

Sedgwick County Commissioner Karl Peterjohn
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Testimony Supporting HB 2188

By Karl Peterjohn, 3rd district

As an elected official I understand both the importance of open records and meetings as well as the delicate balance between items, like certain select personal records, and the public's right to know how their tax funds are being spent. In my first term as a Sedgwick County commissioner I was pleased to see my county create an open checkbook on county spending that is available to the public online. I invite everyone in this room to visit the Sedgwick.gov web site and see how the open checkbook operates so there is accountability how tax dollars are being spent by Sedgwick County.

Now let me talk about what is not open about Sedgwick County spending and spending by many other governmental units in this state. State and local units often contract with third parties who provide governmental or governmentally related services. Disclosure, or I should say the lack thereof, has been brought before the Sedgwick County commission concerning one group that receives significant funding from both the city and county in my community.

The specific case involved the Greater Wichita Economic Development Coalition (GWEDC). There are other groups receiving government funding that are in similar situations.

I support open records and meetings and would want additional disclosure concerning third party groups that are spending tax dollars in this state. During our public discussion concerning GWEDC's spending there were legal opinions stated as to whether or not current law requires such disclosure. I believe that more disclosure is needed for third parties who are operating with a significant amount of tax funds for their operations. I don't believe that this one example is an isolated case.

When the public is told that say, Sedgwick County spent GWEDC \$300,000 for 2013, this provides the gross amount of taxpayer spending, but not a single insight as to what is being specifically being purchased with these funds. Citizens have contacted me and requested this information. Under the current law, it cannot be provided. More disclosure is necessary.

Unfortunately, I must attend a Sedgwick County commission meeting this morning in Wichita and cannot attend this legislative hearing so my written testimony must be provided to you. Let me clearly state that my position this morning is NOT part of Sedgwick County's 2013 legislative agenda. However, my fellow county commissioner, Richard Ranzau, is in agreement with this testimony and the need for additional disclosure on how tax funds are being spent in this state.

HOUSE JUDICIARY

DATE: 2/12/13

ATTACHMENT 15