

MINUTES OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION AND ELECTIONS.

The meeting was called to order by the Chair, Rep. Carol Dawson, at 9:00 a.m. on February 9, 1996 in Room 521-S of the Capitol.

All members were present except: Rep. Herman Dillon, Excused
 Rep. Jonathan Wells, Excused

Committee staff present: Dennis Hodgins, Legislative Research Department
 Jim Wilson, Revisor of Statutes

Conferees appearing before the committee: Rep. Gailen Weiland
 Travis Dodge, Hiawatha High School
 Jeff Davies, Hiawatha High School

Others attending:

Hearing on:

HCR 5035: Allows person eighteen years of age on or before the date of the general election to vote in the primary election to nominate the candidate for such general election even if person is not 18 years of age on the date of the primary election.

Rep. Weiland presented the HCR which would provide for 17 year olds who will be 18 years of age at the time of the general election to be qualified electors at the time of the primary preceding such general election. He described the activities of students at Hiawatha High School in developing and promoting this measure. He also presented some information about other states with similar provisions. See Attachment 1.

Travis Dodge, Project Coordinator and Jeff Davies, Project Administrative Assistant, who are both seniors at Hiawatha High School, delivered a prepared statement. See Attachment 2.

Several committee members commented on the merit of the project for the students and asked several questions of the students. Questions were asked by committee members about the scope of the language in the proposed amendment and the effect on other statutes which require persons to be qualified electors or age 18. In response to a question from committee members, staff and Brad Bryant, office of the Secretary of State, commented that the status of the 17 year olds who will be 18 years of age at the time of the general election might not include the ability to vote on all matters at the primary election unless more explicitly stated in the proposed constitutional amendment. This might require separate ballots for these persons as opposed to ballots for all other electors, which would have a fiscal impact.

In response to a question, Brad Bryant, office of the Secretary of State, commented that the Secretary of State was in favor of people voting, but had no formal position of the proposal.

Rep. Weiland stated the intent of the proposed amendment would be to prescribe that 17 year olds who will be 18 years of age at the time of the general election would be qualified electors for all matters presented to the electors at the primary election.

Staff was requested by Committee members to contact other state laws and constitutional provisions to review what statutes might be affected by such a change in the *Kansas Constitution* and research more specific language to effectuate the intent of the sponsors of the proposed amendment.

There being no further conferees or questions from Committee members, the Chair **closed the hearing on HCR 5035**.

The Madam Chair adjourned the meeting and announced that the next meeting would be February 13, 1996, in Room 521-S of the Capitol at 9:00 a.m.

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TESTIMONY FROM REPRESENTATIVE GALEN WEILAND, BENDENA, KANSAS
ON HCR 5035

My name is Galen Weiland, I represent the 49th district which includes all of Doniphan and Brown County.

About a year ago, the Political Science and Government Class of Hiawatha High School, that is in my district, approached me about their desire to allow a young person who would be eighteen by the general election, to vote in the primary election.

Following is an incomplete list of states that now allow this:

Kentucky	Maryland
Mississippi	North Carolina
West Virginia	Wyoming

This is not a complete list, because some states have not responded to our request for information about voting age. It would take an amendment to the Kansas Constitution. I agreed to sponsor this legislation because I believe it would generate more interest in the election process by young people voting for the first time.

We do have young people here from this class of Hiawatha High School to testify about their feelings on this amendment and why they believe it is the right thing to do.

Thank you for allowing me to appear before you today and testify in support of HCR 5035. I will be happy to stand for questions.

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TO: Governmental Organization and Elections Committee
FROM: Travis Dodge and Jeff Davies, Hiawatha High School
RE: Proposed Amendment to Statute #25-215, #25-2306 and Article V, Section 1 of the
Kansas Constitution

(Travis):

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. I am Travis Dodge from Hiawatha High School, and I am the student project coordinator for this proposed joint resolution. I am joined here today by Mr. Weast my government teacher, and Jeff Davies the project administrative assistant. I would like to take this moment to thank you for inviting us here today to speak on behalf of the proposed resolution to amend the current statute #25-215, #25-2306, and Article V, Section 1 of the Kansas Constitution.

In the spring of 1995 the process of trying to introduce this amendment began, but we were unable to have this amendment placed on the congressional calendar last year. Therefore, at the beginning of this school year we sent out mailings and worked on gaining support for the amendment. The attempt to get this amendment heard has been a long and exhausting process. Many hours of work have gone into this amendment and the approval of it would mean a great deal to us. All of this work on the resolution has helped me to understand the legislative process better. I now appreciate all the hard work that goes into developing a constitutional amendment that is worthy of consideration. I think the passing of this amendment would greatly increase the involvement of young people in the government system.

Not only would this amendment help young adults become better citizens by raising voting percentages, but I also think it would also make young adults want to participate in

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the government more. For example, last year in the city of Hiawatha one of our eighteen-year-old, registered voters, Brian Baker ran for and won the election for one of the city commissioner positions. This shows that many young adults want to do their part to try and make our state and country better places to live. Interestingly enough, in that particular election many of Brian's votes came from the retired age group of voters in Hiawatha. I think this shows in direct correlation with this amendment that even the older population are in favor of getting young people involved with the government. Somewhere in Kansas, there are probably hundreds of young people like Brian, Jeff, and I who want their opinions to be taken seriously and make a difference in this country.

From opinions of students at Hiawatha High school, most of them are in favor of this amendment. Travis Hartter, a junior at Hiawatha stated, "Even though I do not fall under the category of the amendment, I still think it is a good idea because it will increase voter participation." He also said that the students are educated enough to vote so why not let them use the knowledge they possess. Many other students in our high school also are in agreement with this proposal.

(Jeff):

I feel that being involved in the political process is a major part of being a citizen in the United States. We have pursued this resolution because we feel that it affects many people, and we want to be a part of the politics behind getting a joint resolution passed. Before we could get involved, we first had to find an issue that we felt strongly about. This

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voting amendment was something that we felt was important, and we could work hard at informing others about this proposal. Travis and I have sent 384 letters to all Kansas High Schools and 170 letters to Kansas legislators and leaders. We have tried to inform as many people as possible about this proposed amendment.

From our High School in Hiawatha, there are thirty students that will turn eighteen between August 7 and November 5. From research of eight other high schools around our area, there are over 100 students that will be affected by this proposal this year. In addition, the Division of Vital Statistics reported that 37,937 individuals in the state of Kansas were fifteen years old as of July, 1994. Extrapolating that data to 1996, not taking into account statistics such as immigration, emigration, mortality rates, and the number of individuals who would be seventeen at the time of the primary election in Kansas and eighteen by the time of the general election in 1996, the maximum number of individuals eighteen years of age would be 37, 937 additional voters. Therefore, this is an issue that affects many people in Kansas.

I feel that it is necessary for voters to be able to choose the candidates that they want to vote for. Currently, the young people that are seventeen are denied this right. It is only fair to allow these young people the chance to be involved in the election process from the very beginning--this being the primary election. If a person is denied the right to vote in the primary and turns eighteen before the general election, that person must vote for candidates that he or she did not select. This is forcing young people to vote for someone that he or she did not fully support.

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Often, primary elections are decided by only a few votes--especially on the local level. Here, allowing these people affected by this proposal to vote could change the outcome of close campaigns. We also think that getting young people involved in the election process when they are seventeen, will increase voter participation. From a questionnaire concerning voting age privileges in selected states, there were two states (West Virginia and Wyoming) out of six, reported an increased number of voters due to allowing seventeen-year-olds the right to vote in the primary election if they are eighteen years of age before the general election. The other four states with this amendment did not have the information available. This data shows that this amendment would increase voter participation.

Now, there is only one question remaining. Are seventeen-year-olds mature enough to handle the privilege to vote? The constitution says that no United States citizen can be denied the right to vote if that person is over eighteen years of age or older. However, I do feel that seventeen-year-olds who will be eighteen before the general election are definitely educated enough to fulfill the duty of voting. Every high school in Kansas is required to teach government, and I think that many students are more educated about politics and government than the average person. In today's school system there is much emphasis on critical and divergent thinking. For these reasons, young people should use their knowledge and opinions and participate in the election process. I know that I have spent many class sessions learning about government and current issues throughout high school, and I am sure other students from across Kansas have also.

Currently, there are eighteen states that have passed this amendment. The states that

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are nearest to Kansas include Nebraska, Colorado, and Arkansas. From research of the information available from a questionnaire concerning voting age privileges, there have not been any increased costs or any problems related to the passing of this amendment. I am sure that the leaders of these states feel confident in their young people's ability to allow such an amendment. I would like to see Kansas take a step forward and show the young people in Kansas that the leaders of this state are confident in their decisions and judgements. Travis and I feel that this amendment will help to show the youth in Kansas that they have political efficacy, and that they can think independently and choose the candidate they consider best.