

MEMORANDUM

TO: Senate Ethics, Elections, and Local Government Committee
FROM: Sandy Jacquot
611 Jones St.
Lecompton, KS 66050
DATE: February 20, 2013
RE: SB 211

Thank you allowing me to submit written testimony in opposition to SB 211, a bill that would purportedly move city elections to the fall in even numbered years, create four year terms and make municipal elections partisan. I will focus on those issues, although the bill contains more provisions. In short, the bill reflects a lack of knowledge of how city government actually works, particularly in small cities, for the reasons enumerated below.

I am currently a candidate for mayor of Lecompton, and for the first time in many years, we actually have competition for that office. I should note that this testimony is submitted by me as a candidate for local office and not on behalf of the City of Lecompton. Lecompton is a city of about 630 people and it is a common occurrence not to have anyone file for a vacant office. In fact, we only have one incumbent who filed for office and we have two vacancies. The other incumbent has agreed to accept the office if winning a write-in effort. Write-in candidacies are common for city office. The terms of our offices are two years. The city has discussed moving to four-year terms, but the concern is that no one wants to commit to more than a two-year term. This bill would actually make it more difficult to recruit qualified municipal candidates in Lecompton by compelling our city, for no good reason, to move to four- year terms. Two-year terms are working well in Lecompton and the city should be allowed to make that choice.

While it is true that spring elections typically have a lower turnout, the voters that come to the polls to vote in city elections are more informed about the issues and have a desire to have input into the local leaders who will govern the city. This simply is not true for fall elections, particularly in national election years. Yes, there will be more voters in the fall, but they will not necessarily have taken the time to become educated on municipal candidates or issues. They may not have any idea about whom to write-in if there is a vacancy. Local issues and candidates will get lost on overly long fall ballots, without saving much taxpayer dollars. Fall elections will be harmful to cities like Lecompton that depend on voters being able to focus narrowly on city government in making their decisions, instead of having to sort through a ballot with local, state and federal candidates, not to mention special question elections.

Local issues are not partisan issues. Setting the water rates to pay for a new water plant, deciding whether the city can afford to do a chip and seal on any roads, or discussing sidewalk repairs do not depend on governing body members' party affiliations. Such a requirement imposed by legislation will create and interject an issue that is irrelevant to city government. At the local level, we need citizens making decisions on effective local leadership without interjecting partisan politics into those decisions. One might argue that the current partisanship at the state and federal level has lead to certain amount of dysfunction in those levels of government that certainly is not needed or wanted at the local level.

Perhaps the most compelling reason to oppose this bill is that of local control. Currently cities have the ability to move their elections to fall, to create four-year terms and to have partisan elections if that is the will of the community. A bill is not needed for any of those scenarios to occur. Every community is different and cities should be able to reflect those differences in the decisions made for their cities. In fact, one city has moved its mayoral election to fall, because the city determined it was appropriate for that community. Some cities had partisan elections, but chose to discontinue the practice some years ago. What is the perceived problem this bill deems to correct? The short answer is that there is no problem and this bill is unnecessary, unworkable and unwanted. I urge this committee to allow cities to continue to govern themselves without imposing the mandates contained within SB 211.