

Legislative Update No. 2, 2020

This session, unlike sessions of the past, began with both chambers taking up controversial bills. Normally we begin slowly and then the workload increases as we progress. The first bill taken up by the Senate was the “Value them Both” bill, SCR 1613. The constitutional amendment to clearly state the Kansas Constitution does not give explicit rights to an abortion passed the Senate with the required two thirds vote.

The bill was then taken up by the House. After five plus hours of being locked down in the House chamber, the final vote fell four votes short of passing with the necessary two thirds vote. All the Democrats voted no, and four Republicans joined them. The final vote was 80 – 41. The reasons given by the four generally were that the voters of Kansas should vote on it in November instead of August during the primary election. I have learned here that the reasons given are rarely the real reason for a difficult vote.

The real losers here are the Kansas citizens who should have the right to vote and let their representatives know how they want the constitution to read pertaining to abortion in our state. Much was said about how the law would outlaw all abortions in Kansas, and that is a lie designed to defeat the bill. US law clearly protects the right to an abortion. The legislature was only reasserting its right as representatives of the people to regulate the abhorrent practice of abortion to protect the safety of both the mother and the newborn. Without the amendment, all the laws passed to date to regulate abortion will be lost. Kansas could easily become the abortion destination in the Midwest.

There is much talk of running the bill again in hopes of gaining some Democrat votes. The Senate President is threatening to hold up legislation until the bill passes. The Governor is pushing to have Medicaid expansion legislation passed this session and the Senate President is unwilling to allow the debate until the amendment passes. The worry is that if Medicaid expansion passes without the Constitutional amendment, then state tax dollars will be used to fund abortions as has happened in other states. Because of the Hyde amendment at the Federal level, federal funds cannot be used to fund abortion. Without the Constitution amendment, experiences in other states show that current Medicaid dollars will be used to fund abortions, yet another important reason the Constitutional amendment should be passed.

There are other issues of importance working their way through the process. Bills that have passed out of committees and are on the way to the floor for debate include:

Bills to incentivize folks to move into the state and into the rural areas of the state:

- a. HB 2516: First Time Homebuyer Accounts are similar to an education savings account allowing the individual or others to place money into an account for the purpose of purchasing a home. This would apply only to first time home buyers.
- b. HB 2529: Amending Star Bonds by adding rural redevelopment projects and major business and medical facilities to be able participate.

Bills to hopefully aid in the training and retention of workers in our state:

- c. HB 2507: Provides liability protection for businesses that participate in high school work-based learning programs.
- d. HB 2315: Creates the Kansas Promise Scholarship Program. This provides scholarships for students to attend an “eligible postsecondary educational institution.” There would be a requirement to reside in the state upon graduation.

Other bills of interest:

- e. HB 2437: This bill requires easily understood labels for plant-based meat substitute products. Known as the meat analogue or fake meat bill.
- f. SB 294: Truth in Taxation bill that would require local elected officials to vote on property tax hikes, even if the amount is caused by valuation changes. This bill passed by a wide margin in the Senate and will soon be heard in the House.
- g. SB 272: Prevents the state board of tax appeals from increasing property valuations in appeals. Also headed to the House.
- h. SB 295: Prohibits a valuation increase solely as the result of normal repair, maintenance or replacement of an existing structure. Also headed to the House.
- i. HB 2677: An Act concerning health and healthcare; relating to hospitals and healthcare-related facilities; establishing primary health centers as a rural healthcare provider type and enacting the primary health center pilot program act contingent upon state acceptance into a demonstration program under the centers for Medicare and Medicaid innovation.

Mary Clare Halpin is my intern for the 2020 session. She is studying Agriculture at KSU and is a great help for me chairing the Agriculture Committee.

The many forums, events, and recognizing constituents have kept me on the go during the first half of session. My next newsletter will cover all these happenings around District 51 and at the Statehouse.

I can be reached at 785-296-7310, and ron.highland@house.ks.gov. If you call my office you will be speaking to John Willey, my assistant, who schedules all my appointments and keeps me on the run. At my website, www.ronhighland.com, you can find a syllabus that explains in detail how to get the legislative information you need. As always, it is an honor and privilege to serve you and keep you informed with my newsletters.