



Dear Constituents:

Please accept my apologies for the delay in my newsletters this year. This session is off to a slow start like most years, but with 40 freshmen legislators, it is taking them a while to get up to speed and for the rest of us to learn their names and faces, let alone their hometowns and positions on legislative issues.

#### **From the House Floor**

This week was relatively easy because the majority of the bills considered by the full House of Representatives were minor tweaks – we call them “rats and cats” bills. Thursday was the exception. It was “Tax Day” at the Capitol. Here are a few highlights:

You likely remember the temporary 1% sales tax passed during the last legislative session – it was the subject of great angst during the 2010 election cycle. Passing this would have taken another \$330 million out of the budgets, hurting mainly our public schools. **HB 2091** ([http://kslegislature.org/li/b2011\\_12/year1/measures/hb2091/](http://kslegislature.org/li/b2011_12/year1/measures/hb2091/)) failed primarily because those who supported the repeal during the campaign are now elected and realize they have to create a balanced budget and need that income to do so, or make drastic cuts hurting their constituents.

Another critical incentive for Johnson County businesses is **SB 61** ([http://kslegislature.org/li/b2011\\_12/year1/measures/sb61/](http://kslegislature.org/li/b2011_12/year1/measures/sb61/)), the High Performance Incentive Program. This incentive provides a 10% capital investment tax credit for those companies with high-wage employees. Among other changes, the bill would allow companies to take the credit for 16 years instead of 10 years under current law. The House is considering these changes as I write this.

#### **Committees**

Due to my experience in the classroom and a school boardroom, my appointments to the Education and Education Budget Committees are a natural fit for me. Many of my updates will center on education because of its importance to my constituents, but also because I spend most of my days in committee considering improvements to the system.

#### **Education Budget Committee**

Because school finance is more than half of the state's budget, and because the budget is in such dire straits, there is great interest – and great need – in finding savings within our education system. Many of us are pushing for a complete overhaul of the finance formula adopted in the early 1990s. Our schools, demographics, expectations, and economy have all changed in the last 20 years. In order to better prepare our students for the future, school funding should reflect these fundamental shifts. However, the political willpower does not exist this year for such an overhaul, although Governor Brownback has committed to revisiting the finance plan soon.

One of the tweaks we have considered this year pertains to out-of-state students. Did you know more than 700 students from outside our state are attending Kansas K-12 schools for free? **House Bill 2251** ([http://kslegislature.org/li/b2011\\_12/year1/measures/hb2251/](http://kslegislature.org/li/b2011_12/year1/measures/hb2251/)) aims to fix that problem. I introduced that bill in the Education Committee and it passed the full House by a 77-44 vote. When (and if) fully implemented, this law could save more than \$3 million per year. It is now under consideration by the Senate.

### **Education Committee**

#### *ELL Spending*

The Education Committee has investigated why some districts spend \$100 per student for English Language Learner (English as a Second Language) students while others spend more than \$1400 per student, without a proportionate increase in outcomes. An audit recommended these monies be distributed equally per child, not just as a reimbursement to those districts that spent the most. This initiative would have saved money, but rural legislators opposed it and it died in committee.

#### *At-Risk Students*

Did you know that schools are getting 50% more funding for students who are getting a free lunch with the assumption that they are at risk for failure and those who are not passing tests and are really failing are only getting a fraction of that money? If we only spent money to help failing students we could save over \$100 million or put that money back into the base state aid per pupil.

### **Transportation**

Because a significant transportation plan was passed at the end of the last legislative session, this committee has been considering small tweaks – increasing the speed limit, ensuring fines for the recent primary seatbelt law are assessed uniformly throughout the state, and renaming a few highways.

The committee was fortunate to tour the National Academy of Railroad Sciences (NARS) training facility located at Johnson County Community College. The FastTrack training program gets students in and out of the program in a matter of months with starting salaries averaging \$60,000. These jobs range from conductors and mechanics to maintenance and engineering, signal operators, and telecommunications specialists. If you have never toured this facility, I highly recommend it – be sure to drive the engine simulator! Not every student needs a four-

year degree, but every student needs at least two years of post-secondary training to compete in our job-starved economy. If your student is looking for options, I highly recommend this program.

To learn more about NARS, visit: <http://www.narstraining.com/>

It is an honor to serve you in Topeka. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions about these or any other legislative issues.

Sincerely,

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*Sheryl Spalding serves the 29<sup>th</sup> District in the Kansas House of Representatives, which is fully within the city of Overland Park.*

**Resources:**

Johnson County Election Office: [www.jocoelection.org](http://www.jocoelection.org)

Johnson County Government: [www.jocogov.org](http://www.jocogov.org)

City of Overland Park: [www.opkansas.org](http://www.opkansas.org)

Kansas Secretary of State's office: [www.kssos.org](http://www.kssos.org)

Kansas Legislature: [www.kslegislature.org](http://www.kslegislature.org)

Kansas Governor: [www.governor.ks.gov](http://www.governor.ks.gov)

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