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& ASSOCIATES

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

KDHA

Kansas Session Preview

December 21, 2020

A new year is just days away, bringing a new legislative session with it. The 2021 Kansas Legislative Session officially begins on Monday, January 11. The new session will be nothing like any other in Kansas history, with the Legislature's daily routines and procedures looking anything but normal. The Kansas Constitution provides the Legislature must meet in Topeka. To accommodate health concerns due to COVID-19, leadership in both the House and Senate have voted to limit the number of people in and out of the building, including public traffic, legislative interns, and even a reduction of legislative staff assistants. Committees will still meet, though members will be more spread out and voting on the Floor may even take place in groups of 10-20 members. Committee rooms, as well as the House and Senate chambers, have installed audio and visual components to broadcast proceedings to the public.

The 2020 Interim Session saw some of these measures implemented. While many of the interim committees were held virtually, this did not slow down the action. Dozens of new interim committees were formed to meet during the autumn months with the focus on COVID-19 relief or response. Joint committees and special committees met to review tax policy, economic relief, Federal COVID-19 relief utilization, broadband expansion, and budget issues.

Since 2020 saw all 165 legislators up for election, the makeup of the House and Senate changed significantly. There will be 43 new members headed to the Statehouse in January. This equates to a 23% total turnover for the House and 35% for the Senate. The House Committee rosters are still to be released, but the Senate Committee assignments show committees will look vastly different, with many new chairs and members. Due to the high turnover in the House, House committees are also expected to look very different.

Senate Leadership will have all new faces after the retirements of Senate President Susan Wagle and Majority Leader Jim Denning. New leadership was elected on December 7 with Senator Ty Masterson (R-Andover) elected into the top spot of Senate President. Rick Wilborn (R-McPherson) won the office of Senate Vice-President which was previously held by Senator Jeff Longbine, who opted not to run for reelection to the post. Senator Gene Suellentrop (R-Wichita) won the bid for Senate Majority Leader, while Dinah Sykes (D-Lenexa) was elected Senate Minority Leader to replace previous Senate Minority Leader Anthony Hensley, the longest-serving member of the Legislature. Hensley lost his bid for an eighth term during the 2020 election. He has served as Senate Minority Leader since 1997.

House Leadership saw no change with all the top office holders staying in place. House Speaker Ron Ryckman (R-Olathe) will become the first Speaker to serve a third term. Blaine Finch (R-Ottawa) was reelected to serve as House Pro-Term. Dan Hawkins (R-Wichita) won reelection for House Majority Leader and Tom Sawyer (D-Wichita) won his reelection for House Minority Leader. All top spots in House leadership elections ran unopposed.

Even with all the COVID-19 restrictions, the new session promises to see plenty of action. Early indication is the Legislature wants to quickly complete their work to limit risk of COVID-19 exposure. This likely means most committees will begin to hold hearings soon after the Session begins. While much of the focus will be on COVID-19 responses and relief, the Legislature has many policy areas to tackle, including lingering 2020 issues cut short by the early dismissal last March. Most 2020 legislation prematurely died and must be reintroduced. The 2021 Session will see no shortages of issues such as constitutional amendments, tax policy, COVID relief, economic stability and growth, gaming and unemployment reform.

With the Legislature being more conservative, issues such as the Value Them Both constitutional amendment will be pushed higher on the priority list. Proposed constitutional amendments must be approved by a 2/3 vote in each chamber in order to appear on an August or November ballot. The Legislature tried to pass the Value Them Both amendment during the 2020 Session coming four votes short of passage.

Lingering issues such as Medicaid Expansion will see an uphill climb after compromise efforts fell apart last Session. This may still serve as an obstacle for the House or Senate acting as a bottleneck for other health related policy.

More so than most recent sessions, all eyes will be on the state's budget this year. Kansas revenue forecasters have projected the state will be running a \$152 million deficit for the following fiscal year. There will be plenty of discussion around where the money will come to fill in that deficit.

Expect comments about redistricting as the Legislature turns to its requirement to redraw the Kansas House, Kansas Senate, State Board of Education and Congressional maps in 2022. Stakeholder planning will begin after session in 2021 to gather public input.

Other issues such as medical cannabis will likely be hot topics as Kansas is one of a few states to not approve its use, while others hope to approve sports wagering.

For KDHA, several priority issues remain in sight. KDHA is preparing to introduce its Dental Therapy Bill, which is the same version that passed the Senate 38-0 during the 2018 Session. In addition, KDHA seeks the opportunity to address ambiguous statutory language relating to dental assistants, currently an unlicensed role in Kansas. Conversations are ongoing as KDHA determines the most appropriate path forward to address the association's concerns and protection of dental patients.

The Senate Public Health & Welfare Committee will look very different in 2021. The Committee will have a new chair, vice-chair and ranking member, along with four additional new committee members. The House Health & Human Resources Committee roster is expected to be released by House leadership very soon.

As mentioned, Medicaid Expansion remains an unresolved issue, which may continue to serve as an obstacle for other health bills in the two health committees. For the last several years, the committee has limited their bills to prevent the possibility of the bill being amended to Medicaid Expansion.

Once session begins on January 11, please watch for the weekly legislative updates through session.

Thank you and please let us know if you have any questions.

Respectfully,

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