

State Representative

Don Hineman

Don's Legislative Update
February 14, 2015

Kansas Agriculture is Under Attack

In 2012 when a massive income tax cut was proposed, assurances were made that cutting income tax would not result in higher property taxes. Many of us were not buying the story then, and we now have solid evidence that the ploy was a smokescreen to gain enough votes to pass the tax cut.

This week [Senator Jeff Melcher \(R-Leawood\)](#) introduced a bill which would radically alter the way that agricultural land is valued for property tax purposes. [SB 178](#) would cause a massive tax shift from all other classes of property and increase taxes on ag land drastically. Statewide, the bill would increase valuations on dryland by an average of 408%, irrigated farmland by an average of 593% and grassland by an average of 672%. The effect on farmers, ranchers, and rural economies would be devastating.

Once again, the consequences of an overly-aggressive tax cut plan are becoming evident. Instead of laying waste to the economy of rural Kansas perhaps it is time to own up to the fact that we went too far, too fast. The tax cut of 2012 was a bad plan. Our focus now should be to correct the plan's excesses.

KDOT Transfers to the State General Fund

Transferring funds from the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) to the state general fund is not new, and over \$2.1 billion has been transferred from KDOT since 1999. [I recently remarked](#) on the highway system deficiencies that could have been addressed had this money stayed with KDOT. But now the transfers are eating into KDOT's core mission, as it was recently announced that \$300 million in preservation projects will have to be delayed in order to continue the transfers.

And yet Governor Brownback is proposing to accelerate the transfers from KDOT even more, using \$58 million to immediately cover the general fund budget shortfall in fiscal year 2015, and transferring hundreds of millions more in FY 2016 and 2017. But we have recently learned that KDOT does not have enough bonding authority to allow those transfers. KDOT would be forced to ask the legislature for a higher bonding limit.

In a surprise move, the House Transportation Budget Committee took action Thursday to close the cashier's window of the Bank of KDOT. In what appeared to be a unanimous vote, they moved to block the transfers for 2016 and 2017. Rep. Russell Jennings (R-Lakin), Rep. Melissa Rooker (R-Fairway) and others pointed out the recklessness of deficit financing to support current operations. [Jennings likened it](#) to maxing out the state's credit card and asking for a higher credit limit so we can borrow even more. Although the House Appropriations Committee will next take up the issue



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and may well reinstate the transfers, the point has been made: there is nothing conservative or fiscally responsible about this proposal.

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Kansas Transparency Act

Rep. Stephanie Clayton (R-Overland Park) has sponsored the Kansas Transparency Act, which would provide for audio broadcast via internet in some committee meetings. [HB 2148](#) would provide for such broadcasts from four committee rooms in the Statehouse starting with the 2016 session, eventually expanding to all committee rooms. All such broadcasts would be archived and accessible indefinitely.

The process of making law is often compared to the process of making sausage. If that is true, then much of the sausage-making actually occurs in committee proceedings rather than on the floor of the House or Senate. That makes it difficult for constituents really observe what goes on in government. It is an issue of governmental transparency, but opponents have in the past cited high cost as a reason not to proceed.

However Rep. Clayton has worked with the legislative chief information technology officer to craft a plan with very reasonable cost. The project will cost roughly \$77,000 in startup costs and \$34,000 annually in maintenance costs thereafter. I believe governmental transparency is worth far more than that minimal investment, and I was pleased to testify in support of the bill. Interestingly, testimony in support of the bill was presented by individuals and groups from both extremes of the political spectrum.

Live audio feeds of House floor proceedings are available [here](#) by clicking on the A/V Live link in the upper right section of the screen. Live audio feeds of Senate floor proceedings are similarly available [here](#). Neither is archived for later listening, although many of us believe they should be.

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Pages Wanted

I have openings for legislative pages on Monday February 16, and Monday March 9. This invitation is open to junior and senior high school students, and is a wonderful opportunity to spend a day in the state Capitol, help out on the floor of the House, and learn about state government. Please notify me as soon as possible if you are interested. See contact information below.

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This newsletter is primarily intended for the residents of the 118th District (all of Wichita, Scott, Lane, Logan, Gove, Trego, and Sheridan Counties and portions of Thomas and Graham Counties). However it is available to anyone who finds it of interest. Please forward to your friends, or if you are not now receiving a FREE subscription to my newsletter, [click here to sign up](#).

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800-748-4408

Highway Road Conditions
511 (in Kansas)

Housing Hotline
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KanCare Assistance
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Kansas Lottery
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Legislative Hotline
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Mental Health Services
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Voter Registration
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Welfare Fraud Hotline
800-432-3913

Worker's Comp
800-332-0353

Cowboy Logic

Everyone is entitled to be stupid, but the federal government is just downright abusing the privilege.

Quote of the day

“Calling diminished services 'increased efficiency' is a corruption of trust and language.” – **Phil Stover, resident of the 118th District.**

Sermon in a sentence

Correction does much, but encouragement does more.

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