

2015 Legislative Update No. 6 from Ron Highland, Representative of the 51st District

This week, like last, was filled with committee meetings where proposed bills were granted hearings and some were worked. A few bills were passed out of committees and forwarded to the House for consideration. The bills that did not make it out of committee were either tabled for later consideration or voted down by the committee. Voting on bills occurs after debate that at times is passionate where Representatives try to persuade others to their point of view.

My bill, HB 2159, passed on the floor of the House by unanimous vote. It was legislation to allow the City of Alma to purchase the State's half of the Alma Lake for their water supply. Since the language in both the House and Senate bills is similar, it should become law soon.

The Education Committee was lively this week. We held hearings on seven bills. Two bills were tabled and three were passed out of committee. The three bills that passed were: HB 2199 – Requiring parents to opt-in for their children to receive human sexuality education; HB 2174 – Tax credits for low income student's scholarship program (amendments to existing act); and HB 2353 – Correcting language in an existing law.

The Appropriations Committee continues to work through agency and department budgets. We hear six to nine budgets daily, and are all waiting for the proposed budgets for education. Once those are received and the new revenue numbers are in, we will have a clearer idea of how to develop an overall budget for 2016 and 2017.

The Tax Committee is holding informational hearings on topics that may lead to legislation. This week we heard both sides of the proposed tax increase on liquor and tobacco. The presentations were well attended by interested businesses, health care proponents, and media. We will not work bills until such time that it is known what the budget deficits are and the revenue needed to balance the budget. I do not expect any substantive decisions in this committee for a few more weeks.

The Joint Rules were finally passed this week. The final agreement between the House and the Senate are now set to not allow more than four bills to be bundled, except for the Tax Committee bills. This debate held up legislative action in both chambers. Both the Senate and the House are now hearing and debating more bills each day ahead of turn around day. Turn around day, on February 27, is the last day a bill may be entered by a non-exempt committee in either chamber.

Linda and I were honored to be invited by Caterpillar to attend the annual Kansas Chamber Dinner. Dr. Paul Barkey, Pastor of Ashland Community Church, Manhattan, was my guest as chaplain for the House on Thursday. Other groups with whom I visited in the Capitol were the Wamego FCCLA students, K State "Cats in the Capitol," and the Home Educators, whose students had presentations along with choral and instrumental groups who performed in the Rotunda. Saturday I spoke at the Manhattan Legislative Town Hall gathering at the Sunset Zoo.

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