

## TUESDAY TOPICS LEGISLATIVE FORUM DECEMBER 5, 2023

President Mary Lou Davis opened the meeting with directions and welcomed the legislators who participated in the forum. The legislators were Senator Dietrich, Representatives Alcala, Haskins, Miller, Schlingensiepen and Weigel. All legislators representing Shawnee County were invited to attend. All comments below are in response to legislator specific questions from Davis.

When answering President Davis' question about homelessness in Topeka, Sen. Dietrich said the committee only met one day and had a full agenda. Police talked about their CIT unit, the Topeka Rescue Mission and other shelters discussed the issue of mental health. Don't ignore homeless persons. A big question is how can the legislature help? Not all homeless people require the same solution. McPherson is building tiny homes as a way to help the homeless transition to a home of their own. Opening the dialog is important.

Rep. Alcala talked about the new lab being built for the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. It will be more modern and efficient. The cement artwork on the Docking building will be relocated. He was against tearing down the Docking building. Three floors are left that will house conference rooms, offices and maybe a restaurant.

Rep. Haskins talked about nursing home reimbursement rates from the state, conducting a post audit, small "Mom and Pop" nursing homes, and the problem with corruption.

Rep. Miller is the House Minority Leader and as such does not serve on any standing committees. He talked about the state finance council made up of leaders and the governor. It is overpopulated by the majority party. He doesn't believe they need a finance council that is comprised of legislative leaders and the governor. It acts in lieu of the whole legislature.

Rep. Schlingensiepen serves on the Energy, Utilities and Telecommunications committee. He recently went to Germany to learn what they are trying such as regulating companies selling solar panels, getting away from fossil fuels and using renewable energy including hydrogen. The United States is part of the southwest power pool, a pricing marketplace. The government offers financial support of 30 percent for solar panels. They prefer wind first.

In speaking about legislative priorities, Rep Schlingensiepen wants the clergy to be involved in addressing the problem of child predators. He then spoke about Medicaid Expansion that has failed every time it has been brought up, rural hospitals staying viable, public schools and vouchers that take money from the public schools.

Rep. Miller said the Shawnee County Delegation has heard about Medicaid Expansion. Kansas is one of only 10 states without Medicaid Expansion. Kansas has forfeited funds to other states that do have Medicaid Expansion.

Rep. Haskins said the 2024 Legislative session will be a marathon not a sprint. He talked about workforce retention, sub-minimum wages for disability workers and cyber security.

Rep. Alcala addressed Medicaid Expansion that would help women who live longer and need that help. He also said we need to do away with foam and plastic bags and use paper. Changing the subject, he said the Good Samaritan Law needs to be passed. The law would protect those who help others, with or without compensation, from claims of negligence.

Sen. Dietrich supports public education. Too many people want to take money away from public schools and give it to non-accredited schools that have no accountability and that don't take the state tests. She wants tax reform on matters of Social Security taxes -- how do we tax SS or should we. She also mentioned property taxes. We need a new tax policy. Sen. Dietrich supports Medicaid Expansion.

### **Questions from the audience with answers and comments from legislators**

Someone said a representative reportedly said Medicaid Expansion is too politically risky. Sen. Dietrich said leadership won't bring it up for a vote.

Rep. Miller said we have money for Medicaid Expansion. The state Chamber of Commerce, Koch, Americans for Prosperity and ALEC don't support Medicaid Expansion. The Topeka Chamber of Commerce does support it. Miller also added that the statute says the governor cannot use executive order for Medicaid Expansion.

Rep. Weigel said 70 percent of Kansans want Medicaid Expansion, but no one is listening to them. The Flat Tax will help those with money but no one else. The governor vetoed it. Weigel also mentioned work on the veterans and military projects.

Sen. Dietrich said we need to address early childhood and how can we reorganize to make it more available. She also said the School Finance formula needs to provide equitable funding.

Rep. Haskins supports raising teacher pay and suggest people need to see what really goes on in classrooms. Teachers are working hard so don't use them to get vouchers. He supports school administrator pay raises. He also said special education needs to be fully funded according to the law - at 92 percent.

Rep. Schlingensiepen does not support pay raises for legislators when teachers are struggling. He voted against it.

Rep. Miller said there is too much bullying in the House and Senate. Bullied politicians are politically afraid to do the right thing.

Rep. Haskins spoke about how rude some Republicans are to speakers, including the governor.

If you want to contact one of the legislators, go to the Legislative website. You can call or email them.