

2014 Legislative Update No. 6 from Ron Highland, Representative of the 51st District

We are now in high gear at the Capitol. Every committee is meeting longer and scheduling extra meeting times attempting to hear all the bills assigned to their committee. Because of the number of bills being brought to the House for final vote, I will only highlight the most important or those considered controversial. To review all the bills, I refer you to the legislature web site <http://www.kslegislature.org/li/>.

The Education Committee passed a bill, HB 2475, the financial literacy bill. This bill is asking the Board of Education to establish a means for every graduating student to have basic financial skills and to verify with testing. The rest of the week was spent in hearings. The largest hearing ever for us was on Wednesday when we dealt with Common Core, HB 2261. We heard seventy two people testify, alternating those for with those against. Each was given a minute and a half to present their views. There were so many people attending that Capitol Security moved many into the hallway outside the hearing room. The majority of those who spoke were parents, many of whom traveled a great distance to be heard. Voices have been heard loudly in the halls outside of the Education Committee meeting room lately. There have been two rallies of which legislators took notice, one for school choice and another against common core, now known as college and career ready standards.

Other bills that had hearings but not worked (not voted on) by the committee were, HB 2606, student data accessibility, transparency and accountability; HB 2620, health and human sexuality education opt-in; and House Substitute Bill for SB 22, to enact the corporate tax credit scholarship program. A State Senator from Oklahoma traveled here to explain how they enacted a similar tax credit bill and how it is working for them. Another powerful speaker for the bill was Bishop Wade Moore, Jr. from Wichita, who spoke about the plight of the urban children and said that we have a 911 situation in education.

Education Budget Committee heard from university presidents and then we passed their budgets on to the House Appropriations Committee with our amendments. We also heard testimony on HB 2454 – Transportation of non-resident students. Glen Coats from Lyon County testified very convincingly in favor of the bill, but in the end it was tabled due to unfounded fears of flight from the urban schools. I presented this bill because of the unfairness to rural areas that surround the exempted four largest counties.

The Energy and Environment Committee passed two bills out of committee, HB 2458 – Relating to net metering; and HR 6043 – A resolution urging the US Congress to oppose the assumptions and implementation of the President’s climate action plan. We also heard testimony on HB 2661 on Kansas electric transmission authority and prior approval for construction of transmission lines. This bill was brought as a result of the controversy surrounding the KCC approval for the direct current line from SW Kansas across our state heading to Indiana.

The All-Day Kindergarten Committee met early on Thursday to hear testimony on a curriculum proposal for all-day classes. Two representatives from the Children’s Cabinet, funded by the tobacco settlement money, gave presentations on the importance of early childhood development. Gayle Suber from the Kansas Department of Education, Early Childhood and Special Education also testified. We will hopefully gather enough factual information to give the Education and Appropriations Committees a recommendation before session ends.

Visitors this week included the “Vera Roadsters” from Wabaunsee County, Merle and Nora Jean Lietz, Rachael Imthurn, and Peggy Flagler. I was honored to have two pages this week: Lizzie Erikson, daughter of Mike Erikson, Alma, and attending Mill Creek Valley Jr High; and Jonathan Walton, son of John and Sheila Walton, McFarland, and attending St John Lutheran School. They had their picture taken with the Governor and worked hard serving the members of the House during session. Pages are now given the opportunity to climb to the top of the Capitol dome.

Do you know the United States Constitution? March 2, 2014 is the 3d Annual, Yes for Liberty Constitution Bee. It will be held at 2:00 p.m. at the KSU Alumni Center, Banquet Room B, Manhattan, Kansas. I attended last year and attempted to answer the questions. Students from across the state compete for large scholarships. The audience is given the answers to the questions after the students finish with each section of the testing. The public is welcome to attend this great event.

This week I was very impressed with the number of citizens who took the time to come to the Capitol to be heard and to participate in our 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. Many have asked me if I am running again for office; I filed for re-election on Monday.