



Written Testimony in Opposition to SB 211

Senate Ethics, Elections & Local Government Committee Thursday, February 21, 2013

Mr. Chairman and Senate Ethics, Elections & Local Government Committee Members:

My name is Jennifer Bruning, and I am Vice President of Government Affairs with the Overland Park Chamber of Commerce. I am submitting written testimony today in opposition to Senate Bill 211, which would make all municipal elections partisan and move all municipal elections (including cities, extension districts, boards of public utilities, water districts, drainage districts, irrigation districts, unified school districts, and community colleges) from the spring of odd-numbered years to the fall of even-numbered years to coincide with national, state and county elections.

The Overland Park Chamber believes that partisan politics are irrelevant to providing municipal and local services and that choosing the form of government to manage those matters should be left up to local leaders. An emphasis on partisanship could lead to Washington-style gridlock, rather than governments which focus upon fiscal prudence and delivery of essential services such as public safety, water delivery or city street maintenance. Elected officials should be chosen based upon their qualifications for office rather than if they have an "R" or "D" behind their name. Our current non-partisan system decreases political polarization and encourages cooperation between elected officials belonging to different parties, making consensus on big issues more likely.

Furthermore, the percentage of registered voters who choose not to designate a party membership is significant. According to the Johnson County web site, as of February 2013, of 370,249 registered voters, 110,731 are unaffiliated. This means that 29.9% of our county's voters would be disenfranchised and unrepresented without a voice in a system such as is proposed. Because the Republican Party has a closed primary and the Democrats are looking to close their primaries as well, many Libertarian, Reform and Unaffiliated voters will be ineligible to vote in primary races.

Johnson County's non-partisan election system for all local units of government works well and is revered. In 2012 the Johnson County Charter Commission completed its required ten-year review of its charter. As part of the review the Commission held public hearings on whether there should be partisan elections for units of government in the County. Dozens of citizens testified that the current system of non-partisan elections should be upheld; the Charter Commission agreed by not forwarding amendments that would change the system.

The Chamber also opposes moving municipal elections to the fall of even-numbered years to coincide with national, state and county elections. Adding races which should be non-partisan to ballots already loaded with a large number of partisan candidates for voters to research will only lead to voter confusion.

We urge you to oppose Senate Bill 211. Thank you for your consideration.