**ENDING ON A POSITIVE NOTE**

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

The 2018 Session of the Kansas Legislature came to a close Friday evening with a sigh of relief and cheers for the successes achieved. Revenues are ahead of forecasts, and we are on a path to solvency. The damages caused during the last six years will take decades to recover from, but the correction is underway. Most state employees will see pay increases after 12 years of no increases, except the Highway Patrol who have escaped most reductions. KEPRS will receive a $56 million payment this year and next to restore the money borrowed to fund the “Brownback Experiment”; K-12 education funding was accomplished with a new funding plan including Parents as Teachers and Tiny K; and 62.5% of previous cuts were restored to higher education funding. Additionally, the State Water Plan received funds to help preserve our water supply; Medicaid cuts that were made to nursing homes have been reversed; an attempt is being made to address the needs of Department of Children and Families to train staff and help find missing children; and the highway department will start on the 23 T-WORKS projects that have been on hold. These are some of the highlights we addressed with the budget, and although it is a start, we have more to repair. Thousands of employees have left the state, and we are struggling to fill vacancies. A generation of trust and respect has been destroyed, which will take a long time to rebuild after being told from elected officials and past administrations they were overpaid and underworked. This is a model of how NOT to treat people and was instigated by the past administration and arrogant elected officials. Money can’t buy happiness, but it sure makes misery easier to live with.

The last vote of the session was the Mega Tax Bill, and it ended in a tie. When Congress passed the tax reform, it had unintended consequences on Kansas Tax Policy resulting in higher tax burden if no action was taken by the state. We have collected over $400 million more than expected, which means the “experiment” was more costly than anyone had predicted, and we need to make adjustments to the Kansas tax code if possible. Nobody knows how much we should refund, and the estimates ranged from $30 million to more than $130 million, which made no sense to me. The money can be refunded next year when we have more information about the impact of cuts from the Federal Government on Kansans. We usually suffer the most severe reductions due to the use of food as a weapon to punish countries who disagree with national politics. Health care is already mentioned as an area where we can expect to see reductions, and Kansans involved in that industry are suffering with facility closures and an exodus of professionals. I hate the thought of raising taxes, and the actions from past administrations and legislatures have forced local governments to find funds for necessary programs to keep them operating. When Washington and Topeka don’t do their job, local property taxes increase. The increases since 2012 have devastated many Kansans. I will fight to keep this from happening at every opportunity.

These are some of the accomplishments from the 2018 legislative session, and we still have many items to address next year. Take time to contact elected officials with your concerns, and get engaged to make Kansas the best place to live. Franklin D. Roosevelt put it best when he said, “Let us never forget that government is ourselves and not an alien power over us. The ultimate rulers of our democracy are not a President and senators and congressmen and government officials, but the voters of this country.”

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