



THE CAPITOL COMMUNICATOR



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Senator Peggy Palmer
State Capitol, Room 523-S
Topeka, KS 66612



785-296-7388
www.peggypalmer.com
senatorppalmer@aol.com

Welcome to the March issue of Peggy Palmer's legislative newsletter. The intent of this newsletter is to inform and empower the citizens of the 16th District to promote accountability, efficiency, and responsiveness in all segments of state government. This newsletter is Peggy's pipeline to you back home about happenings in the Senate, in the legislature, and in committees. Knowledge is power! Stay informed and involved.

PEGGY'S PIPELINE

The 2007 legislative session is wrapping up with a flurry of last minute, voluminous bills and amendments presented to both the House and Senate at the last minute giving the senators and legislators little time to scrutinize the details or to look for hidden provisions and unintended consequences of the legislation. One day prior to the vote, we were handed three massive spending bills totalling \$12.4 billion encompassing all state agencies, capital outlay, bonding, and building budgets spanning all or portions of fiscal years 2007, 2008, and 2009. And those numbers do not reflect the \$117 million of off-budget items like state employee salaries! These types of maneuvers are unfortunately very common in Topeka and always smack of back-door deals, manipulation, and intimidation. Thankfully, if passed, the Kansas Taxpayer Transparency Act (HB2457) will enable citizens to access certain state and local revenue and expenditure information with the creation of a new, searchable website to be operational by March 1, 2008. If this website was currently operational, taxpayers would be able to access the information related to the outrageously unacceptable cost overruns on the Statehouse renovation project which is currently costing taxpayers \$172 million and has recently been given another \$55 million of additional new bonding from the Governor. The original contract was set for \$135 million but was negotiated without a timeline for completion, without total cost estimates, and with an open-ended fee arrangement.

I have developed a series of policy initiatives aimed at making state government and its employees more accountable with taxpayer money. These initiatives will be attached as amendments to the omnibus appropriations bill currently being debated in both houses. The amendments tighten current spending policies to prohibit state employees from using taxpayer funds to purchase alcohol, require increased

"You have got to have the same interest in public affairs as in private affairs, or you cannot keep this country what this country should be." ~Theodore Roosevelt~

rigorous legislative audit and oversight of employee use of state-funded credit card expenditures, and other positive policy changes.

We're also making progress on tax relief for seniors with my bill to exempt Social Security income from Kansas State income tax. Some Kansas seniors should soon have a well-deserved tax break.

Watch and listen diligently to your state government during the next few weeks. Your hard-earned tax dollars are being spent at a voracious rate. Visit my website (www.peggypalmer.com) and the Kansas legislature's website (www.kslegislature.org) to follow the spending bills (SB 357, SB 358, SB 359) and the related debate by reading the daily journals of the House and the Senate.

March 28th is the last day for bills to be considered in either house; conference committees meet March 29-30, and conference agreements will be considered April 2-3. The veto session is scheduled for April 25-28. Stay vigilant!

Yours for Better State Government,

Peggy Palmer

"I sincerely believe...that the principle of spending money to be paid by posterity, under the name of funding, is but swindling futurity on a large scale."
~Thomas Jefferson~

RECENT VISITORS TO TOPEKA

ANDOVER STUDENT ADVISORY TEAM

Representative Ty Masterson and I were pleased to recently host the following members of the Andover Superintendent's Student Advisory Team: Stephanie Graham, Andy Scharping, Allison Duerr, Ben Minnihan, Eden Galvin, Patrick Dake, and Allison Bond. The team spent the day visiting with their elected officials and experiencing the democratic process in action.

The Parents as Teachers groups from the Andover, Circle, Douglass, Leon, and Remington/Whitewater school districts also traveled to Topeka in March to participate in interactive government.

SENATE PAGES FOR MARCH 2007

Andover: Jacob Lancaster, Meghan Lancaster
Cassoday: Breonna Cooper, Ashley Finstad, Rachel Heibert, Jonelle Reinert
Eureka: Joshua Gudde
Hamilton: Justin Davis, Nathan Greenwood, Kortnie Olson

BUTLER COUNTY VISITORS

Andover: Ben Hart, Ted & Debbie Kimble, Marci & Benjamin Laffen, Julie Lancaster
Augusta: Kari, Rachel, Klare & Emma Hufman, Dean, Becky, Melody, Allison & Danielle Routh, Janet Clark, Jennifer Cody, Jennifer Husselman, Tami Ibarra, Karen McAnulty, Diane Rhoten
Cassoday: Becky Hiebert, Debbie, Jonetta, Joseph & Jordan Reinert
El Dorado: Harold & Sandy Cooper, Susan Harsh, Will Johnson, Dottie Standridge, Richard Taylor
Leon: Julie Ford, Jan Wheeler
Rose Hill: Sam Humble, Harold Brock, Leslie Sissel, Debbie Kill
Towanda: Tina Franta, Sherry Haworth, Rita Robinson,
Whitewater: Joseph Ewers, Joseph Myers, Nellie Myers

GREENWOOD COUNTY VISITORS

Eureka: Sunni Chaplin & Eureka High School U.S. Government students, Dan Melson
Hamilton: Susan Greenwood

OTHER VISITORS

Maryanne Caster (Wichita), Llewellyn Crain (Manhattan), Greg Dye (Wichita), Toby Elster (Wichita), Lynn Kohr (Wichita), Terri Lesser (Wichita), Shari Mills (Clearwater), Sharla, Rebecca & Rachael Poage (Arkansas City), Martha Rhea (Salina), Susan Simmons (Topeka), David Stallard (Derby)

AUGUSTA'S GARFIELD ELEMENTARY EDUCATORS HONORED

I was honored to introduce a Senate Resolution (SR 1844) to recognize the excellent work of the educators at Garfield Elementary School in Augusta for being awarded the 2006 No Child Left Behind Blue Ribbon School Award. This prestigious national award recognizes outstanding public and private schools that are either academically superior in their states or that demonstrate dramatic and consistent gains in student achievement. Garfield Elementary has 240 students and 18 full-time certified teachers, 16 of whom hold Master's degrees. I was delighted to visit with and congratulate the following Garfield teachers who were in attendance: Janet Clark, Jennifer Cody, Jennifer Husselman, Tami Ibarra, Diane Rhoten and Karen McAnulty.

On May 4th, I plan to present a special certificate to the excellent Garfield students whose hard work and commitment were also responsible for this wonderful achievement. Congratulations to you all!

EYE ON TOPEKA

We all know that the folks in Topeka think that money grows on trees and is stored in a bottomless pit, but every legislative session seems to uncover even greater extremes of disregard for taxpayers and their hard-earned dollars. The most recent insanity is related to the renovation of the Capitol building. The Kansas State Capitol is a beautiful, historic, and stately building that reflects the pride and honor that Kansans hold for their great state. Like an exquisite Victorian mansion, the structure should be protected and preserved. However, what responsible homeowner would enter into a contract with an architect or a general contractor that failed to set certain spending, cost, and completion parameters. Yet, this is exactly what has occurred with the current Capitol renovation project. The original project began in 2001 and was projected to be completed by October 2010. Lawmakers were told the cost of renovation, including the construction of a new underground parking garage, would be \$135 million. Now, with only the parking garage and the east wing (Senate chamber area) completed, the cost has climbed to \$172 million with no end in sight. The remaining costs to finish the west wing (House chamber area), the construction of a new visitor's center in an expanded basement, and the repair of the building's stone exterior are unknown. The completion date is now April 2011; at this rate, the costs could easily double.

**"It is irresponsible for us as legislators not to do something about it. You don't build a house this way."
~ Senator Peggy Palmer~**

Granted, many of the building's original design drawings have been lost, and the last major renovation was done in 1915, but isn't it simply prudent and responsible to set a spending limit and to negotiate a contract that contains a definite timeline and a fixed bid rather than a contract that includes an open-ended 11% commission to the project architect? What possible incentive does the architect's firm have to hold down costs when the firm is enjoying such a juicy commission all at taxpayer's expense with no end in sight?

With these concerns in mind, I proposed an amendment that would have required the state to renegotiate these contracts in order to establish accountability and spending limits before we pour more taxpayer dollars into the renovation project. Unfortunately, my amendment was defeated 21 to 18. However, a message has been sent, and other legislators are now aware and concerned about this unacceptable arrangement. We may soon see some movement on this situation.

***"Nothing is easier than spending public money. It does not appear to belong to anybody.
The temptation is overwhelming to bestow it on somebody." ~ Calvin Coolidge~***

STATE-RUN CASINOS

**By gaming we lose both our time and treasure--
two things most precious to the life of man. ~ Owen Felltham~**

On March 26, the Kansas House passed SB 66 (64 to 58) under which the state of Kansas (doing business as the Kansas Lottery) will own casinos and slot machines. The original bill was a simple renewal of the state lottery until a 98-page floor amendment was surreptitiously attached without committee discussion or approval. All amendments that would have applied restraint (restrictions on use of credit cards and ATMs) were defeated. The bill then passed the Senate (21 to 19) and was sent immediately to the Governor (avoiding conference committee) after a 12-hour filibuster and other shenanigans by gambling supporters who exercised unusual procedural moves in order to prevent any improvements to the bill. Apart from valid concerns about the monetary and social costs to families, the apportionment of revenues is unfairly distributed and shuts out surrounding counties (e.g., Butler) that will also bear the burden of negative social and monetary impact on individual families. Surrounding counties are also denied a vote on the question of building a casino. The 22% revenue arrangement is clearly not beneficial to the state; other states have negotiated 27% to 50% of casino revenue. The bill will most certainly be subject to a constitutional challenge by the tribal interests because the original constitutional language authorized a state-run lottery (not casinos) and because of concerns about the state hiring out the casino management. Amendments aimed at oversight and safeguards against fraud and corruption were rejected. Government should protect people from corruption; this bill promotes and encourages it! A constitutional challenge will cost the taxpayers more money as the state defends this unconstitutional bill.

Gambling is an inefficient and disgraceful tactic by the State of Kansas to raise money. Other states are recognizing that the "get rich" promises are a delusion. In an age when personal debt and bankruptcies are skyrocketing and household savings are at an all-time low, it is outrageous for the Legislature to encourage anything as damaging to families and society as gambling. **I never hear the rattling of dice that it does not sound to me like the funeral bell of the whole family. ~ Douglas W. Jerrold**

SENATE BILL SAMPLER

- SB 83 Unemployment tax reduction and \$10 million benefit payments to laid-off Kansas workers and suspension of the “waiting week” for qualified workers
<http://www.kslegislature.org/bills/2008/83.pdf>
Passed Senate 40 to 0
- SB 180 Allows KPERS retirees to rollover KPERS fund money to other tax sheltered investments that will remain sheltered from Kansas income tax
<http://www.kslegislature.org/bills/2008/180.pdf>
Passed Senate 40 to 0
- SB 309 Requires the KS Health Policy Authority to develop health care options for enactment by the 2008 Legislature
<http://www.kslegislature.org/bills/2008/309.pdf>
Passed Senate 40 to 0
- SB 373 Creates the Office of Medicaid Inspector General
<http://www.kslegislature.org/bills/2008/373.pdf>
Passed Senate 39 to 0
- SB 382 Allows certain sales tax exemptions for contractors and certain non-profit groups
<http://www.kslegislature.org/bills/2008/382.pdf>
Passed Senate 39 to 1
- HB 2031 Exemption of Social Security income for Kansans with adjusted gross income less than \$50,000;
Increases net worth threshold for corporate income tax
<http://www.kslegislature.org/bills/2008/2031.pdf>
Passed Senate 40 to 0
- HB 2042 Revision in renewal requirements for drivers turning 21
<http://www.kslegislature.org/bills/2008/2042.pdf>
Passed Senate 40 to 0
- HB 2140 English as the Official Language of Kansas
<http://www.kslegislature.org/bills/2008/2140.pdf>
Passed Senate 32 to 8
- HB 2310 Requires local school boards to adopt policies prohibiting bullying
<http://www.kslegislature.org/bills/2008/2310.pdf>
Passed Senate 38 to 2
- HB 2405 Expands tax credits for development and maintenance of historical property
<http://www.kslegislature.org/bills/2008/2405.pdf>
Passed Senate 40 to 0

BILLS TO WATCH

- SB 357 The major appropriations bill (Omnibus)
SB 358, SB359 Other major appropriations bills
- SB 66 State-run casinos and expanded gambling

TAX TALK

The Kansas Senate passed an altered version (HB 2031) of the Social Security income exemption bill that I proposed this session to give Kansas seniors a tax break. The Senate leadership, in its desire to severely limit the amount of tax relief returned to citizens and to greatly increase the rate (a whopping 9% increase) at which the state government spends, opted to deny the income exemption for some seniors to ensure that the state government will have more dollars to feed its runaway spending spree. Senate leadership wanted to limit the amount of tax relief to \$15 million in order to be able to slash away at the House's more generous \$60 million version of tax relief in conference committee. Consequently, the version allowed out of the Senate Taxation Committee permits an income tax exemption only to those seniors whose income is below \$50,000.

Kansas is one of 8 states that tax some or all of Social Security income; thirty-six states do not tax Social Security benefits at all. The state has received numerous state revenue windfalls the past year; these increases to the state coffers should greatly increase the possibility and desirability of tax relief, especially for Kansas seniors living on fixed incomes. The Social Security income exemption that I proposed would apply to 115,000 retirees, saving those seniors nearly \$19 million (a mere drop in the proposed \$12.5 billion budget bottomless pit) during the next fiscal year. The Senate committee's version would eliminate the Social Security income tax for only 61,000 retirees. These numbers are mere bargaining chips to "tax and spend" legislators who are addicted to spending taxpayer money at any cost. These numbers apply to real retired citizens and their fixed incomes. The State General Fund budget will soon set a new and shameful record by topping \$6 billion and contributing to a \$12.5 billion proposed total budget.

Why shouldn't retired Kansans with private pensions enjoy the same Social Security exemption that is now reserved for government employees in the public sector? Public sector retirees are not subjected to means testing to determine if they receive a Kansas income tax exemption on their public pensions. If Kansas wants to keep the valuable natural resource of our seniors, we need to give them incentives to stay in Kansas rather than moving to other states with mild winters and no state income tax. Seniors with greater means who opt to stay in Kansas spend their dollars on grandchildren, entertainment, vehicles, and hobbies. Their spending boosts the Kansas economy, and their presence benefits us all with their wisdom and company.

Please join me in making your voice known to other legislators on this important matter. Let's keep their feet to the fire and keep their greedy hands off of the pension incomes of our seniors. To do anything less is to be an enabler and to continue to feed the beast of runaway spending.



"The taxpayer--that's someone who works for the federal government but doesn't have to take a civil-service exam."

"The current tax code is like a daily mugging."

~Ronald Reagan~



COMMITTEE TESTIMONY

Jean Plummer of El Dorado recently testified before the House Economic Development and Tourism Committee about her work as Tour Coordinator for the Tour Butler Legislative Tour. Mrs. Plummer gave the committee a taste of the Tour Butler activities, presented a DVD showing the excellent opportunities for tourism in Butler County, and followed up with an informative question and answer session for committee members. She respectfully requested the committee's continuing support of the Main Street program, rural and agricultural tourism development, and maintenance of our state parks and other recreational areas.

SALUTE TO KANSAS SOLDIERS

I recently attended leadership meetings of the National Foundation for Women Legislators (NFWL) in Washington, D.C., including a meeting with National Guard Counterdrug Coordinators and a program honoring women in politics and policy pioneers. When reports surfaced of poor conditions at the Walter Reed facility, Rep. Judy Morrison and I visited several members of the Armed Services currently receiving treatment there to check on our Kansas soldiers. Following the visit, we spoke with Senator Bob Dole as well as Secretary Jim Nicholson of the U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs to discuss the conditions at Walter Reed and the care being received by Kansas soldiers. The visit was a positive experience. We need to increase access to benefits and medical services and to make certain that the returning wounded soldiers receive the highest quality of care. There needs to be an increased focus on the transition of returning wounded service members to veteran status as they are discharged from deployment. I will certainly keep monitoring this situation to ensure the best possible outcome for our brave servicemen and servicewomen. I salute them for their extraordinary service to our country!

“The nation which forgets its defenders will itself be forgotten.”
~Calvin Coolidge~

MR. MAUSLEIN GOES TO WASHINGTON

Senator Palmer's intern, Jake Mauslein, attended the Conservative Political Action Conference March 1 through March 3 in Washington, D.C., with the College Republicans of Washburn University. While at the conference, Jake attended events hosted by leading conservative speakers and members of Congress. One of the highlights was a luncheon sponsored by presidential candidate and Kansas Senator Sam Brownback. Also at the conference were most of the leading conservative Republican presidential hopefuls: Mitt Romney, Mike Huckabee, and Rudy Giuliani. Each of these candidates voiced a desire for a reunited Republican Party, like the party that elected Ronald Reagan in 1980 and the “Contract with America” in 1994.

“It was a great experience getting to meet other conservative activists at such a notable event. It is also very clear that the 2008 Republican nomination for president is still very much up in the air at this point. It will be interesting to see what happens and who will eventually become the front-runner in the race for the White House. I would definitely recommend that anyone who has an interest in politics attend CPAC; it is well worth it.” Jake said.

This was Jake's first time in Washington, D.C., so he took time out of his conference schedule to see the monuments and sights of our nation's capital.

**“Always vote for a principle though you vote alone,
and you may cherish the sweet reflection that your vote is never lost.”**
~John Quincy Adams~