

## Legislative session comes to an end

### Senate Doings Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer



Ending the shortest legislative session since 1974, the Kansas Legislature adjourned 11 days before the constitutional 90-day allotment for the session.

As legislators returned for the three-day veto session, the primary focus was to complete negotiations between the two chambers on budgetary matters for the fiscal year beginning July 1.

As you'll recall, last year the Legislature passed a two-year budget. The governor line-item vetoed the corrections budget for next year because of concerns for job losses and public safety, making it necessary for legislators to consider supplemental money for the Department of Corrections.

Senate Substitute for HB 2231 also included money for caseloads, claims against the state, supplemental expenditures for most state agencies and dollars for capital improvements for some.

The budget bill also included the governor's offer to add \$10.2 million to cut the waiting list for people with physical and intellectual developmental disabilities needing home- and community-based services. Sen Sub for HB 2231 included a one-time bonus for all state employees of \$250 dollars.

The veto session was also used as a wrap up for other outstanding bills from the regular session. In three days, House and Senate negotiators agreed to 25 bills that had been heard earlier this year.

Here are some highlights:

**Mortgage Registration Tax:** The House and Senate adopted HB 2643, which over the next five years will phase out a tax imposed on home and land buyers using a mortgage loan to purchase property. The tax is paid at the rate of 26 cents per \$100 of the value of mortgages received and filed by county registers of deeds.

In addition to paying the mortgage tax, buyers must pay document recording fees to the county to offset costs of recording the deed, mortgage and other real estate documents. Through adoption of this bill, homebuyers needing a mortgage to pay for their home will no longer be singled out to pay this tax, which those who have paid cash or used other methods such as a Farm Credit services don't.

Finally, it clarifies legislative intent for certain property-tax exemptions on commercial and industrial machinery and equipment whether classified as personal or real property. The property-tax portion of the bill creates a solution to the ongoing difficulties associated with appraisal of business machinery and equipment. This bill would set the default classification for the appraisal of machinery and equipment as personal property unless proven otherwise. The language contained in this bill would help prevent Kansas business from paying exorbitant property taxes due to misclassification of their machinery and equipment.

**Tax Appeals Reform:** This week, the Kansas Senate agreed to a measure that would rename the Kansas Court of Tax Appeals to the Kansas Board of Tax Appeals. The change provides a more accurate representation of an administrative agency and not a court that possesses judicial authority.

SB 231 shortens the time for the board to make a decision. Currently, it has 120 days; the bill requires the board to summarize its decision within 14 days and deliver a full decision within 90. Failure to do so would require a refund for filing fees. Also, the bill would allow taxpayers to ask for a new hearing in district court.

**Student Data Privacy Act:** In an age of ever-advancing technology, efforts must be taken to protect the privacy of all Kansans. With an increase in federal collection of student records, the Senate adopted limitations on student data received by the state and for what it can be used. SB 367 would limit what data is on a student's record, what can be disclosed and to whom.

The people authorized to see the record would include parents or legal guardians, authorized school personnel and public health officials. The measure would prevent collection of biometric data. This bill does not prevent the Department of Education from collecting and reviewing information needed for the school accreditation process.

The next deadline for the Legislature is returning to Topeka on May 30 for what is known as sine die, or final, adjournment. This is the ceremonial adjournment for session. It allows us to clean up any bills the governor vetoed or any issues passed over during the wrap-up session.

With the session over, I will be at home and my state phone will not be answered. I encourage you to continue to contact me via e-mail at [Ralph.Ostmeyer@senate.ks.gov](mailto:Ralph.Ostmeyer@senate.ks.gov) or at home at (785) 824-3773.

Congratulations to all graduates. I wish you the best.

It has been an honor to serve you this session. If you need any assistance in the off session, don't hesitate to contact me.



## Technology game changer with privacy

The French writer Voltaire once said, "I do not agree with what you have to say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it."

Donald Sterling, the embattled L.A. Clippers owner, is a perfect example. I hate what he said, but in a private conversation with his mistress, I will defend his right to say it. BC, before cell phones, it would have been a team owner's word against his mistress' word. It is pretty easy to figure out which one's statement would have been accepted as the truth. Had he been speaking to an employee, i.e. a player, his words most certainly would have been a violation, but he wasn't. He was voicing his opinion in a private conversation with his uh, ur...personal friend.

The advent of all our technology has been a game changer. Nothing is really secret anymore, but is it protected and if not, should it be? These questions certainly have plagued the NSA/U.S.

### Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



Government. Recently an article by a Scientific American columnist illustrated this dilemma. His iPhone was stolen and with the Find my iPhone capability he was able to locate the thief's house. After sharing the information on Twitter, his phone was quickly recovered. Many felt sharing the thief's address on Twitter was an invasion of the thief's privacy.

We do assume a certain level of privacy when speaking with a friend. With cell phones' ease of recording and photographing, can anything really be private anymore? We know emails

aren't and certainly social media is not sacred, but can we and should we assume our private phone calls will not be recorded by a...friend?

How much responsibility rests with the media? If technology has been a game changer for the individual, the ramifications of cell phones, iPads, and other devices has changed the role of the media as well.

Now a citizen reporter can launch a Youtube video and bring to light otherwise obscure happenings. The parents showing a child with a cigarette in his mouth certainly lost out on the Good Housekeeping seal for parenting. With Wikipedia, the casual reader may edit any subject. If the "editor" is knowledgeable no problem, but...

I guess, as in most things, we learn by trial and error and definitely there will be a great many errors and countless trials before we get this right. [mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net](mailto:mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net)

## Promoting research to save billions of lives

First watermelon of the season! I'd like to report it was yummy. Unfortunately it was only so-so. Well, it is early for watermelon.

Younger people may not realize this but watermelon once had lots of black seeds. It was fun to eat outside, spitting the seeds at each other. It was inconceivable to eat the seeds, but I guess it would not have really been harmful. Maybe even good for you, fiber in the diet or whatever.

I like the melon better these days: seedless or small white seeds that are easy to consume. How about you?

Consider your answer carefully: seedless watermelon is genetically modified.

There was quite a bit of hoopla about the 100th anniversary of the birth of Norman Borlaug this past March. Borlaug is the only person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Congressional Gold Medal and the National Medal of Science.

He is credited with saving the lives of a billion people. What was the peril of these people and how did he do it? The peril was starvation and he did it with biotechnology.

In a May 2003 conversation with High Plains Journal reporter, Larry Dreiling, Borlaug said, "We have to get people off this notion that GMO's aren't safe. I cannot understand why a people who have every kind of food at their disposal any way they want to take it will deny others the opportunity

### This Too Shall Pass Nancy Hagman



to grow food that can prevent whole peoples from starvation. I can't understand it."

Borlaug is described as a pragmatist. He worked with corporations like Monsanto and Pioneer. Of course, such companies were not funding his research out of altruism. They wanted to make money.

No matter the motivation of any of the parties involved, his research saved a billion lives!

He took on political leaders in developing countries. The introduction of better seeds gave power to hungry people, shifting the political landscape.

Borlaug's granddaughter, Julie Borlaug, is an associate director at the Norman Borlaug Institute for International Agriculture.

She tells how developing a fungus UG99 resistant wheat would help Africans. With poor seeds more care is required to raise a crop. Children are denied education as they are needed in the fields. Much of the backbreaking work falls to women.

Julie says, "How can you say you are for women's rights and yet not give them the modern tools to move be-

yond? It is enslaving women."

Actor Kunal Nayyar was born in India. In an amusing interview on Ellen he talked about grocery shopping in the USA compared to buying food in India.

In India, if there is bread you have one choice: what is there. In a supermarket you have dozens of choices. There is white bread, whole wheat bread, multi-grain bread, nine grain bread and on and on. There are multiple brands.

There is whole milk, skim milk, one percent, what is the difference, does it mean?

Nayyar said, "I can't choose!" Ellen's response was profound, "We're so used to it that we can't back away and get perspective."

A little perspective would be useful. Look at all the food in the grocery store. We can have anything, any time. Any way we want it. We can obsess over GMO's; demand organic and free range. We are not hungry.

How do we reconcile our abundance to the poverty of the world? Is it okay because we are Americans with money so we get something we have deemed better? Are GMO seeds acceptable only for those who are impoverished?

Perspective: What is important? Seedless watermelon?

Organic produce? How should we spend our time?

Labeling GMO foods in our grocery stores?

Or promoting research to save billions of lives?

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Thumbs up to Sue at Nex-Tech for her great customer service last Wednesday. Called in.

Thumbs up for the flowers at the cemetery, they look beautiful and I would like to see them left there for longer. Called in.

Remember there is no charge for rendering a Thumbs Up. Thumbs Up are meant to give recognition for a positive person or event in the community. Also remember all Letters to the Editor must be signed.