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What to expect in the 2024 legislative session

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The Kentucky General Assembly meets to begin the second part of the legislative session at the Capitol in Frankfort in February.

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The election is over, and now Kentucky's political watchers are looking forward to January, when the legislative session will begin.

This year is a budget session, meaning that one of the legislature's primary duties will be to pass a two-year budget to run the government and all its programs and agencies.

It will also pass a two-year road plan, which includes funding for design, planning, utilities and construction for major state transportation projects like the Brent Spence Bridge and the Mountain Parkway four-laning, as well as local projects across the commonwealth.



Sen. Mike Wilson, R-Bowling Green, said that every representative and senator will spend a lot of time getting their projects into the road plan.

In Warren County, that includes a road widening from the roundabout near WKU to Campbell Lane, he said.

What else is in store for the session?

The Budget

Wilson said that about 90% of the budget will go toward education, incarceration and Medicaid. The other 10% is left to run the government.

He said that he expects about 1,000 to 1,200 bills to be filed, in addition to the budget, though.

Some key education issues include the teacher shortage, school choice measures and chronic absenteeism.

Last budget cycle, the legislature made its highest investment in pensions, K-12 and postsecondary education, said Sen. David Givens, R-Greensburg.

He expects more of the same this year, as well as a continued focus on "systematically and appropriately lowering the personal income tax."

In 2016, Kentucky's income tax was 6%. Heading into 2024, it will be 4%, and many Republicans' goal is to eventually eliminate it through incremental half percentage drops each year the state meets certain financial thresholds.

Economics and Workforce Development

Southcentral Kentucky, alongside the rest of the state, has seen a lot of ribbon cuttings and growth recently, said Sen. Max Wise, R-Campbellsville.

“The problem we're running into is just labor participation – being able to fill those jobs without stealing warm bodies from other employers to go work at these different factories and businesses,” Wise said.

He said the legislature needs to look at housing opportunities for workers and encourage people to develop the skills needed to fill the jobs coming to Kentucky.

The General Assembly has spent \$600 million on workforce training programs, Wise said. During the session, the University of Kentucky will present an audit of these programs.

“The ones that are not working well, let's make changes to find out what we need to be doing and what we're doing right because that's a substantial amount of money of workforce training,” Wise said.

Wilson suggested a potential advertising campaign targeting skilled workers moving out of other states and bringing them to Kentucky.

Givens said one of the Warren County representatives' goals is to communicate to their colleagues the level of investment southcentral Kentucky is going to need for infrastructure, roads, water systems and treatment plants as the region grows.

Families and Children



One factor in workforce participation is child care availability and affordability.

Wise said that child care centers were an omnipresent topic during the interim session.

"There's a lot of areas in urban Kentucky in rural areas of Kentucky that just simply do not have child care centers," he said. "We call those child care deserts."

Legislators are looking at potential public private partnerships to bring more centers to the state.

In 2019, the legislature passed the School Safety and Resilience Act, which mandated SROs and mental health professionals in each school.

However, the mandate was unfunded, and some districts have not been able to afford the additional hires.

Wise said that in light of mental health issues during the pandemic, and continued safety issues, he wants to revisit funding the measure.

"We passed some strong legislation going back to 2019 after the Marshall County event," he said.

"But we've also got to fund this and we've got to make sure that our young people do have the ability to reach out to school social workers, school psychologists, school guidance counselors and all of our mental health professionals as a society."

Vaping is another growing issue among Kentucky's youth, Wise said.

He said to expect some legislation to come up to bolster enforcement of guidance regarding how retail industries deal with minors.

Some schools have gotten creative with vaping prevention methods, including putting up a vaping detector in bathrooms, Wise said.

"We need our school districts to step up with this too and also enforce it because it's becoming a major problem, and it only can lead to worrisome things down the road for children with health effects," he said.

Other issues

A few months ago, a group of Republicans presented an 18-point plan to address crime in Kentucky.

Givens said that he expects there to be a focus on some of these violence prevention measures in the session.

He added that they will likely talk about continued natural disaster recovery, and be open to more aid and support, but that not all of the \$200,000 the state granted to western and eastern Kentucky has been spent yet.

Wilson said to expect talk about autonomous vehicles, particularly in the trucking industry.

He is also concerned about veterans nursing homes, which have recently been understaffed.

Wise said that Senate Bill 150, which he sponsored last session, will likely not see any changes.

Several school districts used a language loophole in the law to avoid enforcing it in its entirety, but Wise said that the Attorney General's Office has taken care of it.

"We've allowed local school districts to have a lot of say so in terms of curriculum and some issues involving that," he said. "... To my knowledge, I don't perceive any significant changes to what we've already done."

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