

### **2014 Legislative Update No. 3 from Ron Highland, Representative of the 51<sup>st</sup> District**

It was a very busy week. The committee work was informational in the Education Committee. Presentations were given on, "What can be done to improve education in America." Other talks included one on the use of technology for teaching, and one by a professor of Educational Psychology from KU. The professor's talk centered on why some succeed and others do not and his research is showing that determination and persistence are more important than test scores.

Education Budget Committee began the task of reviewing the budgets of all public institutions in Kansas. We began with the Board of Regents institutions and looking at the Governor's supplemental budget of each university for next year. We started exploring the K-12 budgets and that will continue into next week. Although a two year budget was passed last session, there will be some minor changes for 2015.

The Energy and Environment Committee heard testimony on two bills. HB 2457 is concerning right of first refusal for incumbent electric transmission owners. Basically, it would allow the large carriers first rights on putting in new power lines. Some of the testimony viewed this as pro big business. The committee will "work" this bill at a later date. HB 2458 is concerned with net metering. This would give the companies the ability to change the credit amount given to customers who have alternate forms of energy production (e.g. solar and wind) for all new customers. They are asking for a more favorable formula to cover their costs of production to act as essentially back up for those customers. As expected, this meeting lasted the longest with both sides presenting both factual and emotional testimony.

I was appointed as vice chairman to the newly created All Day Kindergarten Committee by the Speaker. We are directed to study the proposal made by the Governor during his State of the State address and we will begin meeting next week.

My bill, HB 2454 to amend the current busing law and its 2.5 mile rule was officially submitted to the Education Budget Committee. It will be heard and worked by the committee on February 4 and 5. I've heard from those in rural areas that the current law is especially unfair to their children. Working with them, we developed wording to amend the law that we feel is fair to all parties.

Other committees in both the House and the Senate are busy as well. SB 298 brought many to the Capitol to testify or watch the testimony on removing the mortgage registration fee. On the House side, HB 2453 protecting religious freedom also generated a great deal of discussion.

Linda and I were honored, along with other Representatives and Senators, to be invited to dinner at Cedar Crest by the Governor and his wife Mary. Receptions are held virtually every evening giving me the opportunity to visit with people from the district and their respective organizations. Gary Reser of the Kansas State Veterinary Medical Association, Suzanne Simon, Jennifer Savage, and Dave Steuve from Wabaunsee County, several builders from the Manhattan area representing the Home Builders, and District 51 teachers gathering at Topeka High were just a few of those I was able to visit with last week.

Wednesday was a Kansas Day to long be remembered. There were many visitors at the Capitol to participate in the only official dedication ever held of the Capitol. The St. George Elementary School Honor Choir had a dream to be allowed to sing patriotic Kansas songs at the Capitol on Kansas Day, which made it very special for the choir to perform following the dedication ceremony. They received a short tour of the new ground level and cake was served for all in attendance. I am amazed by the talent of these youth and appreciate Director Janet Armstead, accompanied by Principal Debra Edwards, and Kindergarten Teacher, Edie Jensen, and all of the parents and friends for coming to bring the only young choral voices to the Capitol that special day.

Should you like to follow what is happening at the Capitol, the web site is <http://www.kslegislature.org/li/>. Remember, this is your government and your Representatives and Senators need to know how you feel about issues before them. 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](mailto:ron.highland@house.ks.gov). As always, it is an honor and a privilege to serve you.