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With the 2018 Kansas Legislative Session closing in on next Thursday's Drop-Dead Day deadline, many measures were debated on the floor of the House and Senate. The Senate left around noon on Thursday and the House forgoing their budget debate and leaving late afternoon, the heavy lifting on K-12 School Funding and the state's budget debate for next week.

School Funding Constitutional Amendment

On Thursday, the House Tax Committee introduced the long-awaited state constitutional amendment that would give the legislature, not the court power over school finance. The resolution states, "The determination of the total amount of funding that constitutes suitable provision for finance of the educational interests of the state is exclusively a legislative power and shall be made as provided by law."

The resolution needs a two-thirds majority vote in both the House and the Senate and then would be placed on the ballot for a vote. This vote could happen in either the August primary, the general election in November or a special election to consider the question of school finance. Leadership supports the amendment and a coalition of interest groups has been formed to support this constitutional amendment.

K-12 Finance Plan

On Wednesday, the House K-12 Budget Committee sent to the full House, a plan to increase K-12 funding by \$520 million over five years. The committee chairman stated that this increase could be handled within the current Kansas budget avoiding the need for a tax increase. Some committee members, however, argued this is not enough money to satisfy the courts. The plan will now go to the full House next week for debate. Legislators are hopeful that a school finance plan can be passed before first adjournment on April 6th.

Transparency in Government

The House, on Thursday, passed to final action SB 394, the Transparency in Government bill, which would require anyone attempting to lobby members of the executive branch or its agencies to register and report. Transparency has been a buzz word this legislative session and many measures have been introduced to address the issue. This is one of several items that continues to advance.

Budget

On Wednesday, the Senate passed 34-6, its budget bill which contains the non-education funding for this and the next fiscal year. The House budget on Thursday but postponed it to next week so legislators could head home for the Easter holiday.

STAR Bonds

Several STAR bond amendments were offered to the state's budget bill when it was debated by the Senate on Wednesday. The amendments range from grandfathering-in projects that can be approved by July 1, 2018 to requiring a Secretary of Commerce, confirmed by the Senate, approve projects. All floor amendments were defeated, however, there continues to be discussion that the STAR bonds program needs review and could be tightened up. As such, the issue may be revisited later this session.

Tort Reform

Several tort reform bills passed the House this week and are headed to the House and Senate Conference Committee to work out the differences in the bills. The appeal bond cap bill was amended in committee to remove the small business provision. The seat belt bill was also amended to only apply in products liability cases. The asbestos trust transparency act passed the Senate this week and is headed to the Governor for his signature.

Taxes

There was no movement on the Senate Tax Committee bill passed this week that includes changes to the repatriation of income, standard and itemized deductions and expensing for small businesses. This measure, in some form, is expected to factor into the final package of budget, taxes and school finance. Both tax committees are expected to meet next week and will address additional issues.

Amusement Rides

The amusement ride clean-up measure passed the House with minor amendments. The bill now requires inspections of municipal water slides 30-feet and higher and a lifeguard for slides 15-feet or taller. There were some additional changes to bounce houses. The bill now goes to a conference committee to work out the differences in the bill.

Insurance & Health Care

SB 348, electronic health insurance documents has been placed in conference and SB 351, PBM's has been signed by the Governor. HB 2674, the telemedicine bill was amended by the Senate and HB 312, dental therapists, was added to the bill. The bill is still below the line in the Senate, but difference may be worked out by the two committee chairs.

Next Week

With the First Adjournment deadline on Friday, April 6th, the legislature has much work to do next week. The largest issue remains K-12 finance and the April 30th court-imposed deadline to pass a school finance plan. In addition, budget conference committee will work to negotiate a state budget for next year and other remaining issues will be discussed on both the House and Senate floor and in conference committees.