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Legislative Week in Review: Agriculture, budget & energy

Representative Felicia Rabourn

As Kentucky’s new fiscal year officially began on July 1, lawmakers spent the first week of July laying the groundwork for the year ahead through four Interim Joint Committee meetings and one statutory committee meeting. From reviewing how taxpayer dollars are invested in schools and state programs to examining Kentucky’s prison system, energy assistance, agricultural industries, and education accountability, legislators received updates on the implementation of recently enacted laws while exploring priorities that will help shape future policy and budget decisions. Together, the meetings reflected the General Assembly’s continued oversight of state government as a new fiscal year gets underway.

Interim Joint Committee on Agriculture: Lawmakers heard updates on two industries: medical cannabis and bourbon. Officials with the Office of Medical Cannabis discussed the state’s medical cannabis program, its implementation, and what it could mean for Kentucky farmers and the agricultural economy. Members also heard from the Kentucky Cannabis Industry Alliance about the industry’s outlook. The committee concluded with a presentation from the Kentucky Distillers’ Association on bourbon’s economic impact and its longstanding connection to Kentucky agriculture.

Interim Joint Committee on Appropriations & Revenue: Members examined how Kentucky plans, funds, and prioritizes school construction projects, hearing from the Kentucky Department of Education and the School Facilities Construction Commission about the partnership used to assess facility needs, allocate state and local funding, and help ensure students have safe, modern learning environments. Members also reviewed career and technical education investments that prepare students for high-demand careers and discussed the state budget process, including how the executive branch manages funding appropriated for agencies and programs.

Interim Joint Committee on Judiciary: Members heard from the Department of Corrections on the state’s prison system, inmate population, and reentry programs designed to help individuals successfully transition back into their communities after incarceration. The committee also heard an update from the Kentucky Parole Board on its work and responsibilities. Finally, members received a presentation on House Bill 60 from the 2026 Regular Session, legislation related to geoengineering, from the bill’s sponsor

Interim Joint Committee on Natural Resources & Energy: Members heard a presentation and public comments on Kentucky’s application for federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funding for federal fiscal year 2027, which helps eligible households pay heating and cooling costs. The committee also received an update on the implementation of Senate Bill 8 from the 2026 Regular Session, discussed efforts to provide safe drinking water following disasters, and received reports on the state’s solid waste management plan and utility pole attachments from the Department of Environmental Protection and Public Service Commission.

Education Assessment & Accountability Review Subcommittee: Members discussed a series of reports and updates from the Department of Education and Office of Education Accountability. First, the Department of Education discussed the implementation of HSB 257(2026), which restructured the state’s education assessment and accountability system. Next, the panel discussed career and technical education in the state’s assessment and accountability system. Finally, the Office of Education Accountability presented its annual report.

As always, I can be reached anytime through the toll-free message line in Frankfort at 1-800-372-7181. You can also contact me via email at Felicia.Rabourn@kylegislature.gov and keep track through the Kentucky legislature’s website at legislature.ky.gov.

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Sunset watchers

People attending the River Days festival in Warsaw lined up to watch the sunset at the city's riverfront park, on Saturday evening. Photo by Kelley Warnick

Kentucky Commentary

Sen. Paul wants to take on Fauci

By Bill Straub
NKY Tribune

Get ready, folks. Sen. Rand Paul and former COVID-19 kingpin Dr. Anthony Fauci are preparing to go toe-to-toe yet again for old time’s sake.

Paul, R-Bowling Green has spent the past six years belittling and disparaging Fauci, the former director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, who emerged as the leader of the nation’s pitched battle against the COVID-19 pandemic in the early part of the decade.

Fauci received relatively glowing reviews for his conduct during that depressing time. Not from Paul, who sought to manhandle him for a boatload of sins, both real and perceived, from requiring folks to wear masks to fend off COVID contagion during the early stage.

The exchanges between the two at various Senate committee meetings, which generally devolved into accusations and shouting matches, attracted significant public attention. Now the two warhorses are ready to go at it again.

Paul, who has risen to chair the Senate Homeland Security Committee, has subpoenaed Fauci to appear before the panel sometime this month to answer questions about some of his actions during the pandemic.

Paul is chomping at the bit to get another crack at Fauci, convinced he has the goods to establish that he bears some responsibility for the spread of COVID-19, which resulted in the deaths of about 7 million worldwide earlier this decade, including 1.2 million in the United States.

Paul is confident that the origins of the pandemic, first reported in 2019, resulted from a lab leak at the Wuhan Institute of Virology in China, the primary lab involved in coronavirus research. Fauci, and a reported majority of experts, maintain the epidemic developed through a process called zoonotic transfer, that the virus jumped from an unknown species to humans, most likely at the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market, 10 miles from the Wuhan lab and across the Yangtze River.

The World Health Organization has determined that both claims are plausible and that a more conclusive finding lies with a Chinese government that has more solid information at its disposal. But Beijing, as you might expect, is not playing

ball.

Paul is dismissive of the zoonotic transfer theory despite a historical record providing instances of virus transfers from animals to human.

“This was all misdirection,” Paul said. “This was a conspiracy. This was a cover-up and he has not really gotten his just deserts on this.”

While both theories remain plausible, and with vital information unavailable and in the hands of Chinese officials, the preponderance of the evidence seems to tilt toward zoonotic transfers. For one thing no proof exists that the Wuhan lab even possessed SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

It’s not clear how Fauci might benefit from a cover-up, as Paul characterized it, by supporting the zoonotic transfer over a lab leak. Fauci, in fact, told one House committee, “I have repeatedly stated that I have a completely open mind to either possibility and that if definitive evidence becomes available to validate or refute either theory, I will readily accept it.”

Sounds fair enough. But Paul is out for blood and he’s determined to pile on to the extent possible.

Paul appears determined to show that the COVID virus unleashed on the public was the result of deadly manipulation in the Wuhan lab through a process called gain-of-function,

ultimately resulting in the development of SARS-CoV-2, leading to the pandemic.

Let’s first note that the U.S. funding afforded the Wuhan lab is more modest than popularly thought. The stated purpose of the money was to help fund a six-year project to study the risk of any future emergence of coronaviruses from bats, an area of expertise Wuhan was thought to possess. The money came from two federal agencies.

The funds were specifically not supposed to fund gain-of-function, a type of research the U.S. government generally defined in 2014 as aiming to “increase the ability of infectious agents to cause disease by enhancing its pathogenicity or by increasing its transmissibility.”

Fauci insists the funding did not support gain-of-function at Wuhan. Paul maintains Fauci is lying and that he has the proof through documents related to the funding.

Paul’s job, ultimately, is to establish in everyone’s minds that the lab leak theory is all but proven, a high mountain to climb given the lack of information. Failing to do so would mean the argument about gain-of-function research is inconsequential as it regards the COVID-19 pandemic.

But if you’re a fan of vendettas, stay tuned. . .



Cartoon by John Darkow/Cagle Cartoons