

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE KANSAS HOUSE ELECTIONS COMMITTEE REGARDING HB 2271

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2013, 1:30 P.M.

GENE RAMSEY, CITY OF OTTAWA CITY COMMISSIONER

Honorable committee members and staff, I am Ottawa City Commissioner Gene Ramsey and I am here today to testify as an opponent of HB 2271. I have proudly served the citizens of Ottawa as a City Commissioner for 19 years, participated in five (5) municipal elections, and have been elected to represent the Community as Mayor five (5) times during my tenure. I have considerable elected experience and will voluntarily be ending my City Commission service this spring. I am opposed to HB 2271 for the following reasons:

1. City elections are traditionally non-partisan in nature and that is the way they should remain. Local elected officials are chosen by the voters based upon how well they address community issues and seek resolution to the many municipal challenges that face a community. Municipal officials are not subject to the partisan gridlock that has become too commonplace in Washington and, I dare say, in our own State Capitol. Municipal officials find ways to work together, regardless of philosophy, to solve problems for the citizens of their community.
2. If City elections become partisan, I fear that they will become expensive beyond the means of the average citizen to mount a campaign and be elected to office. I also suspect that there will be more outside influences involved in raising funds for local City offices, and I do not view that as a good thing. Local elections are focused on what plan there is for moving the community forward, not on what party philosophy is best for local issues. HB 2271 is likely to decrease participation in the process of local government and creates even more challenges to running for office, since it will turn off many voters that are already frustrated with a highly partisan system that does not solve problems.
3. I feel that partisan elections will create lengthier ballots and more confusion for the voter. The more confusion there is on a ballot, the more negative effect on the turnout. I am in the printing business and currently print ballots for the County Clerk of Franklin County. In my opinion, adding Ottawa and the six (6) smaller cities in Franklin County and all other related governmental jurisdictions will create a marathon-length ballot that will serve to frustrate and confuse the voter, and ultimately create more expenses as well.

4. Finally, it seems to me that this is really an issue of local determination and that a mandate from the State contradicts the Home Rule philosophy. Elections are not a one-size-fits-all event. They are different in every community for many different reasons, and the State should not mandate a change for an issue of self-determination.

This is an idea whose time has not come, and the legislature should not pursue any further. If the intent of the legislation is to generate more voter participation, I would suggest that if you work in a true partnership with local governments, we can find legitimate ways to increase voter participation.

Again, I speak on behalf of my City Commission in opposition to House Bill 2271. I appreciate your time and courtesy in listening to my views on this matter. If you have any questions or comments about this subject, there are over 3,500 cities you can consult with at anytime.

Thank you.

Gene Ramsey, City Commissioner

City of Ottawa, Kansas