

STATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

March 8, 1965

The meeting was called to order by the Chairman who asked Committee members to confine themselves to questions when people appear on legislative matters. Mr. Marvin Clark was then introduced to discuss H.B. 718. Mr. Clark stated that the proposal had been carefully checked for constitutionality; that it was permissive legislation. He discussed the proposal section by section and stated that County business is big business anymore and that a County Manager form of government could be more efficient and useful to the residents of the counties.

Mr. Roy Johnson of the Kansas State Chamber of Commerce, stated that the Chamber favors this legislation; that the residents have the opportunity to express themselves because of the election required to put this into effect. He states that more than 50 counties in the United States employ this type of government.

Rep. Lindahl appeared in opposition to the measure, and introduced Messrs. Kueck, Haas and Evans of Reno County, to discuss their opposition. The gentlemen felt that it was dangerous to put so much power in the hands of one man; that the democratic form of government should be maintained. Mr. Kueck stated that this is another step toward Socialism in trying to centralize another governmental body. Mr. Dwight Peyton spoke in opposition to the proposal (see attached). Mary Abrahamson, Register of Deeds of Stafford County opposed the measure; that speaking for their own county everyone was well pleased with the Commissioner form of government.

Mr. Lill was then introduced to discuss H.B. 829, a proposal to provide for a full-time 3-man bipartisan highway commission. He explained that he felt it is a fulltime job and that a much better job could be done by such a board; that they could look at the overall picture much better than the 6 district plan that is now used, where the men meet two days every other week. Mr. Harder appeared in support of Mr. Lill's statements.

Mr. Loux was introduced to discuss H.B. 859, dealing with bids and purchases, giving preference to local bidders instead of out of state corporations. There was a period of questions by members of the committee.

The Chairman stated that HCR 510 had been previously discussed and asked Mr. Griffith if he wished to vote today, and Mr. Griffith stated that he would just as soon wait. The Chairman announced the matters that would be discussed March 9th, and the meeting was adjourned.

Statement by Dwight Payton
on House Bill No. 718

I am Dwight Payton, weekly newspaper publisher, formerly of Osage and Ellsworth Counties and now located in Topeka. I appear before this committee as an opponent of House Bill 718.

I represent no group unless it be the unorganized citizens who stand in opposition to all efforts to centralize government.

My points of opposition are these:

Point I. That claims made for adoption of a county manager plan, or permissive legislation for such an adoption, on the grounds of increased efficiency ignore the fundamental premise on which the American government was founded, namely, that division and dispersion of power is held paramount to efficiency of operation. It should be quite obvious to anyone that dictatorship is a more efficient form of government management than a balance-of-power plan such as our distinguished forefathers devised. Yet we reject the one and proclaim the other. It should be equally self-evident that, in choosing the latter, what great coterie of scholars and statesmen were advising future generations, in effect: "Leave considerations such as efficiency to private enterprise and deliberately keep government inefficient lest it gain power enough to enslave you."

Point II. Whatever of gain there might be in management efficiency under a manager plan necessarily would be made at the severe price of a partial disfranchisement of county voters. Many of us complain because citizens show so little interest in their government, and the main reason this is so is because the average citizen has come to feel that he is no longer given an effectual part in the big power manipulations which function on the state and national levels. The one major point of intimacy and participation--citizen to government--is in our cities and counties, and here at the grass roots, people do take a direct and lively interest. Here remains a vestige of citizen rule, a practice ground for citizenship unmatched at any other point of our political structure.

To reduce the names on the ballot to the county commissioners, probate judge, court clerk and county superintendent of schools, an office now almost defunct, would be to emasculate this remaining jurisdiction of citizenship through elimination of party competition for the various offices.

Point III. Furthermore, I am firmly convinced that any encouragement given for manager government on the county level will but pave the way for formation of monolithic machine units whereby one party will be able to obtain control of the complete patronage setup and become so deeply entrenched as to make opposition an exercise in futility.

As a country newspaper editor it long has been my observation that the best government, man for man and dollar for dollar, is that at the grassroots level where the citizens are in direct contact. Instead of directing attention at grassroots government in the name of efficiency, it would make more sense and save more dollars to have a state manager, yes, and even a federal manager.

It is specious reasoning to attempt tax savings in government by any means other than to reduce government expenditures arbitrarily and with ruthless unconcern for political popularity. The record of Dade County, Florida, suggests that instead of efficiency savings, government costs under a county manager ultimately will soar to higher levels and become far less susceptible to reduction.