

**Testimony on SB 171
Before the
Senate Ethics and Elections Committee
submitted by**

Dr. George Griffith, Superintendent, Trego County U.S.D. #208

Committee Chair - Senator Holmes and members of the Senate Ethics and Elections Committee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to share my comments on behalf of Trego County USD #208 related to our opposition to SB171. The biggest issue with moving these local issues to the fall is that the local elections will be overshadowed by the larger races held during this time. The students should come first with politics taking a backseat in relation to what is best for the children in the state of Kansas.

SB 171 titled the "*Help Kansans Vote Act*" directly impacts local control in the following manners:

- The language in SB-171 would require changes in school boards in the middle of the fiscal and school year. Having operational and organizational changes in the middle of a school year would cause havoc in local districts especially if the new board made changes to school rules, policies, or staffing half-way through the school year.
- School district calendars are developed in the spring of the school year and in-service days are scheduled at that time. Forcing schools to have an in-service day during the primary and general elections is a direct slap in the face of local control and would make it very difficult for district leaders to find a cost effective presenter on very short notice. The education of our children should be far more important than politics. We currently allow our school to be used for elections and have found a way to work cooperatively even with students in attendance.

SB 171 is not a way to increase ballot turnout, if the leadership truly wants to increase the rate of voter turnout; the use of mail ballots is the best way to address the issue. The benefits of using mail balloting can be confirmed by the leadership of the state county clerks' organization and by evaluating voter turnout in states that use this method of running elections. This bill seems to clearly be an attempt by the state government to impact the makeup of local school boards that are usually in opposition to policies and funding proposals being supported by the current majority.

SB 171 requires partisan local elections for boards of education and a number of other local races under the guise of "truth in advertising." We oppose this portion of the bill for a number of reasons including:

- Requiring party affiliation of candidates in most school rural school districts especially in Northwest Kansas is a moot point since most districts struggle to find enough candidates to fill vacancies or run for these positions.
- Making these elections partisan would discourage individuals who want to do what's in the best interest of local children but do not want to play politics or even be a politician.
- This bill is discriminatory against those men and women serving in the military who can currently represent their school and community by being a member of the school board or city council which these individuals would not be permitted to under this bill. SB 171 will result in the men and women who serve the military losing the very freedoms and constitutional rights they fought to defend.
- Partisan elections would further limit the number of potential candidates by preventing some state and federal employees from running for these positions.

SB 171 will also have a financial impact by increasing costs to the candidates for these unpaid and mostly thankless board positions. This bill will also result in an increase in cost in the county clerk's office which would be passed on to the entities during their election cycle. Basically this would be just another unfunded mandate.

As a representative of Trego County U.S.D. #208, I strongly urge the Senate Ethics and Election Committee not to pass this SB 171. We do not want our local school board elections to become a money driven, mudslinging contest that most other partisan elections have become. If you want to really increase voter turnout, use a mail ballot system which has been demonstrated to address the turnout issue in other states. Finally, we do not want the choice of elected school leaders to be overshadowed by other political races and political games that the November elections have become.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Dr. George W. Griffith", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. George W. Griffith,
Superintendent USD #208

TREGO COUNTY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 208
BOARD RESOLUTION ADDRESSING
KANSAS STATE LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS RELATING TO SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS

A RESOLUTION by the Board of Education of Trego County Unified School District No.208, Trego County, Kansas regarding the Kansas State Legislature's proposed bills to alter the process for electing public board of education members in Kansas.

WHEREAS, the Founding Fathers of the State of Kansas provided in Article 6 of the State's Constitution for the establishment and maintenance of public schools; and

WHEREAS, the people of Kansas approved by popular vote an amendment in 1966 endowing locally elected boards of education with the sole responsibility of maintaining, developing and operating local public schools; and

WHEREAS, all children in Kansas deserve access to a public education absent of potentially divisive partisanship; and

WHEREAS, moving local public school board elections to November of even-numbered years would reduce focus on school board candidates as they compete for attention with all other candidates for every federal, state and local office; and

WHEREAS, moving school board elections from the spring to fall would impair a school district's efficient operation based on a fiscal year of July 1 to June 30; and

WHEREAS, moving school board elections from the spring to fall would potentially create a "lame duck" board, thereby impeding discussions of administrator evaluations, contract extensions, teacher evaluations, teacher negotiations and budget preparation; and

WHEREAS, partisan elections would bar federal executive branch and military employees from running for office and serving their communities by holding local office; and

WHEREAS, current options in voting plans allow local districts to determine the best plan to ensure representation from all parts of the district; and

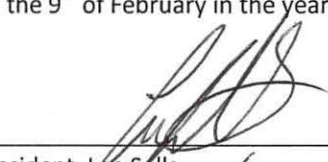
WHEREAS, the current election cycle for electing local public education board members has and will continue to serve the children of Kansas well, as demonstrated by the fact that Kansas ranks among the top states in educational outcome for successful students while spending below the national average per pupil; and

WHEREAS, increasing voter participation can be accomplished without disrupting the current election cycle.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that we as a Locally-Elected Board of Education call upon the Kansas State Legislature to pass no law changing the election cycle for local boards of education; and

FURTHERMORE, BE IT RESOLVED that we as a Locally-Elected Board of Education call upon the Kansas State Legislature to pass no law changing the nonpartisan status of local board of education elections.

ADOPTION: As indicated by the signatures below, the Trego County USD No. 208 Board of Education approved this Resolution on the 9th of February in the year 2015.

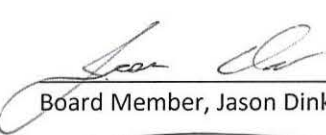


President, Lee Sells

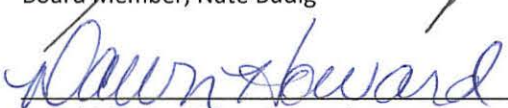
Vice-President, Renae Denning *Absent*



Board Member, Nate Budig



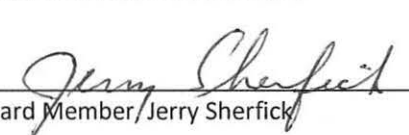
Board Member, Jason Dinkel



Board Member, Dawn Howard



Board Member, Travis Phillips



Board Member, Jerry Sherfick

The above signatures are hereby certified by:



U.S.D. #208, Board Clerk, Becky Windholz