

TESTIMONY COVER SHEET

Regarding: HB 2296 A BILL CONCERNING PUBLIC BUILDING COMMISSIONS

Date: Tuesday, February 24, 2015 at

Time: 1:30 pm

Location: Capitol Building Hearing Room 281-N

Presenter: G. Kent Stewart

Presenter's Address: 2063 College Heights Road Manhattan, Kansas 66502 Riley County

Presenter's Phone: 785-539-2663

Presenter's Position Regarding the Bill: Proponent FOR adoption of HB 2296

THE TESTIMONY

INTRODUCTION: Chairman Steve and members of the committee. I appreciate your time, commitment and dedication to your work; and especially appreciate this opportunity to speak briefly with you in support of HB 2296.

My name is Kent Stewart. I live in Manhattan, county seat of Riley County. First, a minute of about my experience and how it applies to what HB 2296 is about. After spending 32 years at KSU where I taught school administration and specialized in school facilities and school public relations, I closed a 50-year career in education by retiring in 2005.

For the past ten years I have continued part-time work throughout the state for school boards involved in problems and issues concerning school buildings. This work, now spanning over forty years, has taken me to 75% of the counties in Kansas. And in that work, I have been involved at various stages in a lot of school building bond referendum elections. And that brings me to why I am speaking to you today in support this proposed legislation.

COMMENTARY : This bill provides legislators with a rare opportunity. It is seldom indeed that adoption of a Legislative bill makes a winner of everyone involved and doesn't cost much to boot. It seems to me that's a comfortable position for any legislator. What I mean by rare opportunity and making winners of everyone involved is simply this:

The Riley County Commissioners adopted a Public Building Commission, and in so doing found themselves crosswise with a number of their constituents. And to complicate their problem, some critics believe they crossed that fine line that separates political statesmanship from political suicide. Now critics and supporters are concerned about their commissioner's political futures. So, how will

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this bill help? In addition to providing a great way to keep what happened in Riley County from happening in other counties in the future, HB 2296 will do three things:

...First, it will automatically involve voters in making big decisions about large capital improvements.

...Second, it will ease pressure on commissioners in counties that need major capital improvements.

...Third, it will help commissioners avoid the pitfalls that can accompany capital improvement planning.

It is actually incumbent upon voters to help their elected commissioners make good and timely decisions. Without help from voters elected officials find themselves quite alone, simply hoping they are making good decisions and hoping they are doing right things. The referendum process involves the voters and provides the check and balance commissioners need to prove that solutions to capital improvement needs are right solutions politically acceptable to their constituencies.

For example, the most recent school referendum in which I was involved was last year at Abilene; and it ended in a way I have never experienced in my long career with school boards. The needed capital improvements were recommended to the school board. Then the school board convened a citizen advisory committee to begin the process of achieving public understanding and acceptance of the need in preparation for a bond referendum election. All this just occurred like the book says it should.

Much to everyone's surprise the citizen committee wanted additional projects exceeding considerably what the school board thought was a maximum dollar amount. The school board accepted the committee's request for a larger bond package, and guess what happened? On election day the voters approved it handily. You see, the capital improvements had become the public's projects, not the board's. All the school board had to do was provide the legal means to get the public what it wanted.

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...back now for a minute to HB 2296. Enacting this piece of legislation will assure that county commissioners can be a lot more relaxed and face a lot less controversy over a capital improvement construction projects because it will allow them to obtain public understanding followed by approval at the polls before committing dollars for construction. The public almost always approves what it understands.

That is the magic of public understanding. Once achieved approval usually follows because, like Abilene, the project becomes the public's project. And in the process everyone involved becomes a winner. From my experience, I recommend adoption of HB2296.

--End--

GKS:g