



Board of
Reno County Commissioners

RENO COUNTY
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February 16, 2015

Dear Chairman Heubert:

Subject: HB 2235 – Elected county treasurer appointed by commission; election required

On Thursday February 19 the House Committee on Local Government has scheduled discussion on HB 2235 – Elected county treasurer appointed by commission; election required. A representative of the Reno Board of County Commissioners plans to be present to provide testimony to support this bill. The proposed bill is unanimously supported by the all three county commissioners for the reasons stated herein.

The bill is designed to give local officials authority to propose changes that best serve taxpayers and the public. In Reno County, Barton County and, I am told others, there have been seriously problems in electing treasurers with little or no accounting or bookkeeping background. As you probably know, there are no basic qualifications or standards for being a county treasurer other than being popular enough to get elected.

Because the treasurer is entrusted with tens of millions of taxpayer dollars, we feel it is not only important but critical that a treasurer have business or bookkeeping background, or has been employed in the treasurer's office to know what is involved or have practical experience with the laws or practices needed to be a competent and responsive treasurer. In many counties, including Reno, the treasurer also is in charge of vehicle licensing and thus handles tag and title matters for the state....in turn receiving additional state compensation for that portion of their duties. Our problems have included serious accounting efforts, not being able to trust figures for budget purposes and planning come out of the treasurer's office, under or over distribution of tax funds we collect and distribute to other taxing agencies, among others. The result was adding a local auditor, who has extensive accounting background as is a cpa, to help in straightening out the books and make proper distributions. It has added a \$52,000 salary to the county and we have spent another \$50,000 with our auditors, before hiring an extra full time employee, to pinpoint problems and make corrections. These are problems that could have been resolved more quickly and with far less cost if we had an appointed rather than elected treasurer. Elected county officials run their own office and do not have to follow suggestions or changes recommended by our county administrator, regardless of how logic they may be.

Especially in the larger counties, and that is why the bill allows our proposal only in counties with 50,000 or more population, we feel the public would be assured more competency and a better handling of their money if this would be an appointive rather than elective office. Most counties over 50,000 have county administrators, who under this change, would consider an applicant's background, whether they have an accounting degree, accounting experience, have been working in a treasurer's office, management skills and other factors that would make a good treasurer. This change would allow that. It should be noted this proposal represents a unanimous vote and opinion of the Reno County Commission.

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It is critical in considering this bill that no change could or would take place until such a proposal is approved at a regularly scheduled election by voters. County commissioners might agree to propose the office becomes appointive but the final decision would be in the hands of voters. And if a county is happy with having their treasurers being elected they would not be impacted by this bill. There simply would be no change in any county unless a commission majority proposed such a change and voters supported it. This is not unlike some Judicial Districts in Kansas that have chosen to elect, while others have chosen a system to appoint their district judges. Probably few people in this room will remember, but several decades ago a traditional elective office, district court clerk, was eliminated and became appointive. It has produced a number of efficiencies and few would advocate, today, going back to electing our district court clerks.

Right now, when serious problems arise, such as those we have had in Reno County, we cannot make changes or take corrective action nearly as quickly, and economically, as if our county administrator had supervision over the treasurer's office. We believe this is in-efficient and not, in the 21st century, the best way to run a railroad, or in this case, handle public trust and funds.

Again, passage of this bill only gives local county commissions, in counties 50,000 and more, the power to propose a change from electing to appointing the county treasurer. The final decision goes to a public vote and is in the hands of the people. They would have to be convinced this is a better way....and they would have the final say....which we think is in keeping with better, more responsive and more accountable local government.

We urge your committee to vote out, favorably this enabling legislation which brings decision making down to the local level where it could act more responsibly and quickly to solving problems and better serving the public.

/s/ James D. Schlickau

/s/ Dan Deming

/s/ Brad D. Dillon