

Tom's Out-of-Session Legislative-Related Activities – December, 2011

Energy: The past few months have been very hectic. If you have been following the media releases (also posted on this site), you know that I hosted the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Installations, Energy, and Environment (ASA-IEE). I presented information related to a wind-solar-energy storage project that I am promoting to address the primary problem with renewable energy – it is intermittent. Addressing the wind does not blow, sun does not shine objections from utility companies and many state legislators, I proposed having both wind and solar generation tied to energy storage to address the intermittency problem. I also presented information about a possible municipal waste (trash) to synthetic gas to electricity generation. The trash is “burned” in a vacuum and the organic materials are captured in their gaseous state, which then can be burned to create electricity. This process could minimize landfill needs and provide increased energy security.

No such wind-solar-storage project has been developed in the world and I am promoting the concept to the Governor and the Army as a way to establish Kansas as a true leader in renewable energy and to help the Army meet the Presidential and Congressional directives to be “greener.” I have visited the Pentagon to speak with the energy supply personnel in both the Army and Air Force (McConnell Airbase is in Wichita; Ft. Riley and Ft. Leavenworth are the Army bases) as follow-up to my presentation to the ASA-IEE. The military are interested, but do not want to pay more for the electricity, do not want to be “first” to try this, etc.; same with the Kansas Administration. I will continue pressing for this innovative approach to making renewable energy more reliable and secure.

As the only state legislator on the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Electricity Advisory Committee, I have pressed for greater attention to how the Department can make the reliability of renewable energy a higher priority. Increased research funding for better storage batteries/technologies is one way, but equally important is encouraging utilities and regional transmission operators to use energy storage to minimize customer service interruptions. I also am encouraging the Department to address electric vehicles from an electric system reliability perspective. Electric vehicles will increase electric demands, but also offer opportunities to serve as energy storage during peak demand periods.

I am a member of the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) and the Council of State Governments (CSG) energy-related Task Forces. With CSG, I am co-chair of a Task Force developing an interstate compact (model legislation) to standardize the review of proposed electric transmission lines that cross state borders. If Kansas is to develop our full wind and solar generation potential, we need access to customers in other states. Making it easier for transmission lines to be considered jointly by states will reduce the costs associated with such applications, speed the decision-making process, and stimulate the development of renewable generation. Not

all proposed transmission lines should be constructed, but the decision by state public utility commissioners can be made more transparent and faster.

Within both NCSL and CSG I sponsored Resolutions calling on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to be more realistic in the deadlines they have proposed for closing coal-fired generation units or installing more complex emission scrubbers on them. The Resolutions DO NOT say that such actions should not be taken, rather they state that the manufacturing capacity (much of it overseas), itinerant qualified workforce, and cost to consumers mean that greater attention should be paid to achievable and responsible deadlines. A Federal Energy Regulatory Commissioner (FERC) agrees with me and is calling for similar rethinking of the target deadlines for the same reasons that I am.

Water: In early summer, I hosted the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, the person who oversees the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Corps constructed and operates most of the large reservoirs in Kansas. I pressed for greater Corps-Kansas water agency cooperation regarding operation long-term sustainability of the reservoirs. Every reservoir was constructed with approximately a 100-year productive life expectancy. Most of them are 50-60 years old and the loss of water storage to siltation affects flood control, drought protection, drinking water quality, and recreation availability.

As a result of our discussions, Kansas is the only state with a Corps of Engineers staff member assigned to our water agencies to help coordinate federal-state programs. We also have a plan to address conditions at the John Redmond Reservoir (almost 50% of the lake's capacity has been lost to siltation).

I continue to press the Governor and his staff to adequately fund water programs. They have higher priorities, but I will not give up the effort to sustain the drinking water supplies for the future.

Telecommunications: You may have noted that I was appointed to the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) Intergovernmental Affairs Committee (IAC). This is a small group that will advise the FCC on what policies to pursue related to increasing availability of high-speed/broadband Internet services to all Americans. This is particularly important in states like Kansas with large segments of rural citizens with only dial-up service.

I have suggested several research topics related to "best practices" by governments and utilities to increase the use of Internet services. The IAC Committee will select the topics that will be pursued in a January teleconference. The Kansas Department of Labor requires persons seeking unemployment benefits to file electronically, the Department of Revenue encourages taxpayers to file electronically, K-12 and higher education coursework requires access to massive distant databases, etc. Those people

without access to high-speed Internet services are at a significant disadvantage. The digital divide includes those without access to broadband services as well as those with broadband at absurdly slow speeds. Our state's economic and educational future rests on ensuring that all Kansans have access to broadband.

I also have been pressing the Veterans Affairs Administration (VA) to link their telemedicine system (linking their hospitals over the Internet) to the Kansas hospitals so that veterans can receive many types of consultations without going to a VA hospital. My suggestion to the Secretary of the VA resulted in the Kansas City VA staff exploring the feasibility of such a linkage. They determined that such a link was feasible and potentially very beneficial to veterans (including National Guard veterans) and cost-effective. We hope to have the first links established in early 2012. My goal has been for veterans to go to their local hospital and be "seen" by VA health care staff over the Internet. While not appropriate for all health care conditions, eliminating hours of travel for veterans, while keeping them close to home will improve health care delivery and reduce costs to both veterans and the VA.

When Kansas and the VA implement this connective health care service, it will be a model that other states and the VA will pursue. More importantly, the quality of health care for our veterans (particularly mental health care for veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan) will improve.

Other: Notwithstanding my work on large, long-term state and national issues, I continue to address Douglas County resident problems. For example, I contacted the Chairman of the Board of one of the largest national banks because they were not providing adequate customer service to a constituent trying to avoid foreclosure on her home. Also, I continue to support keeping the Lawrence SRS office open, as well as to adequately fund our education system. I support Lecompton's efforts to protect Constitution Hall and increase tourist visits, and I continue to endorse state support for the Arts.