

## **Week 1: January 12-16, 2009**

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### **FROM THE STATEHOUSE**

On Monday, January 12, the Kansas Legislature convened for the 2009 legislative session. I have already begun to tackle the major budgetary challenges we're facing as a state. Kansans are facing difficult times, we owe it to our state to put aside partisan bickering in the interest of what's best for Kansas. My office has moved to the seventh floor of the Docking Building across the street on the West side of the Capitol. And, I have a new email address that is being phased in at this time. You should change my email address in your address books immediately. My phone number is 785-296-7122.

The next few weeks will be extremely busy as bills are introduced and committees begin their work. Complete daily calendars are available at [www.kslegislature.org](http://www.kslegislature.org) along with other useful information. I am privileged and honored to be your voice in the Kansas Capitol. If I can ever be of assistance to you, please feel free to contact me at home 539-6612, or in Topeka.

### **GOVERNOR DELIVERS SEVENTH STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS**

Governor Sebelius delivered her seventh State of the State Address on Monday, January 12<sup>th</sup>. In a year marked by dire financial limitations, the Governor's address focused on ways to best navigate through the budget while still maintaining our commitment to the programs and initiatives that make our state so special. She made it clear that educating our children and protecting the health services of our neediest citizens must top our priority list.

### **KANSAS MISSION OF MERCY COMING TO MANHATTAN**

The eighth Kansas Mission of Mercy will be in Manhattan on February 20-21 at the Kansas National Guard Armory located on Levee Drive. The Armory will be transformed overnight to a dental clinic with 80 chairs and hundreds of volunteers ready to treat approximately two thousand patients in two days.

The Mission of Mercy is a dental clinic targeted to low-income individuals and families. The dental work is performed by licensed dentists and hygienists who have volunteered their time to provide care to the patients free of charge. Patients are screened and treated based on their most urgent dental needs - extractions, fillings, oral surgery and dental hygiene.

The Kansas Mission of Mercy is a project of the Kansas Dental Charitable Foundation and has treated nearly 14,400 patients since its inception in 2003 with over \$6.2 million in free dental care. For more information or to volunteer please visit <http://www.ksdentalfoundation.org>.

### **GOVERNOR'S FY 2010 BUDGET**

Governor Sebelius unveiled her FY 2010 Budget Report on Tuesday. Unfortunately, this year's budget recommendation required significant reductions in all state agencies and could not provide much room for new initiatives. We all know that this trying time will prevent us from funding everything we want, but I am

committed to protecting essential services and vulnerable Kansans. The Governor has taken a measured approach to reductions that will balance the budget without increasing taxes.

Five basic principles guide the Governor's budget recommendations:

- Resolve the budget gap in a realistic way without raising taxes
- Protect the state's investment in public education
- Fund human service caseload costs
- Ensure the public safety of Kansans, and the continuation of basic state services
- Include all state agencies in the budget solution

### ***K12 Education***

A quality education is essential to a prosperous future. If we do not adequately prepare students for 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs, we do a disservice to our children and our state. I am troubled by attempts to make the education debate focused on finance rather than content and quality. The argument that schools receive too much funding- without focusing on quality of product- is flawed. We've made a tremendous investment in education the last few years, and data consistently proves that the investment is profitable. Education will take a hit along with every other state agency in this tight fiscal year, but the Governor has taken great care to propose a budget that holds Kansas schoolchildren as harmless as possible.

### ***Vulnerable Kansans***

While tough economic times have caused the Governor to propose cuts in virtually all areas of state government, Governor Sebelius and House Democrats are attempting to protect the most vulnerable Kansas citizens. The physically disabled waiver list is one of the few sections of the 2009 budget where the governor proposes an increase of \$8.4Million in new spending to help keep cuts at a minimum. The Governor's budget fully funds our home and community based caseload, which enables every Kansan already in the program to continue receiving the lifesaving care they need.

### ***State Employees***

Last year we made significant progress in moving state employees to pay equal to the private sector. Although state agencies face tighter budgets, the second year of the state employee pay plan is funded under the Governor's recommendation. A one percent cost of living adjustment (COLA) for Kansas retirees is also recommended, in addition to a modest longevity increase.

## **DIGITAL TELEVISION WILL BE REQUIRED BY FEDERAL LAW STARTING NEXT MONTH**

A law passed by Congress in 2006 will dramatically impact the way 150,130 Kansas residents view television, starting next month. On February 17, 2009, television stations across the country will complete a federally mandated transition from analog to digital television (DTV) broadcasting. Consumers have much to gain from this, including more free channels, better sound and enhanced pictures. However, 150,130 Kansas households that currently receive free, broadcast television signals through antennas- and do not pay for subscription television service- will risk losing their reception altogether unless they take easy steps to upgrade.

### ***The law:***

In the Digital Television Transition and Public Safety Act of 2005, Congress set a hard deadline of February 17, 2009 for television stations to replace traditional analog broadcasts with digital broadcasts. By 11:59 p.m. on February 17, 2009, all full-power television stations must switch off their analog broadcasting signals and begin broadcasting exclusively in the digital format.

### ***How to make the transition:***

Consumers will have three options for making the switch to DTV and continuing their television service:

1. DTV converter box: Purchase a DTV converter box that will convert the digital signal into analog for an existing analog television set. Converter boxes are available for approximately \$50-\$70. The federal government also offers consumers \$40 coupons for purchase of these boxes (more information below).

2. Digital TV set: Purchase a new television set with a built-in digital tuner. All televisions with a digital tuner are able to receive signals broadcast by television stations.
3. Paid service: Subscribe to cable, satellite or a telephone company/television service provider. All these services will allow consumers to receive digital television signals on their analog television sets.

***Converter Box Coupon Program:***

The government will help consumers with the cost of upgrading to digital. As part of the law, Congress approved a \$1.5 billion converter box coupon program to be administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). Between January 1, 2008, and March 31, 2009, all U.S. households will be eligible to request up to two coupons, worth \$40 each, to assist with the purchase of up to two converter boxes. Coupons will be mailed to eligible households and will expire 90 days after issuance. The coupons cannot be combined to purchase a single converter box, nor can they be used toward the purchase of other products.

Visit [www.ntia.doc.gov/dtvcoupon](http://www.ntia.doc.gov/dtvcoupon) to download a coupon. Also visit the National Association of Broadcasters' digital television web site for more information: [www.dtvanswers.com](http://www.dtvanswers.com).

## **TRANSPORTATION**

We are nearing the completion of a ten-year comprehensive transportation program passed in 1999. Discussions began last year regarding the next program, but in this economic downturn we will be forced to temporarily scale back. Some projects are moving forward but several are on hold until more funding becomes available.

In a tight budget year when our most critical investments face reductions, transportation projects may seem frivolous. We must not underestimate the importance of a quality infrastructure. It is estimated that for every \$1 spent on improving our transportation infrastructure, we receive a \$3 return in the form of economic benefit for the state. The expiring transportation program resulted in 25,000 new jobs for Kansas workers over ten years. Additionally, interest rates are currently at historic lows and construction materials are drastically lower than they were a year ago. Investing in transportation projects now will not only get folks back to work, it will save taxpayer dollars in the long run.

Last summer the Governor created the T-LINK Task Force (Transportation – Leveraging Investments in Kansas) to further explore needs and opportunities throughout Kansas' transportation system. The task force, headed by Department of Transportation Secretary Deb Miller, is looking for a new approach to transportation that reflects today's realities but also creates a framework that prepares for the future of Kansas. The Legislature will work with T-LINK to develop a new strategic transportation plan within our fiscal limitations.

## **GOVERNOR AND LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR ANNOUNCE ENERGY PLAN**

As you know, the energy debate derailed the 2008 legislative session. There will likely be more intense disagreement in 2009 over the rejection of a coal-fired power plant in Holcomb, Kansas. Already almost 30 bills have been pre-filed in the House Energy and Utilities Committee. Regardless of individual opinions on this issue, we must not lose sight of our opportunity to become a national leader in the production of bio-fuels and wind energy.

Last week, Governor Sebelius and Lt. Governor Parkinson announced their energy agenda for the legislative session. Their proposal allows Kansans to generate their own electricity from renewable sources such as wind or solar power through Net Metering. This enables consumers to use their own generation and effectively sell back the extra electricity they produce. The plan also codifies Kansas' existing voluntary Renewable Portfolio Standard and requires that new or extended state leases for real property and state-owned real property meet energy efficiency standards. Additionally, they proposed to modify last year's Cessna legislation to attract and expand wind related manufacturing investment and jobs to Kansas.

Increased renewable energy production will not only help our country become energy independent, it will boost our state economy, provide new markets for agricultural products and make Kansas a better place to live and do business. Seizing this opportunity is akin to what Clyde Cessna and Walter Beech did 90 years ago as they led us into our preeminent position in the aerospace industry. At any rate, we have a responsibility to move forward. Kansans deserve the promise of clean air, affordable energy and a strong economy. We can fulfill all of these promises on energy with a productive, innovative approach.

#### **DEPARTMENT OF LABOR OFFERS SUGGESTIONS ON FILING UNEMPLOYMENT CLAIMS**

As you already know, Kansans are feeling the impact of the national economic recession. Many Kansans have been placed in the very real and difficult situation of being without a job in tough economic times.

The Kansas Department of Labor's Unemployment Contact Center is seeing the effects of the recession with an unusually high number of calls and wait times. Increased inquiries regarding both regular unemployment and extended unemployment programs are causing an average wait time of 25 to 35 minutes to speak with a claims representative. Due to a high volume of calls, some individuals are not able to get through and have to call back more than once.

Although our federal unemployment budget is tight, the Department of Labor recently hired 10 new staff members to take unemployment claims. They also made staff available on evenings and weekends to process claims that have been filed. Additionally, the agency is working to improve its Web site to make it easier for people to file claims online.

We are committed to responding back to each Kansan who needs help in a reasonable timeframe, but please keep in mind that the Department of Labor is also overwhelmed with inquiries. We appreciate your patience as we all work together to help each Kansan who contact us with an unemployment inquiry.

*Here are some suggestions for optimized claim submissions:*

#### **1) Use the Web site.**

The unemployment Web site, [www.uibenefits.dol.ks.gov](http://www.uibenefits.dol.ks.gov), can be a good tool for filing claims and answering many questions, without having to pick up the phone.

#### **2) Try calling the Unemployment Call Center later in the week.**

Wait times are typically shorter on Wednesdays and Thursdays, but with the magnitude of calls coming into the contact center they are experiencing long wait times every day of the week. Wait times are typically at their highest on Monday mornings and Friday afternoons.

**3) Try to call in first thing in the morning** at 8:00 a.m. when the Call Center opens. Callers have a better chance of getting through.

#### **4) Contact Citi with debit card questions.**

The Department has recently replaced all unemployment checks with debit cards provided by CITI Card Services. Claimants who have already been approved to receive unemployment benefits and have questions specifically regarding your Unemployment Benefits Debit Card can contact CITI directly at [www.prepaid.citi.com/kansas](http://www.prepaid.citi.com/kansas) or contact Citi's toll-free Customer Service number at 1-800-582-4910.

#### **NBAF OFFICIALLY COMING TO KANSAS**

After nearly two years of coordinated outreach and advocacy, the Department of Homeland Security has named Kansas as the final destination of a new National Bio and Agro Defense Facility (NBAF).

This is very exciting news. Our state has a lot to offer this facility- we have a central location in the Heartland, a culture deeply rooted in agriculture, a dedicated, enthusiastic community and a bold commitment to bioscience research. The facility will be the largest, most advanced bioscience research

laboratory in the world. Construction on the site is expected to create 1,000 new jobs and bring \$3.5 billion in new revenue to the state over 20 years. It will put Kansas at the forefront of many exciting enterprises relating to public and animal health.

#### **IN CLOSING**

As you can see, we have our work cut out for us over the next few months at the Capitol. The time has come to lead a real conversation about the challenges and responsibilities we face in Kansas. Vigorous debates lie ahead, but our most passionate debates are usually the most important. I welcome your feedback on these important issues or any other issue that impacts you and your family. This is the time for legislators to put aside political labels and do what's best Kansas. With hard work and dedication, we will transform the challenges of 2009 into new opportunities for 2010 and beyond.

#### **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 L80, Docking State Office Building, Topeka, KS 66612. You can reach me at (785) 296-7122 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](mailto:sydney.carlin@house.ks.gov). You can also follow the legislative session online at [www.kslegislature.org](http://www.kslegislature.org).