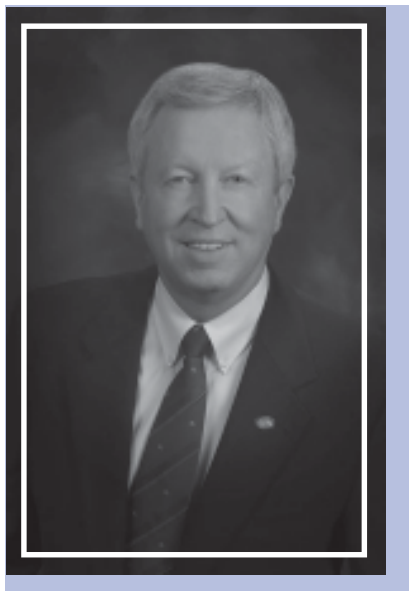


January 5, 2006



SENATE UPDATE

from

Senate President Steve Morris

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A NOTE FROM THE SENATE PRESIDENT....

Dear Friends,

It's hard to believe the 2006 Legislative Session is just days away now. Before the session kicks off, however, I wanted to give you a very brief overview of some of the issues that will almost certainly come up this year. As always, please feel free to share your concerns and ideas with me on these issues or on other matters of interest to you.

My wife Barb joins me in extending best wishes to you for a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Steve R. Morris".

School Finance

As you are no doubt aware, under a state Supreme Court order, the legislature put a huge amount of money into K-12 education last year. Whether you agree with the Court's determination or not, it served to renew Kansas' commitment to K-12 with new dollars, with the 2010 Commission, the At-Risk Council, and with two major studies commissioned by the legislature. The results of those studies were just released this week, and will be the starting point for discussions for school funding for 2006-07.

The studies were undertaken by the Division of Legislative Post Audit, in which members of the legislature have great confidence. The first study is to attempt to determine the actual cost of providing an education to a student in Kansas; the second is an outcomes-based study on the effectiveness of the system under which we provide that education.

While the Kansas Supreme Court has retained jurisdiction in the case, the judges seem willing to sit back and see what comes out of the studies and lawmakers response to those results. Needless to say, funding for education will remain very much on the front burner, very much a high priority for the 2006 session.

State Budget

The State has been enjoying one of the biggest revenue increases in history, with state receipts coming in much higher than expected. That's the good news.

The bad news is, most of that new revenue is already spoken for. In addition to the new dollars committed to education, we have significant financial obligations to the transportation plan revamped in 2004, and to the debt service on pension bonds for the Kansas Public Employee Retirement System. We also face escalating costs and caseloads under Medicaid. Finally, we really don't know what the Court will ultimately decide on school finance.

So, while the fiscal news is good, it simply means we can meet our current obligations while maintaining a healthy ending balance. If we had to, we could dip into the ending balances, but if we did, it would make next year significantly worse.

Regarding Medicaid, we put \$154 million into Medicaid last year alone. In the past four years, we have put in **half a BILLION dollars**. We must find a way to stem the flow. How do we do that?

Well, we had an interim committee on Medicaid that will submit a number of recommendations to the 2006 legislature. I suspect we will look at those ideas early in the session. We must find a way to change people's perceptions and behavior. We may look at a nominal co-pay. Ultimately, however, we need for the Federal Government to step up through Medicare. Our state Medicaid program was never intended to be the major safety net for our seniors.

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Repair & Maintenance for Regents Institutions Infrastructure

For far too long, we have neglected the maintenance and updating of the buildings on the campuses of our Regents institutions. In many cases, significant and serious risks exist that are the result of years of neglect. I'd really like to see this situation addressed. We would never tolerate these conditions in our K-12 school buildings. We need to meet our responsibilities in this area.

Having said that, I think we also need to work with our regents schools to get the word out to activate alumni organizations on this matter. We also need to ensure that privately funded new buildings include an endowment to maintain those buildings. We need a solid plan for ongoing maintenance needs at our colleges and universities.

Other Major Issues of Interest in 2006

Tax Cuts?

The Governor has indicated her interest in repealing the tax on new machinery and equipment, so that will most likely be considered. I would still like to see a change in the estate tax. Keep in mind, however, given our current obligations, it will be difficult to make major tax cuts.

Vouchers?

There is some interest among some members in looking at vouchers for private schools. With the ongoing concerns about school finance, I don't know how much serious play this will receive.

Constitutional Amendments?

There may still be some interest in looking at amendments that would affect how Supreme Court Justices are selected and that would limit the Supreme Court's authority in appropriating state funds. I think we will probably try to find ways to address those matters statutorily rather than tinker further with the state constitution.

Gambling?

There continues to be some interest statewide in expanding gaming in some way. There have been advisory votes in neighboring counties to support casino locations in target areas. With our ongoing need for new revenue, the gaming issue is probably alive and well.

Death Penalty?

As you may know, the constitutionality of our death penalty statute is in question. Attorney General Phill Kline recently argued the matter before the US Supreme Court. Once a decision is handed down, I do not believe it will take much to "tweak" our law to meet constitutional muster.

However, if we have to revisit the law at all, it is critical to remember that it reopens the whole issue. The makeup of the Kansas Legislature has changed since the death penalty was reenacted back in 1994. I have not recently taken the pulse of the Senate membership on this emotional and often divisive issue. We'll see how it plays out once we hear from the US Supreme Court.

Eminent Domain?

I am confident this issue will come up during the session this year. This is a complex matter, with merit on both sides of the discussion. I do not anticipate change in the laws governing eminent domain with regard to public property, but I think we will need to clarify the laws with regard to privately owned property.

The 2006 Elections?

I've been asked how much the specter of the 2006 elections will affect the session. While the prospect of coming elections changes things a bit, when all is said and done, it doesn't have a great affect.

The entire Kansas House of Representatives is up for reelection this year, as is the Governor, the Secretary of State, the Attorney General and others. The Kansas Senate is on a four-year term and will not stand for reelection until 2008.

Perhaps most notably, several members of the Kansas State Board of Education are up for reelection this year. The Board has been the focus of some intense publicity this year -- statewide, nationally and even internationally - over the last few years because of its socially conservative majority, its attempts to change state science education standards, and the hiring of a controversial Commissioner of Education.

Undoubtedly, the reality of elections will result in some extended discussions and some interesting votes, but as I said earlier, I don't expect it to have a great affect on the outcome of major issues.

Construction at the State Capitol

The capitol is in the midst of a 10-year remodeling and refurbishing program. It will bring the building into line with current and future electrical, heating and airconditioning, and telecommunication needs while taking the building back to its original period decor. The Senate chamber and adjoining offices have been completed, and they are really beautiful. We have recaptured the original beauty of our spectacular chamber, and the quiet dignity of the leadership offices.

Although there is still work being done, I hope you will stop into the capitol next time you are near Topeka. It is well worth the look. Bring your children...and if you haven't seen the statehouse since you were in grade school -- you are in for a treat. There is a wonderful underground parking facility for visitors, and a planned visitors center which will come later in the construction phase. Come see us and see this wonderful, historic building coming back to life!