



Statehouse News

February 9, 2024

Shut-Up!

Some Kansas legislators don't want to hear from you. They don't want to know your opinion on legislation. They don't want you engaged in the lawmaking process. That's the point of Senate Bill 373 which would ban any public money being spent on lobbying.

KCCA represents the elected Commissioners in all 105 counties. Republicans. Democrats. Rural. Urban. 362 elected leaders. All working to serve their communities. As Commissioners you can't be in the Statehouse much of the time the Legislature is in session. That's why I'm here on your behalf.

What SB 373 would do is restrict your ability to be effective, engaging participants in the legislative process. This bill would not just silence me. It proposes to silence the voices of all elected County Commissioners and appointed staff in Kansas.

Things move fast in the Statehouse. There is no way County Commissioners can keep up with all of the developments which impact local government. That's why KAC and KCCA monitor bills, alert you about hearings and speak out for or against bills. We send weekly newsletters and conduct a weekly Zoom call about bills being introduced and advanced.

I am a lobbyist. But I am also an advocate, a liaison and an information resource. I defend Home Rule and Local Control. And when necessary, I speak out against legislation which attacks those principles and will hinder the ability of County Commissioners to govern their communities. Some legislators don't like that.

SB 373 is filled with gray areas. Does "prohibiting paying membership dues to an association that is involved in lobbying" mean cities and counties can no longer support their local Chambers of Commerce or economic development organizations? Does it mean the State can no longer pay for legislators to attend American Legislative Exchange Council events or other legislative organizations?

Who determines which "requests for legislative actions or appropriations are deemed necessary for the efficient conduct of public business...?" The bill also says it doesn't prevent "communicating with a member of the legislature on the request of such member..." What if a legislator doesn't ask their local County Commissioner? Information from local governments could not be part of the legislative record unless a legislator specifically asked for that information or opinion.

Under the statutory definition of lobbying, this bill would also prohibit your county from taking part in KDOT forums on highway plans, contacting the Governor's Office or working with KDHE on a health or environmental issue.

SB 373 is a mean-spirited bill designed to censor and silence the voices of local elected officials. The Kansas Legislature should be working in partnership with us not telling us to shut-up.

The hearing on this is set for Monday February 12 at 10:30am in Senate Federal and State Affairs committee.

Legislative Update

SB 468: Eco Devo Incentives and Budgets. This bill demands that any local government which uses economic development tools such as Industrial Revenue Bonds, Tax Increment Financing districts, Community Improvement Districts or tax abatements would not be allowed to exceed the state mandated Revenue Neutral Rate. This bill harms cities, counties, businesses, and citizens. If passed, it makes using economic tools more difficult. I am expecting Chambers of Commerce and other economic groups to oppose this bill. The hearing is in Senate Assessment and Tax Committee Wednesday February 14 at 9:30am. However, if the KC Chiefs win the Super Bowl, the legislature may not be in session and committee hearings could be rescheduled.

SB 332: LAVTR Rebate Program. This is one of four opportunities to get the Local Ad Valorem Tax Reduction program restored after 20 years of being blocked by the Legislature. This bill calls for a direct rebate payment to property taxpayers. The bill is authored by Senator Rob Olson. It's not the best LAVTR bill out there. It only budgets \$50-million a year and requires checks be sent directly to taxpayers. That's cumbersome and costly. The \$50-million is below the statutory formula which would total \$130-million. The other possibilities for restoring LAVTR are SB 196, HB 2508 and the Governor has included \$54-million in her proposed budget.

SB 384: Ambulance Attendants: A compromise has been reached which will allow non-certified attendants to drive ambulances for inter-facility patient transfers with one attendant providing patient care. The driver would be trained in operating emergency vehicles but would not have to be an EMT or paramedic. The compromise removes the time limit currently placed on waivers given by the EMS Board. SB 384 would pull rules and regs on this issue back in-line with state statute.

HB 2683: Budget/Tax Statement Deadlines: This bill moves up the deadlines for submitting budget information and mailing tax bills. Budget information would have to be filed with the State by October 1st. Tax statements would have to be mailed by December 1st instead of December 15th.

HB 2778: Appraisals. Changes the way properties are valued. It would require appraisers to use comparable properties in the same subdivision or township as the property being appraised. Not sure what happens if there is not a comparable property in the same neighborhood. But if an identical house is 5 miles away it may not be able to be used.

HB 2284: Tax Plan. This is the flat tax bill Governor Kelly vetoed. The House was supposed to try an override last Tuesday, but the vote was not held because several Representatives were ill and did not attend session. The vote margin is thin enough that Speaker Dan Hawkins did not want to hold the vote. It might be held this coming week but it depends on attendance. Monday and Wednesday are pro forma days because of the Super Bowl. If the KC Chiefs win the Super Bowl, no one will be there Wednesday when the victory parade is scheduled in downtown Kansas City.

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