

Legislative Update No. 2, January 20, 2017

As I write this week's Update our 45<sup>th</sup> President Donald Trump is being sworn into office. I wish him the very best as he leads this nation.

The second week of the legislature has ended. This week was primarily informational hearings in all committees. That is where different agencies or departments will go before a committee and give an overview of their duties or specifics about some area where they are working. This is primarily for the benefit of new members to the legislature and for new members to the committees. Since all my committee assignments are new, I find the presentations informative and helpful. The topics are selected that will likely come up in bills during the session.

For example; in the Federal and State Affairs Committee, we had briefings by Alcohol and Beverage Control (ABC), Kansas Lottery, and the operation of charitable raffles. In all these briefings, they went over the current laws and were asked if there were changes to the existing laws they would request.

The Agriculture Committee had briefings by the Department of Agriculture on the history and future of farm income. That briefing was both an emphasis on the importance of agriculture to our state and gave sobering facts concerning the declining farm income for this year and the foreseeable future. Another briefing included animal health risk assessment and the preparations in place for an outbreak of disease in our state. The Dean of the College of Agriculture, Dr. John Floros, reviewed the Research and Extension Service and their importance to the state. The last briefing was an overview of the use value property tax calculations for agriculture land. This was a review for me as I studied this in detail during my tenure on the Tax Committee, and have explained this to my urban counterparts in the legislature.

The Transportation committee heard from Colonel Bruce for an overview of the Highway Patrol. Their staffing had been down for a few years, but because of legislation passed the last couple of years they are now approaching full staffing. That is not good news to the speeders traveling our highways. The Revenue Department briefed us on motor vehicle driver's licenses and the new developments in upgrades of their systems, to include a mobile briefcase version of their system. With this system, they will be able to travel to an area of special need and issue licenses on site if needed. Other states have similar services and have had great success. I did learn that Kansas Driver's Licenses are Homeland Security compliant. That means your license can be used as ID for traveling because of the information gathered during the application process. Seven states are not compliant and those travelers must have a passport or other acceptable document to travel within the US.

I was afforded the pleasure and honor of being shadowed by members of the Flint Hills Leadership Program from our area on Thursday. Kellen Liebsch, Manhattan; Shawn Cheever, St. George; Stacie Eiche, Wamego; Tanya Purvis, Westmoreland; and Joe Fanning, St. George came to visit in my office. I enjoyed having them join me on the floor of the House and we continued our visit over lunch. I always learn a great deal when I spend time with people from the district and hope they find the experience worthwhile as well.

If new bills entering committees were birds, the Capitol would be renamed the world's most beautiful aviary. I am somewhat jokingly referring to the notable number of bills that members are either sponsoring or bringing forth on behalf of their constituents. I too am one of those who has entered four bills so far this session. Three are on behalf of either counties or cities within the district dealing with taxes or home rule. The fourth is a school bus safety bill addressing the fines associated with passing a stopped school bus with children leaving or entering the bus. I became aware of how this has become a very serious problem when some transportation directors from school districts informed me on this issue. I will do my best to keep you abreast of the most important bills moving through the system as we progress this session.

Chair of the Joint Committee on Rules and Regulations has been added to my responsibilities by the Speaker this week. This joint committee of the House and Senate meets throughout the year, and brings my committee assignments to four.

At my website, [www.ronhighland.com](http://www.ronhighland.com), you can find a syllabus that explains in detail how to get the legislative information you need. My contact information is: Rm 561 W, State Capitol, Topeka, Kansas, 66612; and [ron.highland@house.ks.gov](mailto:ron.highland@house.ks.gov). My phone number did not change and remains 785-296-7310. Our office assistant is Lisa Davis and if you call for an appointment or wish to leave a message, she will get the information to me. It is an honor and a privilege to serve you.