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The following is a column by Governor Kathleen Sebelius:

A lot left to do

Soon, the Kansas Legislature will return to Topeka for their wrap up session.

Traditionally this time is used for putting the final touches on the Omnibus Budget Bill and tying up loose ends.

However, this year the Legislature has a lot left to do.

One of the most important issues the Legislature has put off is keeping our commitment to Kansas children and enhancing our investment in early childhood programs.

To ensure that all children are ready to learn by the time they reach kindergarten, I proposed \$23 million in block grant funding for early childhood education.

These grants would also include opportunities for expanded pre-natal care, newborn screening, Parents as Teachers, Early Head Start and quality child care.

My budget also proposed a fourth year of our school finance plan, including \$27 million for all-day kindergarten. All-day kindergarten provides children a stronger foundation for a lifetime of learning.

Unfortunately, the Legislature has postponed early childhood funding decisions until the very end of the session. I am hopeful that when they return, they waste no time in addressing these needs.

As we make these strategic investments in our schools, we must also remember that a child or family racked with illness cannot focus on learning.

Rising health care costs are a burden for families, business owners, workers, and seniors. To address these issues, I endorsed the bipartisan health care reform package crafted by the Kansas Health Policy Authority and requested by the legislature.

This reform package is based on three priorities: promoting personal responsibility for health and wellness; paying for preventative care; and providing all Kansans with affordable health insurance.

The Legislature has basically ignored this comprehensive plan. I urge them to move beyond the incremental steps of the past and endorse the meaningful reform proposals, developed by the Authority with input from health care providers, employers and consumers.

The Legislature has a lot to accomplish in a very short amount of time. They must work together, finding common ground on the issues that are important in every corner of our state. The people of Kansas are counting on them.

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