

## **2015 Legislative Update No. 5 from Ron Highland, Representative of the 51<sup>st</sup> District**

Most committee meetings were cancelled on Monday for Senators and Representatives to attend Annette Hedke's funeral. Linda and I went down to Wichita on Sunday to spend some time with Dennis and his family.

The rest of the week was very busy. The committees are presenting the bills they passed to the House for debate and final action now. Most of the bills passed by the House this week were primarily dealing with minor changes to laws allowing for more efficient government. All committees are working hard to hear and vote on bills remaining in their committees. The deadline for non-exempt committees to finish their work is February 24. The bills passed by the House then will go over to the Senate for their consideration. If they agree and pass the bills as written, they then go to the Governor for signing. Those that are not agreed upon by either chamber then go to a joint conference committee to hopefully agree on specific language that both chambers can pass.

One item of business that still remains undecided is the rules for how business between the House and Senate during joint conference will be conducted. Until these rules are agreed to, any bill requiring a joint conference will be delayed. We are hoping the issue will be resolved soon.

The Education Committee held hearings on HB 2034, reducing school district negotiable terms and conditions in the Professional Negotiations Act. Basically this reduces the amount of items the state requires (mandates) for negotiations to salary and wages. If both parties in the negotiations want to negotiate more items, it becomes their choice. It passed in committee. Hearings were also held on HB 2232, requiring a personal financial literacy course for high school graduation; and HB 2099, authorizing school districts to administer certain surveys and questionnaires under the Student Data Privacy Act. There was an informational hearing on how school districts are implementing and adhering to the Data Privacy Act passed last year. Because of the sensitivity of our children's personal information, we feel this topic justifies a closer look.

The Appropriations Committee is hearing the various sub-committee reports on the budgets they have reviewed. This will continue until all agency and education institution budgets are heard. The discussions are lively at times and the spending of millions of dollars in virtually every budget is at times mind boggling. It is my opinion that a closer look at spending needs to be a high priority.

The Tax Committee is looking at the request for increasing cigarette and liquor taxes and held hearings to gather factual information. The communities and businesses along bordering states have voiced their displeasure with the proposal. We had a hearing on bed & breakfast facilities that are being taxed as commercial facilities, and they offered language to amend the law. That classification has the potential of forcing some to close. We will work that bill, HB 2168, at a later date.

I entered a bill and testified before the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee this week. HB 2156 allows the city of Alma to purchase the other half of Mill Creek Lake from the state at a more favorable interest rate. The bill will be worked next week. The Senate committee hearing the same bill

has already passed it. Next it will be on to the full House and Senate for passage, and hopefully it will become law before session ends.

It was my pleasure to recognize the Rossville High School Football team for their great accomplishment of winning the State 3A Championship. The Coaches, Derick Hammes, Dan Schneider, Jeremy Stephenson, Ian Peters, and Brad Anderson; Athletic Director Derek Dick; Principal Toby McCullough; and Superintendent Kerry Lacock were presented a Certificate of Recognition from the House of Representatives on the floor of the House. All of the players were present in the Gallery and received a standing ovation from the House, and then went on to spend much of the day touring the Capitol as part of their daylong celebration of their achievement.

The new President of Fort Hays State, Dr. Mirta Martin, along with Debra Prideaux, Alumni and Governmental Relations Director, and Jenni Rose, Legislative Liaison came for a meeting in my office. I have enjoyed learning of the many FHSU initiatives.

I also spent time with Brooke Powers, a Wamego student at Bethel College, and Joey Jadlowski, Student Body President at Benedictine College. Mary Reed Spencer came to visit representing Kansas MS Society. I also attended the Travel Industry Association of Kansas event, met with the American Legion/VFW members, and visited with District 51 Treasurers Linda Coon, Wabaunsee County; Lisa Wright, Pottawatomie County; Sharon Gaede, Lyon County; and Shilo Heger, Riley County at their Association reception. The week ended with two events at home in Wamego, the Chamber Ag Appreciation Night and Republican Founder's Day Dinner.

My contact information is: 785-296-7310; Rm 561 W, State Capitol, Topeka, Kansas, 66612; and [ron.highland@house.ks.gov](mailto:ron.highland@house.ks.gov). It is an honor and a privilege to serve you.