



# News From The Capitol

Representative Don Hineman

May 20, 2012

## Unprecedented Wrap-Up Session

I am writing this at my desk on the floor of the Kansas House of Representatives, on the 99th day of what was supposed to be a 90-day legislative session. Yes, we ran over. Yes, it has been an exhausting and very contentious session. But now we are nearing the end, on the afternoon of Sunday, May 20. That is just one more remarkable aspect of a truly remarkable and trying session, because no one can remember the Kansas Legislature ever meeting on a Sunday before!

Back in early January, at the start of the 2012 Kansas legislative session, I summarized the big policy issues that I expected the legislature to address. They included redistricting, tax reform, school finance reform, KPERS reform, Medicaid reform, and (as always) adoption of a budget. Here is a report card on those issues:

**Redistricting:** Rebalancing of Kansas House and Senate districts, State Board of Education districts, and Kansas congressional districts is federally mandated every ten years following the decennial census. Politics reared its ugly head early in the process, and although many maps have been drawn and a House map is fairly universally accepted, the same cannot be said for Senate and congressional maps. Things have become very contentious, and the legislature has

failed to agree on new redistricting maps. The matter will now be settled by the courts, and one seems to know how that will work, or what the timetable will be for finalizing maps. The filing deadline for state races has already been pushed back from June 1 to June 11, and it is possible that the August primaries may be moved from the first Tuesday to a later date. Here is a look at the House map, which most expect to survive relatively intact after the court takes action: [Cottonwood II Map](#)

**Tax Reform:** A very aggressive tax cut plan has been passed by both the House and Senate and awaits Governor Brownback's signature. There is much scepticism, however, about whether the plan can truly deliver the promised economic growth, especially in the short run.

Nearly everyone was hoping an alternative tax cut plan could be developed that would provide an economic stimulus and yet not be so reckless as the first plan. Governor Brownback has said that he would favor a less aggressive plan but would sign the original bill if no other plan was sent to him. The legislature has now failed in that effort and the governor's office has announced that the tax bill, which is more aggressive than what many, if not most, in the Statehouse want, will be signed into law tomorrow.

I will have more to say on the details of the plan later, but for the time being I have this thought: we all must now become advocates of supply-side economics in the fervent hope that the tax cuts provide the promised economic growth and expansion of state revenues before they decimate the state budget and many vital state programs.

**School Finance Reform:** Though Governor Brownback had this as a key part of his legislative initiative, it appears that nothing will be done during this session. Many legislators, including me, believe that the present school finance plan is not "broken" and does a good job of fairly allocating state funds to individual school districts.

**KPERS Reform:** Agreement has been reached on a KPERS reform bill that creates a new benefit class and changes the pension plan for new hires. The idea is to provide a reasonable, but fiscally responsible plan for new hires, and at the same time start to address the problem of the large unfunded actuarial liability in the present KPERS system. I am very pleased that we could find common ground, and we have now started down the path toward a fiscally sound KPERS system. Here is an [explanation](#) of the bill.

**Medicaid Reform:** This is one of Governor Brownback's initiatives which requires little in the way of legislative sanction. The administration plans to convert Kansas Medicaid to a managed care system with the intention of delivering necessary services in a more cost-effective manner. Governor Brownback and his administration have responded to extensive public outcry regarding the advisability of including developmental disabilities services in the new plan. Instead that portion will be delayed for one year.

**Budget:** As I predicted last January, the budget has proven to be the least contentious of the big-ticket items this session. I view it as a reasonable and certainly not extravagant budget. Every budget contains items every legislator dislikes, and I certainly disagree with some components. On balance, though, and especially in light of the new tax cut plan, I believe it is about as good as we could expect. I will have more details on the budget at a later date. We literally just passed the budget within the past hour.

**Working Without Pay**

Today is the 99th and final day of the 2012 legislative session. By law, the Kansas Legislature is authorized to meet for only 90 days. But this year the legislature has failed to complete its business in the allotted time. A bill was passed earlier this session that authorizes the legislature to continue to meet. However I am concerned about the ongoing cost of the additional days, which amounts to \$35,000 for legislative pay, plus the cost of legislative staff on top of that. When I was first elected to the legislature I understood that I was signing up for a 90-day job. I do not think it is right to accept pay beyond the 90 day limit, so on Friday, May 11 (the 90th day) I turned back my pay for the rest of the 2012 session. Hey, I'm a farmer... I'm used to working for nothing. Twenty three of my colleagues joined me in this [action](#).

## Prayer for Rain

I traveled home last weekend, for the first time since the wrap-up session began in late April. What awaited me was a sobering scene: the Lane County wheat crop is in very serious trouble. The crop that held so much promise just a few short weeks ago is rapidly declining. Most of the leaves on the wheat plants have died from the drought, and if the rains ever come, the crop will be trying to fill grain from the stem... the only part of the plant that is still green. Throughout most of Kansas the crop still looks fantastic, but for farmers in West Central Kansas it is starting to look like another year of depending on insurance payments instead of crop production.

So we farmers do what farmers have always done; we look to the heavens for help. The following is an edited version of a prayer for rain written by William Lindsay White (son of William Allen White) that originally was printed in the Emporia Gazette during the Kansas drought of 1935:

O Lord, in thy mercy grant us rain, and by that we don't

mean a shower. We want to go out and watch the lightning rip across the southwestern sky in hot blue forks as the fat clouds roll in on us. We want to hurry home to close the house with the first fat drops the size of marbles, on a suddenly rising wind, chasing us and plunking on the car hood. We want to scramble all over the house, just as the first sheets descend, frantically slamming down the windows.

O Lord of Hosts, we want to look out the windows and watch the regiments of close-packed raindrops march diagonally down. We want to hear the gurgle of the gutters under the eaves, and then sputter of the downspout.

God of Israel, Isaac and Jacob, let it come down so hard, let the drops dance so high that the streets and sidewalks seem covered with a 6-inch fog of spatter-drops. Then let it just keep up for awhile, and then begin to taper off, and then turn right around and get a lot worse, swishing, pounding, drenching, the thunder coming — crackity bam — and the lightning flashing so fast and furious you can't tell which flash goes with which peal of thunder. So that all the women get scared and climb on top of the beds and scream at you not to get too close to that window.

And then, O God, repeat the whole act about three times and in the middle of the second time, we will climb the attic stairs and put the wash pan under that tiny leak in the roof which usually you can't even notice in an ordinary rain. And after a couple of hours kind of taper it down, O Lord, to a good steady rain — not a drizzle, but a businesslike one that keeps up until just about dawn and then spits a few drops occasionally during the morning from a gray sky.

Kansas is indeed the promised land, O Lord, and if it gets a break it will flow with milk and honey. But we can't live much longer on promises. So in thine own way in thine own time, make up thy mind, O Lord, and we will bow before thy judgement, and praise thine everlasting name. Amen.

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## Words to Live By

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**Cowboy Logic:** The human mind treats a new idea the same way the body treats a strange protein. It rejects it!

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**Quote of the Week:** “The trouble with the world is that the stupid are cocksure and the intelligent are full of doubt” – Bertrand Russell

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**Sermon in a Sentence:** When you lose, don't lose the lesson.

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