

2014 Legislative Update No. 2 from Ron Highland, Representative of the 51st District

The week was shortened by three events. Monday was a holiday in observance of Martin Luther King. Thursday was shortened to allow members to attend the funeral of Representative Marvin Kleeb's wife, Nancy. She was well respected both at home and at the Capitol. Friday was a pro forma day to allow those, who wished, to attend the Kansas GOP Convention in Wichita.

Wednesday was Pro Life Day at the Capitol with events planned all day. At noon the Governor and all legislators in support of life gathered on the south steps of the Capitol for a rally. I stood for life that day.

The Speaker of the House, Ray Merrick, assigned me to a special education committee as vice chair. He is directing this committee to study the Governor's request for funding of all-day kindergarten in all Kansas public schools. We are to consider the need and the financial ramifications of such a proposal and to make recommendations to the full House membership. I am already hearing from all sides on this issue.

The House passed a piece of legislation, HB 2303, this week. It was a bill from conference committee left over from last session. It raises the fees for driving under the influence (DUI) convictions. A portion of the fees will go to KDHE to purchase Breathalyzer equipment. A portion will also go to the Judicial Branch's Non-Judiciary Salary Adjustment Fund to provide raises to non-judicial court employees who have not received a pay increase for several years.

Testimony from the Kansas Board of Regents President and CEO, Dr. Andy Tompkins, concerning student retention and graduation rates, and Dr. Blake Flanders concerning CTE programing in Workforce Development was made in the Education Committee. We also heard from Larry Isaak representing the Midwestern Higher Education Compact about how the states involved are working to provide reciprocity for classes taught on site as well as on line, making it easier to transfer credit hours. Next week we will hear from the Kansas Board of Regents to determine if they are in support of the desired agreements.

One of the highlights recently was welcoming and participating in the honoring of the Kansas Teacher of the Year awardees. Mary Lonker of Wamego High School was honored as one of the finalists. She is to be congratulated on this great achievement.

Linda and I attended the GOP Convention on Saturday in Wichita. Speeches by Arkansas Congressman Tom Cotton, who is running for the Senate, and Neil Mammen, an Engineer in Silicon Valley, were especially well received. Insight into the current frustrating interworking in Washington was shared by Senators Roberts, Moran, and Congressman Huelskamp. Governor Sam Brownback, Lt Governor Jeff Colyer, Secretary of State Kris Kobach, Attorney General Derek Schmidt, and Treasurer Ron Estes all spoke of how their offices are defending Kansas' sovereignty at the First District meeting. The meeting allowed for a relaxed atmosphere to connect with old friends, make new friends, and to hear from various groups concerning current or proposed legislation.

Kansas Day on January 29 will be a very special day of rededication of the completely refurbished Kansas Capitol. Governor Brownback has a celebration planned for that day. I am

proud to announce that the St. George Elementary Honor Choir under the direction of Janet Armstead will be performing also on Kansas Day at 2:00 on the second floor of the Rotunda. I hope you can join us that day or can come sometime soon to see for yourself the beautiful Capitol, in which Kansans can take great pride.

I had the pleasure of meeting with Duane and Diane Hund, and Judge Carter of Wabaunsee County. Merl Page of Wamego and Glen Coates of Lyon County were also by for a visit. I am honored when people from the 51st District stop by for a visit and share their concerns. Remember, this is your government and your representatives need to know how you feel about issues before us. I can be reached by email, mail or in person at the Capitol. My office phone is 785-296-7310, my email address is ron.highland@house.ks.gov. As always, it is an honor and a privilege to serve you.