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Priorities for Progress, con't from Page 3

Methamphetamine registry. Require convicted methamphetamine manufacturers to register on the state's offender registry.

Broad election reform. Kansans must be assured our democratic system of electing public leaders is free, fair and conducted in the sunlight of public disclosure. Last year, the legislature -- by wide margins -- passed legislation to ensure integrity at the polling place and in advance ballots, provide better public disclosure of the financing of elections, and regulate telephone messages on behalf of candidates.

Although the governor vetoed this important public integrity bill, we continue to believe reforms are needed, and we intend to advance ideas from this vetoed bill and other public integrity proposals developed after the 2006 election cycle.

Are You Interested in an Existing Law or in a Piece of Current Legislation?

On the internet, go to:

www.kslegislature.org/legsrv-legisportal/index.do

In the far right column, under Quick Search, you can access any existing Kansas Statute **OR**

you can enter a bill number to get the full content of a bill **OR**

you can enter a bill number to find out what committee it is in, whether hearings will be held, and whether it passes.

OR go to www.kansas.gov to access a great variety of state agencies and offices. Give it a try!

Not an internet user? You can still call the Legislative Hotline: **1-800-432-3924**

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Senate Update

Senate President Stephen R. Morris

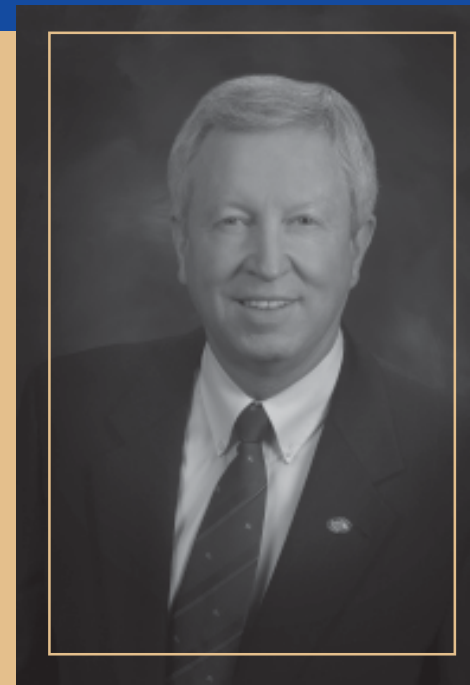
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January 31, 2007



Dear Friends,

The 2007 Legislative Session opened on Monday, January 8. As the result of elections last fall, there have been many changes in the state-house. We have new House leadership and many new members in the Kansas House of Representatives. We also have a new attorney general, and a popular Governor entering her second term.

Certainly, legislators will look to Governor Sebelius for leadership and ideas. We want to listen and be open minded. However, in an effort to be proactive, I took the initiative to create three Senate task forces to study some of the key issues of this session. Details on these task forces can be found in the next column; I'm confident we can reap the benefits of the task forces during the 2007 session.

The Senate Republican Leadership has also offered its own comprehensive list of **Priorities for Progress** outlined later in this newsletter.

As the session progresses, I will keep you apprised of legislative activity. Please feel free to contact me here in Topeka with your ideas and concerns. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Stephen R. Morris
Senate President

Senate President's Task Forces

In my capacity as Senate President, I authorized and established three task forces that are meeting throughout these early weeks of the 2007 session. Separate from the regular standing committees, they provide an opportunity to hear fresh perspectives and ideas on some of our greatest public policy challenges.

They are: The Senate President's Task Force on **Health Care**, led by Senator Jim Barnett (R-Emporia), The Senate President's Task Force on **Education, K-12**, led by Senator Nick Jordan (R-Shawnee) and The Senate President's Task Force on **Higher Education**, led by Senator Jean Schodorf, (R-Wichita).

Each is comprised of a balance of Republicans and Democrats. The task forces are expected to offer recommendations for legislation this session.

Health Care Access to quality, affordable **health care and health insurance** continues to be a great concern for many Kansans. **The Task Force on Health Care** will study initiatives in **other states**, consider the possibilities of expanding current programs and look at new options.

Among new ideas is the concept of "**portability**", where an insurance plan is owned by the individual and follows them from job to job. The task force will look at the impact of paying for insurance with **pre-tax dollars**. They will also consider **public health issues** such as newborn screening and the threat of pandemic flu.

President's Task Forces (con't on Page 2)

K-12 Education

Our **Task Force on K-12 Education** will determine how best to ensure that **at-risk** funding reaches those children who need it. The panel will also make recommendations on how we can coordinate and make **early childhood programs** more effective. They will look for ways to improve **math and science** education in K-12, to better support our **best and brightest** students, and to attract the highest quality candidates to the **teaching** profession in Kansas.

Higher Education **The Task Force on Higher Education** will be crucial to addressing the glaring problems resulting from **deferred maintenance** on our college campuses. Conditions we would never tolerate in a K-12 facility exist in many of our buildings of higher learning. We must begin to make the desperately needed repairs and improvements.

We want to find ways to relieve the stress of **rising tuition costs**. We want Kansas students to be able to achieve their academic dreams without requiring significant personal and family sacrifice. The Task Force will also look at ways to streamline our **vocational and technical education** system. We need to bring stability and uniformity to the governance of these vital and important schools.

Also of note is that during the 2006 legislative session, the Senate was instrumental in creating legislation to form **the Technical Education Commission**. The commission's primary focus is to recommend to the Kansas Legislature a new form of coordination and governance for technical education in Kansas. Technical education in the state of Kansas has historically been a system of higher education that many legislators have a difficult time understanding. Technical education in Kansas is delivered by community colleges, technical colleges and technical schools. All three are locally governed by either appointed or elected boards but are coordinated by the Kansas Board of Regents.

The Technical Education Commission will submit its final recommendations to the 2007 legislature by February 15. The Commission's recommendation is expected to focus on a new coordinating structure and finance for technical education in Kansas. Technical education plays a pivotal role for the Kansas economy and is a critical component of the educational options open to our young people.

Priorities for Progress

The Senate Leadership's Legislative Agenda

The first week of the 2007 session, Senate Republicans announced **Priorities for Progress**, an agenda of key issues for the Kansas Legislature (in addition to the President's Task Forces):

Keeping promises. First, we must **keep the commitments made to Kansas public schools** last year. In the first week of session, the Senate voted to set aside in a **trust fund** the \$122.7 million needed for the third year of the education funding plan. We can do this with our existing fiscal year ending balance.

Government for the 21st Century. We are concerned about the rate of growth in tax-supported government jobs and the cost of maintaining programs and agencies that may be outdated or inefficient. Kansas needs to undertake a comprehensive review of the structure and efficiency of our state government. The state's 2003 "top to bottom review" was a promising initiative that produced limited results. Most reform efforts stall in the face of entrenched interests and a "we've always done it that way" mentality.

We propose a new, statutory commission modeled after the successful Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission at the federal level, to conduct a complete, independent and fair review of our state government and make recommendations to close, reorganize, or consolidate outdated, or inefficient agencies, programs, or positions. The commission's recommendations would receive an up-or-down vote in the legislature and could provide a roadmap for government reform.

Generation capacity. I am firmly convinced that the United States cannot resolve its terrorist threat until we are energy independent, free of our reliance on foreign oil.

Kansas must regain its status as an energy innovator and exporter. The chairmen of three standing Senate committees – Utilities, Agriculture, and Environment and Natural Resources – will coordinate the Senate's energy agenda and work with our House colleagues to formulate a **comprehensive statewide energy policy**.

Ethanol and biofuels present some of the most exciting possibilities for Kansas. We need to bring Kansas to the forefront in the development, production and exploration of future potential for biofuels and other **renewable energy sources**.

Business Climate. We are concerned by recent reports that Kansas ranks poorly among the states in the rate of private-sector job creation. We have taken pro-business steps in recent years, but more progress is needed. To continue improving the state's business climate, we propose:

Unemployment tax freeze. The unemployment trust fund has ample resources; business contributions to the fund should be suspended.

Franchise tax. The corporate franchise tax is an outdated ancestor of the corporate income tax. It should be adjusted over time with an emphasis on relief for small businesses.

Rural development. The continued population decline in rural Kansas is alarming. The state must develop a comprehensive rural development policy. We favor establishing an Office of Kansas Rural Development to assist rural communities. Incentives for investing in housing in rural communities are an important component of rural development policy.

Comprehensive debt policy. We are concerned about the growth of public debt at both the state and local levels. Incurring debt simply requires our children to pay later for public services we consume today. The state must develop a comprehensive policy to manage and limit public debt. As resources allow, we support efforts to prepay some of the state's existing debt. The Senate Commerce Committee will lead this effort.

Animal Health Initiative. Kansas has been a leader in investing in the life sciences. We believe the next logical step is for Kansas to identify a specialty within the broad scope of the biosciences. Because of the agricultural infrastructure already in place, we support designating the region between Manhattan and Kansas

SB 89 ~ Republican River Water Conservation Projects Fund

The Senate Ag. Committee heard testimony Wednesday that would provide for the deposit and disbursement of monies received as a result of violation to the Republican River Compact. All conferees testified in favor of the need to have a plan in place prior to actually receiving funds but each prefaced their comments with the fact that we would much rather have water than the settlement. No further hearings are expected and final action could come as early as this week.

City as the "Kansas City Animal Health Corridor and declaring it to be the national center of the animal health industry. We also favor related efforts to provide tax and financial support for this Animal Health Initiative.

KPERS Reform. The Kansas Public Employees Retirement System requires substantial reform to ensure that it remains a secure and solvent retirement benefit for future Kansas state employees and future retirees. We believe that reform should be accomplished this year without further delay.

Parks funding. The Senate last year overwhelmingly passed legislation to create a permanent funding source to operate and maintain our state parks and to reduce or eliminate park entrance fees for all Kansans. We strongly favor that approach.

Prison capacity and corrections. Kansas must expand the capacity of state prisons to accommodate the projected need over the next decade. We need to establish drug-treatment services for inmates to break the cycle of addiction before they are released from prison. To reduce the rate of repeat offenders, we should incorporate key recommendations from the Criminal Justice Recodification, Rehabilitation and Restoration Project Committee.

Punish felons who use firearms. A mandatory sentence extension should be required for criminals who use a firearm to commit a felony, including drug felonies.

Priorities for Progress, con't on Page 4

Kansas Public Employment Figures:

The biggest jump in employment figures in Kansas from November of 2005 to November 2006 came in government. The addition of 6,000 new jobs might lead some to believe state government is growing. The 2.8% total increase of government jobs includes federal, state, and local units of government combined. That breaks down to a decrease of 600 federal jobs (-2.3%), an increase of 500 state jobs (+0.9%) and a whopping increase of 6,100 local government jobs (+3.4%). Some of the additional state and local jobs are attributed to the timing of the report which coincided with the hiring of additional staff for the 2006 elections.