



2017 Legislative Outlook
by Scott Schneider, KRHA Lobbyist

The Byrds may have sung it best when describing a new season in their 1962 song, *Turn, Turn, Turn*. In the Kansas Legislature, 2017 will also likely experience a new season and discuss big ideas like school finance, tax reform, and the broader role of government safety net services.

The discussions will likely have a different tone and tenor than previous years; however, the decision points seem to always remain the same. There are always winners and losers. If taxes are raised, some will have to pay more. If schools are funded differently, some will get more and some will get less. If services are continued or expanded, some will pay for it and hopefully some will personally receive a benefit.

As discussed in previous articles, tax reform discussions will include eliminating the non-wage income exemption and, of course, increases in the various alcohol taxes. Alcohol taxes are a gateway tax to larger debates because Kansans publically hesitate to disagree. However, politicians have come to learn privately people view increased alcohol taxes as an affront to their personal morals and are quickly motivated to express their opposition through campaigns such as Ax the Tax.

School funding will likely be the hottest topic spending conversation because it impacts every district differently. If the Kansas Supreme Court rules, as expected, on the constitutionality of the Kansas school spending law and offers a remedy, the legislature will be possibly confronted with both a separation of powers question and how to find an additional six hundred million dollars.

Finally, many candidates campaigned on reinforcing government services such as mental health and the health care safety net. Kansas has to date not chosen to draw down the 90 percent Medicaid matching funds. With the election of Donald Trump and the discussions of Medicaid block grants, many healthcare entities are concerned Kansans will get the worst of all scenarios. They will be paying the higher federal taxes and receiving a permanently reduced block grant.

2017 will likely be a season of new debates, but it will not be the first time we have had discussions on raising taxes and spending money. Even though the Byrd's may have sung the song the best, they didn't sing it first. The words from Ecclesiastes were ascribed to King Solomon written in the 10th century BC.

Much like the song, every legislative session is its own new season. Time has proven these debates are hard and some people rise to the occasion and some fade. 2017 will be no different.