

Legislative Update No. 6, March 11, 2019

Act II, scene II of the legislative session began March 6. Turn Around Day was February 28. For several days we were on the floor all day debating and either passing out or defeating bills passed out of committees. Generally speaking, this ends consideration for House bills to make it through the process and referred to the Senate for consideration. The exceptions are bills remaining in exempt committees (Taxation, Appropriations, and Federal and State). One other exception is if a bill is considered important by leadership, and then the bill can be referred to an exempt committee. This procedure is known as “blessing a bill.” When a bill is blessed, it can still be presented to the Committee of the Whole for consideration until session ends.

Beginning on March 6, all committees worked on bills sent over from the Senate and on blessed bills. The exempt committees continue work as usual on bills within their committees and the Senate bills are added to their list of bills for consideration. I have authored numerous pieces of legislation this year which has kept me busy writing testimonies and following my legislation through the process.

Blessed or Exempt Bills:

HB 2173 – The Commercial Hemp Bill. I worked with the Department of Ag and revisors on this bill many months before session began. The bill passed out of committee with amendments. Problems developed because of law enforcement concerns. Leadership considers the bill important and the bill was blessed to allow it to move forward. I have been holding meetings with agency leaders to address any concerns with this legislation. The necessary changes are being made, and the Ag Committee will meet to discuss and return the bill to the House floor for a vote. To learn more about hemp and this important legislation go to this link when I spoke with Representative John Barker and Dan Thompson.

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HB 2160 – I introduced this tax bill on behalf of Wabaunsee County to extend the 0.5% sales tax for bridge and road maintenance and repair. Because this is a tax bill it was exempt, and I successfully carried it on the floor for its passage. I have alerted Sen. Longbine who will be watching for it to arrive in the Senate and shepherd it through their chamber.

HB 2274 – Abortion Pill Reversal (APR) legislation. This would authorize the treatment with a specific drug to reverse the RU-486 pill. The bill has been blessed.

House Bills of note sent to the Senate:

HB 2144 – Community College Taxpayer Transparency Act passed and sent to the Senate. This bill would require Community Colleges to publish several items on their web site to include tuition costs, courses that are transferrable, financial information, and property tax information, among other items. I voted yes.

HB 2006 – Requiring the Department of Commerce to create a database available to the public on economic development incentive program information. This will allow the public and the legislature to view all incentives given and evaluate the return on investment (ROI). I voted yes.

HB 2215 – Gives the Kansas State Fair Board authorization to create a non-profit corporation. I voted yes.

HB 2248 – Allows ATV's to cross federal or state highways. I authored this bill following requests from farmers whose land is bisected by a highway. The highway patrol, enforcing current laws, would not allow them to reach their land by using the highway. After visiting with Col. Bruce (Commander of the Highway Patrol), specific language was added to the statutes to allow farmers to use ATV's in this manner. The bill passed the House easily.

Senate Bills of Note in the House:

SB 9 - The KPERS stabilization bill passed the House 117–0. This bill repays the fund money borrowed (not paid when due) in previous years to include interest. The payment is \$115 million. The bill passed on February 26.

SB 22 - Changes Kansas tax law to allow taxpayers to itemize deductions even though they cannot on their federal return (called decoupling). The Tax Committee amended the bill to include a 1 cent reduction in food sales tax and authorization for collecting internet sales tax on those selling goods in Kansas. The amendment limits the tax collection of businesses to those who sell greater than \$100,000 in Kansas. I attempted to amend the bill when it reached the floor to drop the \$100,000 cap on sales to include any sales. After visiting with businesses who sell their products by the internet, I learned this essentially creates an unfair competitive practice for them. They must collect the sales tax when selling to Kansas residents but a competitor from out of state does not have to collect it if their total sales in Kansas does not reach \$100,000. Our tax code should not be protecting out of state businesses from collecting Kansas sales tax when our Kansas businesses must collect it. My amendment failed, however it could come up again in conference committee. I voted yes.

SB 32 – This is the proposed Kansas Farm Bureau Health Plan. This bill is of special interest to members of KFB to be able to have access to a group health plan in the rural areas of Kansas. It would amend the Insurance Code to add an entity to the list of those providing healthcare benefit coverage that are not subject to the jurisdiction of the Commissioner of Insurance. The bill passed the Senate 28–11 and has been referred to the House Insurance Committee.

Other bills I expect to be seen by the legislature before this session ends are: Medicaid expansion, K-12 funding, and possible election bills. The Omnibus spending bill (final budget) and final tax bill are yet to be heard and normally come at the very last to be voted upon. Act III begins when we return for the veto session and it could be quite lively this year. Hopefully not, and we can finish by day 90 as planned.

My schedule has also been full of events and visitors. It was my pleasure and honor to recognize the 2018 Manhattan Christian Homes in Educational Fellowship (CHIEF) Basketball Team for winning the 2018 National Christian Homeschool Basketball Tournament, Jr. High School Boys Division held in Springfield, Missouri. I presented them with a framed House

certificate. The team consisted of Aden Mericle (tournament MVP), Cody Schurle (tournament MVP), their coach Doug Mericle, Dan Zachary, Isiah Upshaw, Joe Delallo, Merick Dugan, Phoenix Vansant, Stephen McNellis, Adrian Simmons, Grant Amerin, Thomas White, Asst. Coach Dequan Simmons, and Athletic Director, Sid Catterson.

More youth spent time with Linda and I at the Capitol. Nathan Holz came as a part of 4-H Citizenship in Action and we enjoyed a long visit with him in the office. He is a Key Award winner who will graduate early from Wamego High School and go on to pursue a degree in Agronomy from Cloud County Community College.

Annie Payne, Maple Hill, and Margaret Archer, St Marys, who both attend St Marys Academy were Pages for me. They had a full day of activities, touring the Capitol including climbing all the steps to the top of the dome, paging during a long session, and spending time in the office discussing Kansas civics with me. Annie's mother Lori Payne joined us as well.

Wabaunsee County Commissioner Joel Fager and Thayne Bush Director of Wabaunsee County Road and Bridge came to my office for a visit before Commissioner Fager and I went to testify before the Tax Committee. Connie Cahoone and Lucas Moody of SOS, Inc. Emporia area, and Mary Sabatini, my former intern also stopped by.

Mary Sabitini, my former intern, gave the keynote address for the Constitution Bee at the KSU Alumni Center on March 3. We attended the event and are very proud of her and the winner Mark McAllister, Emporia, who gave an outstanding impromptu speech and won the \$3,000 scholarship.

Among events we attended were the annual Kansas Livestock Association dinner where we visited with Barb Downey, President of KLA. We met with our Wabaunsee County Treasurer, Linda Coon, along with those from many other counties at their annual event for legislators. We attended two days of the Kansas Republican Convention. Both of us are State Delegates and Linda was elected as Member at Large to the Executive Committee representing the First Congressional District. A highlight for us was attending the baptism for the newest of our four grandchildren.

You can reach me at 458-W, State Capitol, Topeka, KS 66612; ron.highland@house.ks.gov; and 785-296-7310. At my website, www.ronhighland.com, you can find a syllabus that explains in detail how to get the legislative information you need.

It is an honor to serve you as your Representative.

With kind regards,
Ron