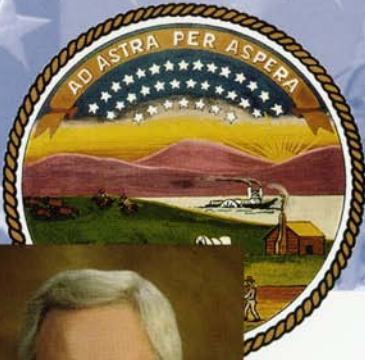


"Senate President Steve Morris"

Capitol Comments

February 2010



Senate President
Steve Morris, 39th District

Budget • Budget • Budget

Dear Friends,

We are now more than a third of the way through the 2010 Legislative Session. We've observed a major deadline -- Turnaround Day -- which is when bills (with some exceptions) had to be considered and passed out of the chamber in which they originated.

Kansas faces a nearly \$400 million shortfall for the next budget year, Fiscal Year 2011. In light of the significant cuts we made last year to state agencies, public education, programs and services, the prospects are not encouraging.

The Legislature is required by the Kansas Constitution to pass a balanced budget; we cannot spend more than we take in.

We must keep in mind that education funding in Kansas accounts for over 65 percent of the total

budget, and human services (including Medicaid, state hospitals, mental health programs, veterans' affairs, etc.) account for approximately 23 percent of the state's total budget. With nearly 90 percent of state spending in these two categories,

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I appreciated having some time to visit and consult with State Senator Jim Barnett of Emporia who serves as chairman of the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee. Sen. Barnett is a physician and a leader in the policy areas of health care and health insurance.

Final Adjustments Made to the Current Fiscal Year (FY 2010) Budget

With the passage of Senate Substitute for House Bill 2222, the Senate made final adjustments to the FY2010 budget year which closes on June 30th.

The measure, which passed the Senate on a vote of 33 to 6, included:

- \$2.4 million to **restore the Governor's 10% cut to Medicaid reimbursements for Home and Community Based Services for Kansans with developmental disabilities. By restoring those funds, the state will receive an additional \$5.5 million in federal funds.** In doing so, the legislature also directed the Kansas Health Policy Authority to evaluate and outline short and long term options for adjustments and improvements to Kansas' Medicaid program and provide a report to specific legislative committees by March 10th.
- A **50 percent reduction in the franking allowance (mailing expense reimbursement) of each member of the legislature.** Members will have to curtail the number of newsletters and/or constituent responses sent at state expense. If any legislator has already exceeded 50 percent of their authorized amount, he or she will not be permitted to charge any further postage this Fiscal Year.
- A **5 percent reduction in salary for all legislators, legislative leadership and staff, judges and justices, statewide elected officials, department secretaries, CEOs, State Board, Council or Authority members, and other positions authorized by state statute.**
- **Restored funds to the Legislative Coordinating Council to cover the cost of the legislative session** if it should exceed the 83 days included in the Governor's budget. Under statute, the Legislature has 90 days to complete its work. Last year, it took 88 days to wrap up all legislative business.

Following Conference Committee discussions, the bill passed the House on a vote of 114 to 5.

Ward Loyd of Garden City Appointed to KCC

The appointment of Ward Loyd to the Kansas Corporation Commission is a tremendous boon for all of Kansas. Throughout his life, Ward Loyd has been the very epitome of a great public servant. His experience and judgement will serve us all well in the critical areas of utility, oil and gas, and common carrier regulation."

"I've had the privilege of knowing Ward for many years, working closely with him as a community leader in Southwest Kansas and serving with him in the Kansas Legislature. He is an exceptional individual whose integrity and character are above reproach. I am honored to know him as a colleague and a dear personal friend."

"Governor Parkinson has made an outstanding choice. I sincerely congratulate Ward Loyd on his well deserved appointment to this significant position, and I look forward to continuing to work with him in the very relevant areas of energy conservation, alternative energy and the future of Kansas' energy policy."

The Governor announced Loyd's appointment on Feb. 24th. The three member Commission regulates rates, service and safety of public utilities, common carriers and motor carriers, and also oversees parts of the oil and gas industry. Commissioners serve four year terms and must meet statutory requirements to qualify for appointment.



I was proud to have the opportunity to meet two students from Southwest Kansas who are in the pioneer class of the Kansas Math and Science Academy which is provided under the auspices of Fort Hays State University. Will Robertson of Liberal stands to my left and Eddie Savage of Holcomb is on my right.

Project Delivery Building Construction

Sub. for SB 513 would amend definitions in the Alternative Project Delivery Building Construction Procurement Act to allow district hospitals and school districts more flexibility in choosing contractors when bidding out projects. This bill was spurred in part by a situation brought to my attention by the Satanta Hospital. Hospitals and school districts will no longer be bound by the traditional low bid contract award when selecting a contractor for a job. Counties already have that flexibility. The bill passed the Senate on a 39-0 vote and is now in the House Commerce and Labor Committee.

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it is very difficult to balance the budget without affecting these areas.

There are those who believe the only way to meet this challenge is to pass some form of tax increase. Some advocate a sales tax increase, while others prefer to repeal some or all of the existing tax exemptions granted over the years. Others would prefer to increase the cigarette tax or impose a utility tax.

There are no easy answers. Whatever solution is ultimately crafted for this year, we will most likely face an unfavorable budget situation next year, and our options may be even more limited.

Discussion continues every single day in the House and Senate, in committees, and between colleagues as we strive to come up with a plan that a majority of legislators in both chambers can support.

Are you interested in tracking these or other bills being considered by the Kansas Legislature this year?

Use the following resources:

www.kslegislature.org

OR

Legislative Hotline: 1-800-432-3924



On Feb. 3rd, I had the honor of meeting Anna Wiebe, winner of the "If I Were Mayor, I Would..." essay contest in Rolla. Anna and her family visited the Capitol, and I was able to present her with a certificate recognizing her achievement. In Anna's winning essay, she advocated among other things, bringing a Dollar General store to town and having a weekly event to build community spirit and pride. Great ideas, Anna.

Marijuana Substitute to be Illegal

HB 2411, outlawing a synthetic marijuana type drug, was the first bill passed in the 2010 Legislative Session. A first possession conviction for K-2 would be classified as a misdemeanor.

The bill adds what is now a legal substance -- an incense that can be smoked to produce euphoria sometimes marketed under the name K2 -- to a list of banned drugs.

K2 is reportedly a mixture of blue lotus, baybean and a other herbs. K2's potent effects, however, come from two synthesized cannabinoids that are added to the mixture.

Synthetic cannabinoids are related to tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, the chemical in marijuana. Because the chemicals in K2 are slightly different, they are not covered by existing drug laws.

Among supporters were the KS County and District Attorneys Assn., the KS Assn. of Chiefs of Police, the KS Sheriffs Assn., the KS Peace Officers Assn., and the KS Board of Pharmacy.

The measure will now go to the Governor.

Friends Don't Let Friends Text and Drive!

Senate Bill 351, which passed the Senate on a vote of 34 to 6, would make it illegal for a person to text message or email while driving. While it would seem to be common sense to refrain from such activities when operating a motor vehicle, accidents resulting from inattentiveness due to texting are becoming more common.

A first conviction would be considered a traffic offense, and a second or subsequent conviction would be a Class B misdemeanor. A person who seriously injures another person in the course of text messaging or emailing while driving would be guilty of a Class A misdemeanor.

Voice-operated or hands-free devices are not included. Emergency, traffic or weather alert messages are not included in the ban. It also remains legal to read, select and enter a telephone number or name in a handheld wireless communication device in order to make or receive a phone call.

The measure is being considered by the House.



In late January, the Senate welcomed a group representing Kansas Mentoring. Kansas State University Football Coach Bill Snyder is actively involved with this effort to pair students with adult mentors. The program has met with impressive success, and a resolution offered on the floor of the Senate encouraged them to continue the good work! The photo on the left is the Kansas Mentoring group in my office, and the photo on the right is of Coach Snyder and me with a group of young men who served as pages for me on that day. You can bet they were more excited about meeting the Coach than me!

Buckle Up -- It's The Law!

Senate Bill 483 would require all adult occupants of a passenger vehicle to wear safety belts. Currently, law covers only passengers under the age of 18 or adults in the front seat. The bill would also allow a vehicle to be stopped if an adult in the car is seen without a seatbelt, and increases the fine from \$30 to \$60, including court costs.

Once in effect and through June 30th of this year, officers would be required to issue a warning citation for failure to wear a safety belt. Beginning July 1, violators would receive a ticket and fine.

By making a seatbelt violation a primary offense, the state becomes eligible for more than \$11 million in federal transportation funds. SB 483 passed the Senate on a vote of 26 to 14. The bill has gone on the House for consideration.

Under current law, law enforcement cannot pull someone over and ticket them solely because there is a seatbelt violation.



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Organization, Calendar and Rules
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