

2015 Legislative Update No. 2 from Ron Highland, Representative of the 51st District

Legislators are entering bills at a fast pace, and they are being referred to committees to consider. As of today the Education Committee has six bills with several more promised to be sent our way. By far, the most bills have been referred to the Judiciary Committee.

In the Education Committee our legal and research advisors gave presentations on the funding formula and court rulings. We also went over methods for retrieving information from the Dept. of Education and the Board of Regents websites so that each committee member can easily access whatever information they need to make informed decisions. Our committee has gone paperless. This is resulting in the information and testimonies being accessed more quickly, and it is readily available for the committee and the public, as well, through a drop box system. More details about how you can access this information will be coming.

The Appropriations and Tax Committees are pouring over loads of information every day. The budget process is complicated and requires legal advice frequently before moving forward. The current topic is school funding. There is no bill on the budget from the Governor's office yet. Therefore, I cannot comment on a budget I have not seen. We only have the Governor's outline that he presented during his State of the State address; however, a detailed request will be coming soon. Among all of my committees, members are concentrating on improving your children's education and finding ways to reward teachers for their work.

The Attorney General spent one meeting updating us on current litigation. The current cases of interest to us all include: a case against Nebraska over water usage from the Republican River, several others involving fraud within the Medicaid system by both providers and recipients, tobacco settlements, and his office's intention to file an appeal on the most recent district court's ruling on K-12 funding.

The tax code is complicated and the goal is to be fair and equitable to all taxpayers. But, what one party feels is fair, the next party feels is unfair. Therein lays the difficulty. It is my belief that we have a spending problem, and we need to take a closer look at all spending within the State's budget.

Puffy's Steak and Ice House was the gathering place for an enjoyable Saturday evening with constituents from Pottawatomie and Wabaunsee Counties. I meet with the Kansas Register of Deeds Association members in the Capitol Rotunda, and Suzanne Simon, Register of Deeds from Wabaunsee County accompanied me to the House floor. January 22 is always the Rally for Life, and I joined with the many Legislators who stand up for life on the south steps of the Capitol that day at noon.

The decision by Westar Energy Company concerning their transmission line placement will be coming out the first week in February. Many of you in Pottawatomie County have written to me concerning this issue. I meet with Westar officials to share with them your wishes, and deliver to them the letters you sent to me. All of you who wrote will be hearing back from Westar. The usual next step is for the KCC (Kansas Corporation Commission) to hold a public hearing before making their decision. I will share that information when I have it.

You can track bills in all of the committees and listen in on the House or Senate proceedings each day by going to <http://www.kslegislature.org/li/>. The House convenes at 11:00 and the Senate at 2:30. This web site also has the daily calendar with a listing of the bills to be considered that day for both the House and the Senate. This is your government and your Representatives and Senators need to know how you feel about issues before them. My contact information is: 785-296-7310; Rm 561 W, State Capitol, Topeka, Kansas, 66612; and ron.highland@house.ks.gov. It is an honor and a privilege to serve you.