

OPINION



Bob Beatty
Special to The Capital-Journal

The good, dubious and quirky

Below is a selective list of some of what did and didn't make it out of the now-completed 2025 Kansas legislative session.

Bipartisan protections

Republicans and Democrats came together on several bills to protect and help children:

- Establishing the Office of Early Childhood, an idea championed by the governor for years. The law consolidates money and programs involving early childhood that had been scattered across different agencies with the goal of increasing efficiency and accountability.
- Adding the use of artificial intelligence to the crime of sexual exploitation of a child if it is used to visually depict a child in an obscene manner.
- Form a new advance universal newborn screening program that will include screening tests, educational resources and a follow-up program.

Constitutional amendment a go-go

The Legislature put two constitutional amendments on future ballots for Kansans to vote for or against. Oddly, they were put on different dates!

The first will state "A 'yes' vote supports amending the state constitution to state that only a citizen of the United States is eligible to vote" and will be on the Nov. 3, 2026, ballot.

The second one will ask voters if they want to elect justices to the Kansas Supreme Court, who are currently selected by the governor after a special committee picks three people to choose from. That one will be on the Aug. 4, 2026, ballot. You know, the summer election in Kansas that features the party primaries that unaffiliated voters aren't allowed to vote in.

Property tax cuts! Yay? No, yawn

Kansas Republicans won big in the 2024 elections promoting property tax cuts. So, the first thing they did when they got to Topeka in January was ban gender-affirming surgery on minors.

To be fair, they did float a whole bunch of plans to substantially cut property taxes — including constitutional amendment ideas capping property tax appraisals — but the outcry from potentially impacted counties and cities quashed them.

So, they finally passed a bill cutting the state's 1.5 mill property tax levy. The cut will save the owner of a \$150,000 home \$25.88! The good news I know you want to hear is that it will save an owner of \$1.5 million home \$258.75.

So. Yeah. Property tax relief.

Watch out for the scary media!

Nothing is more frightening than the media — especially columnists — so legislators acted swiftly and decisively (87-35) in voting down a proposal to allow credentialed media on the House floor.

To make amends for that vote, the Legislature also increased the rent that media outlets pay for their basement offices.

Looks like Gary Numan somehow got on the House floor

Lots of car-related legislation this year. Apparently crazed drivers are less of a threat than the media (see above) as a bill making driving over 100 mph the crime of reckless driving failed.

However, the "move-over" law did pass, whereas drivers have to move out of the lane when they approach any vehicle flashing hazard lights that's in on the side of that lane.

And finally, a law was passed allowing vehicle owners to buy so called "blackout" license plates (white lettering on black background), so drivers going 101 mph (but certainly aren't driving recklessly) can look cool while doing so.

Bob Beatty is a political science professor in Topeka.

Protests, proclamations and performative politics



Russell Arben Fox
Special to the Capital-Journal

Back in December, I wrote a column on symbolism and substance in politics. At the time, I was especially struck by the problem of what it means to take political rhetoric — the constant, often bizarre social media statements flooding from the White House being a great example — "seriously but not literally."

As we continue, both in Kansas and across the country, to be caught up in a political environment filled with protests and proclamations that may or may not be meant to be taken seriously, a return to the topic is in order.

Here in Wichita, the largest standalone city in Kansas, the biggest controversy of the past two months has been a declaration which our city council issued in support of Transgender Day of Visibility, a national occasion promoted by LGBTQ organizations.

Mayor Lily Wu did not endorse that proclamation, though neither did she prevent the majority of council members who did support it from publicly presenting it. Since the relevant city ordinance seems to stipulate that the mayor must formally read any proclamation issued by the council, her action (or lack thereof) has generated heated debate, including multiple accusations both by and against the mayor.

I brought up this controversy while speaking to a civic group recently, and one participant asked a question that seemed to capture what the majority of that group seemed to be feeling: Why are we fighting about entirely symbolic proclamations anyway? It's a fair question.

Like I wrote in my previous column, it's very easy to get frustrated over what might be broadly called "performative politics." Often that term is used critically: you, or the church or business or interests you represent, don't have the votes or resources to affect real change, so instead you just "perform" your demands, grabbing attention, disrupting others with your silly, symbolic claims.

But making statements, carrying signs, or organizing on behalf of recognition isn't silly at all. Rather,

Mayor Lily Wu's refusal to endorse a city council proclamation for Transgender Day of Visibility has sparked local debate.

these kinds of performative actions occupy a range of places within our political life.

At one end, there are those who possess actual administrative or executive authority: a CEO, a mayor, a governor or the president of the United States. The statements such people make, even if they're legally groundless or substantively empty, still matter, because the authority they possess will invariably influence others to take action, even if there is no basis for doing so.

On the other end, though, are just ordinary citizens, possessing no more authority than anyone else. But citizens can nonetheless take up a signs to express frustration (as sizable crowds have done almost every week over the past few months in Wichita, Kansas City, Hays, Topeka, Lawrence, and elsewhere), and by so doing capture the attention of others.

Also, any citizen can petition elected leaders to plead for recognition for the work one does, or the identity one represents. If enough agree, then suddenly a degree of legitimacy — and, crucially, the awareness of others — is granted that didn't exist before, empowering those who made the request.

Over the past decade, as social media has transformed political life, multiple scholars have begun to rethink democratic politics, and the place of performance and spectatorship within it. Today we live in an environment where "attention" is often the most valuable commodity anyone can possess.

Those who can do the work and organize with others and put themselves forward to make sure their cause is seen (and sometimes their opponents triggered or scandalized), may not be a distraction; instead, maybe they're doing politics the way it is fated to be played today.

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Supporting Iranian opposition to regime



Saeid Sajadi
Special to The Capital-Journal

A bipartisan majority in the U.S. House of Representatives recently supported the 10-point plan of Maryam Rajavi for a free Iran with HR 166, led by Reps. McClintock, R-California, and Brad Sherman, D-California.

The resolution acknowledges the legitimacy of the rebellious youths — led by MEK, i.e., the main democratic opposition — confronting the repressive forces of IRGC inside Iran. The support for the resolution transcends party lines and ideological leanings.

From Kansas, conservative Republican Rep. Derek Schmidt and Democratic Rep. Sharice Davids are among the co-sponsors.

It is evident that the legislators have closely monitored Iran's scene and they respond with laser precision to the dynamics of the forces on the ground in Iran — the goal being a free Iran. A viable change, however, has to come from the Iranian society.

The wave of major uprisings since 2017 — the last being in September of 2022 — indicates that the Iranian people won't settle for anything but a regime change by the people. They are ready to pay the price it takes to free Iran.

Toppling the most active regime sponsor of terrorism is not a cakewalk. It requires a vast network of resistance units to pave the way for the uprisings and to defend the people against the repressive forces. The strategy needs to be rooted in reality and confront the repressive apparatus of the regime so that the people can take the ownership of streets. However, the change would be possible if led by a battle-tested political alternative, competent leadership and thousands of devoted 24x7 members inside and outside Iran.

The above alternative is in existence and led by Maryam Rajavi. Her political platform stands for complete gender equality, freedom of expression and assembly, separation of religion and state, secular democracy, and a non-nuclear Iran.

Mullahs know very well that a viable political alternative is a game-changer for intensifying the momentum for change and leading the people down the right path. To curb the alternative, for three decades the Mullahs' propaganda was that the regime bears the solution: reform through its so-called reformist faction.

The recent uprisings, however, ended the mirage of reform from within the regime. As a result, today the focus has become the alternative to the entirety of the regime. As a result, the regime's misinformation campaign has adjusted accordingly.

The H Res 116 targets the propaganda of mullahs' regime, which through its cyber-army and political affiliates attempts to deviate attention to the phony alternatives such as remnants of the monarchy, which was abolished through the 1979 revolution.

The resolution emphasizes that a free Iran is possible through "a secular democratic republic" — a clear no to the dictatorships under monarchy and Mullahs. In his speech on Oct. 6, 2023, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo conveyed the same meaning: "Iran will never return to the dictatorship of Shah ... the remnants of the past monarchy failed to gain any traction during the uprising over the past year. Shah's supporters were exposed for heavily relying on collaboration with IRGC."

The resolution is seen as an advocacy for an open dialogue with Maryam Rajavi, the president-elect of the National Council of Resistance of Iran for the transitional period after the fall of Mullahs' regime. Such a dialogue would send a strong message to the people of Iran that the U.S. is ready for a genuine change in Iran.

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