

From the Superintendent:

The Kansas Legislature was called into session for 2016 on Monday, January 11. This will not be an easy session for legislators, as there are several important issues that must be resolved appropriately and effectively. The manner in which our state leaders address these issues will impact the future of this state and its citizens.

Currently, the State of Kansas is on very shaky ground financially. Revenues to the state have consistently come in under projections for the past couple of years. Prior to the release of the Governor's latest budget, the state was facing a potential shortfall in excess of \$180 million through the end of the next fiscal year. The latest budget does attempt to cover that shortfall through reallocating certain available funds. However, the budget allows for no margin of error with an ending balance on June 30, 2017 that would operate the state for less than 24 hours (that only holds true if revenue meets projections).

There are many who will say the issue is about spending. They believe that the state's budget crisis can and should be solved through cuts in spending. It is not my intent to debate that issue, but I do believe that the State of Kansas does have certain obligations to its citizens. There must be infrastructure (roads, bridges, etc.) that is safe and efficient. There must be programs that assistance and care for those who for whatever reason are unable to care for themselves. The State has a constitutional obligation to provide for the education of our youth.

Public education accounts for approximately 50% of the General Fund spending in Kansas. Because of that basic fact, many legislators are seeking ways to reduce spending on education. There has been rhetoric that spending for education is at an all-time high. Technically that is true, but the additional funding is not available for operating expenditures. The Governor has gone as far as stating that public schools spend money inefficiently and called it immoral. Such a comment demonstrates a lack of understanding of how schools operate, especially in rural western Kansas. I recently had the opportunity to spend an afternoon at the Capitol. While I was there, I spoke with several legislators and was able to share that I am not only a Superintendent, I am also the Principal of two buildings, the District Tech Coordinator and a substitute bus driver. It was easy to see by their reaction they had no idea there are districts operating in that manner.

A good example of the mindset of some legislators is House Bill 2504, also known as the School District Realignment Bill. In general terms, this bill would reduce the number of school districts in Kansas by more than one half. Any county with fewer than 10,000 students could have no more than one school district. It is interesting that the districts represented by the legislator who introduced the bill would not be effected. Obviously this bill would affect Gove County and its schools.

In spite of the significance of the issues before the Legislature during this session, it may be very difficult for this body to achieve as much as necessary. Every Legislator is up for re-election this fall. Many may become hesitant to cast a controversial vote. Because of the importance of the issues, I encourage everyone to do what they can to stay informed and to contact our legislators to express your expectations of them. Our legislators are; Representative Don Hineman of Dighton and Senator Ralph Ostmeyer of Grinnell. As always, if you have questions related to these or any other issues feel free to contact me.