

# Senate Update



## Senate President Stephen R. Morris

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May 2008

Dear Friends,

The Kansas Legislature brought the 2008 session to a close on the 90th day following a grueling veto session. All that remains is the ceremonial final day (May 29th), and the session will be officially over.

In this newsletter, I will outline some of the major legislation passed this session. If you have questions or concerns about these issues or about any other matters considered by the legislature, please feel free to contact my office in Topeka for more information.

It was a great relief to hear our area received some desperately needed rain during the time we were going through the Veto Session. Hopefully that is just the start of what we need for our crops to be successful this year.

Although I will continue to have meetings and responsibilities to attend to in Topeka, I look forward to being home in the district through the summer and fall! Thank you for your interest and support!

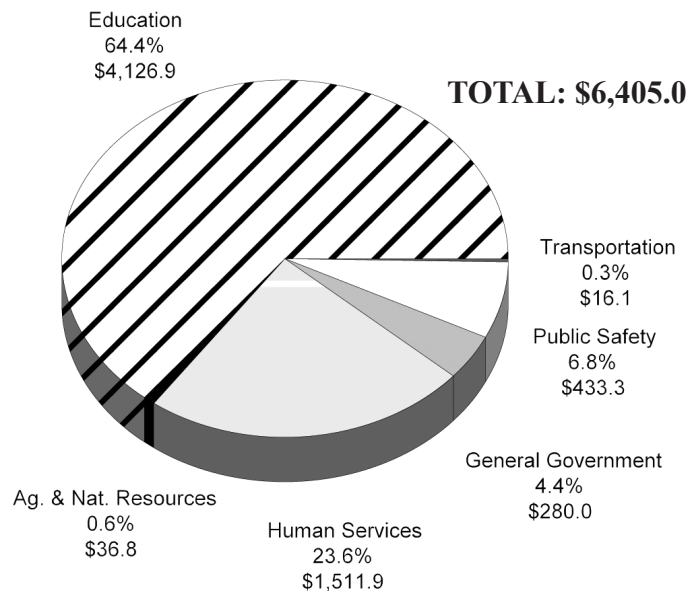
A handwritten signature of Stephen R. Morris in cursive script.

### Budget and Appropriations

In what has been an extremely tight budget year, the Kansas Legislature had to make some very difficult decisions about what to fund and what to hold for another year. It is hard to have to say "no" to some deserving programs and services in order to fund others. But I am pleased with the decisions made in the Senate, and I accept the choices that had to be made so we could come to an agreement with the House.

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FY 2009 STATE GENERAL FUND EXPENDITURES  
By Function of Government  
As Approved by the 2008 Legislature  
(In Millions)



Through hours of discussion and debate, we were ultimately able to:

- Fully fund FY 2008 and FY 2009 **caseloads** in the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, the Health Policy Authority, and the Department on Aging;
- Add \$13.3 million for **Home and Community** for the Frail Elderly, Technology Assistance, Traumatic Brain Injury, Physically Disabled and Developmentally Disabled Waivers and address waiting lists in the Traumatic Brain Injury, Physically Disabled and Developmentally Disabled Waivers.
- Include a total of \$20 million in bonding authority in FY 2009, and funding of \$15.0 million from the Expanded Lottery Act Revenues Fund in both FY 2010 and FY 2011
- Add \$1.0 million from the Children's Initiatives Fund in FY 2009 for additional funding in the Department of Health and Environment.
- Include \$2.5 million in FY 2009 for additional funding
- Add \$1.2 million in FY 2009 in the Health Policy Authority budget
- Provide \$500,000 in FY 2009 to programs in the Governor's budget.
- Add \$9.4 million to the budget of the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System (KPERs) budget for FY 2009
- Include \$750,000 in FY 2009 for

### Commission on Rural Policy

I was proud to be the primary sponsor of the legislation to create the **Kansas Commission on Rural Policy**. The Commission is charged with developing recommendations for rural economic development based on four pillars:

- *existing programs*
- *existing programs*
- *existing programs*

The Commission will have a 9-member Board each with outstanding knowledge and leadership in one of the following areas:

- Agriculture, Aviation, Developing entrepreneurship, Encouraging wealth retention & generation, Finance and banking, Fostering leadership, Health care, Oil and gas, Retaining youth in rural communities, or Tourism.

The Secretary of Commerce, Secretary of Agriculture, and President of Kansas, Inc. will serve as ex officio Board members.

The Commission will not duplicate or compete with the functions of other State or Federal agencies. It will:

- Develop a comprehensive plan to present to the 2009 Legislature which will include an evaluation of current programs,
- Develop partnerships with federal, state, and private entities;
- Develop and recommend a strategic mission for the Office of Rural Opportunity within the Department of Commerce
- Connect organizations and agencies with available resources

The bill requires regional foundations to administer a business development fund for economic development projects. Sixty percent of the money must be spent on job creation or retention and no more than ten percent on administrative costs.

It also increases the Rural Housing Incentive Act population limits to:

- Cities with a population less than 60,000 in a county with a population less than 80,000; and
- Counties with a population less than 60,000.

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For **UMj Y! Xi hm** military personnel, the bill:

- Increases to \$1,500 the one time activation payment made to Kansas employees currently on or called to full-time military duty, and raises the wage differential payment to an amount not to exceed \$1,000 gross payment per pay period.
- Allows a full-time military service member who has been, or will be, deployed outside the United States to defer all or part of the real property tax owed for the person's principal place of residence in Kansas for up to two years while serving on active duty.
- Amends existing law to make military persons currently on active duty eligible for distinctive vehicle license plates for passenger vehicles, trucks of a gross weight of 20,000 pounds or less, motorcycles or travel trailers.



*Senate President Steve Morris addresses a news conference in the Senate Chamber during the 2008 Legislative Session.*

For **j YHfUbg** the bill:

- Appropriates \$60,000 from the State General Fund in FY 2009 to the Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs to fund a new position for a person who will work to educate veterans about available services and lay groundwork for a future enhanced service delivery program.
- Amends existing law to allow the Kansas Lottery to sell Veterans Benefit Game lottery tickets year round and change the distribution of net profits. Forty percent must be used for Kansas National Guard scholarships and 30 percent to benefit the Kansas Veterans Home, the Kansas Soldiers Home, and the Veterans Cemetery System.

For FY 2009 and FY 2010, the bill directs 30.0 percent to the Museum of the Kansas National Guard for the expansion of its facility, to include a 35th Infantry Division Museum and Education Center.

In FY 2011, the 30.0 percent will be redirected from the Museum to a veterans enhanced service delivery program.

- Provides annual hunting and fishing licenses at no cost to honorably discharged veterans with certified service related disabilities of 30.0 percent or more, and appropriates \$75,392 from the State General Fund during FY 2009 to the Department of Wildlife and Parks to reimburse the Wildlife Fee Fund.

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The Legislature passed the Selective Assistance for Effective Senior Relief ("SAFE Senior") Act, to provide a refundable income tax credit beginning in tax year 2008 that will be available to certain senior citizens to help reimburse a portion of property taxes paid on their homesteads.

Taxpayers age 65 or older with household income of 120 percent or less of the federal poverty level for two persons (currently \$16,800) will be eligible to claim the tax credit, which will be equivalent to 45 percent of property taxes actually and timely paid on real or personal property used for

their principal place of residence. Beginning in tax year 2011, the credit will increase to 75 percent.

The SAFE Senior credit supplements the Homestead Property Tax Refund Act, and taxpayers cannot claim the credit for a given tax year if they have also claimed a Homestead refund. "Household income" will be defined to mean all income, including payments received under the federal Social Security Act, received by all persons of a household in a calendar year while members of such household.

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The future of coal-fired plants in our state -- and in particular, the proposed \$3.6 billion dollar expansion at Holcomb -- was the dominating issue of the 2008 Legislative Session.

There were repeated efforts that brought the issue through committees and to the Senate floor for debate. The Senate twice voted to override the Governor's veto of legislation that would have moved the project forward. However, the House was unable to muster the required Constitutional majority necessary for an override.

I am deeply disappointed this major legislation failed; for Southwest Kansas and for the state, it is a tremendous loss in jobs, economic development and future energy security.

Kansas needs a comprehensive energy policy. If we had such a policy, the controversies surrounding coal and CO2 would have been mitigated. As we go forward in the 21st century, we will need every

megawatt from every source of electricity possible, whether from natural gas, coal, nuclear, wind, solar or possibly other sources.

Current U.S. energy reserves are 95% coal, 3% natural gas and 2% oil. In Kansas, 75% of our electricity is produced by coal. Our supply of coal is currently estimated to last for 300 years. Reasonably priced sources of natural gas and oil continue to decline rapidly. We are painfully aware of the toll oil prices are taking on our economy. It is imperative we continue to develop clean coal technology so we will have reasonably priced energy in our future.

We need to do our part to protect the environment; we also have a responsibility to maintain a reasonable standard of living for our citizens. It would be a huge problem for Kansas to be the lone entity in the world to regulate carbon dioxide. Such a decision must be thoroughly debated by all branches of government. We need to develop a viable energy policy at the state and federal levels or we will continue to be very vulnerable to the whims of the Middle East and other import suppliers.