

2015 Legislative Update No. 8 from Ron Highland, Representative of the 51st District

Following “turn around” last Friday; the Senate bills arrived and were assigned to the various House Committees. The bills that are “exempt” (referred to committees from an exempt committee) continue to be worked in the House and Senate. The most important announcement came on Thursday. The K-12 school finance bill, HB 2403, was unveiled at a press conference. With that announcement, the work on the budgets for 2016 and 2017 will begin in earnest.

The Education Committee held hearings on four bills: HB 2262 – Providing a compliance deadline and penalties for non-compliance with the student data privacy act; HB 2266 – Requiring post-secondary institutions to adopt a policy on sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence and stalking; HB 2345 – Prohibiting school board members from having a conflict of interest; and HB 2393 – Requiring school districts to use generally accepted accounting principles and financial publication requirements. It was revealed that policies and state laws already exist covering the issues in HB 2266 and HB 2345. The committee will verify the findings in both instances before moving forward with the legislation. Once again the hearings were overflow and passions ran high. The committee members must listen dispassionately to hear the facts so they can make good decisions. If you wish to make a public comment concerning the state’s current English language arts and mathematic academic standards, an online tool is available at <http://standards.ksde.org>.

The Appropriations Committee continued hearing budget reviews for various agencies. The agencies give their requests for the next two years, the Governor gives his recommendations, and then the House and Senate sub-committees give their recommendations. The House Appropriations Committee hears their reports as does the Senate Ways and Means Committee. They can agree with the report as written or amend it as they see fit. Once all the budgets are heard it will end with the final budget or Omnibus bill that both chambers of the legislature must agree on to send it to the Governor for his consideration. That is the last thing done before adjournment and hopefully we will be able to finish within the 90 days for the 2015 legislative session.

The Tax Committee held a hearing on HB 2307 – State Finances. The bill was presented by the State Revenue Department and outlined steps for tax policy for the next two years. It would include a tax amnesty plan, establishment of tax reduction and budget stabilization funds if tax revenues exceed 103% above expected receipts. It would also adjust the income tax rates, slowing the decline in rates for the next two years.

There were no bills passed by the House this week. This is the time when the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate review all the bills pending and decide which ones are brought to the floor. This is done with consultation from House and Senate members who stress which bills are most important to them and their constituents. Not all the bills that pass out of committee will be heard. However, the bills will remain “alive” for another year. Bills have a two year life span (corresponding to the length of term for a Representative). Interesting times in the legislature are about to begin. Each chamber will consider the other’s bills. Some are voted down, others are changed, and a few are passed

as is. Those that are changed set the stage for horse trading and compromise in conference committees. I will attempt to keep you apprised of the events in the coming weeks.

I enjoyed attending the Constitution Bee held March 1 at the KSU Alumni Center. There were 29 finalists and scholarship winners were: first place of \$3,500 to Chandler Huddleston, Rolla High; second place of \$1,500 to Laura Nicolae, Washburn Rural; and third place of \$750 to Sean Grossnickle, Gardner Edgerton High. Secretary of State Kris Kobach gave the keynote address and Senator Jerry Moran was also in attendance. I was honored to have a visit in my office with Carrie Edmonds, Wamego, of Farm Bureau Leadership Kansas.

You can read the bills in their entirety by going to the legislative web site, <http://www.kslegislature.org/li/>. If you need help navigating the site you can go to my web site, www.ronhighland.com where there is a syllabus that explains in detail how to get the information you need. 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.