

Legislative Update No. 13 from Ron Highland, Representative of the 51st District

The 2013 Legislative session is almost over. The last official day will be June 20. We had a short break and then returned for what was supposed to be a short wrap up session dealing with the budget (SB 171) and a tax plan (HB 2059). But, alas, the wrap up session turned into lengthy debates with frequent conference committee meetings to iron out disagreements over details.

The Governor and the Senate were very similar in their approach to dealing with the problems revealed in the 2012 tax law, whereas the House had different ideas. The budget, by law, has to be balanced with a reserve as well. The tax plan then is designed to provide the revenue to meet the budgeted needs. The House conservative members fought hard to include some spending cuts in the overall plan. Some minor cuts were done, but a more detailed evaluation of expenditures is needed. Taxpayers are asking and deserve for the Legislature to look at the entire picture, not just tax revenues to balance the budget. The best explanation of the new tax plan, covering the next five years, was given by Representative Richard Carlson. As Chair of the Taxation Committee, he worked diligently on behalf of the House to present a tax plan that could pass both chambers. His letter was printed in newspapers last week and I would encourage everyone to read it.

Other legislation that became law and was of special interest to many included Second Amendment Protection (SB 102) for Kansans, and a new well defined Abortion law (HB 2253). Both laws lay out very specific guidelines.

As this year's legislative session wore on the public outcry grew concerning Common Core Standards, the newest education plan for the nation. HB 2391 was introduced to pause funding for Common Core Standards which had not already been put into place, and create a committee to study the issue. The Common Core issue resulted in the largest crowds at the Capitol and the most intense lobbying of Legislators that I saw all year. All of our U.S. Senators and Representatives from Kansas have publically stated their opposition to Common Core Standards. Most agree that the federal control over education through No Child Left Behind needs to end. Adoption of Common Core Standards came into Kansas through the back door by Governor Mark Parkinson and then Kansas Commissioner of Education Alexa Posny signing a Memorandum of Agreement which allowed the state to get out from under NCLB if we would agree to implementation of Common Core Standards. The Legislature knew nothing of this agreement and the State Board of Education voted after the agreement had already been made. Seventeen states have had legislation or Governor intervention concerning halting the implementation of Common Core, and four states never signed on, our neighbor Nebraska being one of those. The Kansas Senate passed their version of the bill by a 2 to 1 margin, but HB 2391 missed passage in the House by eight votes. I am sure the next legislative session will deal with this topic again. I voted to allow more time to study the issue.

The Governor signed 133 bills into law this year and vetoed two. I do not expect the Legislature to override either of the vetoes. If you wish to read about the bills passed you may go to www.kslegislature.gov and the Bills and Laws tab, scroll down to Actions and Subject Index Report, and from there you will be able to search a specific bill for the actual legal document and the supplemental note written in understandable language. I use this web site frequently and I must compliment the legislative staff for all of the work they do and for making all of the information available to us in our open government

Darby Leach and Emma McKee from Wamego Middle School served as my last Pages for the session. The young ladies were able to see the House in action, learn about the legislative process, and tour the newly remodeled Capitol. I have enjoyed hosting all of the outstanding young people who have come to Page, and the many whom I recognized for their achievements.

I hold a 100% voting record since I was present and voted on every bill presented in the House. Some votes were difficult, but I did my best to represent you and all the people of Kansas.

I will be traveling the District some during the summer and fall to answer questions and explain more of what did and did not happen this session. If you have specific questions contact me at Ron.Highland@house.ks.gov. I want to thank those of you who have taken the time to become involved in the governing process, and I especially want to thank the newspapers for their important help and role in informing the public.