



# Senator Jay Emler

## Kansas Senate District 35

## Thoughts from the Capitol

January 27, 2002

Jay Scott Emler, Kansas State Senator, 35th District

### **STRONG LOCAL AND STATE PARTNERS BUILD WORKFORCE NETWORK OF KANSAS**

Although the last four months have tested the nation's economy, Kansas continues to have a strong support system in place for citizens looking for new employment opportunities. The Workforce Network of Kansas combines state resources with local, community-based control to facilitate the matching of willing workers with promising jobs.

Despite the economic slowdown, the Workforce Network has helped to keep unemployment rates in Kansas significantly lower than national averages. The unemployment rate in Kansas is just over three percent; the national average is over five percent.

The Workforce Network prides itself on being easily accessible. Citizens seeking employment opportunities can visit workforce centers in their areas or can utilize the new internet site, [www.kansasjoblink.com](http://www.kansasjoblink.com). At the site, job seekers can build resumes, search online job postings and e-mail copies of their resumes to potential employers. Employers can use the same system to post job orders, outline desired job skills, and contact job seekers directly. In addition, workers notified of a layoff can file for unemployment compensation by visiting this site.

### **KANSAS: A DIGITAL LEADER IN THE NATION**

Kansas was recently crowned the 2001 e-government leader among all 50 states by one of the nation's most respected and recognized studies, the Digital State Survey.

The fourth annual study, conducted by the Center for Digital Government and the Progress & Freedom Foundation, measured eight sectors of digital technologies in state government: law enforcement and the courts, social services, e-commerce/business regulation, taxation/revenue, digital democracy, management/administration, education and GIS/transportation. Kansas was the only state to score in the top 10 ranks in seven of the eight areas surveyed.

Kansas moved up from the previous year's second place ranking, displacing three-time consecutive winner, Washington. Rounding out the top-10 states behind Kansas are Illinois, Washington, Maryland, Arizona, Maine, New Jersey, Utah, Ohio, and Michigan. For more information, go to [www.accesskansas.org](http://www.accesskansas.org) and click on the Digital State icon.

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### **KANSAS IN THE FINAL FOUR**

The Senate Education Committee welcomed the Kansas Teacher of the Year Team. Included in the delegation were:

Tracy Callard, USD #259, Wichita  
Susan K. Hagedorn, USD #223, Barnes  
Linda L. Nelson, USD #305, Salina  
Patricia A. Lira, USD #434, Santa Fe Trail  
Barbara L. Chamberlain, USD #345, Seaman  
Linda McPherson, USD #232, Desoto  
Sarah Pike, USD #202, Turner  
Mark A. Diskin, USD #266, Maize

Tracy Callard of Wichita was named the Teacher of the Year from Kansas. Tracy is one of four finalists for the National Teacher of the Year. Kansas has only had three National finalists in the past. Once again, Kansas is recognized nationally for its achievements in public education.

### **PRIVATE-PUBLIC PARTNERSHIPS WORK**

The Senate Commerce Committee visited Johnson County Community College (JCCC) to see the facilities built in partnership with Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad company. BNSF and JCCC partnered in the late 1980's to build a 52,000-square-foot facility to train engineers, conductors and dispatchers. Overland Park served as a third partner when it issued \$2.9 million in revenue bonds to finance the structure. Burlington Northern would pay off the bonds over a ten-year period, subleasing a third of the space to the college at cost. BNSF would donate the building to JCCC after the building was paid off. The Industrial Technical Center was occupied in January 1988. Just three years later the partners agreed to double the size of the center, with a similar financing agreement.

The real goal of JCCC was to encourage local economic development and to provide a new non-tax revenue stream for the college. BNSF wanted high-quality teaching space - a real "educational" atmosphere - to train its staff at the most reasonable cost to the corporation. The railroad looked at sites in Dallas, Spokane and Fort Worth, but a training facility on a college campus held the most appeal and feasibility. Both JCCC and BNSF were successful in achieving their goals.

The Johnson County community has benefitted from the BNSF employee training program due to the thousands of employees brought to the JCCC campus for training. Travel, food costs and hotel costs have provided a significant economic impact for Johnson County. The local economic development impact is estimated to be \$60 million. Additionally, JCCC now offers conductor and dispatcher training to its students.

The partnership between JCCC/BNSF has received phenomenal national attention. The program is recognized as one of the nation's best and the program gained more recognition when Secretary of Labor Rober Reich alluded to it as "a model cooperative program between education and industry".

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### **LEGISLATORS HEAR UNIVERSITIES PITCH RESEARCH CENTERS**

In what was thought to be an unprecedented event, more than 100 legislators traveled from the State Capitol in Topeka to Kansas State University in Manhattan to attend an all-day seminar on a \$115 million research initiative backed by the Kansas Board of Regents and the state's three research universities. The trip was organized by the chairmen of the Legislature's budget committees, Senator Steve Morris, R-Hugoton, and Rep. Kenny Wilk, R-Lansing. Both chairmen felt traveling to Kansas State University was the best, most efficient way to educate the entire legislature about the proposal.

Kansas State University President Jon Wefald called the gathering "the most important meeting in school history." The schools urged lawmakers to approve state bonds to build three state-of-the-art research centers focused on biomedicine, bioterrorism, and aviation.

Much of the day's presentation focused on K-State's plan to build a one-of-a-kind research center dedicated to the study of food safety and security. School officials say the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and predictions that more are on the way have created a sense of urgency around the project. The proposed research facility would enable scientists to develop crops resistant to biological agents spread by terrorists. At the center, scientists, veterinarians and health-care professionals would be trained on how to respond in case of bioterrorist attacks.

The University of Kansas hopes to gain funding for life science research. KU researchers would work towards cures for cancer, AIDS, and Alzheimer's disease. At Wichita State, scientists and engineers would aid Boeing in developing its new supersonic airliner. Space at WSU would also be dedicated to studying aircraft icing and structural dynamics.

The proposal requests a start-up investment from the state, but would not require the state to fund the entire amount needed to build the research facilities. Rather, the state would issue bonds and spend approximately \$10 million a year for five years to begin paying them back. After the first five years, each university would assume the payments using money generated by research breakthroughs at the centers. Studies show research facilities receive up to a four-to-one return on investments. The research centers would attract millions of dollars in federal research grants and could prove to be a significant stimulant for the Kansas economy.

### **PRESCRIPTION DRUG ASSISTANCE FOR SENIORS**

Beginning March 1, 2002 - Pfizer, a giant in pharmaceuticals research and development, will provide a new series of customized health benefits for seven million Medicare-enrolled Americans. Entitled the Pfizer "Share Card", the program is geared to help low-income seniors enrolled in Medicare afford needed prescription drugs. This program will enable them to buy a 30-day supply of any Pfizer prescription medicine for a flat rate of \$15 - no matter what the drug's actual cost. In addition, there are no caps on the number of prescriptions an enrollee may fill. The program is being operated at a loss to Pfizer, and is not intended to replace any state benefits. The Pfizer "Share Card" program was developed



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to work hand-in-hand with state and federal programs as a partnership to better serve communities across the nation.

Kansas is one of the leading states in percentage of aging population. The "Share Card" will provide much needed relief to thousands of seniors in Kansas. To be eligible for the "Share Card" program, you must be:

- 65 years of age or older, or otherwise a Medicare enrollee,
- have individual reported gross income below \$18,000, or joint reported gross income below \$24,000, and
- have no prescription drug coverage.

For more information, call 1.800.717.6005. The Pfizer call center has trained operators standing by to assist you for enrollment.

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I appreciate hearing from you. There are three convenient ways to contact me. You may write to me at:

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Or, you may call me at:  
785.296.7354.

Or, you may e-mail me at:  
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For those of you who want to write to me at my McPherson office or home, feel free to do so. It takes me a little longer, however, to respond because the letters and e-mail are forwarded to my Topeka office.