



SB 211 Testimony to Senate Ethics, Elections and Local Government Committee

By: Jason A. Gage – February 21, 2013

Request

Thank you for the opportunity to offer to you the City of Salina's position on SB 211. While we are not able to attend the committee hearing, we are appreciative of your time and efforts to consider our written thoughts. With that said, we respectfully request that you oppose the passage of SB 211.

Bill Summary

Our understanding is that this bill would place all municipal elections on the fall ballot and make them partisan in nature.

Bill Concerns

A summary of our major concerns with the bill are as follows:

- Increased Partisanship. Due to the current nonpartisan nature of local government in Kansas, most cities in the state do not experience the type of partisanship that often occurs at the state or federal level of government. Our primary issue is simply the delivery of core, essential services to the public's front doorstep. This mission doesn't typically lend itself to partisan or ideological debates as is experienced at higher levels of government. We characterize the nature of this as "governance" versus "politics" in local policy making. We believe in good governance and believe that increased partisanship could actually erode that aspect of community leadership. This is particularly true of the commission-manager form of

government, which was designed with the fundamental purpose of eliminating the governance hazards of partisan politics by resembling Kansas's private business model.

- Fall Election Date. Certainly election turnout is an issue for all communities. We all search for ideas to increase citizen participation and eliminate the apathy that sometimes occurs. However, we do not believe that a combined fall election ballot will increase voter turnout. Our local experience has indicated that community issues on the ballot are more often a stimulant to voter turnout the list of candidates or the election date. As a result, we are concerned that a fall ballot that is proposed to include cities will be larger and more confusing. Even with the best of intentions, the proposed approach may actually have the impact of causing certain persons to stay away from the ballot booth. We would certainly not wish to see this outcome.
- Election Logistics. If SB 211 passes, it will cause a significant change regarding the logistics of local commission terms of office. While we can certainly address this type of logistical issue if it is absolutely necessary, we believe it is best not to interrupt the current office terms at this time.

Requested Action

We once again request that you not support SB 211 for the reasons previously outlined.

Thank you for considering our legislative request!