



HOUSING HIGHLIGHTS



2025 Legislature Week Six

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The Kansas Bureau of Investigation has formalized a partnership with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to enhance collaboration on immigration enforcement. This agreement allows designated KBI agents to receive ICE training and perform certain immigration enforcement functions, including issuing detainers, serving warrants, and making arrests related to immigration violations. KBI Director Tony Mattivi emphasized that this partnership provides an additional tool to remove known criminal offenders but will not alter the KBI's investigative priorities. The agreement is authorized under Section 287(g) of federal law, which allows ICE to delegate specific immigration enforcement powers to state and local law enforcement. This initiative follows similar agreements between ICE and other Kansas law enforcement agencies, as well as dozens nationwide. Attorney General Kris Kobach stated the agreement will prevent the release of dangerous undocumented criminals and gang members back into Kansas communities, ensuring their deportation.

The House passed a \$10.5 billion state budget for the fiscal year starting July 1st, coming in \$162 million less than Governor Kelly's proposal. The bill aims to align expenditures with revenue forecasts and reflects a new, more collaborative budget development process that resulted in a 2.4% decrease in state tax dollars compared to the current fiscal year, marking a potential first spending reduction in five years. House members debated several amendments, including proposals for Medicaid expansion, funding for volunteer fire departments, restoration of commerce department funding, support for school meal programs, and a Black economic union. The budget, which is now before the state senate, includes funding for two-year college apprenticeships, a juvenile program, state armory and airplane hangar projects, bridge repair, municipal water projects, and Medicaid services for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities. It also allocates funds for judicial and legislative salaries.

The House has given initial bill approval to allow county election officials to add online obituaries to their existing methods of identifying deceased registered voters. Currently, officials rely on newspaper obituaries, death certificates, and the Social Security Administration's death index. The bill has garnered support from county clerks and election officials, as well as individuals who believe it's crucial to remove deceased individuals from voter rolls to prevent potential voter fraud. Secretary of State Scott Schwab noted the change modernizes the process, recognizing the shift away from print obituaries. Opponents however, including the ACLU of Kansas, expressed concerns about the reliability of online obituaries, citing potential confusion with similar names and the lack of key identifying information like Social Security numbers. The bill now moves to a final vote.

A Kansas bill proposes significant changes to university faculty tenure, potentially impacting a lawsuit against Emporia State University. The bill, drafted by ESU's legal counsel Steven Lovett, aims to remove the "property right" aspect of tenure, arguing it's a financial liability for the state as universities face closures and declining enrollment. Lovett contends that the First Amendment adequately protects academic freedom. He even renounced his own tenure while testifying in favor of the bill. However, the bill has faced strong opposition from universities, professors, and students who argue it would hinder recruitment, damage the state's economy (citing KU's \$8 billion impact), and undermine academic freedom. Critics also question the bill's timing, suggesting it's primarily intended to help ESU in its current lawsuit. They emphasize that tenure is earned through rigorous review and that tenured professors can be dismissed for cause. KU, K-State, and the Board of Regents testified against the bill. The bill's passage would directly affect the lawsuit against ESU, where dismissed tenured professors are claiming property damages based on the assumed job security of tenure. The Board of Regents defends its policy allowing the dismissal of tenured professors due to financial issues and declining enrollment, a policy only ESU has utilized. The Board of Regents president sees no conflict in supporting this policy while opposing the bill that would fundamentally alter tenure.

The House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources held a hearing for a bill proposing legalizing pet raccoons, which are currently prohibited in the state. Sponsored by Representative Joe Seiwert, the bill aims to create a permitting system with requirements like vaccinations, veterinary care, and enclosure standards for raccoon owners. While Seiwert cites his childhood experience with wild animals as a reason for the bill, other lawmakers express concerns about the potential danger of adult raccoons and the lack of an approved rabies vaccine for the species. Wildlife biologist State Representative Doug Blex highlighted the damage pet raccoons can inflict. Proponents, like online raccoon enthusiast Stephen Kaspar, argue the bill aligns Kansas with other states and ensures responsible ownership. Opponents primarily object to the bill's preemption of local ordinances regarding raccoon ownership.

The House has passed HB 2177 which will increase penalties for repeat offenders of fleeing and eluding police. Supporters, including law enforcement officials, believe this will deter the dangerous behavior, citing the high number of fatalities in police pursuits nationwide. Opponents, however, question the deterrent effect of increased penalties and argue that it could lead to excessively harsh sentences, disproportionate to the crime, and a significant fiscal impact on the state. They also point out that current sentencing practices already consider prior offenses.

The Kansas Museum of History in Topeka is set to reopen this fall after extensive renovations. Museum Director Sarah Bell reports strong interest from teachers eager to resume field trips. The revamped museum will feature a thematically organized gallery, showcasing a selection of the museum's 122,000 artifacts in a more engaging and adaptable format. While some favorite artifacts like the steam locomotive and log cabin will return, the new design will offer fresh perspectives on these pieces. Construction is expected to be completed this spring, with exhibits designed by Dimensional Innovations. In other news, the Kansas Historical Society and the Kansas Anthropological Association are hosting an archaeology training program in Lecompton from June 6-15, focusing on artifacts from the territorial period. Registration opens March 1 for participants 12 and older.

Senate and House Democrats attempted to introduce Medicaid expansion amendments into separate bills on Tuesday, but both efforts failed. In the Senate, Democrats proposed the HAWK Act, which would expand Medicaid eligibility, during debate on a bill concerning legislative oversight of public assistance programs. Republicans argued against the expansion, citing various reasons, and the amendment ultimately failed 12-28. In the House, Democrats offered a similar amendment to the state budget bill, arguing it would extend coverage to approximately 150,000 low-income Kansans and save the state money due to federal incentives. This amendment also failed, 34-82. Meanwhile, the original Senate bill regarding oversight of public assistance programs passed, despite Democratic concerns that it creates unnecessary bureaucracy and could jeopardize federal Medicaid funding.

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