

## Legislative Update No. 5, February 18, 2019

If you think of the legislative session as a three-act play, we are in intermission following Act I. The opportunity for individuals to enter a bill into the process ended Monday, February 11. Committees can enter committee bills for another week. 134 Senate bills and 218 House bills have entered the process for consideration so far. The chairs of the committees will evaluate the contents of each bill assigned to them and select those that are most important to work on. This is done while consulting with the members of the committee and with the realization of the time limitation. Everyone feels their bill is the most important and some have their feelings hurt when their bill does not make it out of committee, but we all realize the selection process must be done.

Act II begins next week. Committees will have hearings and work bills for the next two weeks. The difficult bills may take a few days to get through the process and either pass out favorably or be voted down in the committee. The bills that pass out of committee are listed below the line in the daily calendar. The Speaker determines what bills are brought above the line for the Committee of the Whole to debate and either pass for final action or are defeated by the Committee of the Whole. The Committee of the Whole consists of all 125 members and those debates can be interesting, entertaining, and at times very passionate. If a bill makes it through, then the next day we have final action where each member's vote is published for the record.

Act II continues with February 28 being "Turn Around Day." That is the day when the House and Senate exchange all bills passed by their respective chamber. The committees then work on the Senate bills referred to them. Act II ends on April 5<sup>th</sup>. During the month of March, Senate bills passed by the House and House Bills passed by the Senate are either the same and no further work is needed, or if there are differences, then conference committees will meet to compromise on language. Once a compromise agreement is made then the House and Senate each vote on the final bill. At any point along the way a bill can fail. The process was designed to be difficult and frustrates some, but generally speaking, the process does work well.

The Agriculture Committee will be holding hearings on the new Commercial Hemp Bill. Last year we passed the hemp research bill that contained many constraints on who could grow the crop and how the crop would be monitored by the Department of Agriculture. The US Congress passed the Farm Bill in December of last year that removed hemp from the controlled substance list making the product now available for commercial production. A new bill has been written, and now the committee will go through the bill, line by line, and hear testimonies. The following week only the committee will be working to finalize the bill with amendments, and then voting on the final version.

The Commerce, Labor, and Economic Development Committee has heard a couple bills of little or no controversy and held two interesting informational hearings on "Teaching the Morality of Free Enterprise" by Derek Yonai, Director for the Koch Center for Leadership and Ethics at Emporia State University, and the Kansas Chamber of Commerce's CEO Poll and Annual

Competitiveness Index, by Alan Cobb, President of the Kansas Chamber of Commerce. Dr. Yonai's talk centered around how business schools are doing an excellent job of teaching students how to make money but very little about interaction with others, especially their employees. He emphasized how everyone needs to be valued and how important it is to recognize all employees for the success of any business endeavor. Mr. Cobb informed us about how CEO's view their needs for employees and their need for less interference from government. It was good to hear Mr. Cobb's information from those operating a business and their request to have fewer government interferences.

Rural Revitalization Committee continued with topics impeding rural Kansas development. The bulk of the week was spent on presentations by rural telecommunications companies. Each gave an overview of their business model and the reasons for slow development in the broadband roll out. Broadband requires the laying of fiber-optic cable to each business and residence and is a very expensive project. The numbers are from \$40,000 to greater than \$60,000 per mile to lay, and then around \$6,000 to attach to the residence or business. Because of the lack of population, the cost can be prohibitive. We heard of the new Farm Bill program with USDA providing some money for broadband development, for which those rural companies are competing. Other programs are available on a competitive basis, such as KUSF and USF funds, which are also used by those companies. A disturbing finding was that the geographic areas assigned by the FCC to each company were somewhat arbitrarily assigned several years ago. Plans are underway to petition both FCC and KCC to define areas of need based upon census rather than arbitrary boundaries.

The House has not passed any bills considered controversial in nature so far. However, the Senate passed two bills out last week that have caused a great deal of discussion with some of the rhetoric being of a nature that Mr. Rodgers would not have approved. SB 9 is a bill that pays into KPERs monies owed to catch up for 2019, and SB 22 is a bill that de-couples the Kansas tax return from the Federal Tax return. If passed, this would allow Kansas taxpayers to itemize even if they could not on the Federal form. This is not a tax break. This is to align the taxation as the legislature intended with last session's tax bill. Both these bills are not what the Governor intended, and I would guess with some confidence both will be vetoed if they reach her desk. The big question is whether the veto can be overridden with two thirds vote in each chamber. The plot thickens.

The rest of my "free time" was spent in meetings with constituents, by phone or in person, with most wanting to discuss industrial hemp, limestone severance tax, or Medicaid expansion. Two highlights were having Joey Thooft from Paxico as my page on Tuesday and having the privilege of honoring the Kansas Farm Bureau with a resolution for their 100-year anniversary. Farm Bureau President, Mr. Rich Felts and his wife Shirley joined me at the Well of the House for the presentation. Then all of us Farm Bureau members gathered together for a lunch. Additional events that we attended this week were the Flint Hills Regional Leadership Program Dinner at the Columbian Theatre, and the Ag Appreciation Night at Kan-Equip.

Visitors were Stefanie Spade and Sarah Hachmeister, Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence; Janet, Teva, and Joseph Thoft, Paxico; Laurie Pieper and Tom Byler, Kansas Small Business Development Council; Dr. James, Kathy, Luke, and Courtney Hurtig, American Cancer Society; Mary Reed Spencer, Lake Wabaunsee; and Deborah Facta, Youth Core Ministries/ Core Circles.

You can reach me at 458-W, State Capitol, Topeka, KS 66612; [ron.highland@house.ks.gov](mailto:ron.highland@house.ks.gov); and 785-296-7310. At my website, [www.ronhighland.com](http://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 serve you as your Representative.

With kind regards,  
Ron