

Legislative Update No. 6, March 31, 2018

I wish everyone joy and hope in the promise of Easter.

The end of session is upon us, except for the education funding solution, the Omnibus Appropriations bills, and consideration of bills vetoed by the Governor. All committees have essentially ended except Tax, Appropriations, and Federal and State Affairs (exempt committees).

The week of April 2 through April 6 will be mostly working bills through the conference committees and final action on bills, ending the week with first adjournment. With the committee work essentially finished, we will be working on the floor all day each day to finish. We return on April 26th for veto session and the omnibus bill. Hopefully that will be the end of the legislature for this year.

Federal and State Affairs: We passed a bill that eventually made its way to the Governor. It was HB 2650 to name the state rock as the greenhorn limestone, the state mineral as galena, the state gemstone as jelinite amber, and the state fish as the channel catfish.

HB 2427 passed and put rules in place for background checks for workers applying to work in adult care homes, as home health aides, and providers of disability services. It involves changes in the background check methods to reduce the time to receive a report from weeks to less than a week.

HB 2778 passed but generated a great deal of debate on the floor. The bill places restrictions on state contracts with businesses engaged in anti-Israel boycotts.

Agriculture Committee: We passed an agriculture hemp bill again. A similar bill last year never reached the floor for debate. SB 263 passed the Senate, and we made a few changes to the bill. Meaning, if it passes through the House, it will go to conference committee. It basically creates a research project involving the Department of Agriculture with support from Kansas State University. I voted for the bill and have heard from several farmers from across the state in its favor. They are interested in promoting research in alternative crops.

SB 331 creates two state parks in Kansas. The first is Little Jerusalem Badlands state park in western Kansas and the second is the Flint Hills Trail state park. The Little Jerusalem Badlands park is in Logan county. The Flint Hills Trail park will be approximately 117 miles running from Osawatomie to Herrington on former rail right of way. This bill is now headed to conference committee.

Appropriations, Education Funding, and Tax Discussions: The Appropriations Committee will be presenting to the Whole House a bill that covers funding for all but K-12. If that passes, it lays the foundation for determining what funding is left for education. The tax bill(s) will follow to provide the revenues needed for the

appropriations and K-12. I expect several versions to be presented to determine where the members of the House are with their votes in hopes of finding one formula that will gather the required 63 votes to pass.

The recent education funding study is still being reviewed. We will be given another review of the study by a different party as a peer review. I also expect a review by the Capitol Research group at some point. When we receive this information the serious work of deciding on an approach to funding the schools will be made. The decisions will likely be made while we are on break from April 7 – April 25. The Omnibus bill will reconcile any differences in revenue and expenses and finalize the K-12 budget.

Expect wringing of hands, heated debate, and many, many calculations. I cannot in good conscious vote for any tax increase, after last year increasing state income tax twice. Increasing sales tax in 2015 led to many areas approaching 10%, and Kansas is among only seven states that fully tax food. And now there is a bill in Tax Committee to almost double your property taxes! We have become the high tax state in the Midwest and it has been reported that Kansas has the 10th highest state and local tax burden in the country.

Events and Visitors: The first meeting by state officials concerning improvements to K-99 between Wamego and I-70 was held at the Capitol to lay the groundwork for the project.

It was my honor to join in recognizing Lori Daniel, Editor, Owner, and Publisher of Wabaunsee County's Signal Enterprise, as the 2018 Washburn University Kansas Small Business Development Center Existing Business awardee. Each year the SBDC recognizes outstanding Kansas small businesses, and I am so pleased Lori received this honor for all of District 51. St Marys Sugar Creek Country Store owner, Dan Hohman was also recognized as the 2018 WU SBDC Emerging Business awardee from District 61. Congratulations to all seventeen small businesses honored from across Kansas.

Hayden Sanders, son of Brett and Sarah Sanders, paged for me. He attends Rossville Middle School, and I am impressed with his many talents and interests.

I was honored to be asked to give two presentations to women's organizations recently. The Kansas Republican Women's state meeting was held at the Capitol and they asked me to give an update on the Kansas Ag Economy. I shared with them the research I have been doing the last couple of months.

Concerned Women for America held their state convention in Topeka and asked me to speak. The topics I covered included debt, ag economy, education funding, and an update on some bills. Linda is the advisor for CWA of Kansas and she noted that it was the first time for her to introduce me at a state event. The organization's CEO and President, Penny Nance, from DC was present. No pressure there. The event included meeting with Governor Jeff Colyer, and legislators, along with other speakers: AG Derick Schmidt, Secretary Kris Kobach, Barry Feaker of Topeka Rescue Mission, Joe

Patton from KFL, Representative Susan Humphries, Senator Caryn Tyson, and CWA national leaders.

The Kansas Prayer Breakfast speaker this year was the Chiefs mascot KC Wolf, Dan Meers, who told of his stadium accident that changed his life toward an attitude of, “It is OK to have pain in my life, but it is not OK to be one.” I liked his coin analogy, “Your life is like spending a coin, how you spend your coin every day is the story of your life.”

I want to especially thank my assistant, Lisa Davis, who was among the honorees at the appreciation luncheon given by the Legislative Spouses organization. Linda is a member and arranged for the entertainment by Prairie Larkspur, Christine Day and Janet Armstead of Wamego. I am told everyone enjoyed their performance of music from the 1800’s. I also thank my intern, Joshua Willis, from Manhattan for coming to be with us this session.

Visitors were Sarah and Hayden Saunders, Rossville; Jill Cook, SBDC at ESU; Laurie Pieper, PhD, Business Advisor Kansas SBDC; Diane Hoobler, Wabaunsee County Farm Bureau; Christine Shompson and Glen Lewellen, Pawnee Mental Health; Alvin and Deloris Matzke, Westmoreland, and Lindsey Douglas, Director of Public Affairs – Corporate Relations, Union Pacific.

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.