

2017 Legislative Update, No. 1, January 13, 2017

First of all, I wish you a Happy New Year and I want to thank you!

It has now been several weeks since the election, and for those who may have missed my message in the local papers, I just want to again express my gratitude and thanks to the people of the 51st District for entrusting me with a third term. It was a hard-fought election against a tough opponent, who deserves credit for giving it her all on behalf of her beliefs.

I also want to thank all who assisted me in various activities - by walking with me, putting up signs, driving volunteers, writing, and all the rest. I simply could not have done it without you. Of course, we knew going in that the election would be close, and for many candidates the prospect of a competitive challenge can cause them to compromise their principles. I have always striven not to do so, not in my voting record nor in the message I take to the door, and I'm pleased to see that my consistent, conservative stands have been upheld by a majority of the voters in my district.

The first week in the new legislative session is usually one of introductions of new members, swearing in, the Governor's State of the State speech, and organization of committees. However, this year is different. We went on general orders to hear new bills and then went to "Emergency Final Action" (EFA) the same day to pass the bills. They were then carried to the Senate the same day for action. This is unusual because it normally takes a few weeks for committees to hear and debate bills before they are passed out to the whole House for consideration.

Two of the bills dealt with our House Rules and another with the Joint Rules for the House and Senate that cover our actions during conference committees. The third bill, HB 2017 was a bill that is what we call a clean-up bill where existing law is either vague or in need of revision. This bill clarifies the requirements for how a new Congressional Representative is elected if the sitting representative is unable to complete their term of office due to resignation or death. The current law was unclear on some of the details of that process. This became of importance when Congressman Pompeo was selected to serve in president elect Trumps administration. It passed without controversy.

The Governor outlined his proposed two-year budget for the legislature on Wednesday following his State of the State address the previous day. Basically, every agency and department is affected, and you the taxpayer as well, in the form of recommended raises in gasoline, cigarette, and liquor taxes. In the coming days I will study all the recommendations made, and if you would like to also study the budget proposal, it can be found at www.budget.ks.gov, volumes 1 and 2, along with the Budget Director Shawn Sullivan's presentation given to the House members. Remember, the Governor's recommendations are only recommendations and the legislature will look at all the details and will make numerous changes before it exits the various committees. The Tax Committee will be the first with proposals. The committee has promised bills to be considered early that deal with income taxes, most notably the "LLC fix."

All new committee assignments for this session were announced by the Speaker, Ron Rykman, two weeks ago. I am Vice Chair of the Federal and State Affairs Committee and a member of

the Transportation and Agriculture Committees. Fed and State (9:00) and Ag (1:30) Committees are live streamed every day at www.kslegislature.com. Transportation Committee meets at 3:30. Transparency in committees has been greatly improved with the introduction of the drop box system, that I first introduced to the House two years ago. This gives you complete access through www.kslegislature.com to all testimonies given in committee, whereas before you needed to be present at the hearing to receive a copy. My Fed and State and Ag Committees are using the drop box system. I look forward to working on these committees and learning about topics in depth. So far we had informational hearings this week to bring the new committee members up to speed on Home Rule, and trucking laws in Kansas.

At my website, www.ronhighland.com, you can find a syllabus that explains in detail how to get the legislative information you need. My contact information is: Rm 561 W, State Capitol, Topeka, Kansas, 66612; and ron.highland@house.ks.gov. There have been problems with some of the Capitol phones, and I hope to have a working number to give you next week. It is an honor and a privilege to serve you.