

Legislature Approves Interim Committees, Utility Study Locked in Stalemate

The Legislative Coordinating Council (LCC) – a seven-person, joint House and Senate leadership panel – met on July 1 to review and approve interim committees and topics to be studied prior to the 2020 legislative session.

Two subjects in particular will receive heightened attention this summer/fall: Medicaid expansion and the Kansas Supreme Court's recent rulings on abortion and non-economic damage caps.

A Senate-only Health interim committee will meet to establish a Senate position on Medicaid expansion. As previously reported, the House passed their expansion bill earlier this year. House Bill 2066 will be a starting point for consideration. Following the Senate committee meetings, a joint House and Senate interim panel will meet in an effort to find some common ground before January.

The LCC also approved expanding the scope of the joint Judiciary interim committee to review the latest decisions by the Kansas Supreme Court. Back in April, the Court found that the state constitution protects a woman's right to an abortion; and just last month the justices ruled that the state's cap on damages for noneconomic injuries in personal injury lawsuits is unconstitutional. There was some discussion that a joint Financial Institutions and Insurance interim committee may be better-suited to study the noneconomic damage caps decision, but that direction remains unclear for now.

On July 9, the LCC met again to consider the consultant bids submitted to study Kansas' high utility rates, which was approved by the Legislature this year. The interesting caveat is that the statute requires at least one minority party vote in selecting the contracts. During the meeting, the LCC voted on several different combinations of vendors for different phases of the project but all failed on party lines. The three bidders considered were London Economics International at \$309,000, Energy and Environmental Economics at \$260,000, and Energy Ventures Analysis at \$1.55 million. With no action taken at the meeting, it appears that the issue will not come before the LCC again and will be delayed until the Legislature can revisit it next year.

The following are some of the other special joint interim committees and topics approved:

- Special Committee on Financial Institutions & Insurance: cost of health care, privilege taxes on banks and credit unions.
- Special Committee on Health: anesthesiologist licensing.
- Special Committee on Judiciary: judicial selection process, Supreme Court decisions.
- Special Committee on Medicaid Expansion: expanding KanCare.
- Special Committee on Natural Resources: flood damage and control.
- Special Committee on Federal and State Affairs: medical marijuana.

These are some of the standing joint committees that will also be meeting this fall:

- Administrative Rules and Regulations
- Corrections and Juvenile Justice Oversight
- Home and Community Based Services & KanCare Oversight
- Information Technology
- Kansas Security
- Legislative Budget
- Special Claims Against the State
- State Building Construction
- Pensions, Investments and Benefits (KPERs)