**Baker's Briefs by Representative Dave Baker, 68th District**

**PLAYING HARDBALL**

This week the Kansas House of Representatives, a seasoned and crafty group of legislators, brought forward a bill on expanding Medicaid. There were a lot of noisy gongs spewing threats and crying over the tactics used to no avail, and the bill passed 70-54. Expanding Medicaid is part of the Affordable Care Act implemented six years ago, and the previous administration refused more than $3 billion in funds. An example was provided of a county with a population of 5,500, and the local hospital losing $1,000,000 annually will recover more than $300,000 from expansion, providing a reduction in local taxes. Statewide surveys mirror my district with almost 80% in favor of making the change. We studied other states and used their experience to maximize our benefit while minimizing our risk. There will be additional economic benefit that has not been calculated, but the positives far outweighed the negatives and I voted yes. This is another part of the Brownback experiment that has gone bad. Please contact your senator and share your thoughts.

Important issues need to be decided in the weeks ahead, and we need to continue legislating. The Senate agreed with the Governor and passed a school funding bill, but the House Education Committee possibly has a better idea. The discussion will be lengthy and intense. Kansas has failed for many years to meet minimum requirements stated in our Constitution. Law firms have made a fortune litigating the issue, and it’s time to end the charade. This will be a debate that mirrors the discussion and vote on Medicaid expansion in my opinion.

The budget has been passed by both legislative bodies and is awaiting action by the Governor. Insiders have indicated she will veto the bill and it will return for further review. There will be a heated debate as we decide the level of funding for state obligations. The prison situation in El Dorado is critical and reflects the neglect to all state agencies. Failure to maintain is very expensive with catastrophic results. The list is long and continues to grow until we get a plan and fund it. Legislators are in favor of spending money, but not providing the necessary funds. The division in the House and Senate will probably continue with an intense discussion on this issue also.

Regional weather is making headlines, and we heard testimony that the metro area of Kansas City is fifth on a list of cities most likely to have a natural disaster. Previous disasters have been very expensive and would be many times worse if they occurred in that area, specifically Kauffman Stadium. Bryant Gumbel said it best, “The other sports are just sports; baseball is love.” Go Royals!

Contact me with questions and concerns, and let’s get ready to “play ball.”

Representative Dave Baker

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