Baker Briefs – Week 9 - March 15th

 The Kansas Legislature concluded the ninth week of the session with COVID-19 (Coronavirus) dominating every decision.  The overall impact will be determined in coming years.  The alarms have been sounded and officials are shutting down or placing attendance restrictions on almost every public gathering in an attempt to curtail the spread of the virus.  We are being challenged at all levels as never before in the history of the state.

  Collapsing market prices have wreaked havoc on nearly every tangible asset.  Commodity prices are far below the cost of production, retail purchases are falling, manufacturers are dramatically reducing production and the transportation of goods is slowing.  Early predictions for potential job losses are staggering, and we are not prepared.  Hopefully, this will be a short correction period.

  The Appropriations Committee worked on the Fiscal Year 2020 and 2021 budgets for the Department of Children and Families.  An amendment was added to create a grant program, using federal funds, for the purpose of packaging excess food from the school districts to give to children. If the schools choose to participate, the grant will assist in meeting the needs of children across the state who may not have another source of food to eat at home. Applications will be handled by the department, with the source of funding coming from Federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Eligible children will come from families with incomes 200 percent or below the federal poverty level and who are enrolled in school districts participating in the program. With the projected job losses, this program will be very important.

  The Appropriations Committee also completed work on budgets for the Department of Administration, Office of Information and Technology, Department of Revenue, State Treasurer, Pooled Money Investment Board, Office of the Governor, Department of Transportation, Judicial Branch, Department of Children and Families and the Department of Aging and Disability. Last Thursday, the committee passed the Eisenhower Legacy Transportation Plan and last Friday the remainder of the budget was completed and has been sent to the floor for debate. This is the basic budget and there will be changes when the Senate has its input.

  Uncertainty is ruling the world and nobody has a clear idea of where we are headed, but my position of not supporting additional spending tax cuts has not changed. The poor management of the previous administrations has not been resolved and it appears will not be any time soon.

  Rep. Russ Jennings (R-Lakin) made the following statement when we voted on a tax credit that had almost unanimous support: “I vote ‘no' on HB 2689. Our nation and state are facing economic uncertainty because of the developing public health challenge. Both short and long-term implications are unknown. I believe we should exercise discipline and resist the temptation to increase tax credits today to lessen the challenges we will certainly face in the future. I believe a conservative, disciplined and measured approach is prudent at this point. A week ago, this would have been and easy ‘yes' vote. Today, not so much.”

  The vote on the tax credit passed with 103 voting ‘yes' and 12 voting ‘no'. I voted ‘no' and hope there is a motion to reconsider after legislators think about their actions. This statement is applicable to all of us as we navigate the uncharted waters of this historic time. My hope is for minimal pain and suffering, but the experts are predicting something else. My memories of previous financial corrections are vivid as I watched friends and families suffer. The changes are difficult to accept, but sometimes it is good to start over again. You may like your new story better. Stay home and take advantage of the opportunity to contact friends, call a neighbor, start a garden, organize your life and get outside to enjoy the outdoor recreational opportunities Kansas has to offer. Dave

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