LEGISLATIVE END GAME POWER PLAYS CONTINUE

The 2021 Kansas Legislature is struggling to complete this session. The scheduled end date is May 11. The Legislature must finish the final budget bill – the Omnibus Reconciliation Act – and fund public education. Most of the Governor’s vetoes of legislation and budgetary items have been overridden by an obedient supermajority of Republicans in the House and Senate.

The first priority of amending the Kansas Constitution to allow governmental interference in women’s health was passed early and placed on the low turnout primary election in August of 2022. The second priority to cut taxes for the wealthiest corporations and individual income tax filers in Kansas was accomplished with House leadership muscling up the required 84 votes to override the Governor’s veto.

Most of the veto overrides were predictable in this governing atmosphere of innuendo and rumor. Gun laws continue to expand in Kansas – now to 18 year-olds and by honoring concealed gun carry rights from other states, regardless of the potential danger of more armed individuals.

With the ‘Big Lie’ of a stolen 2020 national election accepted doctrine by most Republicans, the Kansas Legislature had to restrict voting in Kansas even though the Republican Kansas Secretary of State praised the fall 2020 election in Kansas and offered no legislation for change. In fact - this new election law strips the executive or judicial branch from making any election law changes regarding a public health crisis without the blessing and approval of legislative leaders.

The veto override of the transgender women’s sports bill came up one vote short in the Kansas Senate but will be front and center in the 2022 session. Even though 63% of Kansans favor Medicaid expansion – according to the Docking Center poll from Fort Hays University – there was no time or meaningful legislation allowed for that debate.

Kansas legislative leaders come from Wichita and Johnson County so why worry over their medical care or the solvency of 72 smaller, rural hospitals in Kansas? The question remains what if any authority will the Governor have in deciding how existing and future federal COVID relief funds can be utilized?

The budget battles are far from settled. At this point legislation has not passed to fund public schools in accordance with the Kansas Supreme Court decision. Certain controlling lawmakers have demanded that expansion of tax credits and ‘educational savings accounts’ for private and parochial schools must be included in any funding package for public schools.

If this happens there will be a quick veto from the Governor and a special session of the Legislature called by the Governor. The 20 mill property tax levy ($540 million) for public schools is being used as a leverage play for tax relief to businesses hurt by the pandemic in a hastily concocted bill altered by the Senate in the last
minute and sent over to the House. How all this ends is still uncertain and unpredictable. Policy Watch will report on progress next week.

Note some excellent coverage of veto session in state papers:
https://kansasreflector.com/2021/05/03/kansas-house-overrides-governors-veto-of-two-election-reform-bills/

https://kansasreflector.com/2021/05/03/kansas-republicans-restore-tax-cuts-after-both-chambers-spike-governors-veto/


https://kansasreflector.com/2021/05/05/how-a-failure-to-override-one-of-the-governors-vetoes-was-actually-a-victory-for-kansas-republicans/


FIELD NOTES

TAKING IT TO THE COUNTY: LAND USE PLANS

Most counties in Kansas are zoned and have comprehensive land-use plans (hereafter referred to as “comp plans”). Comp plans establish the vision for development and growth in a county while the zoning and subdivision regulations actually implement or enforce the vision. There is no one template for comp plans so they vary greatly from county to county. The life of most comp plans is 15 to 20 years before they are updated or rewritten. There are state limitations or restrictions on counties regulating agricultural activities (Right to Farm) and confined animal feeding operations (CAFO’s). The same is the case for controlling noxious weeds.

Jefferson County is starting the process of updating its 2001 comp plan along with the zoning and subdivision regulations. While Jefferson County Commissioners adopted the comp. plan in 2001 with improvements in 2003 & 2009 – the zoning and subdivision regulations to implement the vision of the comp. plan did not come about until 2009 and were not totally in line with the comp plan’s vision. With the 2021 Comp Plan review the Jefferson County Commissioners and the Jefferson County Planning commission are updating the 2001 Comp. Plan and synchronizing the zoning and subdivision regulations at the same time.

The attached ‘Plan Compatibility Report’ (See below links) documents the imbalance of vision to regulation and offers a summary of recommendations on page 14. Item one is to align regulations with the vision of an updated comp plan. Community input across the county will be collected virtually via Zoom calls and a project website as well as in-person meetings as the pandemic subsidies.

In the 2001 Comp Plan the vision was to protect the rural nature of the county and direct development to the existing cities and along the major highways. Defining ‘rural nature’ varies from the larger farming operations in the north of the county to the more specialized farming operations in the southern part. Protecting the best soils in the county for future agricultural options is a key goal. Ensuring open spaces along with view corridors and view sheds will be considered. Promoting conservation subdivisions/cluster developments with open space dedication will be examined. Jefferson County needs a comprehensive ‘Natural Resource Inventory’ along with a future land use map to give clearer guidance to developers and the protection of agricultural land.
The meeting between the Jefferson County Commissioners and the Planning Commission on May 3 was a first. The attitude for a timeline was to take the necessary steps to get this done right - which may take 2 to 3 years. Quarterly meetings of the two governing bodies were suggested. The Planning Commission holds the hearings on zoning cases and makes recommendations to the County Commissioners for the final decision. The March 22 staff report lists memos on goals, other county examples and a timeline/engagement plan.

To help understand how a county might go about this process see related documents from Jefferson County Planning process review below:

- Presentation on Plan Compatibility Report
- Comp Plan Updates Part 1 Goals
- Comp Plans Updates Part 11 Examples
- Comp Plan Timeline

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**CALENDAR**

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**The Power of Food**

_Cultivating equitable policy through collective action_

Kansas City, Missouri

The **Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future** is pleased to announce that they will be hosting the first-ever national gathering for food policy councils on **September 20-22, 2021**. The Power of Food: Cultivating equitable policy through collective action will occur in person in Kansas City, Missouri.

Originally planned for November 2020, this national forum is dedicated to supporting food policy councils and similar groups advocating for policies that create equitable and sustainable food systems at the local, regional, state, tribal, and national levels. You can learn more about the event on the Forum website! We will update it regularly as we know more about the schedule, speakers, fundraising, and registration.

http://www.foodpolicynetworks.org/events/the-power-of-food/

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**The Legislative Policy Watch Update** is a project of the Kansas Rural Center. KRC promotes the health of the land and its people through research, education and advocacy that advance an ecologically sound, economically viable, and socially just agriculture.

_If you have any questions about Policy Watch, contact Mary Fund, Editor at ksrc@rainbowtel.net, or contact Paul Johnson, Policy Analyst, at pdjohnson@centurylink.net._

_If you are on KRC's list and wish to opt out of receiving the Updates, contact Joanna Will at jwill@kansasruralcenter.org_

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If you are receiving KRC Policy Watch through one of these organizations and have questions, contact the organization directly.

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