



2014 Legislative Update No. 12 from Ron Highland, Representative of the 51st District

We were supposed to end the first part of the session on April 4. Because of the education bill, the debate lasted throughout Saturday until 1:30 a.m. Sunday, April 6, ending with the final vote at 10 pm that day. Last week was filled with bills to be passed and many were bundled with other bills.

The House version of an education bill differed substantially from the Senate bill on Friday. Both chambers passed their version and the conference committee, comprised of three members from the each chamber, began their deliberations. A compromise bill was presented to the House Saturday evening. Because the bill was a House bill we voted first. We debated late into the night and then it was voted down. The conference committee began deliberations again. They worked all day Sunday and came to an agreement late. The new bill now had a Senate number; they had to vote first and passed it out. The House met at 9 pm Sunday and after a short debate a vote was taken. It passed with the required 63 votes and now awaits the signature of the Governor.

The Kansas Supreme Court forced the issue and placed a deadline of July 1 to resolve the deficiencies as they saw them. The major part was to equalize funding between school districts. Funding formulas are based on an arbitrary number called base state aid. That number in no way reflects the total amount of money each school receives. The Court recognized this and said all funding sources can be used to report funding for districts and per pupil. With that ruling the actual amount of spending per pupil average across the state is about \$12,500.

The bill also sets up a commission to study the issue in depth. This is needed to evaluate the formulas used because inequities did occur and need to be corrected. The Court also stated that funding is not a final determinant of a quality education. They directed that education outcomes need to be considered. The new commission will have to consider methods for determining outcomes as well as the funding. Their work will be difficult and they have to report to the Legislature by the start of next session in January, 2015.

A part of the bill addresses teacher tenure and removed it from the current system. Teachers are appreciated and respected by everyone. However, because of the system, excellent teachers were

limited to a pay scale determined by seniority and other factors. Our desire is to allow them to negotiate more openly, to give the better teachers an opportunity for just reward. Many believe that teacher's salaries are determined by the Legislature and the Governor. This is not the case. The local school districts determine their budgets, not the Legislature. Salaries are negotiated by each district school board and their teacher's representative(s). Their chosen representation in most cases is their union. Many have said that teacher's rights have been taken away, but they still have due process and Federal and State laws remain in place to protect workers. They have the same rights as all workers.

My vote for the education bill was based upon the knowledge gained from serving on the Education Committee for two years and listening to constituents about what would be best for the children of our state. We found during our meetings that learning to read and the value of a good teacher are the two most critical factors for student success. There are some problems with our education system in Kansas and most of the problems have nothing to do with money. In fact, Kansas ranks fourth in the nation in education spending. Teachers and administrators have ever increasing demands upon them from all sides. State and federal mandates force extra work upon the education system. We are losing good teachers because of these frustrations.

Our rankings in the nation are way below where the Department of Education, the Legislature and Governor want us to be and all are working toward improvement goals. Personal responsibility by all concerned will be required for us to improve student success. The Legislature and the Governor have only started the process with the addition of 129 million in spending along with the changes in the education budget. Parents and all interested tax payers must get involved and hold their elected state and local school boards, who represent them, accountable. We value our belief in local control and to retain that control takes personal involvement.

Most bills passed last week were non-controversial and either corrected technical issues in law or enacted laws that were specific in nature that did not affect everyone in the state. Major bills yet to come during the veto session include the Mortgage fee bill, some energy related bills, and taxes. A couple bills that may be of interest to all were: SB 311-amends the Code of Civil Procedure to increase the cap for non-economic damages in personal injury from \$250,000 to \$350,000 by July 1, 2022; and HB 2057-deals with appointing interim county appraisers and personal property taxes. HB 2057 was a bundled bill that six other bills were inserted into. I refer you to <http://www.kslegislature.org/li/> to read the details of the bills.

It is an honor and a privilege to serve you. We are now in a break until the veto session begins on April 30. During this time I can best be reached by email at ron.highland@house.ks.gov.