

2014 Legislative Update No. 7 from Ron Highland, Representative of the 51st District

Friday was the last day non-exempt committees could present bills to be considered by the full House. Long hours were spent on the floor hearing bills read, followed by extended debate and amendments to be considered. This is the stage of the legislative process when some become frustrated and even discouraged. But the system was designed to be slow and deliberate; actually the debates are both interesting and informative. After reading the bill information and listening to the debates, votes are cast for each bill. The first vote is a voice vote that is frequently given with gusto by the Committee of the Whole House. If it passes the voice vote, the bill receives a final vote, normally the next day, and that vote is recorded. Committees did not meet after Tuesday, making way for all day House sessions for the rest of the week.

All the bills passed by the House are carried over to the Senate for their consideration and the Senate also considers our bills. This is called “turn around.” Turn around day was officially Feb. 28. We have two days off so that staff can make preparations. Then the process begins again in the committees looking at the Senate bills sent over for our consideration.

Many bills were passed this week to meet the deadline. Several were technical bills to clarify language of previous laws or to repeal old or outdated laws. HB 2555 was passed that ensured a more open and transparent government. It specifies that arrest or search warrants are to be open to the public unless a judge rules otherwise. HB 2552 ensures that doctors, nursing homes, and hospitals are paid promptly by the Managed Care Organizations (MCO) under KanCare claims. HB 2417 added three more counties to the Rural Opportunity Zone. This designation has helped counties to recruit and keep recent graduates in the state. HB 2613 enacts Meriden’s Law, which would require the State Registrar to establish a certificate of birth following a stillbirth, as well as, a death certificate. This bill passed with only one nay vote. For more information on these and other bills please go to <http://www.kslegislature.org/li/>.

This is the time of the session that gets interesting. The bills that either chamber feels are worthy of becoming law are reviewed by the opposite chamber. Often times, after consideration and much debate, the bill will be amended or even voted down. If it is voted down, it dies. There are special circumstances where a bill may be resurrected for further consideration. I will attempt to explain these procedures as the session continues. The main point here is that because a bill passes either the House of Representatives or the Senate at this point of the session does not mean it will become law. There is still much work to be done.

I have been amazed and delighted by the numbers of Kansans who have taken time away from work and family to come to the Capitol to express their feelings on bills under consideration. We are all receiving more emails, phone calls, and visits from our constituents than last year. You are becoming more involved in your government, as our founders had envisioned. We all must be involved at all levels of government. This is an election year. Every election is important and has consequences. To make an informed vote is a duty we all should take very seriously.

As always, it is an honor and a privilege to serve you. 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.