

Legislative Update by Representative Ron Highland

March 21, 2020

Thank God we live in Kansas where we are not a densely populated state. The pandemic we are experiencing could affect us less because of our wide-open spaces. Please practice common sense measures to protect yourself and your family. The Covid-19 outbreak changed what was priority this year in the legislature. We had our first adjournment on March 19, two weeks short of being able to finish voting on some very important legislation. Several questions were raised that required legislative action. The most important thing for us right now is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the citizens of Kansas. We passed legislation to help the Governor deal with the situation. All of us now must do our best to comply with the recommendations made by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) and the Center for Disease Control (CDC).

The current number of cases in Kansas will be posted and updated daily on KDHE's website, <https://govstatus.egov.com/coronavirus>. Labs throughout the state are testing for COVID-19. KDHE will continue to report and announce results from labs for Kansas cases. **Please note that the impact of COVID-19 is evolving, and you are encouraged to visit KDHE and the CDC's websites for the most accurate and up-to-date information:**

KDHE COVID-19 Fact Sheet: http://www.kdhe.ks.gov/coronavirus/download/COVID-19_One_Pager.pdf

KDHE COVID-19 Resource Center: <http://www.kdhe.ks.gov/coronavirus/index.htm>

KDHE Hotline Number: 866-534-3463 (Monday-Friday 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.)

CDC COVID-19 Resource Center: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

CDC COVID-19 Cases in the U.S.: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-in-us.html>

Legislation we have passed to deal with this emergency:

H Sub for SB 102: AN ACT concerning courts; relating to extension or suspension of deadlines or time limitations to secure the health and safety of court users, staff and judicial officers. This bill is required to give the Chief Justice the authority to extend the time needed to hear court cases. The right to a speedy trial is an important feature of our laws but because of the emergency, we must adjust so that dangerous criminals are not released due to a lapse in time to get them to trial.

H Sub for SB 142: AN ACT concerning education; relating to the duration of the school term; authorizing the grant of a waiver from school term requirements. This allows the school districts to apply for waivers to close for extended periods without having to make up the days. The Governor with the emergency powers has directed all school buildings to close for the rest of the spring semester. The Regents schools have followed as well by conducting all classes by internet. We passed this bill to give the education professionals the opportunity to make the decisions that would best serve their communities.

HCR 5025: A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION ratifying the March 12, 2020, State of Disaster Emergency declaration issued by Governor Laura Kelly and providing for the continuation thereof for the entire 105 counties of Kansas through May 1, 2020. By law, the Governor can declare an emergency for 15 days that can be extended for 30 additional days at a time by the State Finance Committee. The committee only meets a few times throughout the year and could

jeopardize our efforts. The legislature decided to give the Governor an extended period to deal with the current situation with some limitations. We are planning on returning to the Capitol by that time and can extend the authority if the situation warrants.

H Sub SB 27: AN ACT concerning employment security law; relating to the maximum benefit eligibility period; compensation for the pre-payment waiting period. The closing of many businesses during this emergency will be affecting many workers. The legislature decided it was necessary to extend the time for receiving benefits from 16 weeks to 26 weeks. The bill further makes the eligibility retroactive back to January 1. The current balance in the Unemployment Fund is approximately one billion dollars and the Department of Labor is confident they will be able to handle the extra workload.

A new ten-year transportation plan was passed. The Eisenhower Legacy Transportation Program replaces T Works. It is **House Substitute for SB 173:** AN ACT that will authorize and direct the Secretary of Transportation (Secretary) to initiate a program to be called the Eisenhower Legacy Transportation Program (Program). The bill would specify the types of projects authorized, address local funding and new and continuing grant programs, authorize alternative procurement methods under certain circumstances, increase city connecting links payments, add reporting requirements, require at least \$8 million to be spent in each county through FY 2030, state 16.154 percent of sales tax shall be levied for the State Highway Fund (SHF), and make additional changes to law.

By law, the legislature must pass a budget, there are no exceptions. We are planning on returning after the pandemic scare subsides to complete our business of taking up the bills set aside and fine tuning the budget. The goal was to pass a budget so the government can function. However, it does not have all the add-ins associated with a final budget, called the omnibus bill. A budget bill passed that will keep the state running in case we cannot come back to vote on the omnibus bill. It is **SB 66:** AN ACT making and concerning appropriations for fiscal years ending June 30, 2020, June 30, 2021, and June 30, 2022, for state agencies; authorizing certain transfers, capital improvement projects and fees, imposing certain restrictions and limitations, and directing or authorizing certain receipts, disbursements, procedures and acts incidental to the foregoing.

I voted yes on all the bills mentioned above, except a no vote on the budget. We all know that there will be revenue shortfalls because of the current economic crisis and SB 66 has allocations that cannot be sustained with a downturn in the economy.

I am receiving calls and emails asking how to contact the Governor's office. The phone number is 785-368-8500. There is no email address for the Governor, however at the official website you can leave messages. That web address is: https://governor.kansas.gov/serving-kansans/constituent_services

It is an honor to serve you and keep you informed with my newsletters. I can be reached at ron.highland@house.ks.gov. At my website, www.ronhighland.com, you can find a syllabus that explains in detail how to get the legislative information you need.

With kind regards,
Ron