

OPPOSITION TESTIMONY FOR HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE HEARING ON SB 155

Good morning, my name is Dan Peterson. I am a retired USD 506 Ag teacher and lifetime resident of Labette County, having raised one daughter who graduated from USD 506. I am here in opposition to Senate Bill 155. My efforts this morning are to provide you with a bit more context concerning the matter before you. In doing so, I believe you will find as I have, that Senate Bill 155 will produce unintended consequences detrimental to USD 506 as well as any number of other school districts in the state of Kansas. To begin, I would like to share with you how the Kansas Army Ammunition Plant came to be within the boundaries of what is now USD 506 – Labette County.

The property in question has been a part of what is now known as USD 506 since 1893. Prior to unification in 1968, the boundaries of today's USD 506 were those of the Labette County Community High School (LCCHS) and its Board of Education. Also included in those boundaries were a number of common school districts which were all independent districts with their own boards. In 1941, the Kansas Army Ammunition Plant was constructed on 13,000 acres of agricultural and residential property within the boundaries of what is now known as USD 506. This same 13,000 acres of agricultural and residential property, now home to the Great Plains Industrial Park, has never been removed from within the boundaries of USD 506, only taken off of the property tax rolls. The map attached to my testimony and labeled "Labette County School Districts 2012", shows these boundaries and the area labeled Kansas Army Ammunition Plant.

What now constitutes the boundaries of all four Labette County school districts is the result of the 1963 Senate Bill 400 which was the unification legislation that required the consolidation and unification of all school districts in the state of Kansas. Each county in the state was required to form a county committee representing all existing districts to meet and hopefully to come up with a unification plan. The Labette County committee was unable to agree on a plan and under the law, First and Second Class Cities could unify independently. So, in the spring of 1966, Parsons, Oswego, and Chetopa did just that. Their USD numbers indicate the order of unification as follows USD 503 - Parsons, USD 504 – Oswego, and USD 505 - Chetopa. There was in the unification law in 1964, a provision that allowed cities to "claim" up to 20 square miles of land adjoining the city as long as they were compact and contiguous.

As you can see on the Labette County School District map, the Parsons School district claimed their 20 square miles along a strip of territory East along the Neosho County line and south far enough to acquire that part of the Kansas Gas and Electric, Neosho Power Plant that set on the east side of the Neosho river. Oswego claimed their 20 square miles of territory north along the Cherokee County line that joined the Parsons district and to claim that part of the Kansas Gas and Electric, Neosho Power Plant that set on the west side of the Neosho River whereby also skirting the Kansas Army Ammunition Plant property. Chetopa claimed their 20 square miles as a strip of territory approximately 5 miles wide, south to the Oklahoma border and north along the Cherokee County line to join the Oswego territory. It was requested by representatives of the remaining districts to the State Superintendent to declare the balance of the County (which included the Kansas Army Ammunition Plant territory) to be unified. This action established the present boundary lines of Labette County USD 506.

It should be noted that in the Parsons petition for their 20 square miles, they “passed” on including that area now within the Parsons City limits which included the Industrial Park at Southern Boulevard and US Highway 59, the residential area called Prairie West, and the territory of the Kansas Army Ammunition Plant, seeking instead to acquire the Kansas Gas and Electric, Neosho Power Plant to the east. The Oswego district also “passed” on including a portion of the Kansas Army Ammunition Plant property within its boundaries. Each of these districts, during unification, could have acquired a greater portion of the Kansas Army Ammunition Plant property, but consciously chose not to, again, seeking instead to include the Kansas Gas and Electric, Neosho Power Plant.

I am asking you today to not pass Senate Bill 155 out of committee. The property in question has always been in USD 506’s district. There are already laws that concern how taxes are appropriated to school districts. Laws passed that are there to protect the citizens of this state. I ask that you uphold the laws on the books as it concerns the appropriation of funds to school districts, and that you not allow another group that does not like the law to be able to change it.

Thank you for your time.

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Labette Cooty School Districts 2012



