



## KANSAS LEGISLATIVE INSIGHTS NEWSLETTER | MARCH 31, 2025

By: C. Edward Watson II, Susan Peterson PhD, and Eric L. Sexton PhD

### PROGRESS ON BUDGETS, BILLS – BUT PROPERTY TAXES LEFT HANGING

The Kansas Legislature adjourned the regular session on March 27 after advancing dozens of bills but still leaving major issues unresolved. Lawmakers addressed education, elections, national security, and water policy — but key decisions on taxes remain unfinished. The legislature returns April 10 for the veto session, where final outcomes will take shape.

### SESSION SUMMARY: SPENDING, SCHOOLS, AND STALLED SOLUTIONS

The legislature addressed a number of substantial issues including the budget. However, legislators couldn't reach consensus on some of the larger property tax initiatives pursued during the session.

Lawmakers advanced dozens of measures during the first part of the session:

- 14 bills have been signed into law.
- 49 bills await the governor's signature.
- 742 bills and resolutions introduced for the 2025 session.

### Education and Workforce

- SB 78: Gives colleges and universities greater control over accreditation and protects them from conflicts with Kansas law.
- HB 2033: Expands eligibility for at-risk education funding to include International Multisensory Structured Language Education Council-accredited nonprofits that serve students with dyslexia.

## Elections and Ethics

- SB 6: Prohibits ranked-choice voting in all Kansas elections.
- HB 2106: Bars foreign contributions to campaigns on constitutional amendments and increases reporting requirements for ballot committees.

## Public Health

- SB 29: Reduces the authority of local health officials to prohibit public gatherings and strengthens judicial oversight of quarantine and isolation orders.

## Business and Innovation

- HB 2291: Creates the Kansas Regulatory Sandbox Program to let businesses test new products and services with temporary regulatory flexibility.

## Agriculture

- SB 36: Raises funding caps for conservation districts and increases state matching funds.
- SB 89: Updates the Poultry Disease Control Act to allow new testing and certification fees and align with national standards.

## Military and Public Safety

- HB 2185: Expands EMERGE educational benefits for Kansas National Guard members and their families.
- HB 2261: Updates classification structures for Kansas Highway Patrol officers.

## Additional Items Addressed

**Property Tax Action Mixed:** The legislature approved a bipartisan bill eliminating the 1.5-mill statewide property tax levy for state universities, hospitals, veterans' homes, and schools for the deaf and blind. Homeowners will save \$26 to \$86 annually. Beginning in July 2026, the State General Fund will replace the \$81 million in lost revenue, with adjustments tied to property valuation trends. Meanwhile, broader reform stalled when the House rejected HCR 5011, a proposed constitutional amendment to cap annual valuation increases. Legislative leaders plan to revisit the issue in 2026.

**Budget Raises Long-Term Concerns:** Lawmakers passed a \$25.6 billion budget through SB 125, but fiscal projections show the State General Fund may fall \$461.5 million into deficit by FY 2028.

**Special Education Falls Short of Goal:** The budget includes an additional \$10 million for special education, far below Gov. Laura Kelly's proposed \$75 million to meet the state's statutory target.

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**Water Task Force Established:** The legislature created a 16-member Water Program Task Force and a five-member Water Planning Work Group to review state water policy, assess risks to water supply, and recommend long-term infrastructure and funding strategies. The Task Force must submit a preliminary report by Jan. 31, 2026, and a final report by Jan. 31, 2027.

The legislature will reconvene on April 10 for the Veto Session for possibly three days to address any vetoes by the governor and any remaining legislation.

## **POWER TO THE PEOPLE: CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS ADVANCE**

The legislature plans to place multiple constitutional amendments on the election ballots for Aug. 4 and Nov. 3, 2026.

Lawmakers introduced 15 proposed amendments; eight in the House and seven in the Senate. As of the first adjournment, the legislature has passed two amendments. Legislators often introduce constitutional amendments to clarify legal authority, respond to constituent concerns, or give voters direct input on major policy issues.

### **HCR 5004: Clarifying Voting Requirements**

House Concurrent Resolution 5004 will appear on the general election ballot on Nov. 3, 2026. This amendment to Section 1, Article 5 of the Kansas Constitution clarifies that only U.S. citizens age 18 or older qualify as electors. It also states that, unless a residency exception applies, voters must reside in the voting area where they seek to vote.

An affirmative vote will amend Section 1, Article 5 of the Kansas Constitution to reinforce citizenship and residency requirements for voting.

### **SCR 1611: Electing Kansas Supreme Court Justices**

Senate Concurrent Resolution 1611 will appear on the primary election ballot on Aug. 4, 2026. It proposes changes to Sections 5, 8, and 15 of Article 3 of the Kansas Constitution, replacing the current merit-based appointment process for Kansas Supreme Court justices with direct elections.

Currently, the Supreme Court Nominating Commission, a nine-member body consisting of one lawyer and one non-lawyer from each congressional district, plus one lawyer as chair, selects nominees for the Court. SCR 1611 would eliminate this process and require voters to elect Supreme Court justices directly.

The amendment also revises Section 8 to remove restrictions on justices and judges from participating in political campaigns. In Section 15, it strikes the requirement that the commission nominate replacements when vacancies occur.

An affirmative vote will amend Article 3 of the Kansas Constitution to require elections for Supreme Court justices.

### **HCR 5008: Legislative Oversight of Administrative Rules**

The legislature may consider House Concurrent Resolution 5008 when it returns for the veto session on April 10, 2025. If adopted, the resolution will appear on the Aug. 4, 2026, primary election ballot.

HCR 5008 would add a new section to Article 2 of the Kansas Constitution. It authorizes the legislature to revise or revoke administrative rules and regulations — or any portion thereof — by concurrent resolution.

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This proposed amendment would strengthen legislative oversight and ensure elected representatives can directly shape regulatory policy.

## NATIONAL SECURITY COMES TO KANSAS

Bipartisan legislation targets foreign land ownership and the use of drones tied to foreign adversaries.

The legislature has approved national security legislation aimed at curbing foreign influence near military sites and limiting the state's use of foreign-manufactured drone technology. Senate Bill 9 passed with strong bipartisan support and now awaits action from Gov. Kelly.

### Foreign Land Ownership Restrictions

SB 9 prohibits foreign principals from “countries of concern” from acquiring non-residential property within 100 miles of any military installation in Kansas or a neighboring state. The countries of concern include China, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Russia, and Venezuela.

Entities already owning such land must register their property interest with the Kansas Attorney General no later than 90 days after the law's effective date or acquisition date, whichever comes later. If an existing foreign principal seeks to expand operations, the governor must review and approve the request. The governor must consult with the attorney general and the Kansas Fusion Center Oversight Board to determine if the expansion presents a security risk to military installations or critical infrastructure. The governor must make a final decision within 90 days.

The Kansas Secretary of State must notify all businesses and nonprofit entities of the registration requirements during initial or subsequent filings.

Lawmakers revised earlier versions of the bill, removing a forced divestment provision in response to concerns raised by foreign-owned companies already operating in Kansas. The final version aims to address national security without disrupting established investments.

### Drone Restrictions for Government Agencies

The bill also prohibits Kansas government agencies from purchasing or contracting for drones — or related components, software, or services — if critical parts were produced or owned by foreign principals or originated in countries of concern. This restriction takes effect July 1, 2025, but does not apply to drones already in use or under contract before that date.

Proponents of the legislation raised concerns that foreign-manufactured drones, particularly those from China, may compromise sensitive data or surveillance integrity. They argued that national security threats in the digital age extend to the software and hardware embedded in public safety technology.

Earlier proposals included both a drone buy-back program and drone technology research involvement from Kansas Regents universities, but lawmakers removed those elements to streamline the bill and enhance its likelihood of passage.

### Bipartisan Support and Legislative Intent

SB 9 passed 98–24 in the House and 38–1 in the Senate. Legislators who had opposed earlier versions backed the revised bill, noting improved collaboration and narrowed language. With large Republican majorities in both

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chambers, the legislature appears positioned to override a veto, should Gov. Kelly reject the measure as she did in 2024.

Supporters emphasized that the bill reflects a proactive approach to data protection and infrastructure security in the face of evolving foreign threats. Lawmakers aimed to strike a balance between safeguarding Kansas and respecting current business operations.

## Definitions: Who and What Is Affected?

The bill defines a foreign principal as:

- A government or official from a country of concern
- A political party or member from a country of concern
- A business or organization headquartered in or controlled by a country of concern, including subsidiaries
- Any agent or entity under the control of such a country
- Any non-U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident from a country of concern
- Any individual or entity with a controlling interest in companies formed to acquire land or supply drone components

Countries of concern include:

- People's Republic of China (including Hong Kong)
- Republic of Cuba
- Islamic Republic of Iran
- Democratic People's Republic of Korea
- Russian Federation
- Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

## BILL TRACKING HISTORY

A history of the live bills that we are tracking as of March 31, 2025, can be found [here](#).

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Kansas Legislative Insights is a publication developed by the government affairs & public policy law practice group of Foulston Siefkin LLP. It is designed to inform business executives, human resources and government relations professionals, and general counsel about current developments occurring in current Kansas legislation. Published regularly during the Kansas legislative session and periodically when the legislature is not in session, it focuses on issues involving healthcare, insurance, public finance, taxation, financial institutions, business & economic development, energy, real estate & construction, environmental, agribusiness, and employment. Bill summaries are by necessity brief, however, for additional information on any issue before the Kansas Legislature, contact Foulston Siefkin's government affairs & public policy law practice group leader, C. Edward Watson, II, at 316.291.9589 or [cwatson@foulston.com](mailto:cwatson@foulston.com). Learn more about the authors below:

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