**Preparing For A Little Sunshine**

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

After suffering through six years of the worst financial managers in Kansas history, we are starting to have revenues back on track with expenses. This has been a long and very expensive experiment, but hopefully the worst is behind us and we can share what we have learned with Washington D.C. gurus. Those who lead us down that path claimed to be conservative but were actually self-serving. They enjoyed a tax-free holiday that cost working Kansans more than $8 billion. The damages are still being calculated, but the bleeding has slowed as revenues are estimated at $533 million more than projected. However, these are estimates and can change dramatically as actual dollars arrive. The legislature has proposed adding that amount to our school funding obligation. The requested dollars to fund higher education are less than they wanted and will be addressed in the future. Hopefully the positive trend will enable restoration of funds to departments that have been reduced and eliminated. The most obvious is the million dollars a day taken from transportation since 2013, crippling the growth of communities with unsafe roads. Break out the sunglasses as we start to see a brighter day.

Medicaid expansion failed to receive enough votes this year, but the need is more pressing with the passing of each day. Hospitals, care homes and providers are not receiving enough money to operate, and vital services will be compromised if this isn’t resolved in the very near future. Most Kansans don’t realize the cost of this blunder and the pending consequences. The details of this are readily available from everyone in the medical field. Please take time to obtain the correct information, and join me in educating all elected officials about the urgency.

The April break from Topeka provided me an opportunity to visit with constituents throughout the district about issues that we could help resolve in Topeka. Property taxes dominated almost every conversation, and the time is now to work toward a resolution. It is the most regressive and unfair tax of the three we assess to fund government. I have talked to leadership about what can be done, and after lengthy discussions, they don’t know. It is time for new ideas to reach a resolution, and it better start now. I encourage everyone to get involved and share their potential solutions. The majority of legislators have not been faced with the severity of the problem yet, but as buildings empty and the federal government reduces their funds, the bill is destined to increase. Someone must pay for necessary services.

The big news from Wichita this week is the remodeling of seven Dillons stores and the drastic changes customers can expect. Supermarkets are traditionally remodeled every seven years, but with the pressure of online shopping, this now happens more frequently. The internet is changing everything at record speed, and retailers must keep up or be eliminated. If you patronize one of the Dillons stores, please take time to ask the managers when you can expect the update to occur at your store.

The Kansas State Fair received good news when the legislature voted to allow sales tax collected at the site to be used for operations and improvements. Hutchinson has been lax on reinvesting in the facility, and other communities had expressed interest in having the event relocated. I’m sure the American Royal project in the Kansas City area would be a prime location. This investment should renew enthusiasm in the facility with a new variety of attractions and events throughout the year.

The last week of the 2018 legislative session is around the corner, and we have a lot of work to complete. Many bills have not been heard and will need to be revisited next year. Making changes and introducing new laws can result in some very serious unintended consequences if the proposals are not reviewed in great detail. Special interest groups try to convince legislators to shift the tax burden when the goal should be to have everyone pay their fair share. In the two years I have served, the legislature has ended many of the sweetheart deals, but there are many more to be identified and corrected. My opinion is that all tax laws should have a time for review, and adjustments should be made according to economic changes that have occurred.

The good news about the 2018 session is that the sun is shining brighter with the improved financial situation, and more Kansans who receive the benefit of state-provided services pay what they should. To quote George Eliot, “It will never rain roses: when we want to have more roses, we must plant more roses,” and it is time to plant.

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