



Capitol Briefing



My Committees
Taxation
Transportation
Economic Dev &
Tourism

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2008 Session Opens

The first week of the 2008 session has drawn to a close with a celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King's contribution to our state and nation. We were not in session on Monday in commemoration of MLK. The next few weeks will be busy as bills are introduced and committees begin their work. Two of my committees, Taxation and Economic Development and Tourism met the first week. The week of January 21st, the Transportation Committee will meet to discuss SB294, the graduated driver's license bill which, if passed, will place new licensing requirements on teenage drivers. This year a few committees are meeting in the Docking building across the street from the Capitol, but, luckily, the tunnel is open between the two buildings. Complete daily calendars are available at the Legislature's web site: www.kslegislature.org along with other useful information. You can also call and leave a message or get questions answered by calling 1-800-432-3924. My office phone number is (785) 296-7698. My office is on the 7th Floor of the Docking State Office Building. My secretary, Barb Crable, can also arrange for tours of the Capital or other activities if you call and let us know when you are coming to visit, and we would love to have you come.

You may know that the State House Chamber has been completely refurbished with closer adherence in design to its historical origins. I encourage you to visit for a tour of our newly renovated House and Senate chambers. You may call my office or also schedule a tour at 785.296.3966. The beautiful new desks (shown in this photo) were manufactured close to Topeka and once you see the Chamber, I'm sure you'll agree it's very beautiful from top to bottom.



If I can ever be of assistance to you, please feel free to contact me. My schedule is busy but I always make room to meet with folks from home. My committees usually meet as follows: Taxation, 9 a.m.; Transportation, 1:30 p.m.; Economic Development & Tourism, 3:30 p.m.

Governor Sebelius delivered her sixth State of the State Address on Monday, January 14, 2008. The Governor announced a number of new initiatives. Here are her proposals at a glance:

Innovation Economy

The spread of technology and the rise of highly skilled workers in countries around the world have created a global economy. To create a competitive labor force, the innovation economy demands alignment of postsecondary education with the needs of growing Kansas industries.

Education

At no time in history has a quality education been more essential to a prosperous future. To expand early learning opportunities for Kansas children, the governor proposes \$27 million for all-day kindergarten and \$23 million in block grant funding for early childhood education. Just as important as early education is higher education. An additional \$3 million in scholarship money will ensure that 2,000 students will have the opportunity to compete in our new innovation economy.

Health Care

Governor Sebelius strongly encourages the passage of the Kansas Health Policy Authority's health reform package, in its entirety, this session. The plan was developed under the direction of the legislature and has the ability to transform the ailing health care system in Kansas.

Centers for Rural Opportunity

In order to attract investment, business development, and job growth in the state's rural communities, the governor proposes \$2.1 million to support three Offices of Rural Opportunities. The centers will ensure communities have access to state and federal services and assistance.

Energy

The Governor challenged Kansas to join 36 other states in forming a comprehensive climate plan. Kansas can lead America to energy security by tapping our fertile resources, our workers, and the ingenuity of Kansas entrepreneurs. We can and must increase our economic competitiveness by using our natural resources. The Governor and Lieutenant Governor recently created the Kansas Wind Working Group to explore opportunities for developing wind energy across the state. The group will educate stakeholder groups with the current information on wind energy markets, technologies, economics, policies and prospects.

In addition to her State of the State address, Governor Sebelius also unveiled her budget plan for the New Year. Five basic principles guide the Governor's budget recommendations:

- Grow the economy and create new jobs
- Improve health care
- Support Kansas schools and enhance early childhood programs
- Maintain the state's infrastructure
- Fairly compensate those in public service

The Governor's budget proposal limits growth of state spending to 4.6%. Most of the increase is due to higher costs for health services for seniors and for those with disabilities. Additionally, costs increased for the KPERS Retirement System. Overall, the spending increase is still well below the 5% goal set by House Leadership.

As your state legislator, I am highly focused on maintaining fiscal responsibility while maximizing opportunities for Kansans. I was very pleased to see that 70% of the Governor's initiatives came from funds already committed by last year's budget. I was also pleased to see the dedication of new gaming revenues to paying down current state debt.

The Kansas Health Policy Authority recently presented its recommendations to the Legislature on the best ways to expand health coverage for Kansans without adequate insurance. This issue ranks high on our list of priorities for 2008.

Some highlights of the 21 policy recommendations include:

- Cover more kids through aggressive marketing and outreach to enroll already eligible children.
- Expand premium assistance to include childless adults up to 50% Federal Poverty Level in 2009.
- Assisting small businesses by establishing a health insurance clearinghouse and other strategies.

You can view the complete proposal of health care reforms at the KHPA website:

www.khpa.ks.gov.

Whether it be providing health care for a child or addressing the high cost of senior health services, lack of affordability is a tremendous burden for Kansas families. Additionally, high costs hinder our state's businesses who struggle to remain competitive while trying to provide adequate coverage for hard-working employees. Furthermore, inadequate health care prevention leads to an increased need for services and even higher costs. Each year, the price tag on health care demands more and more of the state- and individual family- budgets. It is in everyone's best interest to meaningfully address these issues.

As lawmakers, we must ensure that responsible Kansans can afford quality health care. I'm hopeful the KHPA recommendations will begin a long overdue discussion about health care in this state.

We are nearing the completion of a ten-year comprehensive transportation program passed in 1999. Discussions are already underway regarding the next program. Considerations such as size, types of projects, etc. must be addressed.

A quality transportation system creates job and business opportunities for Kansans. It is estimated that for every \$1 spent on improving our transportation infrastructure, we receive a \$3 return in the form of economic benefit for the state. The current program resulted in 25,000 new jobs for Kansas workers over ten years.

Affordable housing and an increased number of foreclosures is a serious issue that will require action this year. The natural disasters of 2007 compounded the deficiency of housing programs in Kansas. We will most certainly consider proposals to provide adequate, affordable housing in communities impacted by recent flooding and tornado damage.

Additionally, it is likely that we will have a much broader discussion about supporting affordable housing developments throughout the state. In visiting with business leaders, it is apparent that the availability of affordable housing is one of the primary challenges to our state's economic well-being. As the number of foreclosures across the country skyrocket, we must see to it that Kansans have the information necessary to make wise financial decisions that fit their budgets. Affordable housing must be addressed in order to prepare for future natural disasters, promote economic development in Kansas, and keep Kansas families from falling into a financial trap.

The 2010 Commission, composed of legislators as well as educators and private sector leaders, recently proposed a teacher retention package for K-12. This package contains a \$5,000 bonus to teachers in high-demand subjects, such as math and science, who continue working after the date at which they are eligible to retire. The proposal would allow local districts to offer such teachers a \$2,500 bonus which would be matched by the state for each year the teacher remains working beyond their retirement date.

The shortage of teachers in key subject areas is becoming a serious problem as the number of teachers eligible to retire and the number of potential teachers in colleges/universities falls out of balance. The areas where vacancies are most serious include: special education, math, science, vocational-technical, foreign language, music and counseling. The Department of Education conducted an informal survey of all districts, requesting the number of vacancies they had as of June 4, 2007. Districts responded with a total of 1,144 vacancies for certified teachers. This will be an issue that should receive quite a bit of discussion in 2008.

I look forward to a serious discussion about energy in 2008. There will likely be intense disagreement over the recent rejection of a coal-fired power plant in Holcomb, Kansas. Regardless of individual opinions on this issue, we must not lose sight of our opportunity to become a national leader in the production of biofuels and wind energy. Increased renewable energy production will not only help our country become energy independent, it will also boost our state economy, provide new markets for agricultural products, and make Kansas a better place to live and do business. Seizing this opportunity is akin to what Clyde Cessna and Walter Beech did 90 years ago as they led us into our preeminent position in the aerospace industry. At any rate, we have a responsibility to move forward. Kansans deserve the promise of clean air, affordable energy and a strong economy. We can fulfill all of these promises on energy with a productive, innovative approach.

As you know, January 21st commemorated Martin Luther King Day. This holiday falls at a particularly appropriate time of year. Dr. King forged common ground where people from all walks of life could join together in pursuit of important community causes. As a public servant, it is important to celebrate this ideal at the beginning of the legislative session. It reminds us why we bother to gather at the State Capitol every January: to better the lives of Kansans and to leave the state a little better than it was before.

This year's Martin Luther King Day event at the Capitol featured Leland Hardy. Hardy holds two masters degrees in finance, marketing and international business. He is considered one of the world's most fluent scholars on China. Hardy is the founder of *InternetEquality.org*, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote increased internet access and use by traditionally lesser-represented communities, particularly the poor and minorities. His speech is entitled "From Racial Equality to Internet Equality – Applying Dr. King's Principles to the Internet Age."

Participation in the State House Page Program

Young people from the ages of 12-18 are invited to spend the day at the Capitol serving as pages.



If you would like to participate in this program, please call my office right away. I have the option for two pages on January 31st which is coming up rather quickly. This photo is of three pages I sponsored last year: Raffaella Prevot, Rachel Myers, and Ashton Wilkin.

On The Home Front

On the Home Front Juanita continues to battle cancer. We were cheered by an excellent Doctor's



report on November 7th showing “no evidence of active tumor” and another report on January 2nd which was substantially unchanged from November. Juanita continues to battle fatigue, but I can see definite progress which we pray will continue.

Granddaughter, Dakotah, pictured here, is now in the “no”

answer to every question seems to be “no” but we know that stage will pass.

Upcoming Presidential Caucuses

For the first time in several years, Kansas will have a legitimate voice in the presidential primary process. Time and time again we watched early-primary states such as Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina set the tone for the entire country. In the past, by the time Kansas held its own caucus in early summer, presidential nominees were all but official. This left our state's caucuses poorly attended and irrelevant.

This year will be different, offering Kansans the opportunity to be heard before the decision is made. Our 2008 caucus dates have been moved ahead by four months: from early June to early February. I strongly urge you all to attend your local caucus next month. No matter what your political affiliation, our system only works when voters participate. I have included information for the caucuses of both political parties below:

Democratic Caucus:

- Will be held Tuesday, February 5th, 2008 at 7:00 PM.
- Doors at caucus sites open at 6:00 PM. Anyone not in line by 7:00 PM will not be admitted.
- The caucuses will be held in each senate district across the state. Specific locations are listed on the website of the Kansas Democratic Party: www.ksdp.org/caucus.
- Eligible individuals wishing to change their political affiliation to Democrat- or individuals registering to vote- may do so at the door.
- Individuals who are currently under age 18 but will turn 18 by November 4, 2008 MAY PARTICIPATE in the caucus.
- To determine your senate district, visit <http://www.ipsr.ku.edu/ksdata/vote/>.
- Democratic candidates filed in Kansas: Hillary Clinton, John Edwards, Barack Obama.
- More specific questions about the Kansas Democratic Caucus should be referred to the Kansas Democratic Party at 785.234.0425 or www.ksdp.org/caucus.

Republican Caucus:

- Will be held Saturday, February 9th, 2008 at 10:00 AM.
- Please arrive prior to 10:00 AM to allow sufficient time for voter registration verification.
- The caucuses will be held at a variety of locations in each congressional district across the state.

Specific locations are listed on the website of the Kansas Republican Party Caucus:

www.ksgopcaucus.org.

- Only registered Republicans- who have registered by January 25, 2008- are eligible to participate. Registrations will not be allowed at the door.
- A state-issued form of identification is required to participate.
- All individuals must be registered voters and be 18 years of age or older by February 9, 2008.
- Republican candidates filed in Kansas: Rudy Guiliani, Mike Huckabee, Duncan Hunter, Alan Keyes, John McCain, Ron Paul, Mitt Romney, Tom Tancredo, Fred Thompson.
- More specific questions about the Kansas Republican Caucus should be referred to the Kansas Republican Party at 785.234.3456 or www.ksgopcaucus.org.

The following is a list of the numbers I receive the most requests for during the legislative session. You can find these as well as many others online at <http://da.state.ks.us/phonebook>. I hope you will find this information helpful.

Kansas Jobs

(785) 235-5627

Tax Refund Status Info

(800) 894-0318

Taxpayer Assistance

(800) 259-2829

Governor's Constituent Services

(800) 748-4408

Unclaimed Property

(800) 432-0386

Highway Road Conditions

(800) 585-7623

Crime Tip Hotline

(800) 572-7463

Driver's License Bureau

(785) 296-3963

Kansas Department on Aging

(800) 432-3535

KPERS

(888) 275-5737

Housing Hotline

(800) 752-4422

Vital Statistics

(785) 296-1400

Legislative Hotline

(800) 432-3924

Voter Registration Questions

(800) 262-8683

Crime Victim Referral Service

(800) 828-9745

Child/Adult Abuse Hotline

(800) 922-5330

School Safety Hotline

(877) 626-8203

Kansas Lottery

(785) 296-5700

Welfare Fraud Hotline

(800) 432-3913

Insurance Consumer Assistance

(800) 432-2484

Consumer Protection

(785) 296-3751

In Closing

It is a special honor to serve as your state representative. I value and need your input on the various issues facing state government and want to offer a particular word of thanks to all those who took the time to read and return my Constituent Survey. I will take note of the opinions of each respondent as the session progresses. Please feel free to contact me with your additional comments and questions. My office address is Room 49, Docking State Office Building, Topeka, KS 66612. You can reach me at (785) 296-7698 or call the legislative hotline at 1-800-432-3924 to leave a message for me. Additionally, you can e-mail me at rardin@house.state.ks.us. You can also follow the legislative session online at www.kslegislature.org.

As you can see, we have our work cut out for us over the next few months at the Capitol. The time has come to lead a real conversation about the challenges and responsibilities we face in Kansas. Vigorous debates lie ahead. However, our most passionate debates are usually the most important. I welcome your feedback on these important issues or any other issue that impacts you and your family. This is the time for legislators to put aside political labels and do what's best for Kansas. With hard work and dedication, we will transform the challenges of 2008 into new opportunities for 2009 and beyond.