

The tax plan passed by both the House and Senate and went to the Governor where he vetoed the bill. Both the House and Senate then voted again to override the veto where a 2/3 vote is required. The House vote was sufficient to override but the Senate did not. The bill is dead. I voted no on the bill and on the override.

I have received mail concerning taxes from many of you, and thank you for contacting me. I voted no because the time for a tax bill is premature. Unlike a family budget where you know your income and a budget can be developed and adhered to; the state budget is fluid. We are given estimates for revenue to plan for the future, and we know they have been wrong for several years. Also, the Appropriations and Ways and Means Committees are still meeting to develop a budget, and will continue to meet throughout the second half of the session. Unfortunately, they appear to not have the desire to cut agency budgets at this point. The result is that we will see a budget with requests for more money than last year. Additionally, many of the bills being passed now have a fiscal note attached (cost to implement). An example of this was the passage of the Medicare Expansion bill, having a fiscal note of several million dollars that was not addressed in the tax bill. The K-12 education funding is still not addressed, and the fiscal notes attached to some of the plans under consideration are also in the millions of dollars. The point is, that until we have a firm grasp on the needs, we do not know how to structure a tax bill.

It is my firm belief that we are just approaching the situation backwards this session. We must know what revenues are required to finish this year and to fund the next two years before a tax structure can even be considered. In addition, the tax structure needs to have more thought put into the affects it will have on all Kansans to include businesses, the poor, and the middle class.

Turn around was Thursday. This was the last day to pass bills out of either chamber (blessed bills being the exception) and they will be transferred to the other chamber for their consideration. The process begins again when we return March 6. Some of the bills will pass as written, some will be changed and passed, and several will fail. Those that are changed will be eligible for conference committee action where three members from each chamber meet to work out differences on the bills. Those that pass both chambers without change go to the Governor for his action.

We met each day for many hours to consider bills that passed out of committees. By my count, we passed out 53 bills this week that will be transferred to the Senate. That is not counting those passed in the previous weeks. If this session holds true to tradition, fewer than 20% will make it through the entire process and reach the Governor's desk. Our forefathers designed the system to be laborious and difficult for a reason. It requires work and time to shepherd a bill through the system, that in theory reduces mistakes.

Two of the bills I entered into committee did pass. HB 2102 – Board of county commissioner meetings. This bill simply changed the law to allow county commission boards to meet monthly on the day of their choice, whereas previous law stated they must meet on the first Monday. Several counties were technically breaking the law. HB 2095 – Providing a special permit for certain vehicle combinations. This bill is of importance to the agriculture industry across the state. It provided for a permit for vehicles to add a sixth axle and allow the carrying weight to increase by 5,000 pounds. Push back came from labor unions and the railroads but their arguments did not outweigh the need. Another bill I am shepherding is HB 2040 – Citations for overtaking and passing of school buses captured on camera. It was brought to my attention over two years ago, how our children are at risk by cars ignoring the flashing lights and extended stop sign on buses. This bill made it out of committee but was referred to the Judiciary Committee due to the complexity of the issue. I am hopeful they will finalize the bill before session ends.

Additional bills that may be of interest:

HB 2186 – Enacting the uniform arbitration act of 2000 and amended to include teacher due process.

HB 2140 – Authorizing the Governor to enter into the great plains interstate fire compact. This bill came about because of the devastating fires in southern Kansas last year and the Oklahoma firefighters could not cross the state line to assist because we were not in a compact.

HB 2160 – Amending the individual development account program act to allow certain expenditures by individuals who were likely to age out of foster care.

Other bills passed had topics such as bicycle reflector requirements, license plate decals, naming highway segments, water district regulations, vaccine requirements, etc. For a complete listing, you will need to go to the Legislative web site (instructions are below).

Monday was 4-H Citizenship in Action Day at the Capitol. Wabaunsee and Lyon Counties sent six very impressive young adults who graciously spent some time with me. They were Braden Tharman, Trenton L. Archer, Jack Cregen, Frankie Davis, Kaci Duggan, and Kristy Duggan, adult leader. If these fine young adults are the product of 4-H training, then our future will be in good hands.



It was my honor to have the Wamego Caterpillar Operations Manager, Greg Rusk, Nick Brazis, Factory Manager, and the Manager of State Government Affairs for the Western Region, Jim Halloran, attend a joint House and Senate Transportation meeting on Tuesday. There was such a good question and answer session that plans are underway to bring the committees to tour the plant in Wamego. That evening we again joined all the Wamego Caterpillar managers at their table for the Kansas Chamber Annual Dinner. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas was the Ad Astra Award recipient. The keynote speaker, Mitch Daniels, President of Purdue, led state reforms in Indiana as Governor, and challenged us to restore the promise of America, upward mobility to go as far as hard work will take you. On Wednesday, Linda led the Legislative Spouses on a day tour of the KSU campus.

Four pages served me on Thursday and they worked hard. The House being in session all day kept them busy running errands for members who had to stay seated to listen to the many debates. All the pages from Wamego were: Ryan Sparenberg, Bennett Schoenbeck, Trista Hoobler, and Kirby McKee. They had the opportunity to tour the Capitol and even climb to the dome.



At my website, www.ronhighland.com, you can find a syllabus that explains in detail how to get the legislative information you need. My contact information is: Rm 561 W, State Capitol, Topeka, Kansas, 66612; and ron.highland@house.ks.gov. My office assistant Lisa can take a message or arrange an appointment by calling [785-296-7310](tel:785-296-7310). It is an honor and a privilege to serve you.