

Legislative Update No. 5, March 12, 2018

If you live in the Wamego area, we received some very good news last week. The Governor declared the K-99 improvement project a priority and asked that work on it should begin as soon as possible. Myself, Secretary Richard Carlson, and others have been working to push this project for a few years now and the work has paid off. This year I invited Merl Page, City Manager of Wamego, and Jim Halloran, representing Caterpillar, to a joint Transportation Committee meeting to further emphasize the need for K-99 improvements to support the growth of Caterpillar and the increased business development in the area. Planning meetings will begin this week, and with everyone's help, work on the stretch of highway from Wamego to I-70 in Wabaunsee County will now become a reality.

The committees are working on left over bills that have been "blessed" or originated in exempt committees. They are also hearing and working bills that were sent over by the other chamber. In our case, we are hearing Senate bills. In Federal and State Affairs Committee this week we had a 3rd and a 4th grader testifying in favor of passing a bill to name the state rock as limestone, galena as the state mineral, and jelinite as the state gem. They did great. It is a joy to see young people getting involved and participating in the governmental process. The channel catfish was also named the state fish. The bill passed out of committee easily.

This is the time of year when students and their parents are evaluating universities, colleges, community colleges, and technical schools for next year. I want to remind everyone about an excellent resource. I chaperoned the Prospectus bill through Education Committee that requires the Board of Regents to publish the degree or certificate programs each university, college, community college, or technical school offers along with detailed information on time to graduate, expected costs to complete the program, estimated time to pay back loans that are expected to be used, the average starting salary upon graduation, and the expected salary after five years. This information is found within the Kansas Board of Regents web site: https://ksdegreestats.org/program_search.jsp.

Additionally, when doing comparisons, the private colleges also have a web site for information on their programs. The Kansas Independent Colleges and Universities Legislative Handbook is published annually by Kansas Independent College Association (KICA). I find this publication to be very informative and would be useful in making career decisions. That site can be found at: <http://www.kscolleges.org/assets/docs/Legislative%20Factbook%20working%20file%202018.pdf>.

Bills of interest:

SB 405: A bill setting in statute department of health and environment rules for laying and broiler hens. Although there was emotional testimony by those living around Tongonoxie where they successfully stopped the building of a processing plant, there are two counties that would welcome the business and desired that our statutes be strengthened. It passed both

chambers and now goes to the Governor for signature. This bill is required for any future development of poultry production in Kansas.

Sub HB 2572: This requires the Department of Commerce to create a database of economic development incentive program information. This will be searchable by everyone to determine the programs supported, their costs, and eventually what was the return on investment (ROI). This is a transparency issue that I supported and is supported by the majority of Kansans.

HB 2740: This bill was heard in the Tax Committee and proposes an increase in the statewide property tax levy for K-12 education. Currently the rate is 20 mills with the proposal of going to 38.43 mills by 2020. As expected many came to testify against, especially owners of farm ground. It has been said this bill will never go anywhere. I don't support this proposal and caution everyone that because it has been heard it is alive until the session is officially over.

HB 2416: This bill provides tax credits for companies that hire blind and/or disabled workers, making it easier for them to find work. This bill found unanimous support by the House and now goes to the Senate.

The beginning of the Conference Committee phase has also begun. Bills that have passed both the Senate and the House, but with differing language and a motion to nonconcur, are assigned a conference committee to work out the differences. In some cases, it is determined that acceptable changes are made by the Senate, then the motion to concur is made and a vote taken. A majority vote of yes sends the bill to the Governor.

Transparency in the Statehouse is improving even more this week with the announcement of video live streaming in the House and Senate. This is the time when session times fluctuate, but usually the House meets at 11:00 and the Senate at 2:30. The link is:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_0NO-Pb96CFABvxDwXAq8A

Every year I attend the Constitution Bee held at the KSU Alumni Center and am amazed at the opportunity this gives our youth to learn about our Constitution and compete for scholarships. I gave a presentation to the 912 Club in Topeka that was a compilation of my research to date covering debt, declining state population, the state budget, Ag economics, and taxes. Saturday morning began early with a Manhattan Chamber forum. The audience questions centered around transparency in the legislative process and funding for both K-12 and higher education. I shared with the audience that serving in the legislature one quickly learns that it is a competitive process and an obligation of the representative to do his own research and educate others. One of my goals this year has been to educate others about agriculture and its importance to our state. Those of us representing areas, where agriculture is of great importance, work daily to keep unnecessary regulations and laws from making it more difficult for the farmer and rancher to feed the world and make a profit.

Sunday was a special day in Wamego when the Flint Hills Messiah Chorus and Chamber Orchestra gave its 27th performance of Handel's Messiah. Musical talent from all over District

51 and beyond put on this amazingly beautiful production under the direction of Christine Day and Janet Armstead, both of Wamego. I have enjoyed attending, and Linda has enjoyed singing in the chorus for seven years.

Visitors to my office were Allyson Bowers, Kansas Farm Bureau Insurance; Beth Smoller, Kansas Association of Insurance Agents Board Member and Charlson and Wilson Insurance Agency; Don Hill, Emporia State University Government Relations Liaison; Diana Kuhlmann, C.P.A., Vice President for Administration and Finance, Emporia State University; and Linda Adams-Wending, Ph.D., Chair and Professor Department of Nursing, Emporia State university.

It is my honor to represent you and keep you informed with my newsletters. At my website, www.ronhighland.com, you can find a syllabus that explains in detail how to get legislative information. My contact information is: Rm 561 W, State Capitol, Topeka, Kansas 66612; 785-296-7310; ron.highland@house.ks.gov. I look forward to hearing from you.