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Redistricting a focus for 2012

It may be quiet in the halls of the Capitol as 2011 draws to a close, but that is set to change early next week, when the General Assembly returns to kick off the 2012 Regular Session.

Even-year meetings are always a busy time because of the budget, but another major task awaits us as well beginning Jan. 3rd: redistricting.

This is done once a decade, after the nation's Census is completed, and it calls on us to redraw the lines for the 100 members of the House, the 38 members of the Senate and the six congressional districts. We also will likely re-do the seven seats for the Kentucky Supreme Court, something that hasn't been done in 20 years. I will of course keep you updated on what this will mean for our region.

As for the budget, there appears to be a small silver lining in that the days of seeing revenues run backward appear over. The state's economists met this past Wednesday and are forecasting some modest growth for the remainder of this fiscal year and the two that follow.

That doesn't mean there aren't some tough decisions still to be



**Tom
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made. Given the cuts we have seen during the last several years, there is little fat left to trim. We should be able to continue shielding the classroom and critical services for our most vulnerable, but it will be tough to do much beyond that.

A brighter spot is our road plan, which is seeing healthy growth that is expected to continue in the months ahead. We have been fortunate to see a lot of new asphalt paving, bridge repairs and construction in our 78th District, and we anticipate this type of work will continue in 2012.

Another positive sign is that it appears our state's economy is beginning to rebound. Several weeks ago, for example, Forbes magazine noted how much more friendly our state has become to the business community. We now rank 25th among the states in business climate, which is up six from last year and 19 from 2008.

One area that has seen a lot of

success in recent months is farming. Kentucky's commodity sales are on target to exceed \$5 billion this year, which is nearly a billion dollars more than last year.

Poultry and corn are the leaders in this area, and horses and cattle are up there as well. Overall, we should see 10 different agricultural products bring in at least \$100 million in 2011. As chairman of the House Agriculture and Small Business Committee, and a farmer as well, I am truly amazed at just how diverse agriculture has become. Farmers have long been cautioned never to look beyond the next growing season, but I am optimistic that this good news will continue. We saw more corn and soybeans grown in our area than in previous years, and even the future of tobacco looks a little brighter.

Outside of the budget and redistricting, there will be dozens of other issues to be debated during the legislative session's 60 days. One of the more prominent of those will be an effort to tackle an epidemic of prescription drug abuse.

More Kentuckians die from this than they do on our highways, and no community has

been left untouched. Though details are still being worked out, the goal is to find ways to limit doctor shopping and shut down often fly-by-night operations known informally as pill mills.

Several of the topics that made it through the House earlier this year but did not become law will likely be back again in January. That includes raising the high school dropout age from 16 to 18 and toughening our DUI laws to make sure that those convicted of this crime use ignition interlock systems so they never can drive drunk again.

For now, I hope you enjoyed Christmas and that your new year is all that you hope it to be. If you would like contact me about any issues during the legislative session, I can be reached by writing to Room 332B, Capitol Annex, 702 Capitol Avenue, Frankfort, KY 40601.

You can also leave a message for me or for any legislator at 800-372-7181. For those with a hearing impairment, the number is 800-896-0305.

I hope to hear from you soon.
*Representative Tom McKee
represents the 78th House District
including part of Campbell County.*