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# TESTIMONY

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## **House Elections Committee Hearing on Substitute for SB171 1 p.m. Wednesday, March 11, 2015**

**Dale Goter, Government Relations Manager, City of Wichita**

Chairman Kahrs and members of the committee:

The City of Wichita opposes any state legislative effort to mandate the timing and partisanship of local elections.

This position was crafted in response to SB171 in its original form, but also applies to Substitute for SB171 and any subsequent versions that substantially alter the current schedule and format of local elections.

Although the partisanship issue is not raised in the substitute bill, comments below relating to partisanship are offered in expectation that the issue will still enter the debate before final adjournment of the 2015 legislative session.

The format for local elections is best left to the local officials who are closest to the electorate. The option of scheduling elections for either fall or spring in even or odd numbered years is currently within the authority of a local governing body. If the local electorate was clamoring for such a change, local elected officials would be the first to hear about it, and would respond accordingly.

No such public outcry has been registered, and the City of Wichita is comfortable with the current format of non-partisan elections conducted in the spring of odd-numbered years.

It is important to remember that Kansas local government is considered a national model for its emphasis on good government and the absence of partisan influence on the local level. The introduction of partisan politics into local government issues will only polarize local elected officials and create artificial limits on policy debates.

The everyday demands of local government, providing basic services such as public safety and transportation, do not lend themselves to partisan politics. Drawing from long term personal experience, Wichita City Council members are quick to point out, "There is no Republican or Democratic way to fix a pothole."

If local elections are conducted on a partisan basis, it would result in the disqualification of many dedicated individuals who are employed in one fashion or another by the federal government. The Hatch Act and federal directives clearly impose that limitation.

Forcing local elections into the crowded schedule of fall elections in even numbered years will bury them from public view, both on the ballot on the media airwaves. The competition of campaign dollars will be intensified, and local citizens will be shortchanged on the information necessary to make informed decisions at the ballot box.

It also is worth noting that our county election office has struggled to meet the obligations of the current fall election schedule. Adding a host of other local elections to the ballot would further strain the limited capabilities of the Sedgwick County Election Office.

The Wichita City Council strongly and unanimously opposes passage of Substitute for SB171.