

OFFICE OF THE SENATE PRESIDENT



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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**SENATE COMMERCE COMMITTEE ADDRESSES UNEMPLOYMENT**

**TOPEKA** – The Senate Commerce Committee held a full-day hearing on the state’s unemployment system Thursday, hearing testimony from Kansas Senate President Susan Wagle and unemployed Kansans from across the state, and passing legislation to keep the state in compliance with federal regulations handed down by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

President Wagle spoke on the over 1,000 emails she had received from unemployed Kansans, which detailed the grave failures of the Department of Labor. Such problems included hours-long hold times, calls numbering in the thousands, and even abrupt hang-ups when the virtual queue was “full,” even at 7 A.M.

“To put it quite simply, I am appalled by the absolute failure I have witnessed during this pandemic,” Wagle said. “The administration has blamed nearly everyone, except themselves. I applaud this committee for looking into this matter. I pray our state learns a lesson from this catastrophe, and never fails our citizens in this way again.”

Emotionally-charged testimony was delivered from seven Kansans: Luke Aichele, a barber from McPherson; Jake Baker, a self-employed contractor; Heath Harrington, a xxx; Michael Hotchkiss, furloughed from Textron Aviation; Dale Long, a Human Resources manager; Andreas Vandever, a former manager who has placed over 14,000 calls to the unemployment phone line, and Jim Washington, an on-call Army contractor.

Testimony was also provided by the Department of Labor, including Secretary Delia Garcia and members of the Information Technology team.

Finally, the committee considered legislation to ensure there is no gap in federal funding for the unemployment program, specifically funds coming from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. These changes to the state's unemployment law, including waiving the waiting week and allowing for long-term extensions of unemployment, were placed into Senate Sub for House Bill 2154.

"I am grateful to the Commerce Committee for their commitment to completing a full day hearing on the matter of unemployment, and for listening with compassion to the disparaging stories told by the Kansans our system has failed," said Senator Larry Alley, Vice Chair of the committee. "I am pleased we could pass legislation to help bring the state into compliance with federal mandates created by the CARES Act."

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