



## 2018 Legislative & Policy Watch Weekly E-Update

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### In This Issue

Legislature Gets Off to Slow, Uncertain Start

Industrial Hemp Gains Traction

Rural Opportunity Zones Status Updated

Judicial Branch Budget Request to Legislature

Legislative Notes

CEP Live-streaming Facebook Interviews

Farm Bill 2018

About Policy Watch and Sponsors

### About Policy Watch E-Updates

The Legislative and Policy Watch Weekly E-Update is a project of the Kansas Rural Center.

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The Kansas Rural Center 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. For more information about KRC go to [www.kansasruralcenter.org](http://www.kansasruralcenter.org).



### Legislature Gets Off to Slow, Uncertain Start

By Paul Johnson – January 19, 2018

The 2018 Kansas Legislature is settling in for the long ride. With one foot in and one foot out of Kansas, there is very little guidance or leadership coming from the Governor. The Governor's budget kicked the toughest fiscal decisions down the road for someone else to provide the leadership. 2018 is a key statewide election year so political controversy is avoided if possible.

So - for the first two weeks a number of committees have not been meeting or only meet on the call of the chairperson. What never stops is the endless free meals that legislators enjoy from special interests under the dome as taxpayers provide per diem expenses. Friday's are pro-forma days where lawmakers check in at 8am for ten minutes to get their expenses for the day as they head home.

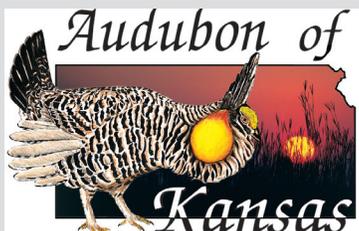
Education funding. The education puzzle remains unsolved. What defines 'adequate resources' for public education and how will this education budget be financed? The lawyers for the Legislature along with the Attorney General are pleading that a decision be made by the end of March so final arguments can be assembled for the April 30 hearing before the Kansas Supreme Court. It remains unclear whether the Legislature will propose a constitutional amendment to take the 'adequate resource' judgment away from the courts and give it to lawmakers. The Governor requested such an action in the State of the State address. Some key legislative leaders have stated that there is no stomach for another tax increase in 2018 regardless of the deficits and understaffing faced by many state agencies. It is a 'hold on' and 'hold your nose' type of political leadership.

State Institutions. Uncertainty carries over to key state institutions. Lansing State Prison needs serious remodeling or a new prison but will a private corporation provide that option? What is the best way to finance such a project and should this prison stay in Lansing? The Osawatimie State Hospital continues to fight for more federal accredited beds. Should existing buildings be remodeled versus demolition and new construction?

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The Kansas Natural Resource Council (KNRC) promotes environmentally responsible practices and sustainable natural resource policies to ensure the quality and abundance of these resources for future generations. For more information about our organization and programs, or how to become a member, please visit <http://www.knrc.ws/>.



Audubon of Kansas (AOK) is a statewide non-profit organization established to promote appreciation and stewardship of Kansas' natural ecosystems, with special emphasis on conservation of prairies, birds, other wildlife, and habitat. For more information about our organization and our programs, or how to become a member, please visit <http://www.audubonofkansas.org>.



Kansas Farmers Union is the state's oldest active farm organization working to protect and enhance the economic interests & quality of life for family farmers, ranchers & rural communities. For more information go to: [www.kansasfarmersunion.com](http://www.kansasfarmersunion.com).

## Legislature Gets Off to Slow, Uncertain Start, *cont.*

Total demolition costs would be \$5.3 million while a new 200 bed unit would cost somewhere between \$58 and \$75 million. Larned State Hospital continues to struggle with staffing shortages. The vacancy rate for RN's is 48%. Mandatory overtime is becoming a necessity with nursing staff having to work six days before two days off while the administrative staff works their normal 8 to 5 shift and go home. These direct care state employees were told to not contact their state lawmakers.

Kansas State University College of Agriculture and Extension continues to plead for more funds to retain key faculty/employees and upgrade or replace aging research and classroom facilities. K-State Research and Extension has seen a 20% cut in state funds (\$55 to \$45 million) since 2008. All higher education institutions have experienced similar budget cuts since 2008.

Clarity on these budget issues will not come easy. Establishing a basic cost for these essential education, health and public safety programs comes first. Then comes the debate over adequate revenues to Kansas to fund these core services. Kansas will get the quality of public or private services it is willing to fund. There are no free lunches in this process. These decisions will determine a quality of life for our State now and on to the next generation. Today's lawmakers are making generational decisions whether they want to or not. Indecision and inaction is also a decision for our future.

## Industrial Hemp Gains Traction

The debate over researching industrial hemp continues in Kansas. Senate Bill 263 would allow the Kansas Department of Agriculture to cultivate and promote the research and development of industrial hemp alone or in coordination with a state educational institution. This bill does not permit the commercialization of industrial hemp or the option to allow private companies to participate in the research. A similar bill passed the Kansas House last year but was not debated in the Senate.

## How to Contact Kansas Legislators

Kansas House of Representatives, [http://www.kslegislature.org/li\\_2014/b2013\\_14/chamber/house/roster/](http://www.kslegislature.org/li_2014/b2013_14/chamber/house/roster/).

Kansas Senate, [http://www.kslegislature.org/li\\_2014/b2013\\_14/chamber/senate/roster/](http://www.kslegislature.org/li_2014/b2013_14/chamber/senate/roster/).

For Kansas Legislature Committees, [http://kslegislature.org/li\\_2012/b2011\\_12/committees/](http://kslegislature.org/li_2012/b2011_12/committees/).

To identify your legislator, click [https://openstates.org/find\\_your\\_legislator/](https://openstates.org/find_your_legislator/).

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League of Women Voters of Kansas is a grassroots volunteer political organization with nine local chapters across Ks.. For nearly 100 years, LWVK has encouraged the informed and active participation of citizens in government. For more information, contact <http://lwvk.org/>.



Climate and Energy Project (CEP) is a Kansas-based non-partisan non-profit working to find practical solutions for a clean energy future. For More information go to: [www.climateandenergy.org](http://www.climateandenergy.org).

## Industrial Hemp Gains Traction, *cont.*

The 2014 federal Farm Bill opened up research options into industrial hemp. 33 states have taken steps towards research. There is limited information on growing hemp in the Midwest. Multiple benefits have been stated for hemp. Hemp would use 1/3 the water that corn uses. As a polymer for plastics and molding, hemp may prove superior to soybeans and other bio-based plastics. Hemp takes fewer nutrients from the soil. Hemp needs little inputs of fertilizer or pesticides for successful growth. Hemp products can be recycled, reused and are 100% biodegradable. Hemp has a quicker turnaround for use as paper than trees. Hemp can be used as an alternative for crop rotations, cover crops, and grass-based buffer zones for soil health and to prevent soil erosion. Hemp seeds are high in Omega – 3's.

Many states have passed both research and commercialization laws at the same time such as Kentucky, Colorado, New York and North Dakota. Kentucky now has 12,000 acres of commercial hemp while Colorado has over 5,000 acres. One profit estimate is \$150-\$300 an acre and a farmer can use an older combine for harvesting. Hemp seed is considered a good animal feed. Hemp fibers can be turned into construction materials such as boards or wall coverings and is much less flammable. SB 263 may undergo various changes as it moves through the process and some limited commercialization option may be added.

## Rural Opportunity Zones Status Updated

Seventy-seven counties in Kansas are now designated as Rural Opportunity Zones (ROZ). All of these 77 counties provide a Kansas income tax waiver for up to five years for out-of-state folks who locate in one of the ROZ counties. These counties or employers can also offer up to \$15,000 in student loan payments to in-state and out-of-state applicants over five years. The cost of these loan payments are split 50/50 with either the county or an employer sponsorship. 47 counties assist with the loans through the county while 26 are through employer sponsorship. Four counties just offer the income tax waiver. In 2016, 476 individuals claimed the state income tax credit and currently 470 individuals are receiving student loan repayment assistance. There have been 3,832 student loan repayment applicants since 2011 with 65% from in-state and 35% out-of-state. There are currently 812 individuals currently on a waiting list due to limited matching county funds and employer sponsorships. More Information: [KansasCommerce.gov/ROZ](http://KansasCommerce.gov/ROZ).

## Judicial Branch Budget Request to Legislature

The Kansas Judiciary requested \$19 million to boost salaries but the Governor did not include this request in the Governor's budget. This request will now be made to the Legislature. Kansas District Court judges are 49th in the nation in salary only ahead of New Mexico. Entry level court employees such as clerks start at \$11.80 an hour compared to Walmart at \$11/hour. Low salaries have sparked turnover in the Kansas courts of 15% - nearly five times the national court employee turnover rate. Last year's 2.5% raise still put a third of judicial branch employees below the federal poverty rate. Many of these jobs pay 20% below market levels for similar jobs. The number of applicants for rural court clerk jobs has fallen sharply in the past few years. The state requirement of having one judge in each county may be endangered as these judges will have to do more preparation work typically done by clerks. There is talk that a class action lawsuit on behalf of judicial employees dealing with low salaries may be filed.

## Legislative Notes

There are 13 committee hearing rooms in the Capitol and all stream live over the internet when in session. 12 of these committee rooms archive audio committee hearings to be reviewed at a later date. The one exception is the Old Supreme Court chamber – 346-S – which has some of the most important committees such as Senate Judiciary, House Federal & State Affairs, House K-12 Education Budget and House Taxation. House and Senate floor action are streamed in audio but not normally by video.

Quite honestly there is not much happening next week. There are a number of informational hearings by State agencies and some annual reports by commodity organizations in agriculture. The list of hearings for January 22-26 are in the Senate and House Calendars – Friday January 19 - [www.kslegislature.org](http://www.kslegislature.org). It will be a couple more weeks before budget hearings begin on the Governor's 2019 State budget.

## CEP Live-streaming Facebook Interviews

Curious about what's going on in the Kansas legislature this year and how you can make a difference? The Climate and Energy Project (CEP) is live streaming interviews on Facebook with leading Kansas Advocacy organizations whose missions include one of the WEALTH topics (Water, Energy, Air, Land, Transportation, and Health). Tune in to CEP LIVE on Facebook every week for the latest!

The interviews will take place on Tuesdays at 2PM CST. See schedule below.

Also, mark your calendars for the 2018 WEALTH Day of Education and Advocacy at the Capitol is on March 15, 2018. [RSVP HERE](#).

### CEP LIVE on Facebook Schedule

1/16/18 Dorothy Barnett, CEP

1/ 23/18 Zack Pistora, Sierra Club

1/30/18 Scot Anglemeyer, Ks. Association of Community Action Agencies

2/6/18 Paul Johnson, Kansas Rural Center

2/13/18 Spotlight on Integrated Voter Engagement

2/20/18 Jessica Lucas, Clean Energy Business Council

2/27/18 A Visit to the Statehouse 101

3/6/18 Mitzi McFatrach, Kansas Advocates for Better Care

3/13/18 Dawn Buehler, Friends of the KAW

## FEDERAL FARM BILL

### **Healthy Fields and Farm Economies Act to Strengthen Federal Conservation Programs Introduced** (From National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) Jan. 12, 2018)

A bipartisan marker bill --The Healthy Fields and Farm Economies Act-- was introduced January 12 in the U.S. House by Representatives John Faso (R-NY) and Marcia Fudge (D-OH). This bill will improve USDA conservation programs for American farmers and ensure the most efficient and effective use of taxpayer dollars. Specifically, the bill strengthens federal conservation programs by authorizing and providing funding for the measurement, evaluation, and reporting of USDA conservation program outcomes.

Marker bills are not stand alone bills but are introduced to offer language and programs that will be debated and incorporated in a broader bill such as the Farm Bill.

USDA invests billions of conservation dollars each year in programs that support farmers and ranchers in adopting conservation activities. These programs - including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) - are utilized across millions of acres of land and help farmers to invest in soil health, air and water quality, water conservation, and wildlife habitat.

"Farmers need programs and practices that they can rely on, particularly when it comes to conservation," said Alyssa Charney, Policy Specialist at the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC). "The Healthy Fields and Farm Economies Act will ensure that American family farmers are getting the absolute best conservation programs and practice recommendations from USDA. By implementing these tracking and evaluation measures, Congress can make federal conservation programs more accountable to American taxpayers and better performing for American farmers. Thanks to this bill, USDA will finally be able to point to hard data showing just how successful conservation efforts have been."

Federal conservation programs play a significant role in protecting and enhancing our shared natural resources, as well improving farms' long-term sustainability. However, because USDA has historically lacked the ability to report on the conservation outcomes of these programs, they have increasingly been threatened with budget cuts and even wholesale elimination. With new evaluation and reporting tools in place, USDA will be able to prove the effectiveness of popular conservation programs; and when programs aren't working well, they'll be able to identify the issues and come up with targeted solutions quickly.

The Healthy Fields and Farm Economies Act will invest in farmers, ranchers, and our shared natural resources, while ensuring accountability to taxpayers who support these programs by:

- Authorizing the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) and expanding USDA's ability to assess natural resource concerns through enhanced measurement, evaluation, and reporting on conservation program outcomes.
- Quantifying the environmental benefits of conservation practices in order to better build upon and improve program and practice performance.
- Directing USDA to use up to one percent of funding available for new enrollments of farm bill conservation programs to support the measurement and evaluation process.
- Requiring USDA to report on program progress to Congress and to the public, provided that individual data is aggregated to protect personally identifiable information.
- Establishing a National Technical Committee composed of individuals with relevant technical and scientific expertise to assist NRCS in monitoring and evaluating conservation programs.
- Authorizing USDA to implement cooperative agreements with qualifying federal, state, and local agencies, universities and colleges, and NGOs to support implementation.

More information on the Healthy Fields and Farm Economies Act, including a summary and detailed outline, is available by clicking [HERE](#).

## About Policy Watch and Sponsors

Contributors to KRC are automatically on the Policy Watch list, if they provide an e-mail address; or you can subscribe just for the Updates for \$25. KRC will send complimentary copies to non-contributors for several issues upon request. To get information on how to support Policy Watch, contact Mary Fund at 866-579-5469 or [mfund@kansasruralcenter.org](mailto:mfund@kansasruralcenter.org).

In 2018, KRC is partnering with the Kansas Natural Resource Council (KNRC), Audubon of Kansas (AOK), Kansas Farmers Union (KFU), League of Women Voters of Kansas (LWVK), and Climate and Energy Policy (CEP) to send Policy Watch to their members. We thank them for their support.

To opt out of receiving Policy Watch as a member of one of these organizations see the following.

- If you are receiving Policy Watch because you are an Audubon of Kansas member or want more information about AOK, or to be removed you need to contact Ron Klataske at [ron\\_klataske@audubonofkansas.org](mailto:ron_klataske@audubonofkansas.org).
- If a member of KNRC, contact Joanna Voigt at [jvoigt@kansasruralcenter.org](mailto:jvoigt@kansasruralcenter.org).
- If a member of KFU contact Mercedes Taylor-Puckett at [kfu.mercedes@gmail.com](mailto:kfu.mercedes@gmail.com).
- If a member LWVK, contact [lww.kansas@gmail.com](mailto:lww.kansas@gmail.com).

If you have any questions about Policy Watch, contact Mary Fund, editor, at [mfund@kansasruralcenter.org](mailto:mfund@kansasruralcenter.org), or contact Paul Johnson at [pdjohnson@centurylink.net](mailto:pdjohnson@centurylink.net).

To learn more about the Kansas Rural Center, please visit our website at [www.kansasruralcenter.org](http://www.kansasruralcenter.org).

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