

# Kansas House Majority Leader

# Don Hineman

## Don's Legislative Update

March 4, 2019

### Session Turnaround

The Kansas legislature has reached the midpoint of the 2019 session, and I am now sending out my first newsletter of the year. Some of you may have regarded its absence as a welcome respite, but others have been asking why I dropped them from the mailing list. After several hectic weeks of total immersion into my new assignment as chairman of the Rural Revitalization Committee (more on that later), I am able to catch my breath and once again communicate with you.

Session turnaround is that point in the session when most bills must have passed out of their house of origin and awaiting action by the other chamber. A few committees are exempt from this requirement and can continue to work on bills which were originally introduced in them. The three exempt committees in the House are Taxation, Appropriations, and Federal and State Affairs. These committees can also become a temporary parking spot for bills which nonexempt committee chairmen wish to keep alive to consider later in session.

Turnaround always brings a flurry of activity. Last week was no exception, although the volume of bills was lower than in past years in both chambers. Some are wondering whether friction between a Democrat governor and Republican supermajorities in both legislative chambers might be the reason. However, it is good to remember that legislatures are deliberative bodies. The best legislative policies and solutions cannot be rushed. At this point the only thing we can say with certainty is that this legislature appears to be extra-deliberative.

### Adjustments to School Finance

Last year the Kansas Supreme Court reviewed the additional funding provided for public education by the 2018 legislature and essentially declared "close but not quite". The Court ruled that the method of distributing funds to individual school districts was sound, and therefore the question of equity of educational opportunity had been met. But the Court also ruled that the new legislation did not adequately allow for inflation during fiscal years 2020 through 2023. Discussions and negotiations are underway regarding how to define inflation adjustment for that period. Consensus appeared to be building toward a possible solution but last week the plaintiffs (Schools for Fair Funding) backed away from it and declared that a higher adjustment would be necessary. They are suggesting (demanding?) an additional \$90 million each year of the four-year period, resulting in an additional \$360 million annually for schools by 2023.



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Please remember that the state is finally emerging from a decade-long period of fiscal imbalance and budgetary austerity. Part of the problem was due to the great recession which began in 2008, and some of it was self-imposed by the overly-aggressive Brownback tax cut in 2012. The worst of the excesses of that initiative have now been reversed but some of the state's major industries (oil and gas, agriculture and aviation) are still struggling economically. For now, the fiscal ship has been righted, but there are any number of needs (not wants) in state government which have gone unaddressed for far too long.

There is widespread agreement that we cannot continue to sweep funds from transportation if we are ever to adopt a new transportation plan which meets the needs of Kansans. We know that there are deficiencies within the foster care system which must be addressed, and the same goes for the mental health system. Adequate pay for some state employees has reached a critical stage, and recruitment and retention of capable employees is a growing challenge in Departments of Corrections and Transportation just to name a couple. Higher Education is requesting an increase in funding which would only restore them to the level of funding they had a decade ago.

Throughout my legislative career I have always been a strong advocate for public education. The additional funding enacted last year provides \$523 million of new funding for schools – a very significant increase. And we will provide more this session to account for inflation. But as legislators we cannot responsibly fund a single function of state government to the detriment of all the other functions of government. And there is connectedness. Failure to adequately fund foster care and mental health services would negatively impact progress within the K-12 system.

The \$360 million that Schools for Fair Funding (SFF) are now asking for represents 25% of our entire corrections budget or 90% of the cost of every judge and court in the state of Kansas. I can't believe anyone wants us to make those sorts of trade-offs. And who wants to fund it by raising taxes? Kansas state sales tax is among the highest in the nation. Property taxes are the most hated and are becoming increasingly burdensome. And funding the amount that SFF is asking for would take a 10% increase in income tax rates.

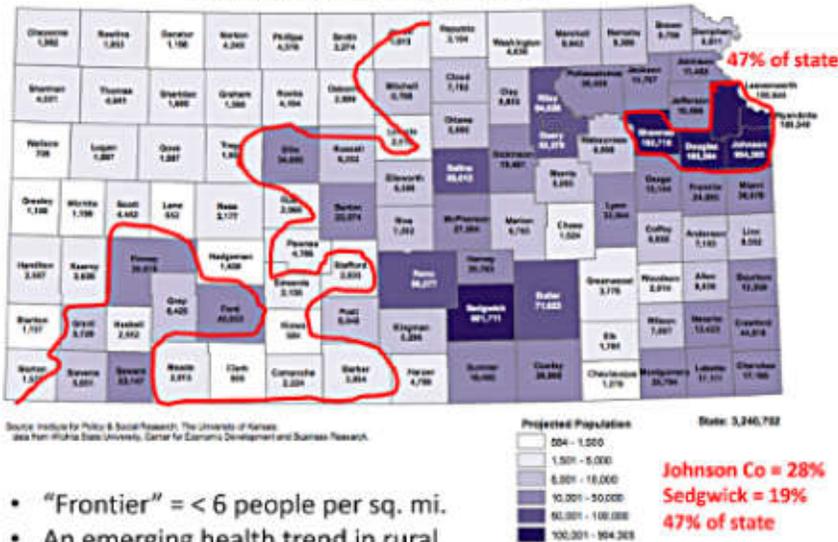
A workable solution must responsibly address the needs of K-12 but it must also be sustainable and measured, so that other functions of state government are not shortchanged to meet the demands of the plaintiffs.

## **Rural Revitalization Committee**

I am pleased to be given the opportunity to chair the new House Rural Revitalization Committee. Although Speaker Ron Ryckman currently resides in Olathe, he grew up in Meade. He understands that rural Kansas faces unique challenges, and he conceived the committee as an opportunity to shine a light on those challenges and work towards possible solutions. But we must be realistic. Shrinking populations and declining economic opportunities are endemic problems that cannot be totally solved by this committee. Given the long list of unmet priorities already existing in state government, we can't expect large increases of funding to address these needs, especially in the short run. But we can identify the challenges, publicize and coordinate existing sources of assistance, and work to reduce or eliminate regulatory overkill which might stand in the way of rural progress.



Projected Population in Kansas, by County, 2044



- "Frontier" = < 6 people per sq. mi.
- An emerging health trend in rural areas...

The committee has examined a number of issues in depth, and has identified three key challenges to be addressed:

- Universal access to highspeed broadband internet
- Affordable workforce housing
- Stabilizing and strengthening delivery of rural health care

Even the editors of the Topeka Capital-Journal have [taken notice](#) of our efforts, and I recently did a [podcast](#) with Jim McLean of Kansas News Service.

My next newsletter will dive deeper into these and other committee subjects.

## Town Hall Meetings

On Tuesday, March 5 I will be conducting town hall meetings with Senator Rick Billinger and Representative Adam Smith (on the Colby stop). Please join us as we travel across my district:

8:00 a.m.	Colby Community College	Colby
9:30 a.m.	Buffalo Bill Cultural Center	Oakley
11:00 a.m.	Midwest Energy	Hoxie
1:00 p.m.	Quinter City Hall	Quinter
2:30 p.m.	WaKeeney Livestock Market	WaKeeney

## Cowboy Logic

If you think you have all the answers, you haven't been listening to all of the questions.

## Quote of the Week

"The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said." – Peter Drucker

## Sermon in a Sentence

“Hate corrodes the container it is carried in.” – *Senator Alan Simpson*

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### Representative Don Hineman

Visit My Website at <http://www.hinemanforkansas.org/>

116 S. Longhorn Road	Room 186-N, State Capitol Building
Dighton, Kansas 67839	300 SW 10th Street
Phone: 620-397-2504	Topeka, Kansas 66612
Fax: 620-397-755	Phone: 785-296-7384
Email: <a href="mailto:dhineman@st-tel.net">dhineman@st-tel.net</a>	Email: <a href="mailto:don.hineman@house.ks.gov">don.hineman@house.ks.gov</a>

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**Newsletter Paid for by Hineman For Kansas - Derek Martin, Treasurer**