

2014 Legislative Update No. 5 from Ron Highland, Representative of the 51st District

Some of this week's activities were controversial, to say the least. However, as usual there are always at least two sides to every story.

The most controversial event of the week was the House of Representative's vote on HB 2453. The bill was written to prevent charities, small business owners or individuals from being harmed and from having legal action taken against them if they refuse to do business with anyone because of their religious convictions. In light of events taking place in other states where businesses, and especially Catholic Charities, have been targeted with lawsuits and other forms of harassment in order to close them down, we wanted to pass a law to protect them from such activities in Kansas. Freedom of religion is an essential liberty that must be protected. It sounds simple that we should protect everyone's right of religious convictions and protect a business's rights. However, some have taken the view that this bill is discriminatory and that was never the intention. The vote was nonpartisan with both Democrats and Republicans in support. I voted yes on the bill.

The Senate had hearings on SB 323, concerning conservation easements. The language in the bill is written to limit an easement to the life of the grantor. Many people drove long distances to testify on this bill. Those for the change cited examples of losing their land and the hardships endured by them and their heirs after signing a conservation agreement. I am hearing about the problems watershed districts are having with the imposing rule of perpetuity agreements.

The Energy Committee attempted to pass HR 6043, a resolution (basically a letter) to the U.S. Congress and the President that we in Kansas are not supportive of the President's climate change action plan, nor are we in favor of the EPA's proposed regulations concerning CO₂ being categorized as a pollutant. I testified for the resolution because the science cited is flawed. In the end, the majority of the committee voted to table the bill. I am hopeful it will come back to be heard.

The Energy Committee held hearings on HB 2636. This bill is an attempt to give the Kansas Department of Health and Environment guidance on how to deal with the expected EPA regulations being proposed. It would give them the flexibility to average the CO₂ emissions by all power generators within the state. The reasoning being, that if each site is calculated separately, the coal generators would be deemed out of compliance and subject to closure. We also want to show the EPA that as a state we are going to regulate Kansas' energy needs.

Bills passed by the House of Representatives that were forwarded to the Senate were: HB 2514, an act concerning insolvent insurance companies, pertaining to certain exemptions for the Federal Home Loan Bank; HB 2516, an act concerning health care provider liability insurance, relating to mutual insurance companies organized to provide health care provider liability insurance; HB 2223, an act concerning alcoholic beverages, relating to homemade fermented beverages; HB 2420, an act concerning school crossing guards; HB 2488, an act concerning the Kansas electric transmission authority; purpose and composition of authority; and creation of a transmission advisory council; HB 2446, an act concerning courts; relating to the court trustee operations fund; HB 2429, an act concerning the Kansas water appropriation act; HB 2418, an act concerning the adult care home licensure act; pertaining to rules and regulations; H Sub for

SB 245, an act making and concerning appropriations for fiscal years ending June 30, 2014, June 30, 2015, and June 30, 2016, for state agencies; HB 2422, an act concerning property taxation; relating to watercraft; definition, levy of tax, and exemptions; and, HB 2464, an act concerning taxation; relating to deductions, privilege tax; certain depreciable property. To read the bills and the supplemental notes written for the specific bills, you have to go to <http://www.kslegislature.org/li/>.

I attended receptions held during the week and met with representatives of the Kansas Firefighters Association, the Kansas Travel Industry Association, and the Kansas American Legion/VFW (of which I am a member). I especially enjoyed visiting with Jon Epler and Kendra Frasier, who represented Wabaunsee County during the Kansas Farm Bureau meeting and dinner. It is good to see younger people getting involved and taking an active role in both their organization and their government.

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.