

Two weeks are now completed. The committees are working, hearing bills, and holding informational hearings to bring new legislators and new committee members exposure to topics that will be dealt with later in committee. In the Agriculture committee we have heard from the KSU College of Agriculture and will soon be hearing from the Kansas Department of Agriculture and the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.

On the House floor there have been only two votes so far. The first vote was on the House Rules. The rules govern how we conduct business in the House of Representatives and were changed to increase transparency. Now, bills introduced in committee will have the name of the person introducing the bill and who sponsored the bill recorded in the minutes and on the bill index available to the public. Also, amendments such as “gut and go” will be publicly recorded and searchable. The second vote was on the Joint Rules; the rules governing actions between the House and the Senate. The primary focus is on conference committee interactions. I have been asked to serve on the House Rules Committee. This makes me serving on five committees, two of which I chair this session.

Debate on the budget has begun in earnest. The Governor has elected to break tradition of the usual two-year budget done the past eight years and only propose a one-year budget instead. They can make a one-year budget look acceptable, but when the effects are carried forward the true consequences are seen. Her desire is to increase funding in several areas in one year, such as K-12 funding, Medicaid expansion, salary increases, etc., all by sweeping KDOT funds and reducing the state’s payments into KPERS. The state’s future payments into KPERS may be problematic; however, retirees payments are secure. The KPERS Board unanimously voted to send a letter to the Governor stating their disapproval of her reamortization proposal. The letter noted that reamortizing the unfunded liability for another 30 years increases the state’s cost by an estimated \$7.4 billion, and KPERS will be more vulnerable to adverse market conditions for more than a decade. The public is also noting that the Governor did not speak about ending sales tax on food in her Statehouse address, nor is this campaign promise in her budget.

There are five groups within KPERS. The teacher’s portion of KPERS has more than seven billion dollars unfunded, the greatest unfunded liability of all the groups. I am proposing that teachers increase their contributions to KPERS and receive raises identical to the amount of their increased contribution in order to be held harmless. This would make KPERS solvent more quickly. Those monies could not be touched by future Governors or Legislatures. This would also protect against a downgrading of the state’s bond rating, like what happened during the recession under Governor Sebelius.

I have been asked by many people, “What is different this session?” With the legislature, I have noticed little or no change. However, this week when special interest groups came to see me, I noticed a more confrontational and demanding attitude by some. Such was the case when an ACLU group came into my office making demands and they did not want to discuss the pros and cons. I had to escort them out and wonder if they really think their tactics will work with legislators.

The week was busy with other meetings and events. The annual Kansas Chamber of Commerce Dinner featured Dr. Arthur Brooks as guest speaker. The attendance was down due to the ice and snow storm. The weather was bad enough that we stayed in Topeka for the night. We also had the March for Life, and a very well attended indoor pro-life rally that I attended. Educational Freedom Day was also celebrated. There were many children present who are positively affected by school choice. They came to ask for more freedom in education, a movement I support.

Others I met with this week included the Legislative Liaison for Caterpillar, Kansas Association of Nurse Anesthesiologists, Kansas Livestock Association, Kansas Grain and Feed Association, Kansas Agriculture Retailer’s Alliance, Kansas Cooperative Council, local government representatives from Riley and Pottawatomie Counties, and the Kansas Family Preservation Coalition.

You can reach me at [ron.highland@house.ks.gov](mailto:ron.highland@house.ks.gov) and 785-296-7310. My office is 458 W, State Capitol, Topeka, KS 66612. 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

It is an honor to represent you and keep you informed with my newsletters.

With kind regards,

Ron