

## **2015 Legislative Update No. 13 from Ron Highland, Representative of the 51<sup>st</sup> District**

The Legislative break is over and the difficult process of developing a balanced budget has begun. The Appropriations and Tax Committees met to begin the process in earnest. The House also met to clean up left over bills coming out of Conference Committees. We passed out nine bills this week. At this point of the process, bills are bundled that cover the same topic. Some of the bundled bills had added in four other bills. There is normally not a great deal of debate at this point. We either agree with the Conference Committee report developed by the six member committee made up of three Senators and three House members, or disagree causing the committee to meet again.

For us locally, SB 52 was of importance because it had the Alma Lake Bill bundled in with additional bills dealing with water in some way. Senator Longbine and I entered identical bills into our chambers and were successful getting them through the legislative process. When signed by the Governor, Alma will be able to buy the State's half of Mill Creek Lake. The dam was originally built as a joint effort by the city of Alma and the State. The bill also included wording to allow a more favorable interest rate for the purchase.

We are working from the April revenue receipts and several other forecasting methods to estimate the revenue we can expect for the next two years. The good news is that for 2015 the receipts are above the forecast we received late last year and major adjustments will not be required. The bad news is that the drop in oil and gas severance taxes is expected to remain flat and even decline. The national and international effects on our economy continue to cause many of our problems. In addition to the lower oil prices, other economic factors are increased health care costs, increased food costs, and a general lack of confidence demonstrated by the public. All that said, we must use the existing economic climate to develop balanced budgets for 2016 and 2017 before we can adjourn.

With 165 Legislators and the Governor making proposals, there is no shortage of ideas on how to accomplish the task at hand. Adding to that, we all receive several suggestions from our constituents and of course the agencies, lobbyists, and friends from around the country. I am approaching the issue from a fairly simple point of view. Any changes to the budget or the tax structure must be fair to all, and I also believe it should be a shared effort. If only one segment of the population is targeted for filling the gap, I will oppose it.

With the Education portion of the State budget being held essentially harmless for 2015 – 2017, we have to also look at the other 35% of the budget in the future. The Legislature is asking for an outside group to evaluate every department and agency and recommend changes we can make to improve our services and do it more efficiently. Hopefully this process will begin in the near future.

As for next week, we have been advised that it will possibly involve late nights and weekend meetings to complete the session. May 12 marks day 90 of the session. Speaking for all of us, we want to be done by that date or before then if possible.

I have received over 5,000 messages from many of you and others from outside of my District, either as emails, letters, or phone calls since January. I am not able to respond to every one of them because of time constraints from being assigned to meetings all during the day. However, I do read every one and consider the information provided when deliberating before voting on any piece of legislation. The ones I consider most important are from those of you whom I represent living in District 51. The others from around the state and special interest groups are read, but placed in the context of nice to know. The question I always ask myself is, "First, how does this legislation affect those living in my District, and then how does it affect all of Kansas?"

The Governor has signed several bills into law. The total signed is 41 with one veto, the UBER bill (SB 117). The Governor's media site has the complete list, <https://governor.ks.gov/media-room/media-releases>. We are officially in the Veto Session and the Legislature will have to either ignore the Governor's veto or try to override at some point in the coming days

You can read the bills in their entirety by going to the legislative web site, <http://www.kslegislature.org/li/>. If you need help navigating the site you can go to my web site, [www.ronhighland.com](http://www.ronhighland.com), where there is a syllabus that explains in detail how to get the information you need.

I was kept busy during the break with local events, radio interviews, and visiting with as many people as I could. Much of my time was spent studying the budget and tax situation preparing for the upcoming debate.

I wish to publically congratulate Shawn Hornung and Suzanne Sprenkle for organizing and leading another successful Honor Flight with Wamego High School student involvement. Linda's Uncle Max Gaston was the oldest Veteran of WWII on the trip. It was with pride that I could again announce in the House that the Kansas Sampler Festival was being hosted in Wamego. All who helped put on this successful event are to be congratulated!

My contact information is: 785-296-7310; Rm 561 W, State Capitol, Topeka, Kansas, 66612; and [ron.highland@house.ks.gov](mailto:ron.highland@house.ks.gov). It is an honor and a privilege to serve you.