



WALLACE COUNTY

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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Sharon Springs, KS 67758

District #1, Mr. Bruce Buck
District #2, Mr. Michael Cowles
District #3, Mr. Adam W. Smith

**Testimony of Adam Smith, Wallace County Commissioner
Before the House Taxation Committee
In Favor of House Bill No. 2609
March 9, 2016**

Chairman Kleeb and Honorable Members of the Committee:

First of all, thank you for allowing a hearing so that the proposed legislation can be properly vetted and decided with input from the proponents and opponents. That is a very important part of the legislative process and I appreciate being able to have our voices heard!

I would like to offer a few words in favor of House Bill 2609.

As you know, cities and counties are required to hold a budget hearing and give citizens the chance to speak in favor or against the proposed budget. In addition, current state law already sets limitations on how much local government can increase their budgets before they are required to publish a public notice specific to the increase. Provisions are already in place to inform and allow citizens the opportunity to voice their opinion about their local property taxes.

That being said, I do agree that the ultimate local control lies in the voice of the voters, and an election certainly provides residents a direct voice. As a property owner, you should have the right to oppose your taxes. However, while an election provides a quantifiable answer, we must also remember that not all voters are property owners and not all property owners are voters! As a commissioner, I attempt to consider everyone affected by county financial policy, because it hurts our local economy if absentee owners find it difficult to do business due to imposing policy.

A protest petition option is an excellent solution for calling a special election. If the public is truly against the proposed budget increases, then petition signatures would fill up quickly! If a petition struggles, the community must generally support the increase and you haven't wasted any further taxpayer dollars on an unnecessary special election. Also, a strong petition in opposition may influence local officials to reconsider their proposed budget without having the election – saving taxpayer dollars once again!

In the end, local property taxes are best when established by locally elected officials. These local officials are directly accountable to their constituents. They are friends and neighbors in the community. They attend the basketball games on Friday night. They shop at the grocery store and chime in at the coffee shop. They know their unique local economy better than anyone. Local officials understand what it takes to provide the essential services for their community like law enforcement, fire and rescue, health and medical services, as well as the public infrastructure like roads and utilities.

If the legislature feels that property tax limitations need to be in place, please do not automatically require more taxpayer dollars be spent by requiring a special election. Allow the people a voice first through a petition, and then a final voice through an election only when necessary.