**Welcome To The Capitol, Governor**

**with Representative Dave Baker, 68th District**

This week we were honored to welcome Governor Jeff Colyer and say goodbye to former Governor Brownback. My comments about the former governor will be shared in a summary column later as we continue to discover the results of his initiatives. Governor Colyer has started selecting new agency heads, and we are very encouraged by his choices. His statement that he is open and transparent is repeated by those he has put into leadership positions. The Governor is a making a great sacrifice by taking time away from his professional career to serve. Please take the opportunity to welcome and show support for him as he travels the state.

The Children and Seniors Committee heard presentations from Governor Colyer’s new appointments, and they are speaking with a new tone. We need to support the new appointees’ initiatives as they chart a path to recovery from the past seven years. Facts and figures indicate a failure to help those who need state assistance. Thirty-page applications written in legal jargon, delays in processing, staff reductions, and funds swept to pay for Governor Brownback’s experiment have all resulted in record numbers of children needing help. A presentation from CASA director Mickey Edwards informed legislators about their progress and impressive results they have experienced despite receiving very few dollars from the state. The Committee heard testimony from parents with handicapped children including examples of their struggles and difficulties in dealing with different government entities. Upon hearing this presentation, it became obvious the needs are great and money won’t solve all the issues. Workers are needed at every level, and I encourage everyone to do a little to help. This committee is comprised of very passionate legislators who are committed to correcting this situation.

We received good news this week while visiting with Westar Energy regarding the value of their new investment in Geary County. They currently pay approximately $1.8 million in property tax to the county, and the new electrical station will add another $500,000. This will help as government agencies work to lighten the tax burden on everyone. Utility companies, pipelines and railroads are major contributors to local property taxes, and I recognize their investments. Several large projects are scheduled to start construction in the district, and I will be encouraging companies to get started ASAP. On another tax matter, I introduced a bill to return automobile sales tax to the county and city where the vehicle is registered. This brought a very irate legislator to my office as he lamented that his city received 53% of its operating budget from this source. I don’t feel his pain and will work to enlist others to help me on this matter. Local governments provide the services for vehicles and should receive the sales tax funds. This situation has provided an unjust windfall to a few districts at the expense of others. Transparency on this issue will result in some very interesting facts coming to light. It will be a lively discussion when the bill comes to a hearing. Stay tuned as we try and correct another transfer of funds to large metro areas. My view: There are some very fat hogs at this trough.

A major topic rural legislators are focusing on is rural broadband. It is one of the biggest contributors to loss of population in the state. We have invested more than $1.3 BILLION in the last 20 years with telecom companies, and the results are still not acceptable. Legislators are prepared to discuss this issue and are armed with facts, figures and testimonials about the situation, sparking very lively and lengthy discussions. There is a lot of talk about the problem, but foremost is how to make money installing fiber optic lines to sparsely populated areas while paying for every other television commercial and sports stadium in America. We did not establish firm dates that required performance with a stated penalty for those who failed, and we have suffered the consequences. I am optimistic about progress on this matter. Several people have come to the aid of legislators to assist in finding a workable solution.

The lack of a major highway in parts of the state has also contributed to population decline, and I will have more information in future columns. It’s more popular to blame a large national company than our own highway department.

In closing, I would like to recognize that the legislature is made up of individuals from many different backgrounds, and their talents never cease to amaze me. Singing “Home on the Range” under the leadership of Representative Barbara Ballard was the most memorable performance we have had this year. On Martin Luther King Day, she inspired and challenged us with a testimonial that I will never forget.

Please contact me with questions and suggestions. I look forward to attending local events in the weeks ahead. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve.

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