



HOUSING HIGHLIGHTS

2025 Legislature Week Three

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Governor Laura Kelly released a statement regarding the air collision that took place Wednesday evening: *"I am deeply saddened by the tragic loss of lives last night and extend my deepest condolences to the victims' families and loved ones. I have been in constant communication with federal, state, and local officials overnight and want to thank the over 300 first responders from across the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area for their response effort."* She issued a flag half-mast order later in the day to acknowledge those who died in this devastating event.

Kansas mental health advocates are working to improve access to care in rural and frontier communities. NAMI Kansas will host a rural mental health summit in Kiowa on April 9th, continuing its "Standing in the Gap" series. This event will equip faith leaders and community members to connect individuals with mental health resources, addressing the significant provider shortage in these areas. The summit follows previous successful gatherings and aims to empower local leaders to initiate conversations about mental health, understand available resources, and seek solutions. Other initiatives addressing the mental health gap include the Kansas Ag Stress program (a partnership between the Kansas Department of Agriculture and Kansas Corn), offering telehealth services and specialized support for agricultural workers. The Kansas Farm Bureau's "Rural Minds Matter" program provides training materials and resources and recently recognized mental health advocates through its Advocate of the Year awards. These programs acknowledge the higher suicide rate among agricultural producers and the increased need for mental health support statewide. For immediate assistance, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is available by calling 988, and the Crisis Text Line can be reached by texting HELLO to 741741.

A coalition of agriculture and energy companies is advocating for a \$5 million state tax credit to encourage gas stations to offer E15 fuel (15% ethanol). Proponents argue this would boost demand for Kansas-grown corn and sorghum, offer consumers cheaper fuel options, and benefit the rural economy. Currently, only 7% of Kansas gas stations offer E15. The proposed annual 5-cent per gallon tax credit (for 2026-2031) aims to offset infrastructure costs for retailers. Similar legislation is also being considered for biodiesel, with a \$5 million tax credit proposed for blends of 10% or higher. Supporters highlight the potential for increased corn and sorghum prices, benefiting farmers, while critics question the targeted tax break. The bills would cap the annual tax credit for each industry at \$5 million, allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.

Kansas State Treasurer Steven Johnson is urging residents to search for their share of over \$600 million in unclaimed property. In recognition of National Unclaimed Property Day (February 1st), Treasurer Johnson is highlighting the importance of reuniting Kansans with their forgotten funds. The state holds a wide range of unclaimed assets, including insurance proceeds, stocks, bonds, safety deposit box contents, payroll checks, money orders, refunds, overpayments, and bank accounts.

Residents can easily search for unclaimed property on the Kansas State Treasurer's website. The search tool requires name, city, zip code, and property ID, and allows users to check the status of existing claims. Businesses and financial institutions regularly report unclaimed property to the state, so Treasurer Johnson encourages everyone to spread the word and to take a few minutes to regularly check-in. <https://unclaimedproperty.ks.gov/>

Kansas is bolstering its wildfire response, prevention, and education efforts following the release of Governor Kelly's Wildfire Task Force report. The report's 30 recommendations include improved interdepartmental communication and increased support for the state's 600 independent fire departments, 95% of which are volunteer-based. A key initiative is the development of an equipment-sharing and reimbursement program for fire departments, coupled with the creation of tiered wildfire task forces with paid staff and equipment. This aims to enhance equipment quality, training, and firefighter compensation. Prevention strategies focus on removing woody encroachment, particularly Eastern red cedar, a highly flammable species contributing to past large fires. Experts recommend prescribed burns for young cedars and emphasize the importance of creating defensible space around homes, including non-combustible roofing, proper landscaping, and responsible brush pile burning. Fire officials stress the importance of monitoring weather conditions and maintaining properties to minimize wildfire risk.

Kansas marked its statehood anniversary (Kansas Day) with the unveiling of "Rebel Women," a mural-sized artwork honoring the state's suffragist icons. This historic installation, the first by a female artist in the Kansas Statehouse, was created by Phyllis Garibay-Coon and championed by the League of Women Voters. Governor Laura Kelly celebrated the "bold, visionary, badass" women depicted in the painting, including figures like Anna O. Anthony, Laura M. Johns, Annie L. Diggs, and Lutie Lytle, as well as the artist's mother. The project, funded through private donations, commemorates Kansas's pivotal role in the women's suffrage movement.

Kansas' opioid settlement funds of \$340 million to be dispersed over 18 years, are finally reaching communities and supporting addiction treatment and prevention efforts. After a slow initial rollout, nearly 60 grants totaling millions of dollars have been awarded to organizations across the state, resulting in increased treatment rooms, recovery beds, naloxone distribution, and expanded access to "Medication-Assisted-Treatment." Initial data suggests these projects have benefited nearly 80,000 Kansans. The funds are supporting a range of initiatives, from expanding MAT programs and adolescent outreach to providing recovery housing and peer support services. While drug overdose deaths have seen a recent decline, advocates emphasize the ongoing need for sustained funding and a comprehensive approach to addressing the opioid crisis, including harm reduction strategies and community-based mental wellness programs.

The Kansas Senate is considering SB 56, to allow home delivery of alcoholic beverages. The bill, introduced by Walmart, Inc., would permit third-party delivery services to deliver alcohol and cereal malt beverages (up to 6% ABV). Delivery services would require a \$1,500 annual permit. The bill includes restrictions: both delivery drivers and recipients must be over 21, and deliveries are prohibited to daycares, places of worship, and schools.

Western Kansas faces a critical water shortage due to decades of over-pumping the Ogallala Aquifer. While individual farmers have implemented efficiency measures, the aquifer continues to decline. This has led to a heated debate between proponents of large-scale water importation projects, such as an aqueduct from the Missouri River, and those advocating for stricter conservation measures. Proponents of water importation argue that it offers a long-term solution to the region's water needs, citing successful projects in other western states. However, critics contend that such projects are impractical, prohibitively expensive, and distract from the urgent need for conservation efforts. Conservation efforts are gaining momentum in some areas, such as Northwest Kansas, where collective water-use reduction programs have shown positive results. However, resistance to change and the allure of "techno-fixes" like the aqueduct continues to hinder progress in many parts of the

region. Social and economic factors further complicate the issue. Agriculture is deeply intertwined with the regional economy, and many farmers are resistant to changes that could significantly impact their livelihoods. Addressing these social and economic concerns is crucial for successful water conservation efforts to be successful with the urgent need for a sustainable water management strategy in western Kansas. While large-scale water importation projects remain a contentious issue, a focus on conservation, coupled with a comprehensive understanding of the social and economic realities of the region, is essential for ensuring a water-secure future. Key takeaways:

- Over-pumping the Ogallala Aquifer has created a critical water shortage.
- Debate rages between water importation and conservation as solutions.
- Conservation efforts are showing promise but face significant challenges.
- Social and economic factors determine the success of any water management strategy.

A proposed bill in the Kansas legislature would allow cities to conduct periodic inspections of government-subsidized rental properties, a power they lost in 2016. Driven by the City of Topeka, the bill addresses situations where landlords accept public funds but fail to maintain safe living conditions. This push for change follows termination of HUD's housing assistance contract with a Topeka management company due to unresolved health and safety violations. While the bill doesn't mandate inspections, it empowers cities to increase oversight of subsidized housing if needed. The City of Topeka emphasizes the bill's focus on protecting residents from negligent landlords. The city is actively assisting affected residents with relocation resources and continues advocating for greater local control over housing inspections.

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