**DEALING WITH DEADLINES**

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

The Kansas House of Representatives Education Budget Committee started working on a school finance bill but has no idea how many dollars to put into the formula. The Kansas Supreme Court has stated that changes need to occur in the Local Option Budget, weighing of at-risk students, and the use of capital outlay funds to pay utilities and insurance. We’ll resume discussion next week, while the Senate Education Committee started working to make changes that the Supreme Court did not like. The legislature is waiting on cost estimates from the Kansas Department of Education and hopefully will be able to understand the study that was recently completed. Representatives of the group who conducted the study will be in the Capitol on Monday. The numbers that have been suggested are staggering, and I am not sure the goal of graduating 95% of students can be accomplished with money. Every group has an idea, but no one solution has surfaced to achieve this goal. The study reinforced my opinion that large schools do not perform up to standards. Rural Kansas schools have higher graduation rates for a variety of reasons, one of which is I believe that smaller communities help students earlier in their education careers. The report indicated some large Johnson County schools would perform better if they were broken into smaller districts; however, economies of scale do not always yield the best results in education. Despite all the news, Kansas schools are 96% efficient with the funds they receive and are among the highest rated in the country. The drama continues, and we are mired in the muck.

The House Transportation Committee is attempting to deal with highways and still leave additional money for the education fund. We have raided the department of around $1 million a day for more than six years. The condition of state highways is deteriorating, and we have to make changes or prepare for a disaster worse than schools. The metro areas have been maintained, but the rest of the state is suffering with unsafe roads. Population growth continues in Southwest Kansas, and better roads are needed to keep this trend progressing. We all benefit from economic growth, regardless of location.

Changes to the Federal Tax Code have been made, and the temptation to give money away has trickled down to Topeka again. Everyone likes to give money away to their friends, but nobody wants to be held accountable when it causes a train wreck. Unlike Washington D.C., we do not have a printing press and must balance our budget every year. It is election year for the Governor, so hang on.

Internet sales tax is going to be addressed by the United States Supreme Court, and the consensus is the tax holiday will end. This has caused more harm to the economy than anything in my lifetime. We need to continue pressuring those responsible to explain why it took 20 years to adjust. Kansans have suffered unnecessarily due to this giveaway, and we need an explanation as to why there has been a delay. Sales tax and property taxes have escalated as local businesses pay all the costs for government. The number of store closings is a sign of the times, but the sales tax burden has fueled a hot fire. We will have to change how local and state governments are funded, and the results will be unpopular for a small group who have enjoyed unprecedented wealth appreciation.

As Marie Curie said, “I was taught the way of progress was neither swift nor easy,” but I am encouraged that we seem to be moving in the right direction on some important issues. Please stay informed of these important changes by attending area events in the coming weeks. I look forward to seeing you there.

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