

2014 Legislative Update No. 4 from Ron Highland, Representative of the 51st District

The snow storm changed everyone's plans and caused the Legislature to meet only Monday, Thursday and Friday. The bill I was scheduled to introduce on Tuesday has been postponed. Schedules for committee meetings are now compressed and those testifying are asked to shorten their presentations to make up for lost time. There are no plans for eliminating topics or for extending the session at this time.

The Education Committee continued to hear from experts. One speaker, Dr. Eric Hanushek, from Stanford University discussed his research of many years showing no real correlation between money spent and learning. He argues that those schools that perform well should be rewarded and that good teachers should be compensated better. I found his approach to be one of common sense and all of the committee was also interested, as indicated by the number of their questions. Later in the week we listened to presentations from Dave Trabert of the Kansas Policy Institute and Commissioner Diane DeBacker from the Kansas State Department of Education. Both presented on K-12 funding and the performance of our students. They agreed that our Kansas student's performance based on NAEP scores are not improving. They did disagree on the funding and whether or not increased funding would help raise the scores.

The budget review process is continuing by the budget sub-committees and the Appropriations Committee. Each sub-committee sends two representatives to the weekly Appropriations Committee with their committee recommendations and they are questioned why they decided to support or amend the budgets proposed by the various agencies or the Governor.

The Education Budget Committee reviewed several budgets from the Schools for the Blind and Deaf, State Library, Historical Society, Behavioral Sciences Regulatory Board, and the Board of Healing Arts. It is interesting to hear the different missions and just how they spend your tax dollars.

One bill was passed out of the Energy and Environment Committee. HB 2488 is a bill that defines both the duties and makeup of the KETA (Kansas Electric Transmission Authority). It was not controversial and passed out without opposition. Our committee took a tour of Westar's Transmission Control Center in Topeka. The room that we could only look into through glass is very secure and reminded me of NASA's control center. All the power lines and energy production areas are on a very large board and the operator can route electricity according to the supply and demand. Differing opinions on what we should be using to produce electricity became apparent during the visit. The cost to the customer isn't always of concern for some.

The House passed four bills by voice vote to be referred for final passage next week. HB 2514 amends a current law to clarify the priority rights of Federal Home Loan Banks as secured creditors in insurance company insolvency proceedings. HB 2416 amends the Health Care Provider Insurance Availability Act concerning health care provider liability insurance. HB 2223 is the "Home Brew" law. Basically the existing law was amended to allow up to 100 gallons per year to be produced and allows a person to provide it to their guests and to judges in a contest. HB 2420 was simply a bill to allow specific governing bodies to supply crossing guards for a school in their jurisdiction.

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 and my email address is ron.highland@house.ks.gov. As always, it is an honor and a privilege to serve you.