232.0454

Child/Adult Abuse Hotline:

800.922.5330

Child and Family Services:

785.296.4653

Commerce:

785.296.3481

Consumer Protection:

800.432.2310

Crime Tip Hotline:

800.572.7463

Crime Victim Assistance:

800.828.9745

Driver's License Bureau:

785.296.3963

Gov. Mark Parkinson:

800.748.4408

Kansas Health Wave:

800.792.4884

Highway Road Conditions:

800.585.7623

Housing Hotline:

800.752.4422

Insurance Hotline:

800.432.2484

Kansas Lottery:

785.296.5700

Legislative Hotline:

800.432.3924

Mental Health Services:

888.582.3759

Department of Revenue:

877.526.7738

School Safety Hotline:

877.626.8203

Social Security:

800.772.1213

State Capitol Tours:

785.296.3966

Taxpayer Assistance:

800.259.2829

Tax Refund Status:

800.894.0318

Teacher Certification:

785.296.2283

Unclaimed Property:

800.432.0386

Unemployment:

785.296.5074

Vital Statistics:

785.296.1405

Voter Registration:

785.296.4561

Welfare Fraud Hotline:

800.432.3913

Workers' Comp:

800.332.0353

Workforce Center:

785.235.5627