

Legislative Update No. 3, January 27, 2017

The week began with a trip to Dodge City on Sunday for the 1st District Republican reorganization meeting. Linda and I were elected as Delegates to the Kansas Republican Party convention. Activity at the Capitol the rest of the week picked up appreciably. Every committee is now holding hearings on bills. The Tax and Appropriations Committees are hearing testimonies on different approaches to the LLC “fix.” The most important fact coming out of those hearings is that the revenue return from any change to the LLCs will not yield as much as was promised by many during the campaign. Many options for both tax increases, budget cuts, transfers of funds from agencies, and yes, even K-12 budget cuts have been discussed to date. It is too early to even speculate on what the committee outcomes will be at this point.

The Federal and State Committee has several new bills dealing with various ways to change the current gun laws. All proposals so far range from attempts to either completely repeal the law, to approaches changing the date the law goes into effect for the state’s colleges and universities. Another bill entered committee that proposes changing Columbus Day to “Indigenous Person’s Day.” The chair of the committee determines when any bill is heard and worked.

Law requires the Transportation and Agriculture committees to hear reports annually from agencies or organizations that receive tax-payer funding. The Transportation Committee heard the new Secretary of the Department of Transportation, Richard Carlson. He shared that the roads and bridges in Kansas are in good shape for now, but continued reduction of funds will cause problems in the future. School buses were the focus in hearings this week for seat belt requirements, and my bill, HB2040, allowing cameras on school buses for ticketing when someone unlawfully passes a stopped school bus. This has become a big issue with bus drivers and parents.

The Agriculture Committee heard from the Kansas Water Authority, and the different commodities commissions. The commodities reports are required because they each receive monies from producers through a check off program when they sell their products. The corn, soybean, sorghum, wheat, and sunflower groups gave details on markets, both nationally and internationally, and what they see for the future of the markets. This was a record year for crop production, but low commodity prices are hampering all of agriculture.

Bill activity in the committees were:

Federal and State Affairs: (hearing)

HCR5003 – Urging congress to propose the regulation freedom amendment to the United States Constitution

Transportation: (hearings)

HB2008 – Requiring seat belts on school buses

HB2040 – Citation for overtaking and passing of school buses captured on camera

HB2060 – Increasing registration fees on electric and hybrid vehicles

Agriculture: (hearing and working of bill)

HB2098 – Naming the mined land wildlife area bison herd passed out of committee and sent to full House for consideration.

I elected to take the legislator’s tour of Ft. Riley on Friday, and I found the fort has changed dramatically since I was stationed there in 1969. Other than the old fort area that is being cared for and preserved, I did not recognize anything. We toured the airfield with attention being

given to the drones operated there. Three man teams operate the drones from within a small self-contained metal unit that is easily transported. The drones are large and can stay aloft for over 20 hours. We also toured training facilities for the modern soldier. An individual can sit in front of screens and virtually fly, drive, shoot, traverse a training course, and much more through computerization. They have programmers on staff to develop whatever is needed. Each program is capable of being personalized. The results of a soldier's recent physical training (PT) test is loaded in, thus adjusting the program for each soldier. That area was the only one where we could not take photographs. The day long tour concluded with a visit to the new hospital on post. It is a very modern facility rivaling any civilian facility.

Ross Hauck, Manhattan, an old friend who is the Fire Management Coordinator for the Kansas Forest Service came to see me. He is encouraging us to approve a compact with surrounding states to cross borders to fight fires. This became important because of the devastating fire in south central Kansas last summer when Oklahoma was unable to assist because we did not belong to the compact.

It was my pleasure to have these visitors this week: Kevin Ingram, President, Manhattan Christian College; Matt Lindsey, President, Kansas Independent College Association; Jeanne Copeland, Wamego, representing Kansas Speech, Language and Hearing Association; Dennis Schwartz from the Kansas Water Authority; Dee McKee, Pottawatomie County Commissioner; Terri Humphres concerning the Kansas Pet Animal Act; Karen Garrison, Paxico, representing Certified Athletic Trainers; Jim Carlson and Ford County Commissioner Shawn Tasset representing Kansas Natural Resource Coalition; Bryan McBride, Director of the Wamego Public Library; Judith Cremer, Director of the Pottawatomie-Wabaunsee Regional Library system; Steve Brunk, Director of Family Policy Alliance of Kansas; and Frank Clark, Transportation Director of the Riley School system after he testified before the Transportation Committee.

The Annual Teacher of the Year was honored in the House Chamber this week. We are proud that Lori Stratton, English and Reading teacher at Wamego High School was a finalist. The finalists receive a cash prize, and for one year will travel the state sharing their methods and encouraging other teachers. Way to go Lori.

The Pro-Life rally to commemorate the 44th year of Roe v Wade was held Monday. We legislators gather on the steps to show support for life. I spoke at the annual school choice rally later in the week. Both rallies, held on the south steps of the Capitol, were well attended on very cold days.

We are given the opportunity to have an intern each session. I am fortunate to have Mary Sabatini, a senior in Political Science from Kansas State University, as my intern. She helps me with research and shares thoughts from her perspective on issues before the legislature. Most importantly, she accompanies me to all meetings to learn the procedures and inner workings of the legislative process. We both learn with this arrangement.

At my website, 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. My office assistant is Lisa Davis, and if you call 785-296-7310 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.