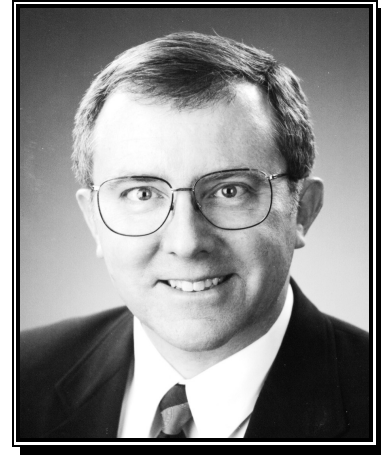


# From The Desk Of... Jay Scott Emler



~Week of February 28 - March 4, 2005~

- **Bills to Benefit Members of the Military**

Several bills that would benefit members of the armed forces have advanced out of committee. One measure would enable an individual who has been activated for military service, to return to the health insurance the individual had prior to activation without medical underwriting. The bill was requested by the Insurance Commissioner to address concerns that Kansas residents in the military could face insurance cancellation, non-renewal or increase of premiums while deployed.

A second bill would provide a death benefit of \$250,000 to dependents of members of the Kansas National Guard killed while deployed by the military. The bill is a substitute for a measure that was sponsored by all Republican Senators. Originally the bill stated that the state was to pay the premiums for \$250,000 in life insurance coverage. In a sense, the substitute measure calls for the state to self insure. The bill is retroactive to November 1, 2004. The date would make the dependents of SFC Wisdom of Atchison and SGT Clary, of Troy, who were killed in action in Iraq, eligible for the benefit.

- **Grandparents as Foster Parents**

Senate Ways and Means advanced a bill that would establish the Grandparents as Foster Parents Program. Grandparents older than 60 who have custody of a child through state placement, legal guardianship or other legal means and have completed training provided through the program would be eligible to participate in the program. To qualify the grandparent must have an annual income level below 100 percent of the federal poverty level. The bill provides participants not less than 75 percent of the reimbursement received by traditional foster care providers.

- **City and County Consolidation**

The Senate Federal and State Affairs committee began hearings, in front of hundreds of on lookers, on a bill regarding city and county consolidation and another aimed specifically at consolidation of Topeka and Shawnee County.

The first bill, The Efficiency in Local Government Act, would allow the county commissioners and governing body of a city create a reorganization study committee to prepare a plan to address reorganization of the city and county.

The second bill would establish a five member Consolidation Commission for Topeka and Shawnee County. The bill calls for a vote of approval from those living inside the city of Topeka and then those individuals living outside the city limits. The bill calls for the Governor, President and Minority Leader of the Senate, Speaker and Minority Leader of the House to each appoint a member to the Commission. Those in favor of the consolidation fear the dual majority vote would cause the consolidation to fail.

During the consolidation efforts of Wyandotte County and Kansas City in 1996 - 1997, the Governor appointed the five members of the Consolidation Commission.

- **Private Prisons**

The Senate Ways and Means committee conducted hearings on two bills regarding the use of private prisons to house Kansas inmates.

The first measure would prohibit Kansas from housing state inmates in out-of-state private prisons.

The second bill would authorize the construction of private prisons in Kansas for the housing of Kansas and out-of-state inmates. The bill would enable the Secretary of the Department of Corrections to veto any out-of-state inmate he considers too dangerous. In addition, Kansas would receive "bumping rights". If Kansas needs 300 beds for inmates, it would be able to rent 300 beds. The state would not have to pay for bed space that is not needed.

Proponents of private prisons claim the benefits are numerous. Besides economic development for their communities, they claim the state would be saving money because there would be no need for the state to spend money on construction costs. Proponents of private prisons say the strict state oversight in the bill would ensure safe and secure prisons.

Opponents of the bill are critical of private prisons because of what they believe is a lack of oversight. They claim, in order to make a higher profit, these prisons skimp on necessary needs for inmates and do not provide necessary rehabilitation programs for inmates. There is also concern that oversight may be restricted when the state enters into a contract with a private prison. Additionally, there are many examples of where private prisons in other states have had riots that had to be quelled by state officials and paid for by taxpayers.

## **Toll Free Legislative Hotline**

The State Library will continue its practice of operating the toll free hotline for Kansans to call their legislators and leave brief messages. The hotline number is 1-800-432-3924.

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