

Legislative Update No. 4

Legislators are facing deadlines. The last date an individual can request a bill to be drafted was February 4 and the last day for bill introductions by individuals is February 13. Committees have the authority to introduce bills as well. Their final dates are February 11 for requesting a bill be drafted and February 15 for introduction of bills. Those deadlines will cause the committees to work quickly once they receive bill assignments by the Speaker of the House. The last day for non-exempt committees to meet is February 28.

My Rural Revitalization and Commerce, Labor, and Economic Development Committees have been overlapping somewhat in content. Both have spent time discussing economic development, the available grants, tax abatements, and other incentives. Generally speaking, the incentives are designed for larger employers and organizations. Our focus, in my opinion, should be more for smaller operations, especially in the rural areas.

The most alarming to me was when we asked for information on existing programs, enabling us committee members to understand where the money has gone, what was the return on investment, and if the desired outcomes had been attained. We were given little information and told much is confidential and that we could not have the information that we requested. The Department of Commerce further told us that they did not have county and municipal economic development information. This alarmed many on the committee and bill drafts are being developed to rectify the situation.

The Rural Revitalization Committee heard from speakers on rural grocery stores, crop alternatives, farm to market initiatives, city-county consolidation, and broadband. To say the least, many of the discussions were depressing in some ways, but I remain optimistic of opportunities for the betterment of rural Kansas.

The Commercial Hemp Bill has been introduced in the Agriculture Committee and we will be earnestly working on that bill this month. It is complicated and as chair of the committee I will take as many days as necessary on the bill to ensure we have a workable product when it passes out of committee.

Finally, I want to re-cap the KPERS discussion that I introduced last week. Many of you contacted me with questions on the future of your retirement checks. Presently, KPERS has a balance of approximately 19 billion. Current retirees and, for a time, future retirees need not worry. My point is, that in the near distant future the system cannot be relied upon if current trends continue. As legislators, you have asked us to handle your money (taxes) wisely for today and for the future, realizing that another recession will happen at some point in time. We must plan for the worst and wisely invest during the good times.

Kansas Day was January 29 when we celebrated our 158th year of Statehood with the singing of Home on the Range in the House and birthday cake for everyone in the Capitol. To celebrate this special occasion, Happy Birthday Kansas! Student Photo Contest winners come to the

Statehouse. Among the 400 entries, there were 25 winners. I am happy to announce that Colby Taylor, Alma, won among all the 4th graders in Kansas with his photo titled, Ranching Roots in the Flint Hills of Kansas, picturing his dad and sister, Cait, horseback riding among their cattle. Colby's parents are J R and Callie Taylor.

I was pleased that Wabaunsee County Commissioner Joel Fager spent time with me in Commerce Committee and visited with me in my office. Additional visitors were Mike Armstrong, Water One; Carl Johnson, Mo. RAC; Alice Weingartner, GraceMed, Community Care Network of Kansas; Renee Hively, Flint Hills Community Health; S. Knight and V. Conkle, Center/CCN of Kansas; Taylor Williamson, Kansas Wheat; and Kim Austin, Andover Augusta Rail Trail Initiative.

There was a huge Sunflower State Trail Appreciation Day at the Capitol. While I had to attend other scheduled meetings, Linda spent much of the morning and lunch hour learning about the vast number of private and state-run trails set aside to explore our beautiful state. She also visited with Renee Hoffman at the Marshall County display about all the trails close to her family's farm back home.

Some of the other groups who came to meet with legislators were KS Electric Cooperatives, Public Accountants Association, Family Policy Alliance of Kansas, County Clerks, Independent Telephone Association and Rural Independent Telecommunications Coalition, and the Cyrus Hotel Grand Opening.

You can reach me at 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 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