

From The Desk Of...

Jay Scott Emler

Kansas Senate 35th District

~Week of January 22 - January 26, 2007~

- **Commerce Committee**

This week, we had hearings on SB 78, which would eliminate the waiting week for receiving unemployment benefits. It does not change the 26-week entitlement. It simply moves the initial week from the end of the 26 weeks to the beginning of the 26 weeks. We also heard testimony on SB 83, which deals with the contribution rate of employers. Some employers would have no contribution, while most other employers would have their contribution rate cut for the upcoming year. Another presentation that was given in Commerce Commission was on the Kansas Tourism Initiative. It is an exciting initiative for all Kansas communities that focus on tourism. I am sure there will be more about that in the near future.

- **Utilities**

This week, we continued the hearings on SB 20, which is the underground water and sewer issue requiring cities to participate in Kansas One Call. The hearings were closed, but the issue was referred to a subcommittee that will take further evidence and report back in the next week or two to the full committee. The Utilities Committee also heard a presentation regarding SB 49 that would require all providers of VOIP services over internet to contribute to the Kansas Universal Service Fund, just as normal telephone companies do. There were so many conferees that the presentation by Tradewinds had to be postponed until a later date. Tradewinds is the company that will be building a wind farm in Southern Lincoln County.

- **Ways and Means**

On Wednesday, Ways and Means heard from the three main players in the discussion of Deferred Maintenance. The hearing was mostly informational and no funding plans were proposed. Testimony was given by Reggie Robinson, President and CEO on behalf of the Board of Regents, Dr. Ed Berger, President of Hutchinson Community College, on behalf of the community colleges, and Dr. Jerry Farley, President of Washburn University. Mr. Robinson provided an updated estimate for the committee of \$663 million backlog, down from the earlier \$727 million previous estimate. He attributed the new figure mostly to not including athletic facilities and partially to other items at the Regent campuses. He also stated that a more detailed

list from each of the institutions was due into the Board by this Friday (1/26) that will include a more comprehensive detailing of the specific needs of each campus. Dr. Berger, on behalf of the community colleges, detailed the needs at the 19 institutions with an estimated bottom line of about \$149 million. Dr. Farley estimated Washburn's needs at just under \$22 million. All estimates have been updated to exclude dormitories, athletic facilities and student unions.

We also heard testimony on SB 24, which is a medical student loan program.

- **Kansas Public Employment Figures:**

The biggest jump in employment figures in Kansas from November of 2005 to November 2006 came in the government sector with the addition of 6,000 new jobs, leading some to believe we are growing state government. The 2.8% total increase of government jobs includes employment figures for federal, state, and local units of government combined. Broken down for our state, this represents a decrease of 600 federal jobs (-2.3%), an increase of 500 state jobs (+0.9%) and a whopping increase of 6,100 local government jobs (+3.4%). Some of the additional state and local jobs were due to the timing of the report with respect to the hiring of additional staff for elections in 2006.

- **SB 37 ~ Smoking Ban**

Modifications to the proposed smoking ban have already been approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee with more debate to come. The definition of food service establishment was clarified to mean a place where more than 50% of revenue is derived from the sale of food for consumption on the premises. The bill was amended to not affect current smoking regulations in all adult care facilities and veterans' hospitals and homes. Lastly, the disbursement of fine revenue under the bill was amended from a 75/25 split between the community and the state general fund to divvying up the fine revenue in accordance with current law. The committee has not yet voted on the bill.

- **SB 89 ~ Republican River Water Conservation Projects Fund**

The Senate Agricultural Committee heard testimony Wednesday that would provide for the deposit and disbursement of monies received as a result of violation to the Republican River Compact. All conferees testified in favor of the need to have a plan in place prior to actually receiving funds but each prefaced their comments with the fact that we would much rather have water than the settlement. No further hearings are expected and final action could come Wednesday January 31.

- **TOLL FREE LEGISLATIVE HOTLINE**

The State Library will continue its practice of operating the toll free hotline for Kansans to call their legislators and leave brief messages. The hotline number is 1-800-432-3924. If you are receiving this newsletter and really would like to be taken off my list, just let me know. My legislative district includes: Barton, Dickinson, Ellsworth, Lincoln, Marion, McPherson and Rice counties. If you know of others that would like to receive this newsletter, have them contact me and I will add them to my list. I prefer to send by e-mail since the cost is essentially free, but I do have a limited legislative postage allowance, which is largely reserved for distributing this letter. I would remind you, however, if you send me an email, make sure you include your street address.

Senator, 35th District
State Capitol Building, Room 449-N
Topeka, Kansas 66612
(785) 296-7354
emler@senate.state.ks.us

NOTE: I receive many emails and I need to make sure I am responding to my constituents and not to somebody in another part of the state. I want to be responsive to you, so please include your home address so that I know I am being responsive to my constituents.