

KANSAS LEGISLATIVE NEWS

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ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES SHOULD GET MORE ATTENTION IN 2018

Ahead of the Mid-term Election, Expect A Variety of Bills to Pass in a Shorter Session

Even after a record-tying session length of 114 days, Kansas Lawmakers ended the (quite expensive) 2017 Legislative Session enacting the fewest amount of laws in a session in the last five years. Granted, there was a steeper learning curve with the influx of newly-elected legislators who totaled nearly one third of all State Representatives and Senators. Moreover, the legislative focus was narrowed to righting the imbalanced revenue and tax situation, producing a balanced state budget, and increasing funding for public schools. To those objectives, the Legislature eventually prevailed, even withstanding opposition from Governor Brownback. With the leadership of a new, bipartisan Women's Caucus, state lawmakers finally ended the five-year long Brownback Tax Experiment and increased state funding for Kansas schools by \$295 million over the next two years. However, the accomplishments of 2017 fall off when considering environmental policy, because no serious environmental legislation was passed.

The 2018 session could mean a better future for the environment of Kansas. Moderate-leaning politics have become the winning majority in both chambers. The House and Senate each possess veteran lawmakers with 'experience' as well as 'keenness' from first and second-timers who want to get problems solved. Most lawmakers I have spoken with are sentimental to reducing pollution and health concerns, protecting Kansas lands, conserving water resources, and support affordable electricity through homegrown, renewable energy. There are important topics that need to be addressed: risks and damages from new manmade earthquakes, secured funding for water conservation, extreme weather preparedness, expanding green industry jobs, and more. Especially with constituent pressure, the right policy solution on any issue could be successful. Additionally, I expect the Governor-to-be, Dr. Jeff Colyer, will be smart enough to side with ecologically-beneficial policy fixes, particularly if he hopes to stand a chance in the Gubernatorial race. Time will tell for all of these predictions; for all of us, I hope I am right.

THANK YOU FOR READING THIS KANSAS LEGISLATIVE NEWS

I will be continuing policy discussions with legislators and stakeholders in preparation for the 2018 session. If you have any ideas or want to lend a hand, please reach me below. As always, please contact me if I can be of any help. Thank you.

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The Sierra Club is the largest grassroots environmental organization dedicated to preserving, protecting, and enjoying our great outdoors. The Kansas Chapter represents our state's strongest grassroots voice on environmental matters for more than forty years.